NANCY SPERO: PRINTING, WRITING, COLLAGING

BY

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DISSEPTION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that works by American artist Nancy Spero made feminist interventions into the medium of painting and into exclusionary patriarchal narratives as they are presented in museums. The result is an oeuvre visualizing what Gertrude Stein called a “continuous present,” revealing how misogyny recurs in different ways throughout time. Spero achieved this by utilizing printmaking methods and by tying her own contemporary production to art of the past, both through appropriation of imagery and physical juxtaposition. This study is organized thematically into three chapters. Chapter One posits that Spero’s decisions to work on paper and employ printmaking methods strengthened her feminist political content. Though trained as a painter, she made a deliberate decision in 1970 to work only on paper because it is a consistently undervalued medium and surface. To her, oil painting on canvas symbolized the monolithic patriarchal art world system that showed no interest in women artists. Spero’s adoption of print matrices allowed her to repeat appropriated images dozens of times in dramatically different contexts, while at the same time providing a continuity throughout her long career.

Chapter Two orients her use of language into four phases during her career: as titles, quotations, narratives, and “hieroglyphics.” Unlike contemporaries such as Joseph Kosuth, Spero’s use of text was not a withdrawal from the visual; indeed, she continuously altered the appearance of her text to effect meaning. Early works incorporate painted phrases, but she came to prefer printed or typed letters, and ultimately eliminated the linguistic altogether in favor of image-signs that had gained meaning for her through repetition. Chapter Three considers her connection to nineteenth-century
history painting methods to create moralizing feminist narratives. I argue that she constructs a new kind of historical record within individual works, for example in her epic multi-paneled collage *Notes in Time on Women* (1976-79), and also through site-specific installations.

In these ways Spero underscored the oppression of women through history, initially expressing outrage but later adopting a celebratory approach that sought to recognize women’s resilience and successes. In her work Spero juxtaposed images of women from the past and present, stressing the critical importance of history today. It is for this reason her oeuvre exemplifies a “continuous present.”
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INTRODUCTION

American artist Nancy Spero (1926-2009) resisted categorization and art-world trends throughout the dynamic decades that saw the transition from modernism to postmodernism. She and her artist husband, painter Leon Golub, produced figurative work when abstraction was considered more important, and political work during the heyday of Minimalism and Pop. Her feminist subjects relate her work to the broadest range of political art and history painting, as this dissertation demonstrates. Personal outrage over the male-dominated art world drove her practice, yet the autobiographical (described by some critics as a narcissistic impulse) is never as overt as in the work of her peers because she appropriated imagery and text. Whereas many of her contemporaries experimented with video and performance, Spero produced primarily two-dimensional work. Most importantly, she never wavered in her commitment to politically motivated themes within the discourse of feminism.

Most existing scholarship has approached her work chronologically or in relation to specific artists (including Kiki Smith, Hannah Wilke, and Ana Mendieta). In contrast, this dissertation addresses this artist’s work thematically, focusing on its materiality, use of text, and construction of “herstory.” This term, describing a feminist perspective of the past, best describes Spero’s project to both denounce violence against women and celebrate women’s resistance to misogyny.

Spero’s work focuses on themes of social justice, war, human rights, torture, and, most frequently, the effects of physical and linguistic violence against women. Appropriating a wide range of sources both literary and visual (including Antonin
Artaud, Egyptian iconography, and lingerie advertisements, to cite a few), Spero created disturbing narratives from a profound disgust and rage over the atrocities and conditions caused by centuries of patriarchy.

Chapter One, “Paper, Printmaking, and Feminism,” analyzes how Spero’s unique use of printmaking extended the conceptual import of her subjects. The materiality of her works and her political convictions are inseparable. Spero abandoned oil painting on canvas in 1964 and painting altogether in 1970—overlapping, not coincidentally, the years when feminism came to fruition in the United States. Questioning all aspects of tradition, many women artists moved away from oil painting on canvas and embraced mediums or materials previously denigrated, such as fabric. Spero painted, printed, and collaged on paper as a means to reject the hierarchies of medium rooted in European Academic traditions. In this dissertation I focus especially on the connotations of printmaking. Though printmaking methods were Spero’s primary means of artmaking for the majority of her career, it is an aspect thus far not considered because she is not a traditional printmaker; in fact, most would not consider her a printmaker at all.

Historically printmaking has been employed for its reproductive capacity; thus, printmakers created editions. Yet increasingly artists have been producing unique, singular prints, and not simply in a shallow effort to increase market value. As I explain in Chapter One, Spero utilized printmaking in non-traditional ways, making it difficult to classify her as a printmaker but accurate to describe her practice as participating in a kind of “print logic.”

Spero graduated from the Art Institute of Chicago in 1949 as a painter, but in 1966 made a deliberate choice to work only on paper. In the last two decades of her life
she created temporary wall installations, fabric banners, one series of mosaics, and a large sculpture, but she is best known for her collages. Always aware of her working context, Spero viewed persistent biases against works on paper by art markets and institutions as an opportunity to dedicate her practice to “undervalued” mediums. Derrida’s mistaken claim, stamped by Spero onto one panel of Notes in Time (1976-1979), that “feminism…is the operation by which woman wants to come to resemble man,” could easily be rephrased to suggest a cynical response to those who view works on paper as only emulating more “serious,” “valuable” works on canvas or cast in bronze. Spero’s choices of materials were highly deliberate.

Using the physical characteristics of Spero’s chosen surface and medium—paper, printmaking, and collage—as a unifying, conceptual guide, I write about Spero’s work as fluctuating between its own materiality and a sense of imminent dematerialization. Compared to a more archivally sound and highly valued medium such as oil on canvas, Spero’s chosen materials were deliberately fragile and transient: she worked on paper and her installations were usually temporary. I consider the significance of paper itself: paper as both a material and conceptual object affecting the work’s message just as much as the text and images on its surface. Though Spero coded paper as feminine in numerous interviews and writings, seeing it as antithetical to the preferred medium of successful male artists, oil on canvas, this study historicizes this assertion by considering paper outside simplistic gender dichotomies.

While Spero’s prints are regularly referred to as drawings or paintings, no one argues about her status as a collage artist. This medium has gained increased attention, as
is evident in recent surveys.¹ It may be Spero’s unconventional method of cutting and collaging her printed images that makes some reluctant to call her a printmaker. Likewise, she differs from most collage artists in that she mediates her appropriation of found imagery through the process of printmaking. Rather than directly pasting fragments from magazines, newspapers, and other printed matter, Spero replicated found images on zinc and polymer plates, which allowed her to repeat figures many times in different contexts. She ultimately accumulated over 400 of these printed motifs, which she moved around on large sheets of paper like characters on a stage to create different narratives.

In Chapter Two, “Langue et Parole,” I consider the juxtaposition of text and image in Spero’s work. The artist began incorporating text even as a student at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1948. Her use of written language became more and more prominent through the years, to the point that her twenty-four-panel Notes in Time on Women (1976-79) is comprised almost exclusively of printed text. After this she made an abrupt turn away from the linguistic, seeing her gesturing figures as a kind of “virtual hieroglyphs.”² This chapter describes four ways Spero used text, addressing the implications of handwritten (painted) words versus typed text and distinguishing her methods from other artists who have used text.

With only a few, very early exceptions, Spero appropriated her words from existing sources. Spero was interested in everything from ancient codices and philosophy...

² As described by Nancy Spero in interview with Erika Hoffmann in New York, March 5, 1991; reprinted in Nancy Spero: Dissidances (Barcelona, Spain: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), 137.
to mythology, poetry, and contemporary news. Initially she incorporated texts that she felt expressed her outrage at her inability to have a voice—that is, be represented—in the art world. For this purpose she relied heavily on writings by Antonin Artaud (1896–1948), a French playwright whom many consider unintelligible. After completing two cycles of works based on Artaud’s morbid and often repulsive prose, the artist culled from a broad range of historical texts notable for their misogyny—some inherently (as in Derrida’s aforementioned anti-feminist stance), others explicitly (as in Amnesty International’s reports of torture to women). A final shift occurred in the early eighties, when Spero felt that she could combat misogyny more effectively by celebrating women rather than spotlighting the myriad ways in which the “lesser sex” had been demeaned and degraded. In this phase she gleaned from the writings of Hélène Cixous and American poet H.D., among others.

Spero was very conscientious in her selection of textual sources; the text is, however, not always legible. For example, much of the Artaud text is not translated from its original French and so is often unreadable by her chiefly American audience. Thus it is sometimes unclear precisely what she wanted to communicate with her viewers: in many works the legible narrative is paramount, while in others illegibility of words is the premise of the work itself. From 1948 to 1970 she hand-painted words in cursive and block letter; beginning with the Codex Artaud she utilized a Bulletin typewriter and large letterpress characters. Occasionally typed words overlap, with the effect that the joined and obscured letters blur together to become a shape or line rather than legible words or phrases. Each approach results in a different texture on the surface of the paper;
additionally, text color and size greatly affect the manner in which viewers interpret the words. In this way my analysis returns to issues of materiality.

“This Continuous Present,” the third and final chapter, examines select installations, and the idea of history as it is bricolaged in Spero’s work. I argue that Spero redefined and revitalized nineteenth-century conventions of history painting. While stylistically Spero’s work contrasts greatly with that of nineteenth-century history painters, I draw a comparison between her work and that of Théodore Gericault (1791-1824), in order to highlight the ways in which her work, like that of the famous French painter, draws on a politically-motivated conceptions of history that combines past and present to particular ideological ends. This chapter also examines four projects in which Spero engaged with ancient art: in 1991 the artist was invited to exhibit her work among the permanent collection of Greek and Roman sculpture at the Glyptothek Museum in Munich, Germany; in 1995 Peter Soriano invited her to create a site-specific installation in the galleries of ancient art at Harvard’s Sackler Museum; in 1996 her print The Black and the Red was projected onto the Pantheon in Rome; and in 2003 she created two banners (Hymn to Isis I and II) specifically for the Egyptian Koptos Gateway at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. These fascinating and understudied projects raise questions about how contemporary art changes our understanding of art from the past, as well as history itself.

While the artist was always interested in art and myths from the past, she increasingly made history (more specifically, historical and mythological figures) a subject of inquiry. She appropriated female figures, both fictional and real, from various cultures and histories (e.g., Greek goddesses and Holocaust victims), in effect collapsing
time to interrogate how women have been defined by their representations. Spero’s
construction of new, ahistorical narratives exemplifies Gertrude Stein’s “continuous
present,” meaning that past and future are perpetually relevant to the current moment. In
this way, there is a conceptual undoing, or dematerialization, of historical chronology.
The question of what and whose history is communicated through Spero’s work follows;
her characters are exclusively female, yet they imply a wider re-interpretation of the past
and present. Mignon Nixon described the artist’s use of historical figures this way:
“Spero reveals the past that haunts the present through myth, finding in the remains of
ancient civilizations cultural encryptions of the passions that haunt the modern world.”

I consider again the relationship of materiality and concept: just as paper appears
homogenous but is woven of many fibers and is easily adaptable to a plethora of
aesthetics and functions, history is organic and continually re-worked. Like collage, there
is a literal layering of historical events, producing a visual transhistoricity. Spero
collapsed history to emphasize collective trauma, then applied the same method from the
1980s onwards to exalt women through representations of strong, active female figures.
In this last phase of her career Spero perhaps unintentionally entrenched herself within an
outdated feminism that essentialized the female sex, one that Peggy Phelan describes as
“the trap of heroine worship, in which the achievements of women are uncritically
celebrated in an understandable but counterproductive effort to compensate for years of
neglect.” Nevertheless, these late works still effectively challenged the male-dominated
exhibitions and collections they were created to confront. In sum, this dissertation aims to
link Spero’s materials and printmaking methods to her feminist politics.

CHAPTER 1

PAPER, PRINTMAKING, AND FEMINISM

Nancy Spero created the print *Woman Breathing* in 1978. The work (fig. 1.1) is comprised of two long panels, each made by gluing together three sheets of paper. Overall it is thirteen and a half feet long and twenty inches in height. Soaking the sheets of paper in water after block printing the words WOMAN BREATHING across the top of each panel, Spero then adhered the paper to a heavier support at regular intervals (perhaps every four inches and running the height of the paper), creating parallel furrows that look very much like three-dimensional waves. The corrugated print, with its faded and subtle text, flows across the wall, suggesting a continuous rhythmic pulse and breath. The subject is ambiguous, though a female viewer may feel the printed phrase refers to herself, especially as one’s reflection in the glass protecting the piece interrupts the composition. As Jo Anna Isaak noted, “For women viewers, the implication is more explicit, because the woman in the image is always you.”5 One may understandably become hyperaware of their own breath. Text provides the only added color in this work, and shadows from the shaped paper create calm, rhythmic compositional elements. Most notably at the top, but also at the bottom, an undulating shadow appears like a relaxed pulse line on a heart monitor. Shadows change as one moves. The uneven manner in which the paper absorbed water and subsequently dried out lends the work an organic,

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skin-like quality. A squeegee was carefully dragged over half of the text on the right panel, partially obscuring the phrase and suggesting a prolonged exhale.

*Woman Breathing* is an anomaly in the artist’s body of work because it includes no representational imagery. As outlined in the introduction, Spero is best remembered for large-scale collages in which she juxtaposed text and images. In the sparse composition of *Woman Breathing*, she took full advantage of the paper’s resiliency with the result that the paper becomes part of the content of the work. The intimate delicacy of paper and breath coalesce.

This chapter argues that Spero’s choices of medium are central to her feminist political messages. Specifically, the artist’s deliberate turn away from oil painting on canvas in favor of printmaking methods was for her one of the most meaningful conceptual gestures against centuries of art world patriarchy. While her works are typically referred to as paintings—even occasionally by the artist herself—I reject this as an indiscriminate term on the basis of both the materials and processes preferred by Spero in her mature work. Works on paper have long been subordinate to other media in informal hierarchies governing taste. Traditionally, drawings and sketches on paper were seen as preparatory works, especially for oil paintings. Prints were seen as lacking the uniqueness of a singular work of art. Much has changed over the last century. Even at the

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6 Many artists and art writers have drawn this connection; Jo Anna Isaak mentions that Kiki Smith enjoys working with paper because of its “proximity to the texture of human skin” (“Working in the Rag-and-Bone Shop of the Heart” in Jon Bird, ed., *Otherworlds: The Art of Nancy Spero and Kiki Smith* [London: Reaktion, 2003], 63), and Joanna Walker notes of Spero’s works that “The paper may wrinkle like an aged and traumatized skin in reaction to, or even rejection of, the drawn, printed and collaged figures stamped on its surface like irreversible tattoos. The gouache or ink at times look like ominous stains made by the bodily fluids of a corpse in distress.” (*Nancy Spero: An Encounter in Three Parts—Performance, Poetry and Dance*, PhD diss., [University College London, 2008], 35).
beginning of the twentieth century, the dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler included Pablo Picasso’s drawings in his contract with the artist as independent works. Painting has lost some of its preeminence in scholarship as it has been challenged by other media such as photography and film, yet it remains true that works on paper carry less prestige than paintings.

Works on paper should be recognized for their unique and equally potent aesthetic and conceptual contributions. It is because she made works on paper that I was initially compelled to focus my dissertation on Nancy Spero. In the following pages I consider her use of paper and printmaking matrices utilized to reproduce images again and again, albeit in different contexts and to different aesthetic ends. I argue that her processes and materials extend the conceptual import of her work; that is, her non-traditional utilization of printmaking and collage methods underscores her primary theme: political and social resistance. As Deborah Frizzell describes it, “Her paper panels, glued end-to-end and push-pinned around gallery and museum walls, violated the normative ‘masculinist’ scale, valued materials, and arrangement of discrete framed paintings.” In these ways Spero placed her work in direct opposition to artistic and political hegemony.

Spero’s first major series, which she called *The Black Paintings*, was also her last foray into oil on canvas. Created between 1956 and 1966, the series consists of thirty works on canvas and eighteen works on paper. Spero and Golub moved several times within this decade: to Italy for one year, then Bloomington, Indiana, for two (where

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8 This series is variously divided; here I include what has been called the *Lovers* series and the *Fuck You* paintings because all are predominately black. Studio assistant Samm Kunce reported that Spero was not insistent on distinguishing between series until 1966, when she began *The War Series* and worked exclusively on paper.
Golub taught at Indiana University), then Paris from 1959 to 1964, when they relocated to New York. If her dedication to producing art even during this nomadic period is commendable, it should also be noted that she was simultaneously raising two small children and had her third son in 1961. Indeed, the ease of storing and transporting works was one of her reasons for turning to paper as opposed to large, cumbersome canvases. Water-based mediums also made for easy clean up and quick drying time. Of the Black Paintings on paper, thirteen are gouache and ink, two are watercolor, and two combine gouache, watercolor, and ink. Each work includes at least one figure and most include several: lovers, mothers with children, and families are roughly sketched, largely concealed in darkness. Many layers of paint are evident in Untitled (Lovers) (1965, fig. 1.2), with the result that colors waft in and out of clarity like puffs of smoke. The creased and wrinkled paper absorbed black, red, blue, and brown washes of gouache, ink and watercolor. Frizzell describes these surfaces as “carbonized.” Heavy black contours on the right outline a man and woman sitting in the position of couples on Etruscan sarcophagi, with which the artist was entranced. In a few places the paper is worn thin, evidence of Spero’s constant scraping of the surface. American poet John Ashberry, also an expatriate in Paris in the early sixties, reflected that “it is not the figures but their surrounding void which one retains: the transparent sooty depths,” which aligns with Spero’s claim that the works were the result of her focus at that time on existentialism and alienation.

9 Stephen (b. 1953) and Philip (b. 1954) were both born in Chicago, and Paul in Paris in 1961. 10 Deborah Frizzell, Nancy Spero’s Installations and Institutional Incursions, 1987-2001: Dialogues Within the Museum, and Elsewhere (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2004), 78. 11 Frizzell, Nancy Spero’s Installations, 81.
These works may lack the striking graphic quality and gut-wrenching conceptual power of her better-known series. However, in light of Spero’s entire career their standing as early works is striking because they offer so little indication of her mature aesthetic. However, what does carry over is her approach to working on paper, which is markedly different from those Black Paintings on canvas. When working with oil, she apparently felt compelled to cover the entire surface of the fabric. Dark layers ranging from black to blue to green, grey and brown stretch to the edges of every oil painting in this series. This was achieved by a nearly obsessive practice of layering and scraping. Brushwork appears aggressive, gestural, even sloppy. The works on canvas, covered to the perimeter, suggest the darkness continues ad infinitum. In contrast, the paintings on paper are much more sketchy, with irregular borders, and textured streaks achieved with a “dry brush” technique. Titles are incorporated into some compositions. Against an irregularly painted black background, three skulls in profile seem to race toward the right side of the paper in *Les Anges, Merde, Fuck You* (1960, fig. 1.3). These words are painted in white and together with the trio of heads make a balanced, ovoid arrangement. “les anges” is repeated at the bottom in black, like a faint echo. The paper is visibly violated: scrubbed with the brush, idiosyncratically creased and warped. These profanities are typically used impulsively, out of anger. Pompidou Curator Jonas Storsve explains, “She employed extremely violent vocabulary to express the anger of the young artist ignored.” Mimicking these emotions, Spero’s brushwork and paint application are frenetic and unpredictable. This suggests she approached paper with less concern over creating a “finished” work. At this juncture process was more important; she was coming

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to not only accept but embrace her marginalized status as a woman artist as a focal point for her work. Put more simply, frustration became her wellspring, and her retort was to underscore her disregard for art’s permanency and sacredness. As Spero later reflected, the paintings on paper “were meant to be read with the urgency of a manifesto rather than a delectionation of ‘fine art’…I liked the idea of paper as disposable, fragile, less loaded with high cultural values than canvas—almost like throwaways. Oil on canvas implied the grandiosity of the ‘Big Statement’. Paper was more suitable for the irreverent spontaneity of political graffiti.”

The energy apparent in the brushwork is noted frequently when describing *The War Series* (1966–1970), and its origins are clearly in these *Black Paintings* on paper. As Jo Anna Isaak explains, “brushstrokes…were applied rapid-fire, like slaps across the fragile paper…erupt[ing] in an emotional release…Urgency, anger, and release were in every gesture…” Likewise Elisabeth Lebovici observed that Spero’s works on paper are “more fragile and crumpled; the traces, traits, blows, bites and scratches [signify] an apocalyptic lamentation.”

Highlighted by the whiteness of the paper, these paintings on paper retain an intense energy that is lost in the layers and darkness of the oil paintings on canvas. While the deskl作ed and layered aesthetic of the *Black Paintings* is strikingly different from all subsequent work, a synthesis between form and content is established that becomes paramount to all of Spero’s choices of materials and techniques. Frizzell touches on this

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when she writes, “for Spero, form is an embodiment of meaning contingent on process, interaction, and bodily experience.”\textsuperscript{16} While Rosalind Krauss, in Voyage on the North Sea, effectively pointed out the fallacy of any division of form and content, many artists are not as deliberate or conscientious as to how their chosen mediums mean in relation to their subjects.\textsuperscript{17} Spero is an exception.

By 1966, when Spero resolutely turned to working on paper, a variety of strategies and theories—among them Pop and Minimalism—had undermined the strong legacy of Abstract Expressionism. However, large paintings on canvas made by male artists continued to dominate criticism, scholarship, institutions, and the market. Feminist artists developed a plethora of means to expose biases not only against women and under-represented artists but against mediums and materials thought to be “crafty,” “feminine,” “unimportant,” or otherwise scoffed at by art world heavy-hitters. In defiance, marginalized mediums were embraced; as Amy Ingrid Schlegel describes, the “feminist avant-garde consciously and collectively organized itself in opposition to ‘painting’—representing both the exclusionary, commercially-driven structure of mainstream art institutions and the valorized medium of Greenbergian modernism.”\textsuperscript{18} In this self-conscious move away from predominant, “hypermasculine” trends, Spero opted to paint with gouache and ink on paper for her next two series, The War Paintings (1966–1970) and The Artaud Paintings (1969–1970). Spero remarked, “I would no longer do

\textsuperscript{16} Frizzell, Nancy Spero’s Installations, 333-334.
\textsuperscript{17} Rosalind Krauss, Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition (London: Thames & Hudson, 1999).
\textsuperscript{18} Amy Ingrid Schlegel, Codex Spero: Feminist Art and Activist Practice in New York Since the Late 1960s (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1997), 21-22.
‘important’ work, in terms of collector’s preferences for canvases of the ‘proper’ dimensions.”

The War Paintings stand as the artist’s first overtly political art, the beginning of what became a defining characteristic of all subsequent work: art as political protest. The escalating violence in Vietnam was the initial impetus that pushed her in this direction, but this was only a jumping off point for collapsing staunch pacifism into feminist demands for equality. Spero frequently drew direct parallels between her political subjects and her chosen mediums; “I decided I was going to make quick manifestoes, which expressed my anger and said something about violence, collusion, and power in a way that would shock the viewer.” Rather than pre-planned, tedious compositions, she made many placards in quick succession as public declarations.

The timing of Spero’s decision to make paintings about Vietnam deserves some explanation. As previously mentioned, Spero and Golub had lived in Paris from 1959 to 1964. Vietnam had been part of French Indochina since 1858, and France had been fighting Communist Viet Minh even before the end of World War II in 1945. Prompted by Mao’s establishment of communism in China in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the United States armed and funded the French. US military arrived in Vietnam as early as 1950, but the French withdrew in 1954. So, while the conflict in Southeast Asia had been going on for more than a decade when Spero embarked on her anti-war project, the most controversial and publicized conflict during her time in Paris

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was the Algerian War. One of the only interviews in which Spero spoke about this period was with Phong Bui, published in the *Brooklyn Rail* in 2008. A long excerpt is worth quoting:

Bui: It must have been quite intense the year you came to Paris, in 1959, because it was the year that the French army…proclaimed that [they] were fighting for the Algerian Revolution, defending their freedom as if they were defending the West’s freedom, which led to de Gaulle’s dramatic change of mind by refusing to recognize the GPRA [Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic]. It was also the same year in my country, Vietnam, that the National Liberation Front was created, as was the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the beginning of large scale operations against Diem’s unpopular South Vietnamese military. You and Leon must have been affected by all of those political events.

Spero: For sure. The Gaullist regime showed no signs of bringing the anti-colonial struggle to an end. They certainly didn’t learn much from their defeat at Dien Bien Phu [in 1954]. Obviously, things built up by 1960. The anti-war movement was led by students and leftist intellectuals, including Sartre, de Beauvoir, Boulez, and many others. Even the liberal intelligentsia sided with the Algerian independence struggle. However, the big blow came in December 1960, when French troops joined with other European-derived populations in Algeria and began their murderous attacks on the crowds during their mass demonstrations under the FLN [National Liberation Front] banner. The political crisis didn’t get any better when we moved back to New York in 1964: the war in Vietnam was getting worse, tension escalated. I remember looking down the street with [my son] Paul in my arms on a Sunday afternoon, and there was a group of young people marching against the U.S. government for having entered the war against Cambodia.22

Presenting intervention to the American public as a critical necessity to stop the spread of communism—but secretly acknowledging economic motivations among government officials—Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson gradually escalated US involvement. War was declared in August 1964.

Like many Americans, Spero was horrified not only as an American citizen but as a mother of three sons. Spero recounted,

I wasn’t political at all until I came back to the U.S. during the Vietnam War… After being an expatriate for five years in France, it just suddenly hit me that the responsibility was mine, as well as that of other Americans. So, it was a combination, an integration of both the art work and activism… I had this sense of anger, disgust and frustration directed at the Vietnam War and how it was ruining this country. I was trying to keep the war away, like a personal exorcism. I had three young sons and when we came back from Europe the war was on TV all the time: uncensored pictures of Vietnam interspersed between the soaps and on the news…I was angry at the art world and at the world in general…I asked myself, how am I to address this kind of thing? I thought of mass destruction and my fury at it coalesced with my fury at the art world. And because I thought I had things to say and nobody was listening, I was especially frustrated. That was the combo: art and real life.23

The premise of The War Series is that violence is gendered. In about 150 works created over four years, Spero depicted fantastical and disgusting cyborgs: machine-bodies wreaking devastation on victims. Phallic helicopters and falling excrement painted in feverish, rough dry brush presented war as the most offensive patriarchal engagement.

In Sperm Bomb (1966, fig. 1.4), ribbons of watered-down blue gouache spiral in all directions, loosely forming a mushroom cloud. Tiny heads with mouths agape, some with long tongues, cap off the ends of these brushstrokes. The wild, irregular lines seem to move, an effect heightened by evident smearing and scratching over the wet paint. The varying the value and intensity of the paint seems to almost inadvertently create atmospheric perspective, lending a three-dimensional quality to the work. Spero turns the function of sperm on its head; rather than aiming to procreate, these seeds sow destruction. The mushroom cloud shape is a consistent trope throughout the War

Paintings, sometimes achieved with larger heads and female characteristics. Bomb and Victims (1967, fig. 1.5), for instance, depicts what seems to be a hill of dirt hit by a bomb at its apex, causing a brown umbrella of mud. Two female busts in profile (identifiable by large breasts) at either end of this shape spew blood from their mouths and nipples. Below them lie at least twelve prostrate bodies, outlined in black and splattered with blood. The foremost corpse appears to be a naked pregnant woman in the midst of labor, a small head emerging from her crotch. The mess of red paint on her mouth, stomach, and especially the pool collected between her legs insinuate she is being massacred, or perhaps already dead. It is not possible to identify the sex of the other corpses, but the relationship of the mother at the bottom of the composition with the apparently female bomb at the top underscores the horrors of war and specifically women killing women.

The bomb was an apt sign for this conflict; historian Howard Zinn reports “By the end of the Vietnam war, seven million tons of bombs had been dropped on Vietnam, more than twice the total bombs dropped on Europe and Asia in World War II—almost one 500-pound bomb for every human being in Vietnam. It was estimated that there were twenty million bomb craters in the country.” In addition to the mushroom cloud, the helicopter became Spero’s preferred symbol for the war. Later incarnations abstract the machines as ovals with numerous “legs” comparable to enormous bugs, but the portrayal is slightly more detailed in Clown and Helicopter (1967, fig. 1.6). Long blades, two legs, and two exaggerated canons emerge from a pod shape in the center. As if looking directly into the sun, the scene appears to glow in a halo of light. Even more extraordinary is a

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24 Zinn, 224.

25 Spero relayed, “I asked myself, what is the real symbol of the Vietnam War? And I thought, the helicopter.” In “Picturing the Autobiographical War: An Interview with Robert Enright” (2003); re-printed in Arkesteijn, 37.
clothed man straddling a huge canon, the latter attached to the top of the helicopter. The suggestion that the canon is the man’s penis is reinforced by two spherical shapes hanging underneath, an obvious allusion to testicles. Still more disturbing is the man’s grin.

The man’s left arm is outstretched holding a cross while his right rests on the giant gun. Here Spero represents the conflation of religious and political bigotry readily expressed in nearly all wars. Catholic Cardinal Francis Spellman infamously “remarked from an armed helicopter [in Vietnam] that this was a war fought in defense of Christian civilization.”26 No doubt this prompted Spero’s biting critique, although Nina Felshin notes that “the nature of Christ’s presence is deliberately ambiguous and paradoxical. According to the artist, it refers to a statement made repeatedly by Cardinal Spellman during the Vietnam War that ‘God is on our side.’ It simultaneously suggests that if God exists, he is uncaring.”27 One wonders if the cross, which appears in other paintings within this series, was yet another way Spero, who was Jewish, could distance herself from the perpetrators of this violence. Nevertheless the reference to the supernatural is emphasized by the brilliant heavenly light that seems to radiate from the helicopter itself.

Bomb Shitting (1966, fig. 1.7) further stresses the abject nature of war. In the center of this composition floats an oversized buttocks, loosely painted in with pink paint, with four decapitated heads falling as excrement into the void below. The truncated body is topped by two heads in profile, facing each side of the paper, that vomit blood. Each bomb-head does likewise. Apparently dissatisfied with the crisp black contours, the artist

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26 Lucy R. Lippard, A Different War: Vietnam in Art (Seattle: The Real Comet Press, 1990), 34.
aggressively smeared the wet ink, creating a horizontal hazy band in the center of the piece.

Aspects of the War Paintings appear like the work of a bad or untrained artist. The figures are poorly rendered, and in places the brush was not adequately loaded with gouache to cover its intended area. Yet this very purposeful deskillings aligns perfectly with the subject at hand. Spero exploited the qualities of immediacy and dry brush possible with highly viscous mediums on paper to accentuate intense anger. She inserted blasphemy, sexuality and all manner of bodily discharge to disgust, offend, and even nauseate viewers. As Dominique Nahas describes, “Angry, scratchy gouaches detailed the not very latent scatological and sexual meta-discourse of war.”28 The artist continually emphasized the importance of violence as a subject and a process in her artistic practice: “I used bloody colors, and literally a lot of spit with gouache paint…to correct anything I would rub spit in with my finger. Even though they seem so delicate, they are violent; a lot of them are patched on the back from all this rubbing.”29 There is a congruity of content and medium: like war-torn bodies, paper can be torn apart with ease, but both are also surprisingly resistant to some amount of external force. Fibrous bodies and fibrous papers are receptive, organic, and porous. The War Series appears in dire need of conservation, with rampant untamed warping and occasional holes. The rough handling suggests discarded scraps or the idea of worthlessness. It may be surprising, then, that Spero developed strong preferences with regard to what paper she used, even if it was maimed in the process of making. In the pages that follow, I continue this analysis

of materiality by focusing on two significant facets of Spero’s work: paper and printmaking.

PAPER

Though scarcely recognized even among artists, the variety of paper available today is truly astounding. Subtle nuances of a chosen paper hold great interpretive potential for conceptual association. It is an unfortunate curiosity, then, why works on paper are catalogued in museums and archives as just that: works on paper—with no specifications as to what kind of paper. While discourse about paper is common in some areas of studio art (such as book and paper arts, paper- and printmaking), this field is quite marginalized in art scholarship. Considering paper as content has received virtually no attention, even among formalists who derive an artwork’s meaning from the physical materials and visible elements to the exclusion of external contexts or references.

There was a growing interest in the potential of paper throughout the fifties and sixties, and in the seventies the handmade paper industry flourished. Charlotta Kotik and Sheila Webb credit Robert Rauschenberg’s Pages and Fuses from 1974, for which he traveled to the Richard du Bas Mill in Ambert, France, as “substantially expand[ing] the definition of paper, indicating its potential in two- and three-dimensional

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30 This is evident in the number of publications on paper and paper arts, including The Handmade Paper Object (Ron Crozier, 1976); The Fall (Michelle Stuart, 1976); Paper Forms, Handmade Paper Objects (Kathy Halbreich, 1977); Paper Art (David Rubin, 1977); The Art and Craft of Handmade Paper (Vance Studley, 1977); Paper in Prints (Andrew Robison, 1977); New Ways with Paper (Janet Flint, 1978); and Papermaking (Jules Heller, 1978). Further, in 1977 American Artist devoted an entire issue to the papermaking revolution.
compositions.” In 1977 the Smithsonian American Art Museum (then the National Collection of Fine Arts) hosted New Ways with Paper, and the National Gallery of Art presented Paper in Prints. In 1978 the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) organized Paper as Medium that brought together work by fifty-one artists who primarily explored the sculptural possibilities of paper. Nevertheless, paper was (and is still) viewed by many as a less significant material because less valuable monetarily and less permanent archivally. It is because of this bias that Spero chose it as a surface and medium. Christopher Lyon states, “Spero considered her 1966 decision to work solely on paper an act of defiance” against male dominance and the mainstream art world. The artist explained, “I deliberately did the works on paper, since paper, as a surface, was devalued. As we say, it had lack of monetary value.” Thus it was the symbolic and metaphorical possibilities of paper that drove Spero’s choice.

Not surprisingly, it took time for the artist to gain awareness of the variety and nuances of papers; in addition, she had a very cynical attitude: “I went from oil on canvas to paper, and pretty lousy paper at that. I paid no attention to my materials. In being careless, there was a residual Arte Povera attitude…I started to think: I don’t want my

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32 More recently, a small temporary exhibit at the de Young Museum in San Francisco, called Surface Tension: Contemporary Prints from the Anderson Collection, described paper as integral to the conceptual process. This 2011-2012 exhibit featured artists Ann Hamilton, Louise Nevelson, Joseph Albers, and Jasper Johns, among others. Though the exhibit was not promoted as focusing on paper, presumably due to the medium’s low profile among museum visitors, it is exciting to see even a cursory flirtation with the idea of paper as content.
33 Lyon, 76.
stuff to be so permanent, so important…Nobody’s looking, nobody cares.”34 Quickly she came to favor some papers over others, however.35 As she recalls:

Toward the end of The War Series I switched to a handmade Japanese rice paper, Sekishu White. It was more absorbent than the Aquabee rough 100% rag bond and other bond papers I had used, and I could no longer work (I still rubbed and smudged a bit) in the same way. That’s when I started collaging. For example, I would paint on the Sekishu almost abstract outlines of helicopters with metallic paint, over which I collaged figures in various configurations. So the figures gained a second and more literal level of freedom from the ground. In the early works of The War Series the visibility and autonomy of the gestural signs had been heightened by the contrasting whiteness of the paper. In the later works of the series, collaging allowed greater fluidity in the relationships between figures and their relation to the ground. Figures could be cut up and recombined in new configurations.36

According to studio assistant Samm Kunce, Spero preferred Sekishu and Bodleian papers.37 Japanese papers tend to be thinner than Western papers. They are made on flexible bamboo mats whereas Western papers are made using wire screens. Additionally, they are dried differently: in Asia sheets are stacked directly on top of one another, whereas in the West they are separated by felts. Sekishu, one of the oldest papers in the world, is created from the kozo or gampi plant and can be either handmade or machine-made. The latter has a distinctive, polished surface that is much more slick than any handmade paper and has an artificial deckled edge. Sekishu features sensual, wispy fiber lines and is still available today in white or natural colors. Both Bodlein and Sekishu

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34 In 1985 interview with Nicole Jolicoeur and Nell Tenhaaf, reprinted in Arkesteijn, 15.
35 Terri Weissman, who worked as a studio assistant in Spero’s studio in 1990, recalled that Spero was extremely mindful of her materials and would only use certain papers (interview with author January 31, 2012).
36 In interview with Stephen Götz, 149.
37 Email correspondence with Samm Kunce, October 27, 2011 and January 22, 2012.
papers are some of the most resilient papers due to the long fibers.\textsuperscript{38} Unlike many papers, Sekishu retains its strength even when wet.

Bodleian is a handmade laid paper produced by Barcham Green and Company at Hayle Mill, Maidstone in Kent, England. Hayle Mill was built in 1808, and the Green family produced paper there from 1813 to 1987,\textsuperscript{39} thus Bodleian paper is no longer manufactured—a loss still lamented by paper conservators today.\textsuperscript{40} All Barcham Green paper is identifiable by a “BG” watermark. Bodleian was a laid paper, meaning it was handmade on a screen which imprinted horizontal wiremarks and vertical “chainlines” (woven wires that secured the screen). These lines are quite visible when the paper is held up to sunlight. Bodleian was made for paper conservation, especially because the pale cream tone (created using ochres and umbers) closely matches older books and papers, but became popular as a drawing paper. When first made in the 1930s it was made from linen; during the fifties and sixties from cotton and then from the 1980s flax fibers, a long fiber that resulted in very strong, durable paper.\textsuperscript{41}

All papers, even those produced by machine, have distinct sides, one more textured than the other. Irregular fiber distribution gives handmade paper idiosyncratic qualities such as a subtle mottled appearance and uneven texture. Artists typically develop a preference for the recto (front) or verso (back) of papers, or maximize the texture to different effects. Dorothea Eimert notes, for example, that Edgar Degas

\textsuperscript{38} Conversation with paper conservator Richard Baker, January 26, 2012.
\textsuperscript{40} Maureen Green’s research presents the history of Hayle Mill and has been printed in a limited-edition run of 200: \textit{Papermaking at Hayle Mill 1808–1987} (Vermont: Janus Press, 2008).
\textsuperscript{41} Email correspondence with Simon Barcham Green, January 30-31, 2012.
sometimes printed lithographs on the “wrong” side of the paper to incorporate lines and watermarks into his compositions.\footnote{Dorothea Eimert, \textit{Paper Art: History of Paper Art} (Düren, Germany: Wienand Verlag, 1994), 21.}

Unfortunately curators and conservators are reluctant to identify specific papers due to simple lack of knowledge. It is possible to discern what paper Spero used for a particular work by very close inspection of color, surface quality or texture, how the paper holds wet and dry media, thickness, edges, and, most obviously, watermark. While Spero had favorite papers, no record was ever kept specifying what papers were used for which works. Kunce, studio assistant to both Spero and Golub for over twenty years and manager of the studio estate, indicated Spero’s insouciance in not keeping a complete list of her works or even a list of works belonging to a given series. Her practice of giving works away to friends also makes it hard to inventory her work.\footnote{Interview with author September 26, 2012.} My research on the \textit{Artaud Paintings} reveals that she did not always use the same paper for every work in a given series (which can also vary in size). Lyon relays that she used two kinds of paper in \textit{The War Paintings}: smooth, thin, rag bond and later Sekishu white.\footnote{Lyon, 76.} The artist said of her \textit{Artaud Paintings}, “The figures and abstract shapes were painted on 100 percent rag bond paper, cut out and glued onto the Sekishu with Higgins vegetable glue…The paper puckered and yellowed, which I liked for the Artaud works because I wanted the work to look used or old. Only the handwriting is directly painted onto the paper.”\footnote{Lyon, 114-115.}

Throughout her career the artist preferred Japanese paper for its deceptively fragile appearance and hidden resilience. Long-fibered papers could withstand aggressive

\footnote{\textit{\textcopyright 2012-2016} John R. Feese. All rights reserved.}
working even when wet or collaged with additional layers, and retain a visible texture for dry brush techniques. The material presence in the *War Paintings* and some of the *Artaud Paintings* is startling; the surfaces have been repeatedly reworked, and accidental tears and rips are left as certain evidence of the artist’s process. In *Bomb and Victims*, described earlier, there is a small ripped hole in the paper on the pregnant woman’s left leg, suggesting her body has been mutilated. *Les Bourgeois Passant...* (1968, fig. 1.8), another in the *War* series, is comprised of a passage of text from French writer Jean Genet with a swath of brown paint at the bottom, that appears to represent a dirt ground. Nine heads, most with arms, lie on this ground as if just killed. Just left of center a blackish grey smudge jumps up from the ground, and the paper has been worn away by abrasive rubbing. It suggests remnants of an explosion, and the hole in the paper makes physical what the painting only intimates.

Some of her early paintings on paper are wildly warped. As paper is capable of absorbing only so much water before pools collect on its surface, and as it dries unevenly, an idiosyncratic texture emerges. *Helicopter Blinding Victims* (1968, fig. 1.9) presents one instance. Decapitated heads in profile with mouths wide open, painted in black ink with minimal strokes, seem to fall in a curiously regular pattern. Their eye sockets are painted in with red gouache, and each has been blotted and smeared. The resulting faded lines point to the surrounding heads and, together with the furrows created by wet paper pulling at dry, create an arrangement almost like bathroom tiles. No helicopter is readily visible but a pod with blade-like appendages is painted in white at the top. Spero could have prevented these effects to a certain extent but chose not to, underscoring the importance of materiality and paper’s contradictory characteristics of delicateness and
strength. In interviews Spero stated that she did sometimes have studio assistants flatten works with old-fashioned heavy irons but this was not done regularly because she liked the creases and wrinkles. Allowing a seemingly fragile material to retain its “wounds” proclaims its resiliency in the face of physical assault, which may be understood as a parallel to women’s resistance within patriarchy.

Taking cues from the artist, many writers have upheld her stance that the choice of paper grew from a feminist resistance. Cristiana Perrella observed that as early as the beginning of the 1970s, [Spero] had been focusing her work on the creation of a specifically feminine language of painting, giving up canvas for the fragility of paper, grandiloquent and expressive brushwork for the repeated and patient act of printing or collage and creating a new grammar of movement, rhythm, and color…In this way she conquered and feminized the masculine space of painting.46

While Perrella’s crediting Spero with a heroic act of genius counters the larger project of feminism, the use of paper does, as Jon Bird states, bring up issues of “fragility and strength [and] the decorative with its connotations of craft,” which high modernism rejected as “unacademic.” The choice was logical politically and aesthetically, for Spero often remarked how much she loved the “ephemeral and fragile qualities of certain varieties of paper.”47 While Spero viewed the use of paper as surface and medium a symbolic gesture against male-dominated traditions, it is interesting to note that the Japanese have an even more specific theory about the relationship between gender and paper. As Richard Sweeney notes,

Kozo is considered a masculine ingredient: thick and strong, it delivers a tough, resilient paper. Mitsumata on the other hand is considered feminine, and as such graceful and modest. It delivers a delicate and soft

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46 In Cristiana Perrella, Alessandra Mammi and Archille Bonito Oliva, *Nancy Spero* (Milan, Italy: Charta, 2009), 16-17.
47 Lyon, 136.
paper, and because the plant takes longer to grow, it is more expensive than the more widely used Kozo. The age of Gampi fibre meanwhile bestows on it a reputation for nobility, dignity and richness. With a seductive sheen, Gampi is often used in very fine, tissue-like sheets, and does not bleed when written on. More generally, Washi is known for its warmth, its body and its strength.\(^48\)

While it is perhaps overly simplistic to reduce the characteristics of different papers to stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, they nonetheless suggest various functions, contexts, and interpretive possibilities that artists may manipulate and emphasize.\(^49\) As I shall demonstrate, Spero’s innovations in extending the conceptual possibilities of a medium were even more profound in the arena of printmaking.

PRINTMAKING

When Spero was thirty-two she was diagnosed with degenerative arthritis. This painful condition made her hands increasingly inflexible through the years, and by the mid-eighties she could no longer hold a pencil or cut paper. She shared with one interviewer in 2008 that she had lost six or seven inches of height due to osteoporosis and


\(^{49}\) This extends to writers as well; Eimert reports that “Goethe was…an admirer of good paper and selected the paper for his publications very carefully, and even for his letters he made sure that the type of writing paper corresponded with the contents,” and “Paper and its manufacture served as a parable of life and of Christian teaching. In 1664 Wolfgang Jacob Dümler described paper production in Nuremberg: ‘The spectator is reminded of the resurrection: in the same way as the old clothes and fouled and beaten rags are lifted beautiful and pure out of the vat and become a new sheet, so the fouless of the grave rusts out the roots of our sin and a beautiful and transfigured body rises on the Day of Judgment.” Further, Benjamin Franklin correlated various papers to human personalities. (*Paper Art: History of Paper Art* [Düren, Germany: Wienand Verlag, 1994], 19, 21-22.)
Whether motivated by this disease or not, the process she developed during the early seventies made it possible for her to continue to create even as finer motor skills deteriorated. This was a collage method using printed imagery she produced from appropriated imagery, which led to a kind of cast of characters—figures who were repeated within and across her works. Eventually she would have studio assistants print thousands of impressions, varying in color and facture, which would be organized into drawers to await incorporation into a collage. In this way Spero could select imagery from a vast archive and move the papers around to compose new collages.

Repeated motifs predate this print-and-collage process, however. Heads with gaping mouths, often with long pointed tongues, appear in numerous War paintings, and this image carries over into the Artaud Paintings (1969-1970) and nearly every series thereafter. Two series incorporating text from French writer Antonin Artaud followed the War paintings: Artaud Paintings (approximately ninety works) and Codex Artaud (1971-1973, thirty-seven panels of varying lengths, each made from pasting together between two and seven pieces of paper). All text in the Artaud Paintings is handpainted, but nearly all text in the Codex Artaud was typed on a Bulletin typewriter. This is arguably her first use of matrices, as typewriters function on the principles of printmaking: each letter makes a physical ink impression onto the paper, like a stamp. Both Artaud Paintings and Codex Artaud are defined by Spero’s equal use of text and image. While some elements are repeated, all images are painted.

In 1974 Spero started using letterpress alphabet blocks given to her by her father, who sold and repaired printing presses for a living, creating works that were almost

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Smoke Lick (1974, fig. 1.10) provides one example: the phrase “smoke lick” appears about seventeen times over three pieces of paper which have been pasted together to create a horizontal scroll over five and a half feet long. Each iteration of the phrase is printed in curvaceous lines reading from bottom to top, to suggest both smoke and snake-like tongues. This piece was made in response to a 1973 studio fire that damaged some works and “smoke licked” paper that Spero decided to use rather than discard. Because handprinted, the letters are not uniform; some are darker and other blocks were under-inked, revealing the texture of the paper. The phrase “smoke lick” appears in many subsequent works. Another text-only piece from the same year is Ars Sine Scientia Nihil Est (fig. 1.11)—a Latin phrase that translates as “Art Without Knowledge is Nothing.” Here Spero chose brown paper and aligned the work vertically. The authoritative, seriffed, uppercase serif characters overlap so that, even if one knows Latin, the words are slightly puzzling. Several of the letters (most notably the “H” and second “I” in “Nihil”) are ghost printed, an affect of printing a plate twice without reloading the ink so that the second impression is not as strong (“ghost-like”).

These examples importantly reveal that Spero was experimenting with repetition (of phrases and images) and letterpress handprinting before she began using zinc plates. It was not a stretch, then, to makes matrices of her drawings. Deborah Frizzell gives an account of the shift in her approach to artmaking:

In 1975, when she was shopping for more examples of alphabets to add to her repertoire, a salesman told her about the ease of transferring her drawings to metal plates. Spero added the letterpress process to her other techniques at once: ‘I make drawings from the media or from art history or

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51 Frizzell, 106.
I cannibalize my own drawings. Then I send them to a place in New Jersey to be made into zinc plates.  

So her process entailed photocopying appropriated images, altering them by drawing or painting on the reproduction, photographing the altered image, and sending the photos to the company that produced the plates. Frizzell described how photographer David Reynolds would assist Spero in manipulating the images:

Reynolds experimented with Spero in blowing up and reducing the 8 by 10 inch black-and-white images, accentuating specific lines, forms, or shadows, subtleties or ambiguities, using a variety of high-contrast, linear or continuous-toned, screen shots in order to attain a range of effects: from a relief-like dimensionality to a flattened, simplified, manifesto-like quality.

She accumulated hundreds of matrices. Roel Arkesteijn cataloged 434 unique plates, published in Codex Spero; these range from prehistoric images of women giving birth to Marlene Dietrich and Josephine Baker to Greek, Egyptian, and Hindu goddesses and photo reproductions of women being tortured. Lyon reports that approximately two hundred of these comprise the main group from which Spero and her assistants printed and then cut out and glued to another paper surface, and about fifty of those were what she called her “stars.” Later, when Spero began creating site-specific installations by printing on walls, she had the images made into flexible polymer plates that allowed her to imprint onto curved surfaces.

Though Spero turned to matrices to overcome physical obstacles to artmaking, the medium was far from new to her. As previously mentioned, her father worked in the printing industry. When in college at the Art Institute of Chicago, Spero saw five

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52 Frizzell, 106-107.
53 Frizzell, 168-169.
54 Arkesteijn, 170-187.
55 Lyon, 242.
significant exhibits of prints between 1945 and 1947: *Prints by Picasso, Recent Lithographs by Pablo Picasso, Lithographs by Stuart Davis, Prints by Adja Yunkers,* and *Japanese Prints.*\(^56\) Frequently contrasted with New York at this time, where abstraction reigned supreme, Chicago was a holdout for figurative artists, and German Expressionist prints were especially popular at the Art Institute. More directly, Spero frequently credited her study with renowned printmaker William Stanley Hayter, who was visiting faculty at AIC in the spring of 1948. Indeed, the description of his legacy reveals numerous points of intersection or influence:

Hayter was an artist of strong political and social convictions, who enlisted his passionate graphic language in support of the republican cause during the Spanish Civil War and in other anti-fascist causes. In 1945, Hayter established the well-known Atelier 17 in New York’s Greenwich Village, named after his old Paris studio on the Rue Campagne-Premier. He was admired for his cooperative approach to studio printmaking practices and his experimentation with new techniques, subsequently going on to work closely with Abstract Expressionists such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, and David Smith…In addition, word and image conjunctions were important facets of his graphic approach; he often collaborated with writers, such as Samuel Beckett, in seeking a contrapuntal dialogue between the two sign systems, rejecting mere illustration.\(^57\)

Hayter thus combined text and image, utilized printmaking to communicate deep-seated political convictions, and today remains a paragon of non-traditional printmaking.

Under Hayter’s guidance she created one etching, *The Burp* (1948, fig. 1.12), and later went on to make two lithographs: *Birb Worms* (intended to be *Bird Worms* but misspelled because the “d” has been transformed into a “b” by the printmaking process) and *Dancer,* both from 1948. Conventionally a print’s title is written to the bottom left of the printed area, before the edition number and artist’s signature, but in these Spero

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\(^{56}\) Frizzell, 34.  
\(^{57}\) Frizzell, 39.
conscientiously placed the text within the image. Admittedly, these works are quite unremarkable excepting their status as the artist’s first foray into printmaking and incorporating text. *The Burp* depicts a head with loose, minimal lines and an elongated, squiggly mark over the mouth and neck, suggesting perhaps the sound of its subject. The title appears in all-capital letters at the bottom much like a traditional label. All lines are approximately the same width and were drawn very quickly—signs that the artist did not yet grasp the range of possibilities with this medium. *Birb Worms* and *Dancer* likewise reflect amateur experimentation with lithography. The former composition is a blob created from short, nervous lines of deeply black tusche painted with a wide brush. Smooth gradations of increasingly lighter grey towards the edges show how this medium can appear like an ink wash. “Birb Worms” was painted at the top of this abstracted vignette. Use of a lithography crayon in *Dancer* resulted in sharper lines but the figure remains vague as it is rendered in similarly shaky or nervous lines. Here the word BALLET was sloppily written near the middle of the stone, almost camouflaged within a mess of fast scribbles, perhaps suggesting the speed of the dancer. The handwriting is shaky from writing backwards on the plate and stones. The inconspicuous “BALLET” right of center in *Dancer* blends with the frenetic, nervous lines surrounding it. While she never again made intaglio or lithographic prints, this early juxtaposition of text and image using letters as active compositional agents hints at one hallmark of her mature work.

The significance of Spero’s eventual adoption of printmaking methods is not simply a turn to a new medium, but how she utilized the reproductive abilities of printmaking. The earliest prints from the beginning of the fifteenth century—woodcut reliefs—were mostly broadsides that disseminated text and news. Very quickly artists
used the medium to copy their paintings in order to advertise their work to distant collectors, in the hopes that another painting would be commissioned. This “reproductive printmaking” was the primary focus of intaglio mediums when they emerged shortly thereafter, and although individuals did begin amassing print collections, the medium’s subordinate relationship to painting persisted for centuries. Its connection to “low-brow” culture through popular prints further diminished its status. Even when printmaking was established as a viable creative fine art form, in the mid to late eighteenth century, its primary appeal was that one could edition or make multiple “originals,” which was profitable for the artist. Still today printmakers who do not edition are viewed as “alternative.” Spero editioned fewer than twenty prints, and usually when invited to be part of a portfolio with other artists. More commonly she used printmaking to create images for collages. This approach meant that, rather than using a plate or motif being used to create independent prints, she used them again and again in a variety of contexts and distinct utterances.

One example is a nude acrobat doing a backbend with pointed toes, a simple line drawing in profile. This figure was adopted around 1990 and is the star of a multi-paneled work titled The Acrobat (fig. 1.13) from that year. Seven columns, each comprised of four pieces of paper glued end-to-end, have a unified composition, with some figures collaged across two vertical scrolls. Six acrobats alternate in a circular pattern with an image of a mummified skeleton, suggesting a clock with twelve pictures rather than twelve numbers. Adhered in several different directions, the figure appears to flip impossibly and eternally. Alternatively, the arrangement could be understood as six

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58 See Appendix A for a list of editioned prints.
different acrobats in synchronic performance, as each is a different color. Despite the
presence of six skeletons, the work seems celebratory; the ring and a rainbow of different
colors keep the eye in constant motion, as if following a ferris wheel. Three figures to the
right push the circle off-center and further add to the work’s ambiguity. At the top is what
Spero called her “dildo dancer,” appropriated from erotic Greek pottery and depicting a
woman holding two dildos in a state of personal pleasure. Below her is a woman running;
considering the majority of Spero’s cast of characters are victims of war, it is possible
that originally she was running for her life, but transposed in this environment her action
might appear joyous, celebratory, or perhaps performative. At the bottom stands a woman
bound tightly with rope and gagged, her head turned downwards. This disturbing photo
stands in great contrast to the exuberance of the acrobat and dildo dancer. Many smaller
figures pepper the open space. The acrobat appears in numerous collages after this date,
even in Spero’s only mosaic in the 66th Street/Lincoln Center subway station in New
York City (fig. 1.14). In order to demonstrate briefly how Spero reuses figures, I turn to
2001 (fig. 1.15), another collage in which Spero used the acrobat.

As the reader may surmise, this work is one of at least three collages made in
direct response to the terrorist attacks on September 11th. Two sheets of paper create a
vertical column, signifying one of the Twin Towers. The top sheet is white with cloud-
like swaths of green and blue and the bottom has been covered in dark blue ink. Figures
large and small are collaged and printed directly on the surface of the paper and seem to
waft in space. A gorgon with wings, unborn babies, and acrobatic figures in various
displays of contortion seem to shower from the sky, comingling with smoke and detritus.
Ghost prints of eight running women line the bottom. In this context, the acrobat, who
appeared so full of energy in *The Acrobat*, seems utterly deflated. Though in the same pose, with her back arched, the pull of the darkness from below and the emphasis on verticality, along with the unchoreographed disarray of other figures, signify listless victims falling to their death. This is just one of many examples wherein Spero utilized a single matrix for very different ends.

While editioning may be one of the most fundamental reasons for selecting printmaking as a medium, some artists have protested the so-called “tyranny of the edition.” Artist Charles Cohan explains,

> The expressive capabilities of the print have been severely limited by the dominance of concern for replication… The demand for exact repeatability has restricted printmaking’s natural tendency toward variation and alteration… The democratic need for the edition has passed. The edition has little to do with present cultural politics. It is a production distant from the creative act. The print must reconsider its motive, its necessity and its supposed effect in today’s world of instantaneous reproduction and transmission by electronic means.\(^{59}\)

Some artists creating prints in the past have taken advantage of the “variant matrix,” including Rembrandt, Munch, and Picasso, though I am not aware of any other artists who repeatedly printed matrices within single works to the same extent as Spero. Additionally, no other artist has gathered such a large pool of protagonists that make regular appearances over decades of art production.\(^{60}\) Spero used repetition to suggest crowds of figures, time lapses, and movement. Often this combination of methods produces a cinematic effect.

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\(^{60}\) An exception might be self-taught recluse Henry Darger, though his 15,000-page illustrated novel of the “Vivian Girls” repeats nearly the same young girl to represent thousands of protagonists.
Two lithographs from 1956 indicate early experimentations with repeated images. *Three Figures* (fig. 1.16) is not the result of printing the same matrix three times; rather, three distinct, shadowy contours were painted on the same stone. The mummy-like bodies are lifeless in their closed stances, separated from one another yet still comprising a group. Ten years later, many works in *The War Series* use repetition to emphasize gratuitous violence. *Bomb Proliferation* (1967, fig. 1.17) depicts numerous mushroom clouds with mirrored heads vomiting blood again and again and again. Arranged in uneven rows within the top half of the composition, I count 71 “bombs”—but the number is not important, because the artist seeks to present the idea of the “innumerable” to drive home the egregious volume of attacks inflicted on victims of war. In this piece the images are painted and each is unique. All appear to have been painted with brown gouache but the values range from transparent wash to dark, mud-like opacity. Each profile features a long red tongue and has been purposefully smeared by the artist’s hand as well as a wide, uneven pink wash painted with a larger brush. Here the repetition suggests time-lapse photography, or icons on a map marking where bombs have been dropped. Whereas the repeated motifs in *Bomb Proliferation* (as well as *Codex Artaud*) were painted, transitioning to print mediums allowed Spero to accomplish the same means much more efficiently. Still, she never sought to produce multiple, perfect prints of her matrices. *Torture of Women* (1976, fig. 1.18) and *Notes in Time on Women* (1976–1979, fig. 1.19) were originally intended to be a single, multi-paneled work. Both works focus on oppressive histories as revealed in written accounts, from human rights reports to poetry (see Appendix C and D for a complete transcription of the texts). After completing fourteen scrolls, Spero felt the work would be unwieldy and decided to divide them into
two separate series. Thus she titled the first set *Torture of Women* and went on to create *Notes in Time on Women*, a work comprised of twenty-four scrolls extending two hundred and ten feet. These two sets mark a gradual shift in Spero’s artistic practice to a more prolific use of printed text and images. Both juxtapose words and pictures, but in *Torture of Women* only the text is printed with letterpress blocks while the images were painted, cut and pasted onto the scrolls. She utilized a variety of different alphabets as well as a Bulletin typewriter to present appropriated quotations. The only exception is panel nine (fig. 1.20). Here Spero printed what she called her “Sky Goddess” matrix in a grid. This abstract sign, which is not immediately recognizable as a figure, appears as three sides of an uneven square; the top portion has a bulbous head on the left and four breast-like protuberances, in turn propped up by two “legs.” The image is printed in three rows across four pieces of conjoined paper. There are eighteen columns of square compartments but some boxes are empty. The “Sky Goddess” is printed in yellow and dark blue.

This marks an interesting transition in Spero’s approach for two reasons. Though this is the first time she uses a matrix to repeat an image multiple times, she already positions herself as an unconventional “printmaker” in that she is not producing multiples for the purpose of having numerous separate impressions. Secondly, while she repeats the same image again and again, there is no implication of movement in a static grid. Spero developed a very cinematic approach to printmaking through overlapping and “imperfect” impressions, and while these images do range in value due to variations in plate pressure, there is nonetheless a mechanical and “frozen” effect in such a rigid arrangement.
*Notes in Time* is the first instance wherein Spero regularly used image matrices to print her figures in addition to printing the text, and is the first work which can be aptly described as “cinematic.” This multi-paneled work is meticulously laid out; as Christopher Lyon shows in his diagram (fig. 1.21), the scrolls are grouped by theme ("struggle in political and social realms," “struggle against negative images in myth and history,” and “women’s sexuality and experience of their bodies”). However there is no definitive chronology and viewers can enter the work at any point.

Panels two through five depicts the same figure at least thirty-three times; many are ghost prints (fig. 1.22). The outline of a nude woman with her hair pulled back lifts her arms to be perpendicular to her body, one in front and one in back. Her graceful stride suggests she is skipping or dancing, with her weight about to land on her left foot. This pose and the repetition of the image, spread out over several feet, suggest a troupe of graceful ballet dancers moving in synchronicity across a stage. Facing stage left, the figures cluster and overlap one another. One impression is bright blue, some are brown, and others appear purple. Further differentiating the figures is the range of value achieved through uneven pressure. Spero frequently commented on her love of the “unevenness” achieved by handprinting and learned to exploit this more and more as she used plates to reproduce images. As Frizzell writes, “Within this hand-printed method, Spero again shifts the mechanistic, repetitive means of doubling an image via letterpress regularity, by undermining this regularity in handprinting, emphasizing the endless variation of pressure, inking, and papers.”61 For this reason Spero never used a press.

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61 Frizzell, 107.
Six smaller painted and collaged women leap and gesture above or behind this
group. The effect of this printing method contrasts starkly to that seen in panel IX of
*Torture of Women*. Spero emphasizes movement not only through the pose of her figure
but the manner in which the matrix is printed. A different female figure is repeated
twenty-six times in panels twelve through fourteen (fig. 1.23). This woman turns both
arms behind her back, palms facing up, while lunging forward with her left leg in a very
awkward position. Though Roel Arkesteijn identifies this figure as running, the pose
seems more theatrical or yogic.\(^62\) Her contortionist-like gesture and impressive ability to
balance make this grouping closer to the stop-motion photography of Marey or
Muybridge than the aforementioned implied movement of many people in panels two
through five. Perhaps fourteen of these imprints were executed with adequate ink for a
dark and complete impression—one that traditional printmakers would find acceptable.
The others were printed immediately after an initial stamping without re-inking the plate,
and thus appear as ghosts: fading, as if culled from a foggy memory. Spero employed
repetition and ghost-printing regularly from this point on.

Early works show a mere flirtation with text, but each series has progressively
more and more text to the point that panel nine in *Notes in Time* can be described as
visual logorrhea (fig. 1.24). In what may be understood as total exhaustion after this
explosion of language, Spero abruptly excluded text from her next work, *The First
Language* (1981, fig. 1.25). She attributes this turn in many interviews to a realization
that her cast of characters had become pictographs.\(^63\) The viability of this claim is taken

\(^{62}\) Arkesteijn, 170.
\(^{63}\) For example, Egyptian and Greek goddesses represented for Spero all-powerful females who
were revered by patriarchal societies.
up in Chapter Two of this dissertation, which deals with Spero’s use of text. The significance of this decision in regard to printmaking is that the artist became more experimental in her printing methods, exploring facture’s ability to communicate different meanings. Printmaking affected her approach to her art in general and generated meanings that would not have been communicated as clearly had she remained a painter. One of the qualities she exploited was texture as achieved through the transfer process. As previously mentioned, varying the pressure on the plates creates an uneven transfer of ink. Combined with the surface quality of her highly tactile, fibrous papers, Spero often portrayed victims on the edge of death with this technique. Repetition and irregular handprinting suggest bodies in various states of decay.

One example can be seen in panel three of *The First Language* (fig. 1.26). The same image of a naked woman sprawled on the ground is printed at least seven times on the right hand side of the composition. The woman is spread eagle with one visible arm stretched out to her side. The position makes her vulnerable, if she is not already dead. Printed in black ink with dark impressions overlapping and ghost images, the technique suggests a charred body. Another excellent example of the variant matrix is seen in *Fleeing, Mourning Women/Irradiated* (1985, fig. 1.27) in which the texture achieved by the combination of transfer process and paper choice suggests the fatal effects of radiation and Napalm. This work is a single panel created with two sheets of adjoined paper, measuring twenty by fifty-three inches. At least four matrices were used; one of a woman sitting, her facial expression revealing physical or emotional pain, is repeated twice. One woman walks between them wearing a headscarf and striped robe. In the upper right corner a bust of a singing or talking woman floats. The fourth matrix is
unidentifiable as it was used to smear black ink across the lower half of the work; only a leg is discernable in this chaotic ground. The two women on the left, one seated and one standing, are printed in black with blue outlines that alludes to an otherworldly flash of light in darkness, or perhaps a covering of ash and soot from a recent explosion. Disembodied legs lie scattered around them. The second impression of the seated woman is red, suggesting she is drenched in blood (her own or another’s) as she sits and wails. The repetition of this figure, once in black and again in red, might be understood as a time lapse—has she passed into death?—or the psychological state of disarray experienced at times of extreme trauma. Perhaps this woman is experiencing her own immediate pain or loss while emotionally present in a different location, where her family is also confronting war. This work is just one of many examples that align the fragility of the paper support and the fragility of the body. Both the work and the subjects threaten to disintegrate. Curator and Spero scholar Robert Storr has written, “Loosely but exactly delineated on rice paper, these drawings combine an extreme delicacy of facture with an extraordinary pictorial ferocity… Spero takes full advantage of the broken edges [and] disintegrating textures.”

Similarly, the somewhat uncontrollable results of the transferred image illustrate the beaten body in other works. Bertolt Brecht’s four-verse poem The Ballad of the Jew’s Whore, Marie Sanders, penned in 1935, inspired Spero to make several works, both

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64 Robert Storr, “Nancy Spero: Central Issues—Peripheral Visions” in Nancy Spero: Works Since 1950 (Syracuse, New York: Everson Museum of Art, 1987), 47. It is notable that Storr refers to Spero’s works as drawings; most others categorize them as paintings. This reflects both a dismissal of printmaking as a viable medium for serious art and, often, unfamiliarity of print processes on the part of art writers.
prints and printinstallations.\textsuperscript{65} The artist paired the chilling narrative—inspired by actual events—with an image of an unnamed woman. Spero described the woman as a Gestapo victim, nude, her body bound, a noose around her neck and she’s gagged, about to be hanged. It looks like a porn photo—it is porn and it [depicts a historical event]. I developed a plate of it, but for a long time I never used it. I didn’t have the context for it until I read Brecht’s \textit{The Ballad of Marie Sanders, The Jew’s Whore}, and I put the two together.\textsuperscript{66}

Uncharacteristically, Spero made an edition of this print in 1991: seventy impressions with SOLO Impression, Inc. in New York (fig. 1.28).\textsuperscript{67} Titled after Brecht’s poem, she reprinted the original German text with the appropriated photograph. Two verses are printed in clusters on the left, and verses three and four are in the center of the paper. The image of the woman, bound from shoulders to feet, is printed twice: once in yellow ink under the text on the left, and again on the right. The latter is printed in overlapping blue, purple and black ink that make her body appear cold and dead. Sadly the discoloration and bruising, though here aestheticized, was likely not far from the actual appearance of this tortured woman. Spero described how she came to prefer printed over painted images:

I am able to get many variations of imprint. Depending on the pressure of the hand, the angling of the plate, the amount of ink rolled onto the raised image, etc. I can repeat and differentiate an image, emphasizing the staccato of the mechanical, varying hand printing directly on the paper itself with collaged hand printed images…figures [can be] printed to resemble x-rayed human forms—as in the moment the bomb blasts.\textsuperscript{68}

Spero’s persistent focus on bodily violence even into the eighties reflects her position between first- and second-wave feminisms. She persisted in calling attention to the

\textsuperscript{65} See Appendix E for this poem.
\textsuperscript{66} Arkesteijn, 148.
\textsuperscript{67} Interview with Stephen Götz, 151.
\textsuperscript{68} Lyon, 241.
oppression of women even while many of her contemporaries had moved on to questioning the definition of gender itself, and calling out work like hers that suggested an essential femaleness or universal womanhood.

One very late work does represent violence against neutered bodies. *Maypole*, Spero’s only large-scale sculpture, was created for the 52\textsuperscript{nd} Venice Biennale in 2007 (fig. 1.29). Perhaps not surprisingly for an artist who works primarily on paper, this room-size piece was based on a drawing from 1967 (fig. 1.30). As its title suggests, its form is that of a stanchion with many ribbons and chains hung from the top. Mocking the celebratory symbolism of a traditional maypole, images of decapitated heads swing gently from each strand. The heads were “cannibalized,” as she describes it, from earlier paintings—scanned, digitally manipulated, then made into polymer plates and printed onto metal. *Maypole* is also another instance of printed textures alluding to battered bodies. Most were printed more than once, with different colors, emphasizing the look of grotesque decay (figs. 1.31, 1.32). Spero took great pleasure in printmaking’s collaborative tradition and would often select a particular studio assistant to pull a print based on their individual manner of printing. Sometimes it was difficult for studio assistants to understand that she wanted “imperfect” impressions: she sought scumbled or scratched results to signify assaulted bodies.

Yet another effect of Spero’s manner of printing is seen in only one work: *Search and Destroy*, made between 1967 and 1974 (fig. 1.33). Six sheets of paper adjoin to create a long panel on which large, bold letters read SEARCH AND DESTROY   LICIT EXP. The first phrase is printed in red ink, the second in black. The varying volume of ink within each letter makes the words look like a long-dysfunctional sign. Distinct to
this work are the intermittent visual punctures in the letters that appear very much like bullet holes. The suggested residue of violence parallels the aggressive call to action of the saying “search and destroy.” This effect could have been caused by deterioration of the letterpress plates, impurities in the ink, or dirt on the plate or brayer. Spero certainly did not intervene to create the “holes,” but was most likely pleased at the unexpected result. Artist Peter Soriano relayed his observations of her printmaking process:

Nancy never just stamps an image onto a surface. At times the image is barely pressed onto the wall or paper…Her closely grouped repetitions are reminders of the control used in inking the plates and the range of pressure used to transfer the images to the surface…Ephemerality and touch are the paradoxical bedfellows of her uncompromising subject matter.69

As singular works employing print methods, it might be argued that Spero challenged the lower status of works on paper and/or printmaking by reifying originality through unique and idiosyncratic printing.

In other cases, Spero’s printed textures allude to crumbling stone or aging. The facture of ancient feminine archetypes, for instance, was exaggerated to foreground long-standing yet largely forgotten matriarchal wisdom. Sheela-na-gig first appeared in medieval Great Britain; she was always carved in stone and is quickly identifiable by her unusual pose, in which she squats, arms reaching around her legs, to hold open her vulva. The overtly sexual images in Spero’s works were typically chosen because they depict female sexuality without a male presence. Her attraction to imagery such as this connects to body- and sex-positive feminist artists such as Carolee Schneemann, who performed *Interior Scroll* in 1975. Sheela-na-gig appears in numerous works by Spero, including one printinstallation at the Festspielhaus Hellerau in Dresden, Germany (fig. 1.34).

69 Peter Soriano quoted in Lyons, 242.
Originally a school for Eurhythmics, this building was turned into a Nazi police school in 1936, and then a Soviet military hospital in 1945. The building was in total ruin when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. In 1998 Spero was invited to print on the walls, both exterior and interior, which were severely cracked, exposing every layer of paint and much of the original concrete. Importantly, she chose to print on the walls as they were, without repairing or smoothing the rough surfaces. Thus, the literal disintegration of the ground amplifies the ghost-like qualities of many of Spero’s images works on paper. As Frizzell describes it,

The deteriorating plaster and peeling paint made for intricate and irregular wall textures, revealing preserved wallpapers, signage, and remnants of painted symbols and graffiti, pentimenti from Nazi and Soviet histories which Spero chose for the most part to leave untouched. These surfaces absorbed the water based ink readily so that the printed images ‘held’ to these surface textures, giving them the appearance of fresco, as though fused with the wall. At regular, gridded intervals, rusted iron bars from old exercise gear poked out several inches from the walls, while holes remained from removed apparatus, such as dance barres and mirrors; a disturbing, implied violence permeated some passages, while a poignant delicacy resonated in other passages as light suffused the dance floor.

The installation was intended to be temporary, and much was lost during a later restoration, however one wall was retained. It features the Ballad of Marie Sanders (fig. 1.35). To the left of the nude bound woman are vestiges from a once-vividly painted Soviet mural. One can make out blue and orange buildings as well as Russian letters. Brecht’s German poem is stamped in the same arrangement as the edition, and the morbid figure is printed in black over a field of yellow. Green and beige snakes with human heads sticking out their tongues were printed intermittently below. Curator Susanna Altman explains that while this motif is damning, celebratory female figures

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70 Walker, 80.
71 Frizzell, 345-346.
from mythology and history were printed in adjoining rooms.\textsuperscript{72} All the layers are chipped and faded, making visible a rough history.

Passersby might justifiably believe Spero’s prints to be significantly older, not only because of the mottled aesthetic and chipped wall but also because the image is unfamiliar. The artist loved how one assistant described the effects of her printing process: “It was as if the figures and symbols had always been there, as if we had simply uncovered them.”\textsuperscript{73} These perceptions play into Spero’s preoccupation with history—specifically, how women have been both revered and demeaned through the centuries. The acrobat motif makes an appearance on an exterior wall, printed in bright yellow on a small portion of grey concrete wall that had not yet lost its paint (fig. 1.36). Over a doorway two impressions of a monstrous yet graceful dragon-woman follow a large winged bird carrying a woman—Leda and her swan (fig. 1.37). Printed over a chipped whitewashed wall, the mythological figures looked convincingly like parts of an ancient fresco. In another space a winged Lilith stands on two lions and is flanked by owls (fig. 1.38). Spero did not always exploit texture to create the effects of deterioration, violence, or aging, but repetition became a signature characteristic of her unique approach to printmaking.

While Spero’s work is not overtly autobiographical, personal life events influenced her work in many ways. As a young mother she painted women with children and families in the \textit{Black Paintings}, her anger at being excluded from the art world coalesced with her anger toward the U.S. military operations against innocent civilians in


\textsuperscript{73} Daniel Kerber in conversation with Susanna Altmann, quoted in Frizzell, 346.
Vietnam, and she identified with the pain of Artaud. Certainly her experience as a woman in a patriarchal world resonated with the mythologies, histories, and news stories she consumed, which led her to portray only female figures in her work. Additionally, her life partner Leon Golub was also a behind-the-scenes collaborator, finding sources for her work and engaging in constant conversation and critique in their shared studio.

Perhaps most personal of all her work, though, is *Mourning Women* (reiterated in New York with the title *Cri du Coeur* [“Heart’s Cry”]), her response to Golub’s death. *Mourning Women* was installed at the Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea (CGAC) in Santiago de Compostela, Spain (fig. 1.39). Golub passed away on August 8, 2004, and this exhibit opened on September 24th that year—a reflection of the incredible pace Spero must have been working to produce a room-sized prinstallation. For this work the artist retained the extended scroll/frieze format, but placed it at floor level. One encountered hundreds of small figures around the entire perimeter of the gallery, as if looking out onto a silent mass. Surprisingly, the frieze was made with only one plate, an image of a group of Egyptian women standing with their arms raised to the sky. They wear ankle-length robes and have long black hair. Arkesteijn identifies the motif as part of a painting in the tomb of Ramose, in Thebes, from the thirteenth century.\(^4\) The repeated, overlapping printed images become an assembly of women who convey the overwhelming sense of loss caused by death. One segment of this funeral procession is underprinted in rose and blue etching ink (fig. 1.40). The stark white gallery with vaulted ceilings, flooded with light, dramatizes their solemn and ghost-like (or angelic) appearance. Spero also included eight figures higher on the wall who appear to be ascending into heaven. The white void

\(^4\) Arkesteijn, 174.
of the gallery walls dominates the space, suggesting the greatest unknown: afterlife.

Conscientious use of empty space is a hallmark of Spero’s work; here the ratio of image to white space parallels one’s awareness of just how small and insignificant we are in relation to the broader contexts of history and the cosmos. The second segment of *Women Mourning* contrasts the first in that much of it is nearly black from overprinting (fig. 1.41). Some of the papers were first printed with fields of color. These mottled backgrounds of red, yellow, and purple mask and distort most of the figures so that from a distance the throng appears to be a band of nearly black paper. Occasionally plates were purposefully moved during printing to push obscurity. The two segments seem to present the two poles of mourning: sadness, meditation, or melancholy in the airy, white section and anger or denial in the aggressively printed and dark section.

*Cri du Coeur* was installed a second time in 2005 at Galerie Lelong in New York. As in the SGAC exhibit, the scrolls of paper were positioned at floor level, but in this iteration Spero also had assistants print directly onto the walls. This gallery is smaller than the previous space and is also irregularly shaped with many corners (fig. 1.42). These differences activate what seemed a still moment of reverence into a more dynamic representation of the crowd. This effect is heightened by the fact that the selected panels and wall printing are more colorful and most of the figures were cut out at the top, freeing their arms from the inanimate paper. This *Cri du Coeur* suggests movement and the passage of time. Thus it is not only repetition and irregular printing but the nuances of the space in which these works are presented that impact their message and aesthetics.

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This exploration of printmaking demonstrates the great potential of theorizing materiality. All prints—whether relief, intaglio, lithograph, screenprint, or so-called “alternative method”—emphasize the indexical trace of the matrix (whether it be a woodblock, a metal plate, a stone, a screen, etc.). While photographs have an indexical connection to the things they picture, as it is light reflected off of them that passes through the lens of the camera and leaves a trace on the photographic film or plate, prints have an indexical connection to the matrix that created them, as they are a direct result of the matrix being pressed upon the paper. Often the indexical quality of prints is hidden or effaced, but it is always present. Indeed, one might go so far as to say that prints are the most indexical of images, since they must bear the trace of the matrices that created them.

Furthermore, Spero’s particular approach, involving the appropriation of images from actual historical events, can also be understood as what might be called a historical index. The subject of history in Spero’s works is the subject of Chapter Three of this dissertation, but it is relevant to consider here the significance of repetition or layering of indices through the artist’s chosen processes. She repeats a found image in the creation of a plate, which in turn is repeated in the act of printing. Arguably the artist’s imagery maintains two indices: that of the original photograph, and that of the printed matrix made from that photograph. This allows her to situate a protagonist within different contexts, in conversation with different characters, signifies different meanings.

Take for example the image of Masha Bruskina, a 17-year-old Jewish Russian who was hanged, along with two others, by the Nazis in 1941 for her Communist political stance. Theirs was the first public execution of resistance members in the Soviet
Union. Spero used this image many times in different works. Though unnamed for many years, the three victims were eventually identified.\(^{75}\) Bruskina lived in the Minsk ghetto but was able to move around within the city by dying her hair a lighter color, and volunteered at a hospital. Here she assisted wounded soldiers in escaping by giving them false identity papers. Sadly she was identified and arrested, and then tortured and paraded through the streets as a warning to others who might resist. A Lithuanian battalion member collaborating with the Germans documented the gruesome event in seven photographs.\(^{76}\) Historian David H. Weiss reports that these were some of the most publicized photographs in the Soviet Union and came to symbolize Russian resistance to Nazi invasion. These photos spurred an international conference in 1996 to establish dialogue between Holocaust researchers in Minsk and the United States. The absurdist Swedish movie *Songs from the Second Floor* (2000) includes a brief, wordless vignette based on the photographs. Director Roy Andersson explained that he struggles with and was addressing the feeling of collective guilt over atrocities in which one did not directly participate—something that relates his artistic practice to Spero’s.\(^{77}\) The artist (assisted by Golub and her studio assistants) continuously gathered source material, primarily from newspapers and magazines. 1974 was the year she committed to use female figures only. Her resolution to raise awareness of historical and contemporary misogyny explains why she would have been drawn to the image of Masha Bruskina.

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\(^{75}\) In his lecture, Daniel H. Weiss cites two sources that identified Masha Bruskina: see Judith Miller, *One By One, By One* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990) and Bill Keller “Echo of ’41 in Minsk: Was the Heroine a Jew?” *New York Times* (September 15, 1987).

\(^{76}\) Daniel H. Weiss “A Historical Injustice: The Case of Masha Bruskina,” 2006 lecture given at Lafayette College. Accessed online March 20, 2012: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkI7hVcOhOY. These photos were not ordered to be official records but were taken by a soldier on his own accord.

\(^{77}\) Director’s commentary, *Songs from the Second Floor*, directed by Roy Andersson (2000).
In Masha Bruskina (1993) one image of Masha walking with her humiliating sign around her neck is handprinted three times (fig. 1.43). Spero cropped out Masha’s two male companions, fellow resisters who marched with her and were executed on the same gallows. While some may protest that this exclusion disregards the injustice and tragedy of these men, Spero’s intentional focus on women aims to balance hegemonic, patriarchal histories. In this case the duplication suggests Masha’s slow movement towards the gallows (comparable to Gerhard Richter’s 1988 series of paintings depicting Ulrike Meinhof). Nondescript shadowy figures in the background reflect a plethora of spectators, an international mix of oppressors and oppressed. Below this tripartite set Spero collaged a fragment showing Masha’s fate: the four repeated images of her disembodied head, hung from a noose, make it appear to swing back and forth. The composition reads almost like two lines from a written account, one that is profoundly disturbing in its abruptness. The olive green and sepia tones of the ink, mottled and blurry in their printed registration, imply a history or event that has been camouflaged.

Individuals like Masha are indeed lost in incomprehensible figures such as “two million Russians” or “six million Jews,” only approximate estimates of those killed during World War II. In selecting a single figure Spero makes the statistics personal, relatable, and arguably more disturbing. The sign around Masha’s neck, while visually centered, is silenced not only by its aesthetic and linguistic illegibility but also by the focus on Masha’s face, which reflects dignity. In these ways Spero gives back what humanity she can to this victimized woman. As a print Masha Bruskina is an index of a matrix, and as an appropriated photograph it is also an index of a historical event.
Another work utilizing the same image, *Masha Bruskina/Gestapo Victim* (1994), acts similarly but with a significant difference (fig. 1.44). Masha’s walking image is again repeated three times, this time in black ink, but her procession is broken by the figure of Marie Sanders. Here the issue of historical indexicality is complicated, for the image refers to another historical figure tortured by Nazis in the 1940s. Reflecting on the development of this work, Spero said,

> The photograph is chilling—but if one doesn’t know that it was found on a member of the Gestapo it could be perceived as pornographic titillation…When I heard [Brecht’s] poem [*The Ballad of Marie Sanders* on the radio] I was greatly moved by its power—and was struck how the photo of the Gestapo victim amplified the poem, sexual abuse and victimization of women.  

In this way the figure—and, as I shall address in Chapter Three, all of Spero’s protagonists—becomes an index not only of a single isolated incident or woman but all instances of torture and dehumanization of women throughout history.

Spero juxtaposed this image and poem in six different works: five installations, and the aforementioned print. In two temporary installations in 1990 and 1993 at Smith College (fig. 1.45) and the Whitney Biennial (fig. 1.46), respectively, the verses are printed in English translation. A permanent version at the Von der Heydt Museum in Wuppertal, Germany (fig. 1.47) was completed in 1991; like the recently restored mural at the Festspielhaus in Dresden, these verses are in the original German and are spread out across one wall. In 1993 the poem was printed as part of a temporary exhibit on a wall in the Jewish Museum alongside a poem entitled “That the Persecuted May Not

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78 Spero quoted in Lyon, 275. See Appendix E for this poem.
Become Persecutors” by Nelly Sachs (fig. 1.48). Lastly, the image without text appeared in four pages of the Viennese newspaper Der Standard as part of the Resistance Project “exhibition” organized by Museums in Progress (fig. 1.49). Each of these iterations renewed the relevance of Masha’s plight in the present; still representing a past moment but relating to current misogyny and torture. Spero’s freely inclusive and widely divergent sources point to a myriad of historical moments but are cohesively unified within her sensuous yet disturbing printed collage aesthetic.

Ultimately Spero’s works are about remembering; as Ingeborg Kähler describes it, the artist “is interested in the personal participation in the collective memory.” The variant matrix is the most apt metaphor for collective memory because fleeting nuances occur within repetition and recurrence. Each impression is simultaneously unique and similar. Spero capitalized on the marginalized status of paper and printmaking by expanding their conceptual potential to feminism and violence. Her deliberate choices to work on paper and use printmaking, and to exploit the qualities of texture to emphasize violence and aging demand that one consider technique, facture, and materiality in her exquisite synthesis of form and content.

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79 Nelly Sachs (1891–1970) was a contemporary of Brecht’s and a well-known poet in her day. See Appendix F for this poem.
CHAPTER 2
LANGUE ET PAROLE

If woman has always functioned ‘within’ the discourse of man...it is time for her to dislocate this ‘within,’ to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of.

– Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”

Discourse over image-text relations has exploded in the decades since the Cubists intensively explored the juxtaposition of words and images at the beginning of the twentieth century. Many artists since then have utilized text for a short period, or relied upon it for their entire careers. Nancy Spero was not a writer but appropriated text copiously, and though some connections can be made between select quotations and images, she was not an illustrator. The aesthetics of text was significant for Spero; it was integral to her visual as well as her conceptual practice. In what follows I consider the materiality of her text, or what might be termed its “extra-linguistic” qualities: the visual appearance of text in her compositions and how she exploited or subverted linguistic signs for visual purposes.

This chapter outlines how Spero’s approaches to using text shifted over a span of fifty years. Her transition to new phases was often abrupt. I describe four strategies Spero employed successively: many works between 1959 and 1970 incorporate titles; subsequently she used quotations in the Artaud Paintings (1969-1970) and Codex Artaud (1971-1973); Torture of Women (1976) and Notes in Time on Women (1976-1979)

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contain whole narratives; and finally the most radical change—what the artist called her own “visual hieroglyphs,” or repeated use of print matrices based on hundreds of appropriated images. In many interviews she claimed to have ceased using text after 1979, yet this somewhat contradicts her own position that her consistent repertoire of matrices had become a language unto itself. It is more accurate to say that she stopped heavily relying on text after 1993. *The First Language* (1981) marks the turn into Spero’s fourth and final phase. Here I argue that the physical contexts of site-specific installations offer “readers” the interpretive foundation that texts previously provided.

Spero played with the visuality of written language, much like the mid-twentieth century Letterists, contemporary American artist Ed Ruscha, and graffiti artists. And like them, she saw writing as an extension of drawing, with a “natural interaction or continuum” between the two modes of expression, as she stated in a 1994 interview.82 She was fascinated by Henri Michaux’s work for this reason. With this approach, text cannot simply be compared to visual images; rather it constitutes parts of a composite. As W.J.T. Mitchell points out (taking Derrida’s lead),

> texts incorporate visuality quite literally the moment they are written or printed in visible form. Viewed from either side, from the standpoint of the visual or the verbal, the medium of *writing* deconstructs the possibility of a pure image or pure text, along with the opposition between the ‘literal’ (letters) and the ‘figurative’ (pictures) on which it depends. Writing, in its physical, graphic form, is an inseparable suturing of the visual and the verbal, the ‘imagetext’ incarnate.83


Indeed, the original Greek verb *grapho* encompasses both writing and drawing. It is easiest to appreciate the visuality of language when looking at an unknown language. For those with knowledge of a Latin-derived language, a more distant linguistic family such as Korean or Inuit readily appears like a system of pictures or signs because one cannot interpret them as letters. Spero often mangled and disfigured letters and words to make them illegible. She also frequently retained a text’s original language of French and German (and, in one case, Vietnamese), knowing the majority of her audience would not be able to read the appropriated text. While this does not always approach the alienating effect of a foreign alphabet, it distances viewers from content and prioritizes the visual over the verbal.

Another aspect of Spero’s incorporation of text is a transition from handwritten (or painted) to Bulletin-typed text, which occurred distinctly at the end of 1970 after the *Artaud Paintings* (1969-1970) with the *Codex Artaud* (1971-1973). Both handwritten and typed text can be personal, idiosyncratic, and indexical, but these qualities are arguably more apparent in handwritten text. Typed text could be anyone’s. Typewriters are in essence printmaking machines, and the unique mix of letters results in a monoprint. As I described in Chapter One, Spero exaggerated the hand-printed qualities she could achieve by varying the pressure of her matrices. But why did she choose to move from handprinting text to typing when she did, and how does it affect one’s understanding of the content?

Relaying a clear and easily grasped concept of a text to her audience was not always a prime objective for the artist. Her collages include excerpts from such diverse sources as the first-century Romans Pliny, Juvenal, and Tacitus, the *Malleus Maleficarum*
(a guide to identifying witches published in 1487), Roman Catholic liturgical texts, the playwright Bertolt Brecht and artist Oskar Kokoschka, French feminists Francoise Parturier and Hélène Cixous, Sojourner Truth, American poet H.D., news media and reports from Amnesty International, and of course, Antonin Artaud. Some quotations are credited and even cited as if in a formal academic paper, while others remain mysteriously authorless. While some are blunt and vulgar interjections (“Fuck You”), others are ambiguous descriptions (“Woman Breathing”). Spero maintained Artaud’s original French for much of his appropriated lines, which has the effect of alienating her primarily English-speaking audience. In another example, she found one of Brecht’s poems, entitled “The Ballad of Marie Sanders,” particularly suited to expressing the profound losses women have suffered at the hands of patriarchy, and presented this text numerous times in English translation.

The various types of text affect one in different ways, sometimes more as a viewer and other times more as a reader. Depending on the font size, style, and color, as well as spacing and composition, Spero’s appropriated quotations can appear alternately as angry exclamations, exquisite poetry, searing political criticism, or strictly formal elements (in particular when text is illegible). Some narratives relay very personal experiences of the horrors of war and act as obituaries. In what follows I delineate the shifts in how text is used by Spero, focusing especially on the relationship between text and image in her collages. As other scholars have addressed the conceptual implications of the artist’s utilization of texts by Antonin Artaud, I focus more on the visual aspects of
the text and how Spero moved through various stages of incorporating text into her work.\footnote{Among them Jon Bird, Lucy Bradnock, Deborah Frizzell, Christopher Lyon, and Amy Ingrid Schlegel.}

Spero’s relationship to other artists working with text deserves some elucidation, especially as her most prolific use of text in her work was during the heyday of Conceptual Art in the sixties. Living abroad, she would not have had much awareness of Jasper Johns or Robert Rauschenberg’s very different forays into using text in the late 1950s and early 1960s (figs. 2.1 and 2.2), nor would she have cared, for at this time she still carried much resentment against the art world’s exclusive focus on New York and more specifically on the male painters there. Suffice it to say that Johns used primarily stencils of letters and numbers in oil painting on canvas, often ambiguously and sometimes camouflaging the signs amidst lively brushstrokes and primary colors. Though he worked closely with Johns in his early years, Rauschenberg culled text from mass media such as magazines and newspapers, which he collaged and later screenprinted onto his mixed media works. Appropriating, collaging, and printing were also Spero’s techniques; however her selections derived from literary and historical texts aimed at highly specific political and feminist goals.

This is also the characteristic that sets her apart from text-based artists Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, and John Baldessari, who came to define Conceptual Art. While Jon Bird rightly points out that Spero’s relationship to Conceptual Art is under-investigated—citing parallels such as “the notion of institutional critique, word and sign; seriality and repetition; the grid; and her relation to, and incorporation of, the broader
political and social issues and themes of the period”—a disparity in aesthetics remains. Even when using a typewriter and printing with block letters, Spero retained an autographic touch and often chose bright, expressive colors such as red or yellow. In contrast, most Conceptual artists made every effort to remove individuating and affective qualities from the graphic form of their texts, with the result that the words seem impersonal and authorless. The cold tautology of Baldessari’s *What Is Painting?* (1968, fig. 2.3) exemplifies this difference.

In his 1996 essay “Spero’s Other Traditions,” Benjamin Buchloh aligned Spero with Cy Twombly because both artists derived source material and inspiration from literature and history. The number of artists who have integrated raw, autographic, freehand writing into their work is negligible: Twombly, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Sue Coe are a few who come to mind. Most artists using text, from the Russian Constructivist Alexandr Rodchenko to contemporary American artist Jenny Holzer, are partial to clean, legible and impersonal machine-generated letters. Though she almost always appropriated pre-existing text, Spero’s intentionally sloppy handwriting was inspired by the concept of automatism propagated by the Surrealists and Letterists. As Deborah Frizzell has noted:

> Drawing and writing, including street graffiti, were both related codes for Spero, systems of expression that had visual, graphic, aural and symbolic qualities: ‘One was an extension of the other, a natural interaction or continuum.’ Spero recalls influential experiments by European artists, ‘There were certain French artists who used language, such as Henri

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Michaux’s automatic writing.’ Michaux (1899-1984), the Belgian poet and artist who lived in Paris, first exhibited his calligraphic ink drawings in Europe during the late 1930s, as ‘exorcisms’ of modern industrial society and formal aesthetic canons…Michaux’s concept of drawing as handwriting, a spinning out of spontaneous responses in the process of uncovering raw primal emotion, had permeated expressionist and surrealist thought during the 1930s and 1940s, thus impacting Spero’s approach to image making via her teachers and the European journals which her group [at the Art Institute of Chicago] shared.  

Furthermore, Spero found ways to make her printed and typed words autographic.

I. TITLES

Spero’s engagement with text began when she was still a student at the Art Institute of Chicago (1945–1949). Notably, this was before the explosion of text-as-art in the 1960s. Three prints from 1948, The Burp, Birb [sic] Worms, and Dancer (an etching and two lithographs, respectively), incorporate their titles into the composition, as was described in Chapter One. Nearly two decades later, titles appeared in a few of the 150 works in the War Paintings series (1966–1970), albeit in a strikingly different manner. Prompted by rage over the U.S. military action in Vietnam, these paintings constitute Spero’s first cohesive body of work protesting a specific policy. This series, all gouache and ink on paper, is characterized by fantastical representations of war: most frequently, multi-headed bodies in the shape of a mushroom cloud, with sperm-like heads raining down.

One painting in this series, L.O.V.E. T.O. H.A.N.O.I. (1967, fig. 2.4), shows an olive-green explosion with two decapitated heads and exposed breasts at the top of the

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mushroom cloud. Red strands fall from their gaping mouths, suggesting grotesquely long tongues and streaming blood. Like the Black Paintings on paper discussed in Chapter One, the War Paintings appear anxious and frantic due to the messy, irregular drybrush application of paint. The artist seems to have taken her aggression out on the paper with her brushes, hands, and sharp objects that have created slices where the paint has pooled. Below the mushroom cloud, fourteen figures appear to be drowning, each in their own narrow hole in the ground. Their facial expressions reveal states of extreme crisis, as arms flail in piteous attempts to save themselves. One figure toward the bottom holds a baby. All the figures scream and appear to vomit blood with mouths agape, mirroring the monstrous heads in the bomb cloud above them. Centered within the horrific scene, as if coming directly from the source of the explosion itself, is hand-painted text “L.O.V.E. T.O. H.A.N.O.I. x.x.x., U.S.” The rounded, all-caps style of the letters and cute salutation liken the message to a note written by a teenager. Clearly it is anything but love that is delivered mercilessly to the bloodied and disfigured bodies: the meaning of the painting derives from the tension between, on the one hand, the text’s literal meaning and, on the other hand, the way it is inscribed and the images in the painting. The artist implies that the U.S. military assault was myopic and juvenile on one hand, and unspeakably brutal and inhumane on the other. Unlike Spero’s use of text during her student years, such bitingly ironic phrases in the War Paintings inflect the meaning of the images and tie them to a particular time and place. Implied narrative, however oblique, is a trope Spero retained for the rest of her career.

88 Another painting from the same year, also titled Love to Hanoi, has a blue mushroom cloud with people in large red vases falling below it.
More explicit still is the text in \textit{D.O.W. M.U.R.D.E.R.E.R.} (1968, fig. 2.5), in which Spero depicts a smokestack with stripes in red paint. D.O.W. D.E.A.T.H. and D.O.W. M.U.R.D.E.R.E.R. are painted in blue, complete with stars in obvious reference to the U.S. flag. Decapitated heads emerge from the bottom of the tower, circling back toward the top with gaping mouths and unusually long tongues. Smoke or fire emerges from the top. Though difficult to make out, the ghost of an eagle seems to stand proudly amidst the toxins. Here, an ejaculating phallus stands in for Dow Chemical Company, which produced napalm for the United States military from 1965 to 1969. In other \textit{War} paintings, a similarly shaped tower alludes to a crematorium chimney, thus bridging the geographical and historical distance between deaths in Vietnam and the crematoria of the Nazi’s concentration camps. The composition as a whole suggests the shape of male genitalia, which is explicitly referenced elsewhere in this series as a pronouncement that war is gendered. Spero endorsed Virginia Woolf’s belief in the idea that, as paraphrased by Susan Sontag, “war is a man’s game…[T]he killing machine has a gender, and it is male.”

Like \textit{L.O.V.E. T.O. H.A.N.O.I.}, the painting identifies a specific party as the perpetrator of the violence of the Vietnam War. In this case, Spero identifies a specific corporation and plainly accuses it of murder.

Most of the text in the \textit{War Paintings} is hand-painted in freestyle, though the artist occasionally used a stencil. \textit{Peace} (1968, fig. 2.6) is a horizontally oriented work portraying a simple helicopter sketch in black, overpainted with white. A nude male figure stands where the blades meet on the top holding his arms victoriously, grasping what appear to be cherubs. To the right the word PEACE is unevenly stenciled in white.

paint. Compared to the rest of the series (of which *L.O.V.E. T.O. H.A.N.O.I.* and *D.O.W. M.U.R.D.E.R.E.R.* are exemplary in their macabre and searing criticism) *Peace* is strikingly subdued, optimistic, and even suggestively spiritual. The letters float like smoke, ephemeral against the ivory paper, and the stencil creates a kind of double entendre as the word is quite literally pieced together. The word “peace” suggests the figure may be offering up these miniature winged creatures to the gods, a sign of surrender or penitence. Whereas Spero typically depicts the helicopter as a ferocious instrument of execution, this one appears harmless—merely a means of transportation, not a means for destruction. Many of the paintings with text in this series are very sarcastic, but this work is not.

The artist’s use of symbols (in the Peircian sense) emerges as an important trait in this series with her inclusion of swastikas, crosses, and Stars of David. To these well-known symbols she adds her own iconography: helicopters, bombs, and decapitated heads. The former all have religious origins and then became politicized, while the latter grouping is more idiosyncratic. Decontextualizing the religious signs from traditional settings, Spero upsets and challenges their meanings. *Male Bomb/Swastika* (1968, fig 2.7) shows the outline of a male nude from his chest to his knees in spring green. Broad swaths of paint mask the space where his head and arms should be, and over this Spero painted a large black swastika. Each tip ends with a snake-like head, and all are deliberately smeared. Small black Stars of David, each encircling a skeletal face, cover the figure’s navel, penis, and right kneecap. Many identified the bomb and later the helicopter with the Vietnam War. But her inclusion of Nazi and Jewish symbolism within a series on war connects the series to World War II, the Holocaust, and anti-Semitism in
no uncertain terms. In collapsing the military conflicts Spero sought to persuade her viewers that all wars are devastating, for while there was debate over whether the United States belonged in Vietnam, only far-right and neo-Nazi extremists would dispute the righteousness of World War II. Here Spero uses the symbols to explicitly communicate her political aims.

Spero’s conflation of the Vietnam conflict and the Holocaust argues against the uniqueness of the latter, a position that many find very offensive. In her book *Unwanted Beauty: Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation* (2007), Brett Kaplan describes this phenomenon in a discussion of work by Christian Boltanski:

Boltanski’s images disturb because he collapses specific historical losses into transhistorical traumas. Because Boltanski’s photo-sculptures expand the role of the individual survivor and efface his or her individuality, because he therefore invites us to mourn loss in general and not necessarily losses in the Holocaust, his work exemplifies the postmodern tendency toward cryptic historical references that are meaningful in an emotional rather than political or historical manner. 90

Likewise, Spero utilizes this strategy in the *War Paintings*, and continues throughout the rest of her career. Admittedly, her work after the *Codex Artaud*, which addresses the female sex broadly, is essentialist in its definition of “woman” and an equation of women with victimhood.

In her painting *Eagles, Swastikas, Victims* (1968, fig. 2.8) Spero conflates the actions of the U.S. military with those of the Nazis more explicitly still. Three golden eagles with red striped wings, each overlaid with a large black swastika, perch atop corpses. Blue stars adorn the Nazi symbols. Disturbingly, the symbols of American pride

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and strength look down at their prey as if making sure they are dead. The birds actually seem more like vultures. Spero vigorously rubbed the paper where she had painted the bodies, further smearing the brown, red, and black paint into a mess of bloody dirt. It seems that with the War Series, Spero began conceiving of images as coded signs that could stand in for ideas across numerous iterations, which would be the basis of her “hieroglyphs” after her turn away from the alphabetic.

Text enters even the most “purely” visual images with the addendum of a title. W.J.T. Mitchell asks, what is the title’s interpretive relation to the image? Titles do not generally explain but rather insinuate. Above, the titles L.O.V.E. T.O. H.A.N.O.I., D.O.W. M.U.R.D.E.R.E.R., Male Bomb/Swastika, and Eagles, Swastikas, Victims state Spero’s interpretation of events, and in this way deviate from the descriptive norm. As Mitchell points out, titles can be misleading or even obfuscate comprehension of the visual image. In fact, Spero’s next two series pivoted on the failure of words to communicate.

II. QUOTATIONS

Spero soon began to incorporate longer phrases. She had already painted appropriated quotations in 1957: At Their Word (The Sick Woman) (fig. 2.9), the first in her Black Paintings series, includes an excerpt from an ancient Sumerian poem entitled “Inanna’s Descent to the Netherworld.” This text appears subtly, in black ink against a very dark background, and is painted in the bottom right in Spero’s characteristic handwriting, an idiosyncratic cursive with elements of block lettering. The full quotation reads

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At their word, the word which tortures the spirit,
The sick woman was turned into a corpse,
The corpse was hung from a stake.

Even without knowledge of the poem’s narrative, one assumes the outlined figure in the center of the canvas is this sick, tortured, hung woman. Although macabre subjects and dark, layered, painterly compositions defines the *Black Paintings*, this is the only work in the corpus of forty-two works to include a quotation. Spero selected quotations throughout her career that directly reflect her own reading journey: what she found most powerful and revelatory, most congruent with her artistic practice at the time.

Spero’s next instance of quoting, in a gouache and ink titled *Les Bourgeois passent...* (1968, fig. 1.8), brings one back to the *War Paintings* (1966–70). The title derives from the first line of the quotation in the painting and comes from Jean Genet’s first novel, *Our Lady of the Flowers* (1943): “The bourgeois pass by, making up a crowd and seeing nothing, knowing nothing, in their state of calm confidence, they are disturbed by nothing, not even a little.” Notably, the original French is retained, even though Spero was living in the U.S. when she made this work. The choice distances her audience; some may recognize Genet’s name but few would readily absorb the meaning of the passage. Yet, the choice to quote in a foreign language is conceptually aligned with the content of the work within the context of the *War Paintings*. This series of 150 paintings was a fierce declaration against war directed to an American audience that was at best permissive and absentminded regarding U.S. military actions. Spero and other anti-war protesters raged against American acquiescence as much as they did the war itself, and this series of paintings was intended to put the disgusting obscenity of war in front of people’s eyes and minds. But Genet’s words seem to admit the futility of art as protest;
the American public sees and knows nothing and is disturbed by nothing. The layer of illegibility stemming from the words’ foreignness doubly insults the viewer who is being criticized without even knowing it. Below the quote Spero painted a brown line suggesting exposed earth, with six corpses and three decapitated heads: ignored victims that viewers pass by to continue daily life, to look at the next painting or visit the museum café.

A fascination with the abject continued in Spero’s next series, for which she narrowed her source of quotations to the French writer Antonin Artaud (1896–1948). This brought the subject and aesthetics of text to the forefront, as it dominates the compositions. The *Artaud Paintings* are referred to by the first line of the written phrase, so remain titles in practice.

Much has been written about Spero’s use of this abstruse male author, which may at first seem curious given her focus on women and feminism. Spero was first introduced to the work of Artaud when she met Jack Hirschman at Indiana University in 1958, who edited an anthology of the writer’s work. She saw an immediate parallel between her own exasperating experience as a marginalized female artist and Artaud’s perpetual agony over his attempts to express his views of social revolution through theatre. Furthermore, Artaud suffered severe mental anguish (it is thought he had debilitating migraines as well as escalating problems with schizophrenia), and as Spero

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92 Curiously, Spero included in her painting not only Jean Genet’s name but the title of the book and the page number (“Notre-Dame Des Fleurs p. 42”), allowing earnest viewers at least a hint of where to contextualize this quote.


94 *Artaud Anthology* ed. Jack Hirschman (San Francisco: City Lights, 1965); Lyon, 34.
struggled daily with arthritis, she sympathized with his pain. Beyond these reasons, Spero often said she had never before read anything that so accurately expressed extreme anger. Artaud wore many hats as an actor, playwright, essayist, poet and visual artist. Though frequently dismissed as insane, he has also been recognized as one of the most important theatre theorists of the twentieth century. However, this does not mean his writing is easily understood or even readable. In fact, Artaud’s denseness was a quality that attracted Spero as a parallel to her experience expressing herself without being heard. She reflected on it in several interviews:

In the four years from 1969 to 1972, I used the language of Artaud because I didn’t know anything else as extreme…[he was] the tragic artist who couldn’t find a foothold, and who had been knocked around and ignored in bourgeois society…I identified with Artaud’s sense of victimage—using his language to exemplify my loss of tongue…because I felt a victim as regards to both being a woman and an artist…I used [his] fragments of texts in tension with my painted cut-out images to exemplify the artist (myself) rejected in a bourgeois society.

There is a contradiction in both Artaud’s and Spero’s focus on being marginalized, for while both lambasted institutions and systems for excluding them, a deep desire to be accepted and promoted by those very structures emerges through their hatred. The narrow social norms and discrimination they fought also fed their prolific careers. As Susan Sontag describes it in her essay “Approaching Artaud” (1973), “Artaud’s wish to produce art…is at the same time anti-art.” Both Spero and Artaud

95 Sontag wrote, “Brecht is the century’s only other writer on the theater whose importance and profundity conceivably rival Artaud’s.” “Approaching Artaud,” in Under the Sign of Saturn (New York: Picador, 1972), 42.
96 Arkesteijn, 11, 31, 65.
97 Amy Ingrid Schlegel points out that “This conflicted approach—a desire initially to separate from the commercial art market but ultimately to integrate with it—is the hallmark of the New York women’s movement in the arts.” Codex Spero, 50.
radically challenged conventions of form with the aim of shaking viewer’s apathy into action. Both called for radical change in societies they saw as quickly deteriorating—however Artaud pushed for cultural revolution while Spero, fully enconced in the feminist movement, believed that political change was paramount. Sontag summarizes Artaud’s intentions:

> From the mid-nineteen twenties on, Artaud’s work is animated by the idea of a radical change in culture. His imagery implies a medical rather than a historical view of culture: society is ailing. Like [Friedrich] Nietzsche, Artaud conceived of himself as a physician to culture—as well as its most painfully ill patient. The theatre he planned is a commando action against the established culture, an assault on the bourgeois public; it would show people that they are dead and wake them up from their stupor. The man who was to be devastated by repeated electric-shock treatments during the last three of nine consecutive years in mental hospitals proposed that theater administer to culture a kind of shock therapy.99

While Spero did not suffer from mental illness and so was not traumatized by shock therapy, she was driven to create work that would act as an alarm to alert others to political and social crises. As she stated, “I view my work as acts of rebellion” and “To my mind being feminist and political is the same thing.”100 Both she and Artaud shared the belief that art should not be an escape from life, and both represented personal pain as a metaphor for social ills.

Artaud is widely recognized as a writer whose work is difficult to understand. Spero chose his work in part because his corpus represents a career that was plagued by an inability to communicate. His texts are absurdist even in the original French; non-French readers are therefore doubly disadvantaged when it comes to understanding them.

In addition to having a mental illness, Artaud struggled with an opium addiction, was grossly mistreated in numerous mental hospitals, and suffered greatly from the effects of electroshock therapy. In his writings he meditated on mental anguish.

At the same time he is considered a philosophical savant in the arena of theatre theory and poetry, though because he rebelled against social and cultural norms, he was not easily accommodated within existing discourses. Artaud scholar Lucy Bradnock poses the rhetorical question, “If, according to Derrida, the ‘unsensing’ of language is core to Artaud’s ethic, then is to translate it into English to lose meaning, or further unsense it? Does Artaud make more (or less) sense in English? Perhaps…one may better understand the ‘nonsense’ of Artaud when one is not French.”

Speaking specifically to Spero’s connection with Artaud, Joanna Walker explains:

Through the medium of [Artaud’s] writing—a personal account of alienation, disempowerment and physical pain—Spero voices her own feelings of anger at being exiled as a female artist on the peripheries of the New York art world…Spero carefully selected the passages of text that fitted her sentiment of disenfranchisement, scouring the French artist’s published letters and poems in an attempt to locate an accurate and convincing surrogate voice.

Spero discussed parallels between her own situation and Artaud’s unproblematically, as if her situation was nearly the same as his, but some distinctions should be made. When Spero embarked on the Artaud Paintings, her husband Leon Golub and many male contemporaries were receiving attention from gallerists and critics. Even though Spero and Golub shared a studio, she recalled being completely disregarded when people visited to see Golub’s work. Though socially adept, highly intelligent, and

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articulate, she was ignored ostensibly because women’s artwork was not viewed as seriously as men’s by patriarchal and hegemonic art world leaders. While she empathized with Artaud’s frustration in gaining attention and professional endorsements, she of course did not share his mental illness and substance abuse.

Artaud’s writings percolated inside her for over a decade, for the *Artaud Paintings* did not commence until 1969. Then, over a two-year period, she produced ninety collaged paintings, appropriating excerpts from his published letters and poems because she felt no other writer adequately expressed such seething frustration over one’s inability to be heard by society. These works average 25” x 20”, though a few are as large as 63” x 50”. All are some combination of gouache, ink, crayon, and charcoal on paper. This series is widely dispersed, has never been exhibited or published together, and unfortunately was not entirely catalogued; however, eighty-four can be accounted for (see appendix A) and of these, eighty-three are known to feature text. Notably, nearly half of the works were completed in 1969 and mainly present Artaud in translation, with thirty-four in English and three in French. One combines both French and English, and still another is in Latin. For the second group, made in 1970, the ratio is reversed: just six are in English, while thirty-seven are in French. Studio assistant Samm Kunce shared that Spero was not fluent in French but was a lifelong Francophile. The premise of the series is her frustrated attempts to communicate, and she does this by selecting one of the most difficult writers. Retaining his original French adds yet another obscuring veil for her English-speaking viewers; it is as if she were making a gesture of defiance to the gallerists, collectors, critics, and audiences who ignore her—but the irony is that she desperately wanted them to pay attention. Paradoxically, she also drew in viewers
because of her choice of language. As French is associated with high culture and especially the visual arts, it seems Spero both courts and insults a targeted audience in her selection of French and Artaud, respectively.

All text in the _Artaud Paintings_ is hand-painted with the exception of _suckaprickadildo_ (1970, fig. 2.10), for which the artist used letterpress blocks. This would become her preferred method of incorporating text for the next decade. More often than not Spero painted the words with her left hand; she likened the look to graffiti, telling Hans-Ulrich Obrist, “I scribbled [quotations from Artaud] with my left hand to make it look more insane.” As I described one aspect of the _Black Paintings_ and _War Paintings_ in Chapter One, Spero changes the style of her painting in relation to her text selections. Highly perplexing yet unambiguously angry phrases are briskly scrawled onto the paper. _ALL WRITING IS PIGSHIT_ (1969, fig. 2.11), painted in nearly three-inch high, blood red, all-capital letters, stands out as one of the most crude. The phrase suggests the sort of exaggerated thought one has when not fully mature or not wholly rational, and by writing it the artist indicts her own painting. Spero’s aesthetic and typographical decisions relay anger, protest, and contradiction.

Spero painted some phrases with even greater attentiveness to how their appearance would affect the message. In _I also preach..._ (1969, fig. 2.12), text spirals out from a white star, which has a ghost-like visage in its center. The citation reads: “Because I foresee total destruction by water, earth, fire, and by a star that shall occupy the total surface of the air in which the spirit of man is bathed, I also preach total destruction.” Spero makes her viewer work for the message; it must be absorbed slowly, rhythmically.

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This prophetic and apocalyptic passage sounds almost theological compared to the crass brevity of “All writing is pigshit.” It is as if Artaud schizophrenically plays every character in an incomprehensible play. He takes on the voice of a god one moment but spews impieties the next: for example, “Get back down in your grave god you low down corpse” (1969, fig. 2.13). Above this last quotation Spero collaged a nude, brown, male body hanging from a noose. The figure may be a god, though her images are never simply illustrative. Like titles, images often obscure or multiply meaning more than clarifies or disambiguates it. Bradnock aptly summarizes, “Symbolic structuring of body and language are attacked by both Artaud and Spero: irrationality becomes a weapon, the ‘split mind’ of the schizophrenic a rejection of the self imposed by psychoanalytic law.”

In addition to divinatory proclamations and contemptuous insults, a third voice surfaces among Spero’s selections from Artaud’s writings. It is pitiful, defeated, and reflective, as revealed in such phrases as “I suffer from a frightful disease of the mind. My thought abandons me at all stages” and “I died at Rodez under electroshock.” (figs. 2.14 and 2.15). These quotes are written in much smaller, cursive script, suggesting mere whispers or personal notes compared to other paintings, which look more like placards. The composition and handling of I suffer… (1969) suggest that it is an improvised or totally unplanned painting, comprised of random red and blue stains layered with a few thin gold arches of splattered gouache. An androgynous collaged profile adheres to the bottom left side, and it is in front of this face that Spero inscribed the words from Artaud

104 Bradnock, 12.
with an ink pen. In Spero’s work, text often vies for a position within the often chaotic compositions, occasionally dominant or nearly hidden but more often in balance.

There is a marked increase in the use of cut and collaged figures in the *Artaud Paintings*, which probably lead Spero to create printed multiples to use in a variety of different contexts. The *Codex Artaud* (fig. 2.16), made from 1971 to 1973, consists of thirty-seven panels ranging in size and orientation. It too is dispersed among many collections (and, unfortunately, four segments are missing). The *Codex* is a meditation on death and proclaims Spero’s obsession with Egyptian art, which thereafter remained constant to the end of her career. Color is sparse; negative white space abounds. The bodies populating the panels appear as ashen corpses with few exceptions. Numerous motifs that eventually became printing matrices make their debut in this work, including a scarab (fig. 2.17), the eye of Horus (fig. 2.18), a three-headed serpent with human heads and extended tongues (fig. 2.19), and many decapitated heads. The *Codex* is also Spero’s first multi-paneled scroll work. Though clearly inspired by the *Book of the Dead*, eighteen panels are vertically oriented.

Quotations and images convey morbidity and crude sexuality. The work may be appreciated on a purely visual level, but for those who read French, the text offers another level of appreciation. Spero clearly did not expect viewers to read the text carefully, for besides being in French it is presented in formats that make reading difficult. Her text is never simply typed in a standardized format. Some longer passages made it through her editing process, but most quotations are brief. She did not usually correct mistakes, allowed paper to wrinkle when typing and gluing, and hand-tore most 105 panels 4, 16, 26 and 27.

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segments, with the result that the fragments appear like found pieces of rejected notes that someone intended to throw away. Fragments appear haphazardly arranged, sometimes backwards, upside down, or overlapping. The schizophrenic display is reiterated when one looks closer at the text. Many lines are repeated again and again; some of these were typed so closely together they look like a mass of figures in a crowd, with only a few recognizable letters. Other lines are only slashes or dots. Some legible lines of text were deliberately typed at an angle so that one first perceives a grey shape rather than a piece of writing. Monstrous creatures, corpses, copulating bodies, and decapitated heads with unnaturally long tongues float in the space within and around the segments of text. Thus, even without comprehension of French the work suggests that it is the product of fitful anger or anxiety.

Spero retained Artaud’s original French consistently for the Codex. Almost all words in this body of work were typed on a Bulletin typewriter; only one small section of text on the sixth panel is handpainted. Comparatively, the Artaud Paintings display a graffiti aesthetic while the Codex appears more like a newspaper. Typing allowed more text in a compacted space. Not surprisingly, Spero did not simply collage fragments from standardized typewritten formats (8.5” x 11” paper, 1” margins, reading across the page from left to right). Some quotes are stretched out, only one letter per line; others are fragmented or illegible, and still others are spaced to create shapes in the composition. For example, panel eighteen includes three phrases that cascade down the paper as bold lines or broken chevrons. They read, in French, “ABANDONED BY MY BODY,” “FEAR IS POETRY,” and “THEY WILL TORTURE YOU, MY FRIEND” (fig. 2.20).

106 Bulletin describes the size and spacing of the letters, which is larger than a regular typewriter.
The letters overlap and are seen as extended individual sounds as opposed to coherent words (IIIIIIIIIIIIII, SSSSSSSSSS, etc.) The effect is that text is seen as shape, for visual rather than linguistic interpretation. Panel twenty-one includes two pyramids created with “X’s” (fig. 2.21), but this is as close as Spero comes to a calligram.

The scattered arrangement of text makes it all the more striking that Artaud’s name is typed after every single quotation, and often more than once. Clearly Spero wanted her audience to know, regardless of where they focused in on the sprawling collage, that she was not the author of these words, and that all the quotations came from the same source. This, in addition to the standardized font, lend continuity to otherwise broken motifs.

She continued occasionally to include quotations from Artaud quotes in later works, but greatly broadened her range of sources after the two series titled after him. As previously mentioned, the scope of her reading encompassed ancient and contemporary texts, from Aztec mythology to Derrida and, especially in Notes in Time (1976-79), current news media. Notably, though she represented only female figures after 1976, she never restricted herself to quoting only female voices, for two main reasons: it was primarily male philosophers, scientists, and historians who created and buttressed patriarchal domination through pseudoscience and all forms of writing, and female voices have always been suppressed. The contrast created between all-female figures and largely male-generated texts is intentional and powerful, as the women leap over, storm through, dance among, turn away from, and contradict in every pose the demeaning words and horrific stories of torture.
As Spero completed the Codex, a political and social crisis was gaining momentum in another part of the world. In September 1973 President Richard Nixon worked with and supported leaders of the Chilean military to stage a successful coup d’etat that ousted the democratically-elected Marxist President Salvador Allende. Violence and brutality ensued, and within months Amnesty International reported unimaginable torture—perpetuated against women in particular. These events galvanized Spero to disseminate the gruesome details beyond the limitations of these reports. Truncated phrases would not suffice to achieve this goal. Torture in Chile (1974, fig. 2.22) was the first of many pieces made from a disgusted response to current violence—bringing the artist back to the motivations that drove the War Paintings. The work consists of two panels, one with text and one with sparse collaged images. The former is six sheets of brown paper adhered together with four bands of text in white ink:

TORTURE IN CHILE WOMEN REACHING THE BUEN PASTOR JAIL HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO THE MOST BRUTAL TORTURES LIVE MICE AND INSECTS INTRODUCED INTO VAGINAS HAIR PULLED OUT BY THE HANDFULS NIPPLES BLOWN OFF OR BURNED GENITALS DESTROYED BY ELECTRICITY

It is impossible to simply pass over this image/text. Images of the atrocities would repel the viewer/reader, suggesting the events may have occurred someplace at some time, but the specific details root them in the present and force upon the reader an awareness of the U.S. involvement. This is the beginning of Spero’s third text strategy: employing longer documentary narratives.

Though Spero eventually became rooted in the New York art world, she and Leon Golub often described themselves in opposition to it during their formative years. Part of
this stems from their schooling in Chicago, which was a figurative holdout during the height of abstraction. Yet Spero drew upon a major current in modernism generally and in the New York School especially: introspection. Her aims and aesthetic were always vastly different from Abstract Expressionism, but both her series incorporating quotations from Antonin Artaud are more about her own experience of pain and frustration than any other work she did before or after. *Torture in Chile* and the epic *Torture of Women* (1976) mark a significant turn in the artist’s choice of subjects, away from herself and towards women broadly defined. As the artist described, her approach and perspective changed when I decided to turn my attention to real events, to real victims in real prisons, tortured for political reasons. In dealing with these extreme and actual situations I further began to explore other aspects of women’s experience, not only torture, but war and rape, birth, aging, work, dance, and women from many cultures and time periods even going so far as to envision the utopian possibilities of women taking charge of their bodies, challenging the prevailing standard of the male ‘gaze,’ the way in which women are coerced culturally and physically.\(^\text{107}\)

Eleven of the fourteen panels in *Torture of Women* include text.\(^\text{108}\) Two sources are mythological: panels four and five (fig. 2.23) run together to convey the Babylonian narrative of Marduk’s sexualized murder and grisly mutilation of Tiamat, a myth describing how patriarchy gained power over female deities through violence:

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marduk caught tiamat in his net and drove the winds which he had with him into her body and whilst her belly was thus distended he thrust his spear into her and stabbed her to the heart and cut through her bowels and crushed her skull with his club. on her body he took his stand and with his knife he split it like a flat fish into two halves and one of those he made a covering for the heavens.
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\(^{108}\) see Appendix C for a full transcription.
This is printed in four lines of lowercase letters approximately three inches tall. Some letters are dark and bold while others are faint and ghostly, but the words are never so pale as to be illegible. One representational image is glued to panel five: a crudely rendered female torso cropped around the breasts and under the pelvis. This painted body fragment suggests ancient fertility figures. Panel thirteen features “Inanna’s Descent to the Netherworld” which Spero had previously painted on a Black Painting in 1957 (fig. 2.24). The handprinted aesthetic is again highlighted in the uneven impressions of the all-capital letters. This panel has three images that are unrelated or obliquely related to the text. Just over the second iteration of “word” are a seven tongue-wagging heads sharing a single neck and what seems to be an androgynous body with an oversized head hovering above. Far off to the right, separated by an entire length of paper, floats a solitary “sky goddess.”

The first and last panels include the phrases “Explicit Explanation” and “Knife Cut,” respectively. These are printed in large block letters with yellow ink. Both appear in several other works; the first derives from the eighth-century manuscript Beatus Apocalypse, and the latter was Spero’s creation. The remaining texts come from Amnesty International reports on women tortured in Brazil, Chile, Iran, Turkey, and Uruguay. One paragraph from panel seven (fig. 2.25) reads

The methods of torture include the pau de arara (parrot’s perch), setting fire to parts of the body which have been dampened with alcohol, injection of ether under the skin, strong electric shocks combined with near-drowning, forcing objects up the rectum and the vagina of women, and the ‘Christ’s crown’ (a steel ring, applied to the head, which is gradually tightened)

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Most of these gruesome narratives are printed with a Bulletin typewriter, and the letters are more consistent in value than their handprinted counterparts. The appearance of the text—its size, color, and print variations—prompts the viewer to read and understand the content differently. Whereas a report typed on a Bulletin typewriter suggests objectivity and absence of an individual author (indeed, the text is credited to an organization rather than a person), the idiosyncratic handprinted words bear the marks of imperfection and underscore the text’s already abstract meaning. At the same time, Spero reflected, “I type badly, and I kept all the messy corrections which revealed my emotion in transcribing these personal accounts of torture and incarceration.”

Accompanying images suggest corpses and fantastically demonic creatures, bringing to mind the title of Francisco Goya’s best-known print from the Caprichos series, The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters (1799). The largest and most intimidating is on panel eleven (fig. 2.26): a being with a serpent’s body, enormous wings, and eight legs stretches out over two lengths of paper facing six small figures in a variety of poses. While clearly fictitious, the hellish beasts do not seem out of place alongside accounts of such unreal brutality. Importantly, this work may have more blank spaces than any other in Spero’s career. These provide essential moments of silence that allow the viewer to meditate on the atrocities described in the text selections. The violence described in the texts could hardly be more graphic.

Perhaps because she had plumbed the depths of the most horrific violence, Spero’s subsequent work was less morbid. The next epic series of panels, Notes in Time on Women, did not abandon bleak reports of torture; however, it includes many more

\[110\] from Welish, reprinted in Torture of Women, 108.
positive texts about women’s empowerment as well as active, assertive figures exerting a powerful sense of agency. If Spero’s career heretofore had been one increasingly driven by rage and disgust, *Notes in Time* marks a turning point after which her works become more and more hopeful.

*Notes in Time* (1976-1979), described in detail in Chapter Three, also marks the apex of Spero’s use of text; indeed, the ninth panel consist of nothing but words. As Susan Harris describes it, “*Notes in Time* was the apotheosis of Spero’s experiments with language in which words take on form and material substance, and become signifiers for images.”

This twenty-four panel work truly shows an explosion of language and, because Spero subsequently and abruptly stopped using text to this degree, seems to expend the artist’s capacity for it.

The viewer’s mind volleys between reading and looking when examining Spero’s extended scrolls. Most people read only snippets of printed text. The small scale of most fonts and a highly disjointed presentation make for tedious reading, a fact that would appear to conflict with the artist’s decision to include text whose content was central to the piece. (See Appendix for full transcription.)

Of twenty-four panels, fourteen have text. Sources range from ancient codices and classical philosophy to current Amnesty International reports and poetry. Though the texts are ostensibly related by a focus on women, brash jump cuts from one kind of text to another as well as the often graphic and unsettling nature of its content try even the most dedicated reader’s endurance. It is true, as Christopher Lyon points out, that the

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111 “Weighing the Heart Against a Feather of Truth” in *Nancy Spero: Weighing the Heart Against a Feather of Truth* (Santiago de Compostela, Galicia: Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, 2004), 38.
work begins with a reference to birth and ends with a divorce; however, there is no clear trajectory between them. It was certainly not Spero’s intent for a viewer to absorb these divergent narratives and references in a particular order. Each snippet demands contemplation. The ninth panel (fig. 1.24), however, is utterly overwhelming. The entire left third and most of the right side feature two rectangles created by large block-printed letters, and nearly all of the remaining space is filled with Bulletin-typed reports. Though the larger text is more immediately noticeable from a distance, Spero interferes with its legibility. Many letters are faintly printed; words run together and are truncated abruptly. She makes readers work for comprehension.

While Spero moved into her fourth strategy—relying solely on “hieroglyphics”—upon completion of Notes in Time, she did return to textual narratives in 1990.\footnote{One work, \textit{H.D. Fragments} (1979), consists of thirteen small collages incorporating excerpts of poetry by H.D. (penname of Hilda Doolittle). This is likely the “last” text-based piece before Spero’s brief return to it in the early 1990s with the \textit{Ballad} works and the 1993 Whitney Biennial; however, \textit{H.D. Fragments} is inaccessible for research in the private collection of Richard Flood, currently curator at the New Museum.} \textit{Ballad of Marie Sanders} was a “printstallation” on a wall at the Smith College Museum of Art (fig. 1.45). The four stanzas were printed in black ink over a stairway in a large, open gallery, with a single impression of a naked, bound woman near the center.

The connection between Bertolt Brecht and Spero runs deeper than her appropriation. Both were socialists who shared a belief that art can enact social and political change, and both created epic narratives: he in the form of theatre, she in visual art. Both merged the past and the present in powerful ways. For his “Ballad of Marie Sanders, The Jew’s Whore,” Brecht chose the old form of the ballad to suggest the contemporary story was from long ago. He also saw this as a parallel to Nazi
Brecht frequently collaborated with women writers; Spero’s appropriation of his poem might be understood as a posthumous extension of these working relationships. There is a conceptual parallel in the two artists’ approach in that both appropriate (Brecht appropriates form, Spero appropriates text) from the past to respond to current events.

As mentioned in Chapter One, *Ballad* was produced as an edition of seventy prints in 1991. The poem had another iteration in 1993, as part of the exhibit *From the Inside Out: Eight Contemporary Artists* at the newly expanded Jewish Museum in New York City. This temporary installation, spread out over three adjoining walls, juxtaposed Brecht’s verses with a poem by Nelly Sachs titled “That the Persecuted May Not Become Persecutors” and an excerpt from “Death Camp” by Irene Klepfisz (figs. 2.27, 2.28; see Appendix for these poems). Spero considered the latter two a separate work titled *Voices: Jewish Women in Time*. Writer Marjorie Welish and Spero describe in a 1994 interview how the content and rhythm of the poems influenced aesthetic decisions. Spero explained, “the Sachs poem is about footsteps, and I tried to envision her poem as steps on stairs. I spread it out at the bottom but it narrowed to the top like traditional perspective.” She goes on to point out that the different fonts of the three poems were her way of suggesting differences in poetic genre. Welish writes,

Brecht’s is a ballad with all the implications of the sentimental horrific story being told—the tradition of the popular entertainment of ballads sung on the street. With Brecht, of course, there are always didactic lessons encoded. Then Sachs’ poem, with its constant reiteration of the

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113 Conversation with Brecht scholar Paula Hanssen March 27, 2012.
114 This poem was first published in English in *O The Chimneys* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1967).
word ‘footsteps,’ might be considered a march. And the fragment of the lyric by Klepfisz could be considered a song.\textsuperscript{115}

“Death Camp” is written in the voice of a woman who has died. Only the last verse was printed in this installation, just above a baseboard (fig. 2.29). Klepfisz’ original formatting, with extra spacing between phrases, was retained, demanding that readers slow down and consider the words with care. This final reflection reads

\begin{quote}
when i passed through the chimney it was sunny and clear
my smoke was distinct i rose quiet left her beneath
\end{quote}

The three poems are ruminations narrating individual experiences with terror, Sachs’ more metaphorical than the other two and inserted between verses three and four from Brecht. In an atypical move for Spero (who rarely incorporated abstract shapes when printing on walls), she emphasized the disjuncture with six highly colorful trapezoid shapes radiating from Brecht’s third verse (fig. 2.30). The exhibition catalog calls this a knife, though the image is not apparent without suggestion.\textsuperscript{116} Small printed photographs, depicting women arrested by German SS in the Warsaw ghetto, occupy the amorphous spaces like the damned in Dante’s circles of hell. Even in their silence the images recount an entire world from the disturbingly recent past. Throughout her career Spero acknowledged both the power and subjectivity of words and images, but her last phase is marked by a spirited focus on imagery.\textsuperscript{117} She had, in fact, already developed

\textsuperscript{115}Welish, reprinted in Arkesteijn, 157.
\textsuperscript{117}One temporary installation at Ikon Gallery in Birmingham, England in 1998, Let the Priests Tremble... included, among numerous figures, phrases from Hélène Cixous: “let the priests tremble, we’re going to show them our sexts! too bad for them if they fall apart on discovering that women aren’t men, or that the mother doesn’t have one.”
this different approach to “language” a decade prior to the Ballad installations. This was first realized with the twenty-two panel scroll work The First Language, in 1981.

IV. HIEROGLYPHICS

The First Language (fig. 2.31) communicates through dramatically gesturing figures that Spero called “hieroglyphs.” As she later explained, “for me, the body is a symbol or hieroglyph, in a sense, an extension of language.”118 In 2008 she told Hans-Ulrich Obrist “many hundreds of protagonists have become something akin to an alphabet. In a way, it’s another form of language—more with images than with letters.”119 One may dismiss the artist’s view that these images constitute a language; it is true that the absence of alphabetic text gives viewers less of an entry point or interpretive foundation, but the subjectivity of language, even in written words, had been a critical aspect of her work all along. Even those works with phrases and narratives of torture do not have any universally agreed-upon meaning. Both her text and image selections act as divergent points from which every viewer constructs their own interpretation. In this way the “hieroglyphics” phase of her career is a natural continuation of her experiments to communicate visually. She strengthened this position in later interviews, pointing out that both the written word and her collaged scrolls are based on rhythm.

In contrast to past works, The First Language is almost entirely celebratory. Most figures are in states of physical exertion, in the midst of running, dancing, leaping, flexing, rollerskating, or giving birth. Of roughly 130 figures (many different iterations

from the same matrix), perhaps seventeen exhibit distress; one, repeated three times over panels five and six, is a victim impaled with a sword (fig. 2.32). The rest bound in a kind of procession toward the left (approximately eleven figures face right). Among the images are prehistoric women taken from prehistoric rock paintings on Unbalanya Hill in Australia (fig. 2.33), Artemis (fig. 2.34), and a woman riding a centaur (fig. 2.35). The latter is particularly striking: the centaur’s hands are tied behind his back, and the woman appears to pull his hair while pointing a spear at his shoulder. She dominates by force and the male has no agency, subverting patriarchal norms. This is just one example wherein Spero makes clear her aims; as she later explained, “I want[ed] to try to re-invent a language. I tr[ied] to create a new kind of hieroglyph to subvert old meanings and open up the possibility for new ones. My most important concern [was] that in the work ‘woman’ is not ‘the other,’ she’s the activator. I am bringing these things forth as a kind of proposal. It’s a kind of utopian ideal.”¹²⁰ Given this premise, the impaled corpses stand out as incongruous anomalies.

Panel eighteen includes a curious rectangular shape: an ancient fertility figure of unknown origin, truncated at the shoulders and hips (fig. 2.36). It is not immediately evident this is a human form, with triangular breasts unnaturally far apart from one another, and a very exaggerated, oblong vulva. Like many of Spero’s figures, it loses identification when decontextualized. Viewers versed in the artist’s repertoire of motifs might surmise this is an abstracted female body, but it remains puzzling to the untrained eye. Likewise the minimal “sky goddess” form, which appears twenty times, requires

prior familiarity to correctly decipher its connotations. All other imprints on the scrolls are less perplexing, but still do not hint at any cohesive message.

Site-specificity lent many subsequent image-only works a critical context for their interpretation. Spero continued to create works on paper but was invited to create installations with more regularity during this “hieroglyphics” phase of her career. Often these sites became the interpretive foundation that text previously provided. Some examples are Minerva, Sky Goddess, Madrid (1991, fig. 2.37), on the floor and walls of the Circulo de Bellas Artes, Premiere (1993, fig. 2.38), inside the Ronacher Theatre in Vienna, and Artemis, Acrobats, Divas and Dancers (1999-2001, figs. 2.39, 2.40) on the walls of the 66th Street-Lincoln Center subway station in New York City. In each of these Spero highlighted women in performing arts, aligning with the purpose of the venue. For example, Premiere includes Egyptian figures playing musical instruments alongside “great Parisian actress and singer Mistinguett, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec’s muse Yvette Guilbert, and the American star Josephine Baker, who appeared at the Ronacher in 1932.”

Museums also invited Spero to create installations tied to particular collections, including the Glyptothek in Munich (1990), Harvard’s Arthur M. Sackler Museum (1995), the Pantheon in Rome (1996) and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (2003). As with her site-specific installations, visitors to these temporary exhibits accessed and understood the images through the contexts of their display, granting viewers more information than autonomous works on paper. These exhibits are addressed in Chapter Three.

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121 Lyon, 282.
I do not suggest that Spero’s evolution incorporating language was self-conscious or predetermined. Each transition developed from both play and consideration over the efficacy of the artist’s messages. She worked in a period when many other artists employed text, but perhaps because they employed it for such different purposes—as in, for example, Pop or Conceptual art—Spero’s own use of text is remarkably unique. She seems to have developed the use of text largely on her own, without influence from or even a dialogue with other artists. There are notable shifts throughout her career, including the choice to work on paper rather than canvas and use of typed and printed letters instead of hand-painted writing. This Chapter has presented a framework for understanding the artist’s changing approaches to text and language, which, I argue, can be viewed as four phases over the course of her dynamic career. Through all her aesthetic and conceptual shifts, Spero remained steadfast in her commitment to a practice rooted in reading and intended to educate and compel viewers to engage with real-life events.
CHAPTER 3
THIS CONTINUOUS PRESENT

Where history is obscure, violence endemic, the media compromised, memory suppressed and evidence destroyed even as it is produced, new ways must be found of responding to and representing the past.\(^\text{122}\)

— Paul Rae

Thus far I have described Nancy Spero as a feminist artist utilizing printmaking methods for political ends (Chapter One), and who plays with the aesthetics of appropriated texts in order to effect meaning (Chapter Two). This final chapter frames her as a collage artist who drew broadly from the history of art to construct moralizing narratives. I continue an analysis of materiality, drawing conceptual links between collage practice and Spero’s construction of history itself—though in this case, the chronicles are decidedly herstories.\(^\text{123}\) She does this by engaging figures and narrative devices from the history of art to reimagine and propose new possibilities for women. With this approach she addressed moral issues—in particular, violence—through representations of the human body. I first examine four site-specific installations in which the artist employed figures from the distant and more recent past to stress the idea of a continuous present. I then consider Spero as a contemporary “history painter,” looking specifically at parallels between her and French painter Théodore Géricault (1791-1824). I do not propose that Spero was directly influenced or inspired by nineteenth-century history painting or Géricault specifically. Rather, I use the example of Géricault’s painting *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819) as a hermeneutic device to explain how Spero

\(^\text{122}\) Paul Rae, *theatre & human rights* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 70.

\(^\text{123}\) Though the Latin root word *historia* does not reference any particular gender, feminist historians have used the term “herstory” since the early 1970s to counter androcentric history.
reinjected political content into artmaking,reviving a focus on the body and a degree of narrativity on a large scale.Clearly there are significant differences between masculine, heroic history paintings in the grand style and Spero’s fragmented compositions, but the comparison illuminates key aspects of her art.

A critical re-evaluation and subsequent re-presentation of history is central to Spero’s process and resulting work, and I argue that the artist constructs histories in two ways: through site-specific exhibitions or installations, and within individual works. Appropriating imagery from all time periods, Spero presents history as a malleable, ever-changing phenomenon that can be edited, cut up, negated, and ultimately utilized to effect political and social transformation. In this way her practice continues institutional critiques initiated by artists like Hans Haacke, and especially Fred Wilson’s Mining the Museum (1992-93). These artists’ interventions turned attention to the external structures of artmaking and museum display. Wilson’s invitation to curate the Maryland Historical Society collection instigated a new relationship between museums and artists that continues today, and this played an important role in Spero’s invitations to create installations within museum collections.

As Mining the Museum made painfully clear, the past is necessarily understood in fragments and in relation to new developments. Spero’s organizing of the past reflects how the human mind processes any new information: by relating it to what is already known. In this way the artist, like Wilson, is not necessarily inventing narratives as much as re-telling herstories according to a primary recurring theme of violence against women (in Wilson’s case, recurring violence against African Americans). Collage is an apt metaphor for how all histories are bricolaged from existing histories, as well as how the
mind is capable of hosting myriad thoughts simultaneously and organizing those disparate thoughts into coherent sentences and behaviors.

Most collage is made by putting together images and/or text from various found materials such as newspapers, magazines, musical scores, or scribbled notes. Spero’s approach differs in that she did not directly cut and paste existing printed matter; all of her found imagery and text was mediated by printmaking. Though still juxtaposing fragments from a wide range of sources, the appropriations were transformed through transfer processes. The result, due to the relative consistency of her paper choices and palette, is a more aesthetically unified composition than most collage works. As previously described, Spero retained an autographic mark in her “imperfect” application of ink and paint.

Just as Robert Rauschenberg transformed collage into three dimensions with his combines in the 1950s, Spero expanded collage into physical space with site-specific interventions during the last two decades of her career. Four interventions reveal the versatility of meanings and appeal of this strategy. In 1991, Spero was invited to exhibit her work in the midst of the permanent collection of the Glyptothek in Munich, Germany. Because of this exhibit (and the vogue for inviting artists to devise museum interventions), artist/curator Peter Soriano invited her to create a similar dialogue within the ancient collection of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum at Harvard University in 1995. One year later Spero projected select collages onto the façade of the Roman Pantheon, and in 2003 the artist produced two silk banners for an ancient Egyptian structure in the collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Spero engaged with and constructed history in many other works, but these installations did so within particular physical
environments and resulted in a dramatically altered collage aesthetic. Her juxtaposition of past and present and mixture of mythological, historical, and fictionalized characters create a new kind of historical record.

1991: SPERO AT THE GLYPTOTHEK IN MUNICH

The Glyptothek is located on the Königsplatz in Munich, and with seven other museums it forms the cultural center known as the Kunstreal. The Glyptothek possesses a world-class collection of Greek and Roman sculpture, including the provocative Barberini Faun. The Neoclassical building is comprised of sixteen galleries with grand arched ceilings surrounding a square courtyard. While the museum has no regular schedule for showing contemporary art, it has hosted exhibitions of work by Paul Cézanne, Oskar Kokoschka, Jim Dine, Eduardo Paolozzi, and Joseph Beuys, among others. Prompted by Barbara Gross, who represents Spero at her Munich gallery, the Glyptothek invited the artist to exhibit in its building. Spero visited various museums in Munich and was greatly inspired by works in the Glyptothek and the Staatliche Antikensammlungen (State Collection of Antiquities). She made printing plates based on works from these collections: two versions of a maenad on an attic drinking cup by the Brygos Painter in the State Collection (fig. 3.1), the Aphrodite of Knidos by Praxiteles (fig. 3.2), and Athena after a frieze from the Temple of Aphaia (fig. 3.3). Her exhibition, entitled Nancy Spero in der Glyptothek: Arbeiten auf Papier 1981–1991

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124 Both museums were under the directorship of Klaus Vierneisel from 1978 to 1994.  
125 Spero’s appropriation of ancient motifs continues the appropriation of Greek art by the Romans.
included nineteen works on paper and ran from April 14 to June 16, 1991. This exhibit is particularly fascinating for its juxtaposition of ancient sculpture and Spero’s prints, which predominately feature motifs from ancient Greece and Rome. The result was a fresh and dynamic conversation between present and past.

Unfortunately, the accompanying catalog reproduced only five works as installed in this exhibit, and the museum has since lost its own documentation, so a complete analysis of every collage in relation to surrounding sculptures is not possible. Even so, the extant images provide one with much to consider. Beyond the artist’s own fixation on and appropriation of ancient art, Director Klaus Vierneisel explained another significant aspect of Spero’s exhibiting in the Glyptothek: women artists are greatly underrepresented in its collection, and Spero saw her work’s presence throughout the museum as counterbalancing this bias. Many of Spero’s collages brought more attention to sculptures of female figures. One example mentioned by Vierniesel is *Hera Diptych III* (1988), which was hung on either side of a doorway and over sections of sarcophagi depicting two different Greek myths (fig. 3.4).

The left frieze (fig. 3.5), from about 160 B.C.E., depicts the tragedy of Niobe, a mortal who boasts of her fourteen children in front of the goddess Leto, who had only two children. In retaliation Leto sent her children, Apollo and Artemis, to slaughter all of Niobe’s children. The stone fragment is divided horizontally into two registers. The lower half shows the height of the massacre: the figures’ eyes are cast upwards in various states.

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126 It was also exhibited that summer at the Salzburger Kunstverein Kunstlerhaus.
of awareness of what is happening. Some stand with upraised arms as if trying to shield arrows and others have already fallen. The upper half of the frieze is filled with all fourteen corpses piled on top of one another; women on the left and men on the right. Thus the narrative is collapsed into a single frame. The theatrical poses and gestures of the people are made even more dramatic by the inclusion of flowing fabric in the background that seems to blow in the storm of slaughter. Above this the left panel of Spero’s *Hera Diptych III* (fig. 3.6) appears comparatively calm. The horizontal scroll, comprised of three sheets of paper, is almost as long as the frieze, or nearly seven feet long. On the left is an image of a Middle Eastern woman wearing a burka and printed in blue ink. She glances to her left toward a representation of Greek goddess Hera (who doubles as Phrygian goddess Cybele), nude from the waist up and presenting her breasts cupped in her hands. She wears a very tall turreted headdress. This image, printed in yellow with purple shadows, is a close up fragment of a larger sculpture shown on the right side of Spero’s collage in its entirety. In this version Hera is flanked by lions. Between the two iterations of Hera are three snakes and a woman doing a backbend—an acrobatic figure taken from the Karnak Temple in Egypt. The only other figure included in this collage, at the far right, is a nude woman in an unusual pose, with knees bent and arms seemingly pressing against something in front of her.

While the scene depicted on the sarcophagus is dynamic, the frozen postures of its figures are underscored by the whiteness and physical mass of the marble from which it is carved. Spero’s collages from this period may not be noted for their liveliness or use of color when exhibited elsewhere; however, in this largely monochromatic setting her use of color becomes striking. Hera remains immediately recognizable as a figure from the
distant past, but her juxtapositions with images of modern women acknowledges the presence of women throughout history. Relationships are suggested among the figures in the sarcophagus, the figures in the print, and even myself as a viewer. Some poses are echoed in the two works. For instance, the woman doing a backbend in Spero’s print resembles one of the male corpses in the upper right portion of the sarcophagus, who lies over his brothers in a similar manner.

Exhibited together, the sarcophagus and the contemporary print seem to represent history’s continuous cycles of death and life, particularly in mythologies of women. The figures represent archetypes within mythological narratives, though in the case of Spero’s work, the myths are ambiguous. Since the Enlightenment the West has attempted to distinguish myth from history, the latter understood to be objective. But this has not always been the case; Karen Armstrong explains the pre-Enlightenment relationship of myth and history:

> Today the word ‘myth’ is often used to describe something that is simply not true…Since the eighteenth century, we have developed a scientific view of history; we are concerned above all with what actually happened. But in the pre-modern world, when people wrote about the past they were more concerned with what an event had meant. A myth was an event which, in some sense, had happened once, but which also happened all the time. Because of our strictly chronological view of history, we have no word for such an occurrence, but mythology is an art form that points beyond history to what is timeless in human existence, helping us to get beyond the chaotic flux of random events, and glimpse the core of reality.¹²⁸

From this perspective, Spero’s ambiguity is meaningful. The artist is not attempting to narrate a particular story or set of events but confronts her audience with numerous lost mythologies, related in their focus on women’s experience.

The reliefs on the sarcophagus to the right of a doorway (fig. 3.7) relate a narrative as brutal as the one on the left, though less graphically and legibly than those on the Niobe sarcophagus. They illustrate moments in the life of Orestes, son of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon and brother to Electra, including his notorious matricide, which was foreseen by an Apollonian oracle as revenge for his mother’s killing of her husband and Orestes’ father. A narrow decorative frieze above the narrative depicts putti holding a celebratory garland.

Spero’s collage (the right side of the Hera diptych, fig. 3.8) repeats three of the characters from the left: the Egyptian acrobat, the nude woman bending her legs, and Hera. A woman wearing a skirt suit with high heels stands confidently between the first two, and another nude on tip-toes turns as if to exit the image at the far right. The Egyptian acrobats loosely echo the graceful swaths of garland on the sarcophagus. But the relationships between the collage and the sarcophagus, and the larger museum context, as well as images within the collages, are more than formal. In a 1987 interview Spero explained, “These depictions of ancient goddesses along with images of contemporary women become palpable reminders of our relationship to the past and our memories of the past. The past and present become inextricably woven.”

Though Gertrude Stein’s use of the term “continuous present” is vague, Spero linked her work with the concept in conversation with Jo Anna Isaak:

> Once you and I were talking about the printing process I use in which the same figure appears and reappears in an extended narrative format. You mentioned Gertrude Stein’s use of repetition and her term, the ‘continuous present.’ That is a good term for what I am doing. The history of women I envision is neither linear nor sequential. I try in everything I do—from

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using the ancient texts, to the mythological goddesses, to H.D.’s poems on Helen of Egypt—to show that it all has reverberations for us today.\textsuperscript{130}

The paradoxical phrase was first used in Stein’s 1926 essay titled “Composition as Explanation,” wherein she addressed the process of writing and the experience of being a writer. At points she both relates and contrasts the “continuous present” to “beginning again and again.” Each work by an author or artist is new while it also repeats to some extent all that has come before. The term is especially applicable for an artist like Spero whose process was based on recurring figures placed into different contexts. In installations such as the one at the Glyptothek, Spero’s works remind viewers of the history of figuration, and representations of women specifically. Spero’s persistent feminist focus and use of repetition and juxtaposition visualizes this continuous presence.

In another gallery, Spero’s vertically-oriented Aphrodite (1990, fig. 3.9) was displayed between two ancient marble representations of the goddess: a Head of Aphrodite from 350-340 B.C.E., and Aphrodite of Knidos, a Roman copy made between 300 and 290 B.C.E. Spero appropriated the latter for a printing plate and includes five impressions of it in her collage, stacked in a kind of column on the left side of the composition. Centered to the right of this is a nude female athlete running toward the viewer, derived from a photograph of Olympic track star Marion Jones. At the bottom is Artemis, goddess of virginity, the hunt, and the moon. This image derives from a Roman copy at the Louvre, Artemis the Huntress, in which the larger-than-life goddess strides forward, reaching for an arrow as she holds a buck by the antlers (fig. 3.10). Spero

cropped the figure and eliminated her quiver. With these changes Artemis appears to be flexing her arm, à la Rosie the Riveter. In this way Spero iconographically unites the strength of women past with the strength of modern women.

Color provides the most striking contrast in the juxtapositions of Spero’s works and the museum sculptures. The colorized Aphrodites in Spero’s collage appear clothed when seen next to the pure white marble statue. Indeed, the collaged procession seems like a time-lapse sequence from a fashion runway. The three-dimensional sculpture stands as a continuation, pausing for photographs before returning behind stage. Spero’s colorful works may remind viewers that the sculptures were originally painted themselves, and that the contexts of their initial display—Roman villas—typically featured elaborate wall murals, creating a vibrant context difficult to envision when standing in a gallery at the Glyptothek.

Exquisitely dynamic examples of Hellenistic statuary populate another gallery displaying Spero’s collages. Dancing Totem, comprised of a column of five dildo dancers, was situated between a male head and a muscular man holding a baby (fig. 3.11). The latter’s right arm, though broken, mimics the raised and bent arms of the women holding phalluses. The contrast of self-pleasure alongside the results of procreation would not have been lost on Spero. In fact, she likely found humor in the placement of another sculpture nearby: a man crouching and twisting awkwardly as if trying to secretly behold the dildo dancers, but whose head and arms have been broken off. Emphasizing the carefree exhibitionism of these dancers, an elongated, minimal figure appropriated from ancient Aboriginal petroglyphs tops the totem with its legs spread. By calling her work a totem Spero suggests spiritual significance and, with
association to totem poles, the concept of lineage or ancestry. This tower of women indulging in sexual gratification stands as an emblem of liberation, signaling to contemporary viewers that the recognition of women’s sexuality has ancient roots.

On the other side of a large arched doorway, the diptych *Elegy II* hung next to a headless draped statue (fig. 3.12). This collage includes four iterations of a woman running, an image likely taken from a photo of a Vietnam War survivor (fig. 3.13). In the center, a line of figures holding one another’s shoulders in procession suggests John Singer Sargent’s moving painting *Gassed* (1919, fig. 3.14), which shows blinded soldiers after a battle during World War I. Figures above and below this dance in celebration, adding energy to the piece, while Artemis flexes at the bottom. The active poses in the collage contrast with the quiet stillness of the standing sculpture. While there is no clear narrative Spero encompasses a range of mental states with these figures, from desperate and defeated to jubilant and determined. As in all her work, this acknowledges the breadth of women’s experience and defies any easy definition of the female gender.

Mieke Bal theorized how contemporary art changes art from preceding centuries, calling it an “active reworking.” While her book *Quoting Caravaggio* focuses on the Baroque, her observation easily applies to the dynamic of Spero’s collages within the Glyptothek collection:

the [older] works gain a new dimension through the juxtaposition... [which] also makes the[m] recede farther into the past. Such re-visions...neither collapse past and present...nor objectify the past and bring it within our grasp...[but] demonstrate a possible way of dealing with ‘the past today.’ This reversal, which puts what came chronologically first (‘pre’) as an aftereffect behind (post) its later recycling, is what I would like to call a *preposterous history*. In other words, it is a way of
‘doing history’ that carries productive uncertainties and illuminating highlights…

From this perspective Spero’s aim is to underscore the relevance of historical representations by denying that they are stuck in the past—again, visualizing a continuous presence.

1995: RAISE/TIME: SPERO AT HARVARD’S ARTHUR M. SACKLER MUSEUM

The exhibition at the Glyptothek, underscoring a natural symbiosis between Spero’s works and ancient art, prompted Peter Soriano to invite her to create a site-specific response to galleries of ancient art at Harvard University’s Arthur M. Sackler Museum in 1994. Soriano, an art history alumnus of the University who had met Director James Cuno while both were students, initially proposed a group show for the museum’s courtyard. Those overseeing contemporary exhibitions at the time felt Soriano was infringing on their area of specialization, but Amy Brauer, curator of ancient art, found the idea of a contemporary artist’s intervention into the museum’s less-visited galleries very exciting. Spero visited the galleries with Soriano and was, not surprisingly, inspired and motivated by the collection. As in Munich, she adapted her favorite works from this permanent collection to her repertoire. She created matrices of *Aphrodite Holding a Dove*, a bronze sculpture from the 5th century B.C.E. (fig. 3.15), a Cambodian Apsara (a female spirit in Buddhism, fig. 3.16), and a sixth-century Kore head stacked upon a horned Gorgon’s head from a hydria handle (fig. 3.17). With these she mixed recurrent...

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131 Bal, 6-7.
132 Phone interview with Peter Soriano January 29, 2013.
protagonists in her art such as Sheela-na-gig, running figures, Greek dancers, and aboriginal figures.

Unlike the Glyptothek exhibition, Spero’s plates were printed directly onto walls and pedestals throughout three galleries on the top floor as well as in a stairwell. Soriano recalls that Spero was particular about the placement of her images, but together they did not form a cohesive narrative presentation. He describes her as extremely reverential toward the ancient objects yet also assertive about the placement her female cast of characters among them. The resulting printstallation was spare, accenting the permanent collection rather than dominating it. One gallery in particular reveals Spero’s biting sense of humor. Between two doorways stands an intimidating and stoic statue of Trajan wearing ceremonial armor; to his right Spero printed Josephine Baker, posing dramatically with hands raised in the air as if mid-dance (fig. 3.18). Her significantly smaller scale compared to Trajan gives the impression that she is irreverently mocking him from a distance. Like fairies swirling in the air around him, nude women float around Trajan. This image, repeated four times, derives from a dildo dancer on a Greek vase, but Spero eliminated her object of pleasure. The figures guide the eye up to the top of the doorway, where a woman in a toga turns back as if frightened by someone following her. Spero adapted this image from a Roman sarcophagus. To her left and centered above the doorway are two impressions of Sheela-na-gigs, who comically flout their oversized vulvas. The procession of women charges the room with estrogen and color; their celebratory poses do not even acknowledge a historical absence. Further, their placement directly on gallery walls suggests graffiti or vandalism, underscoring a sense of critical imposition. Spero’s asymmetrical additions enliven an otherwise minimalist presentation.
Over an opposing doorway Spero printed the Egyptian vulture goddess Nekhbet (fig. 3.19), patron of children and expectant mothers. Characteristically represented with one wing extended and one wing down, Nekhbet demonstrates her protective role (she appears to be shielding something). In printing two Nekhbets facing one another, Spero implies that the gallery ahead is an especially protected space. The elegant and symmetrical framing further emphasizes the significance of the room one is about to enter. As a female deity later associated with childbirth, her placement asserts women’s presence and importance in an even earlier time period than those already represented by the museum’s objects.

In another gallery Spero printed two different aboriginal figures, one leaping through the air and another swaying slightly to the right. The first is printed twice and the latter four times, cascading down a wall (fig. 3.20). These minimal, elongated figures appear to fall from a skylight directly above them; within this vaulted space is a small impression of a Cambodian apsara derived from the museum’s collection (fig. 3.21). Spero positioned this trajectory above a pedestal displaying a marble statue, which suggests the waif-like figures are attempting to enter the collection covertly, floating in from the sky. Conceptually this is no stretch, since the artist persistently aimed to break up exclusive canonical ideas of history, defined as male. Also aligned with this feminist agenda (which seeks equality for all underrepresented/historically oppressed persons) is the inclusion of cultures outside Western Europe, here signified by Asian and aboriginal figures. Like the Glyptothek exhibit, this installation gave Spero the opportunity to assert her protagonists within a museum collection lacking in portrayals of assertive females.
In 1995 Italian gallerist Stefania Miscetti curated and organized *Projected Artists: Objective: Rome*, for which she invited six artists to project their work onto various buildings in Rome. Concurrent with these ephemeral projections, which were visible only at night, 2RC Edizioni d’Arte displayed *Cabaret II* (1994, fig. 3.22) in its Roman gallery space. Ten excerpts from Spero’s 1994 collage *The Black and the Red III* illuminated sections of the Pantheon façade on February 27th, 28th, and 29th, 1996 (figs. 3.23 and 3.24). *The Black and the Red III* is a 177-foot long collage comprised of twenty-two panels. It was displayed in one continuous band at the Malmö Konsthall in Sweden (fig. 3.25), but its length typically demands it be shown in two or more rows. In contrast to her earlier scrolls, which have sparse compositions and minimal color, this work jumps off the walls with a vibrant palette. Many sheets are covered entirely in blood red ink or checkerboard patterns, while others are cool blue or shocking yellow. The artist explained in a 1994 interview with Hans-Ulrich Obrist that this change was motivated in part by her seeing brightly colored heraldic flags in Spain, and by her desire to underscore the celebratory aspect of her treatment of women. Spero’s signature figures were printed and collaged over these fields of color, and segments projected onto the Pantheon highlight a handful of these. The physical collage was exhibited at Studio Stefania Miscetti.

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133 In addition to Spero, other artists were I) Doris Bloom and William Kentridge; II) Paolo Canevari; III) Maurizio Pellegrin and IV) Yoko Ono. Spero’s work was exhibited in collaboration with the Embassy of the United States of America.
134 Email from Stefania Miscetti, December 4, 2012.
135 Obrist, 41.
The aim of the urban intervention was to engage a wider public who did not typically seek out art experiences, as well as present a more direct dialogue between ancient and contemporary cultures. Spero’s appropriation of ancient Greek figures in her work both heightens and complicates this dialogue. The title of this series references the two main types of Greek pottery (red figure and black figure). The excerpts projected onto the façade include two dancing women—one with dildos—and a woman holding a child on her back, probably appropriated from media coverage of war. Peter Schjeldahl aptly remarked that the continuous band of figures “suggests narration while narrating nothing in particular.”

Projected onto such a historically loaded building as the Pantheon, the images are further re-contextualized. Like Spero’s intervention at the Glyptothek, her images layer women’s presence over an iconic monument of patriarchal culture. Alessandra Mammì’s short essay accompanying the exhibit interprets Spero’s projection as underscoring the artist’s confrontation with painting; specifically, American abstract and “European chromatic” traditions. She writes, “Dancing female figures ignore the conceptual battle between the figurative and the abstract, as if it were something remote, a problem occupying another place, another story. Because this is another history; it is histoire feminine.” Arguably Spero is one of the most fitting artists for a project like this, because her work already brings together ancient and contemporary histories. One might see this projection as an attempt to impose women’s history onto a symbol of patriarchal orders. Unfortunately the existing documentation is not convincing; the decontextualized images, dwarfed by the imposing façade and fractured by columns,

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do not invite strong conceptual parallels. Some images were not even cohesive enough to be seen as anything more than patches of color. Indeed, the most interesting aspect of the projections may have been purely visual.

2003: Hymn to Isis: Spero at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts

With similar intentions to re-frame and reconsider ancient objects, curator Rita Freed invited Spero to create a work for the Boston Museum of Fine Arts to celebrate the centennial of their world-class Egyptian collection. This would be the artist’s last museum installation before her death in 2009. Hymn to Isis I and II are double-sided silk banners displayed within a sandstone gateway from Koptos, Egypt. Only one-fourth of the original structure was recovered, but the museum fitted missing spaces with undecorated stone to exhibit it as a free-standing edifice. The gateway served as an entrance to a temple dedicated to Isis, goddess of fertility. Carved and vividly painted images and hieroglyphics adorned this gateway. Though only the dark red-orange hue remains (most notably as a skin color), the contours of the low relief readily jump out under bright museum lights. Several scenes show the gateway’s patron, King Ptolemy VIII (182–116 B.C.E.), presenting myrrh and food to the god Min, goddess Isis, and the latter’s son Horus (here in the form of Harpokrates).

Hymn to Isis I (2003, fig. 3.26) hangs to the left of this scene. It takes the long, narrow form of a traditional Chinese hanging scroll painting. Like Egyptian wall painting it is divided into registers. The Goddess Nut, mother of Isis and a familiar figure in Spero’s repertoire of figures, arches over the top with elongated limbs against a brilliant

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blue background. She assumed this pose to bridge the western and eastern horizons. The artist repeated this motif numerous times on both banners. Below this section is a long golden portion with text running vertically. Nine glyphs float in this space: most prominently, two wedjat (eye of Horus) with pink and green irises. A third wedjat is nearly camouflaged within the text. One small figure with a lion head lies mostly in the blue register but its legs protrude into the gold (Frizzell notes the contrast of Spero’s dynamic compositions next to the regularity of the Egyptian registers). Twin figures wearing feather headdresses stand in the top right corner, and toward the bottom are two more iterations of the lion-headed figure. To the left of these is a tiny three-legged version of Spero’s hybrid Nut/She-Wolf creature. The text in this register reads “I AM ISIS THE RULER OF EVERY LAND / I AM THE ONE CALLED GODDESS THEOS BY WOMEN / I CALM THE SEA AND MAKE IT SURGE / I AM IN THE RAYS OF THE SUN / I CONQUER DESTINY / HAIL O EGYPT THAT NOURISHED ME.” These are excerpts from an aretalogy that was chanted daily by priests and priestesses of Isis. A red line divides the middle and bottom panels, below which a blood-maroon register flows onto the ground. Over this Spero printed her chorus of Egyptian women that she would use a year later to commemorate Golub’s death. These women tilt their heads upwards and raise their arms in worship or reverence.

The aretalogy continues on the reverse side of Hymn to Isis I: “HAIL O EGYPT / I AM ISIS, THE RULER OF EVERY LAND / I SHOWED THE PATHS OF THE STARS / I AM IN THE RAYS OF THE SUN / I CONQUER DESTINY” (fig. 3.27). Fluttering among the letters are eight imprints of an allegory of fame derived from a

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The nude, winged trumpeters appear full of energy in green, orange, pink, blue, and red. Additional figures, all appropriated from Egyptian art, line the top and bottom. The latter are particularly vibrant against the cream tone of the silk. Two musicians, one with a lyre and the other playing a flute, walk toward a trio of figures in the center. The lion-headed goddess of healing Sekhmet, printed in twice in orange and once in green, raises her hand as if in blessing.

*Hymn to Isis II* (fig. 3.29) is wider (11’3” x 63”) than the first version. The top half has two frieze-like spaces and the bottom is divided vertically into two sections. The chorus of mourning women is repeated at the top, this time blurred nearly to the point of obscurity. Nut/She-Wolf walks among musicians below this, and the goddess in her recognizable arched position is printed four times at the bottom. The text seems to swing in a gentle breeze; this reads “I SEPARATED THE EARTH FROM THE HEAVENS.” A multi-colored acrobat arching upwards completes the cast of characters. The text-free verso of *II* features five bands of color (fig. 3.30). At the bottom Nut lies on her back with arms and legs extended toward five iterations of a nude woman running—from an appropriated and altered photo of Olympic track star Marion Jones. These figures, in white, purple, blue, black and greenish-yellow, appear to be in competition with one another. At the top Spero repeated her Nut/She-Wolf symbol in parade-like procession.

Though this work is not displayed in the museum consistently, it is the only site-specific installation focusing primarily on history by Spero that could potentially be viewed indefinitely. She did create other printinstallations directly on walls (at the Harold

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140 Frizzell, 30.
Washington Library in Chicago, for example); however these are less about the construction of history and arguably less site-specific. In the four installations I have described, Spero negates the idea that history brings closure to any event. As Jon Bird describes it,

In the narratives that Spero draws upon and the interplay of past and present, fiction and documentary that structure her iconography, the act of remembering is neither simply an exercise in archaeological retrieval nor in the unreflexive expression of a Romantic sensibility; rather, she asks how the entwining of myth and history have constructed the cultural representations of women and how these constructs might be undone, or done differently.¹⁴¹

These are proposals for how women can reclaim the role of protagonist. The four celebratory installations addressed here, executed in the latter part of the artist’s career, present a great contrast to her earlier work that expressed anger and disgust over her own exclusion and women’s oppression worldwide. This turn may reflect Spero’s increasing success in the art world that had previously shunned her. Whether or not there is a causal connection, the shift certainly shows a different strain of feminism. Though still essentialist in her visualizations of a universal womanhood, pessimism and aggressive antagonism gave way to a focus on revering goddesses and honoring women’s accomplishments. This radical change can be seen to some extent in the large-scale collage work *Notes in Time on Women* (1976-79), which I consider in relation to nineteenth-century history painting.

Traditionally history paintings were large-scale, grand narrative works created to promote a moral. Oriana Baddeley explains their political function:

In its most straightforward manifestation history painting exists as a very specific cultural phenomenon. It has spanned different eras and cut across different political contexts but maintained one clear criterion, the belief that the past can be used to validate and debate the present. Essential to the relevance of the genre is a recognition of the politics of the ‘now’ in relation to which the archetypes of the past can be given meaning to a public audience.142

Anne Wagner took this position in her 1996 interpretation of Andy Warhol, asserting that some of his series (such as the Race Riots) prompt viewers to recognize the significance of very recent events in a broader (present) context.143 Acknowledging Spero’s relationship to this tradition, but also how she diverged from it, Helaine Posner titled a 2007 essay “Nancy Spero: Radical History Painter.” Posner states, “[Spero] is, in a sense, a history painter who ignores standard chronological history and established hierarchies, preferring to take an intuitive, synchronic approach to telling the epic story of women. Her approach to narrative is nonlinear and open-ended, and favors the poetic over the pedantic.”144 This chapter expands and supports this position through analysis of Géricault’s Raft of the Medusa (1819) and Spero’s Notes in Time on Women (1976-1979).

Again, I am not suggesting that Spero had nineteenth-century models in mind when

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creating her works. Instead, I make this unconventional and specific comparison to further contextualize Spero within a broader art history and to underscore a conceptual link between her practice and politically-motivated figurative artists from the past.

Géricault and Spero intersect beyond a mutual focus on social justice through representations of history. The Romantic painter is also remembered for his exquisite depictions of horrific subjects such as decapitated heads and mutilated appendages.\textsuperscript{145} These disturbing yet beautiful pictures set Géricault apart from others in the genre of history painting. Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer couches this artist’s fascination in the abject within a Romantic, anti-bourgeois, vanguard zeitgeist: “a voluntary and provocative act of transgression intended to upset bourgeois morals and unsettle established aesthetic canons…[Victor] Hugo defined the taste for horror as a symptom of rebellion against the joint forces of classicism and political conservatism.”\textsuperscript{146}

For similar reasons Spero unabashedly presented graphic images and accounts of torture and death. Both artists join political criticism to images of bodily violence.\textsuperscript{147} While Spero’s appropriation of graphic images and textual descriptions was driven by humanitarian protest, both artists aestheticize violence. Both observed their nation’s defeat from a distance: for Géricault the defeat was Napoleon’s, and for Spero it was the U.S. in Vietnam. Spero, and to a lesser extent Géricault, challenged artistic conventions and visualized protest in the depiction of deeply macabre and abject subjects. Both

\textsuperscript{145} In his quest the artist became utterly obsessed with the tragedy and his painting. A contemporary account relayed that “he locked himself in with cadavers…One evening, he entered his atelier in the dark; his foot of a sudden slipped on something round and sticky; it was a head rats had gnawed loose from a man’s trunk that had rolled on the floor.” (Alhadeff, 9).

\textsuperscript{146} Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, 119.

\textsuperscript{147} Though not the topic of this study, it is notable that both Géricault and Spero suffered a great deal personally from physical ailments: he from tuberculosis and she from arthritis. Perhaps these very real and painful experiences pushed them toward visceral subjects.
created tension between the visually pleasurable and the visually revolting, and both freely juxtaposed classical tropes within contemporary frameworks. Several of Spero’s series lend themselves to correlation with history painting, including the *War Series* and *Torture of Women*. Arguably her numerous iterations of Masha Bruskina make for the most apt connection to *The Raft* because in them the artist focuses on a single event to represent a persistent problem, but in what follows I offer a consideration of a more abstract example: a multi-paneled extended scroll in which Spero brought together myriad historical and mythological characters and narratives. The result is a kind of manifesto asserting women’s resilience against persistent misogyny.

*Notes in Time on Women* (1976-1979, fig. 1.19) is comprised of twenty-four panels and is the last work in which Spero incorporated text extensively. Appropriated text and images coalesce in a non-linear, collective, and non-heroic chronicle.\(^\text{148}\) The text is critical to understand this work as a “history painting” — though more accurately termed, because focusing exclusively on women and printed, collaged images—a “herstory collage.” This work is most striking in its reliance on text as a compositional element.\(^\text{149}\) Only three panels are entirely text-free. All others include a competing array of fonts both large and miniscule. Though one is compelled by habit to “read” from left to right, certain phrases jump out before one can get close enough to see the fine print. Most prominent are WOMEN: APPRAISALS, DANCE, AND ACTIVE HISTORIES and DEFENSE D’URINER.\(^\text{150}\) No doubt Spero laughed at her inclusion of a woman carrying an enormous detached penis next to this phrase. Numerous figures of varying

\(^{148}\) *Torture of Women* (1976) and *Notes in Time on Women* (1979) can be understood as a dyad; originally they were to be a single series, but the artist decided to divide it because of its size.  
\(^{149}\) See Appendix D for a full transcript.  
\(^{150}\) “No Urinating”
size populate the panels. These women dance, jump, gesture, sit, float, and tumble in spaces both wide open and constricted by text. Some figures are choreographed and synchronized and others stand alone or engage in sexual acts with one another. Decapitated heads appear lined up in neat rows as if arranged on shelving. Text and image vie for attention. A minimal palette offers little direction to the wandering eye; some phrases are printed in red or yellow but figures are suggested by contour only or in muted, dirty browns and greys.

In his monograph Christopher Lyon offers a surprisingly systematic diagram of this work (fig. 1.21), revealing a structure despite appearances to the contrary. The panels are divided conceptually into quadrants: 1-5 “celebrates women’s bodies”; 6-10 shows “struggle in political and social realms”; 13-18 “struggle against negative images in myth and history” and 18-24 “women’s sexuality and experience of their bodies.” Though the layout is cyclical, the pattern would be nearly impossible to perceive when viewing the works because of space restrictions in a gallery. (When displayed at the Museum of Modern Art in 2008 the panels progressed in a kind of spiral over four walls within one room so that most viewers absorbed the collages out of sequence rather than circling the room four times; see fig. 3.31). Lyon further notes that half of the panels deal with public aspects of a woman’s life (panels 6-17: career, discrimination) while the other half focuses on private aspects (panels 1-5 and 18-24: childbirth, sex). By inserting the former in the middle of the progression Spero connects the beginning and end of the sequence. Lyon argues that, with this work, Spero presents (some) women’s individual history from childbirth to career to divorce, as well as a larger trajectory from the first woman (birth)

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151 Lyon, 213. Panels 11 and 12 are described as “title panels.”
to historical misogyny and the feminist revolution, resulting in the celebration of women’s bodies and sexual liberation.

Spero’s selection of texts, whose sources are indicated by almost-imperceptible endnote-style numbers next to each block (correlating to separate, typed citations), structures this organization. She indicates immediately in panel one the range of her sources, opening with “sahagún Aztec book II: certainly childbirth is our mortality, we who are women, for it is our battle.” (fig. 3.32) With this the artist announces her target audience and identifies herself with them, also suggesting that the proceeding chronicle is personal. A troupe of female figures occupies panels two through five as if performing a graceful ballet on a wide stage (fig. 3.33). This strong and celebratory focus culminates in panel six, which announces “ARTEMIS…bore the epithet APOLLOUSA the destroyer” and “HER LACK OF PERMANENT CONNECTION TO A MALE FIGURE IS THE KEystone TO HER INDEPENDENCE.” (fig. 3.34) In the next panel a news story declares government extension of military benefits to women who served during World War II—a victory won, but diluted of its power next to a politician’s belittling remark “I think we can do that much for our american girls.” (fig. 3.35) This section references discrimination against women in the professional arenas of national defense, science, medicine, and organized religion.

In panel eight one can read part of an Associated Press article on an International Women’s Year Conference in Mexico City, in which Indian Parliament member Parvathi Krishnan is quoted as saying

THERE ARE MORE THAN A BILLION IMPOVERISHED WOMEN, CONSIGNED BECAUSE OF THEIR SEX, SHE SAID, TO THE BOTTOM OF THE HUMAN HEAP IN LIVES MOST AMERICANS DO NOT COMPREHEND. TO HER AND OTHER THIRD_WORLD DELE
The powerful quotation broadens the issues at stake, reminding readers how easy it is to have a myopic vision of civil rights. Supporting this aim in the collage are narratives of political prisoners in South Africa, Latin America, and Indonesia. Accounts of torture in Latin America, taken from Amnesty International reports, become increasingly difficult to absorb. These describe brutal incidents of rape and torture by military juntas (fig. 3.36). The message is clear: women are oppressed worldwide.

The next section underscores Spero’s second point: gender-based oppression has a very, very long history. Quotations from fifteenth- and sixteenth-century sources in the tenth panel seethe with hatred and disgust; one defines woman as “an imperfect beast, faithless, lawless, fearless, and fickle” (fig. 3.37). Several phrases by Semonides of Amorgos explain how women were created from wild animals: a pig, fox, dog, weasel, or monkey. From them Spero printed, “Zeus designed [women] as the greatest of all evils.” These phrases are interrupted in panels fifteen and sixteen by snippets from feminist poet H.D. (penname for Hilda Doolittle, 1886-1961), primarily from her book-length poem *Helen in Egypt*. Spero printed H.D.’s eloquent words in a large and formal font with yellow ink (fig. 3.38). Strong and defiant figures command the space. Spero later explained:

Working on *Notes in Time* was so depressing; the history of women was so horrific, so negative, so oppressive, that I thought, how can I counteract this? That is how all these depictions of athletic women got started. Gathering all this information about women, being madder than hell, realizing further my status as a woman, I decided to make Woman the protagonist, to depict her as liberated, even if I know this really isn’t the case... The history of women I envisage is not linear or sequential. I try, in everything I do—from using the ancient texts, to the mythological
goddesses, to H.D.’s poems on Helen of Egypt—to bring it in to today, to show that it all has reverberations for us today…

While the majority of Spero’s Bulletin-typed text blocks in panels seventeen and eighteen derive from misogynistic male authors, one must come very close to the works to read them. However numerous, H.D. overpowers them; her meditations on a mythical heroine demand immediate attention. One reads

how she was rapt away
by hermes, at zeus’ command,
how she returned to Sparta,
how in Rhodes she was hanged
and the cord turned to a rainbow.

could a woman ever
know what the heroes felt,
what spurred them to war and battle,

Using H.D.’s words, Spero presents a woman’s voice lamenting the fate of another woman whose only crime was her beauty. Helen was a pawn in a game between men vying for power over her and one another’s empires. Like the contemporary accounts of torture in Latin America, Helen’s story is just one in the larger narrative of patriarchy. As she explained in 1983, “Despite the mythologizing, the story of [the goddess] Tiamat is another case history comparable to those reported by Amnesty International.” Spero illustrates the ubiquity of misogyny by juxtaposing myth and historical fact.

Panels nineteen and twenty are text-free, a welcome space of “silence” after so much reading. Five rows of floating heads in the former suggest points of ellipsis and

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thus omitted information (fig. 3.39). This could also stand in for a period of prolonged thinking. Viewers are given a moment to contemplate the visual logorrhea of the preceding panels. Arranged so systematically following narratives of death, the heads also stand in for unknown victims throughout history—especially those so-called “disappeared” under South American dictatorships. The unnamed faces are lined up like so many posters of missing persons. This parallel is reinforced by the fact that each has a unique expression and characteristics, like snapshot photographs from the last time they were seen alive. Surprisingly, this vignette is bookended by graceful dancing figures, many from the same matrix as appeared in panels two through five. A flexing Artemis printed in red ink emphasizes the empowering tenor of this section (fig. 3.40). In this section Spero is in turns realistically grounded, confronting oppression, and visionary.

Though Lyon suggests panels eighteen through twenty-four deal with female sexuality, the subject is not addressed explicitly until panel twenty-one, which presents several quotations from sexologist Mary Jane Sherfey. These theorize that females are inherently hypersexual beings who have had to control their desires in exchange for social stability. Following Spero’s irreverent logic, the next panel—devoid of text—depicts nude figures engaging in a variety of sexual acts. Her star protagonist, the “Dildo Dancer,” appropriated from a Greek vase, teases viewers as much as standing figures who play with themselves (fig. 3.41). Spero often derived images from pornographic magazines. Her re-representation and re-contextualization of these figures into her collages, where they are typically painted in muddy browns or simply outlined in an ink wash, effectively turns their original meaning inside-out. This is not to say that the images are no longer pornographic; rather, Spero liberates the figures from the pages of
full-color glossy magazines, created and purchased primarily for male consumption, where they are artificial, airbrushed constructs. In Spero’s work they cavort in a space by women and for women. The figures pleasure themselves and each other out of uninhibited desire, not for business or the anonymous voyeur’s delight.

The celebration seemingly continues onto panel twenty-three, though the texts pull a reader in opposing directions at once. On the left is a “song for a girl on her first menstruation” from New Guinea. Above this text Spero placed a female figure with her knees bent and arms askew, as if stretching. Across the woman’s chest and hips are bands of text describing the sensitivity of the vagina (fig. 3.42). Next is a French sonnet by Natalie Clifford Barney and, in short snippets spread out over fifty inches, an incantation by Egyptian goddess Isis. These poetic verses contrast jarringly with the darkest block of text on the panel which relays experiences of sexual assault. Above and below this Spero typed “collectivehumiliationcollectivehumiliation” (fig. 3.43). Thus the sequence of panels in Notes in Time does not predetermine the subject of texts and images. The experience of reading the work is more like getting lost in the woods than a pendulum swinging from celebration to trauma—the trajectory is completely unpredictable.

The last panel brings a sense of finality or closure, however, with a poem about an abortion and two about divorce. Notes in Time can be understood as a tautological history painting: it is a work about history itself. Spero challenges the notion of history and the history of women’s representation. Rather than heroicizing a single momentous event, the artist casts the widest possible net, encompassing all time periods, all cultures, and people both famous and anonymous. Her text selections bring together many voices: goddesses and tortured women, feminist poets and misogynists. Spero explained, “these images are
not about the past. [I] use images of women from the past to speak of the present and the future."¹⁵⁴

Though Géricault did not focus on women, he could have explained his use of nude, classical bodies in the same way. The sickening yellow light cast upon the mass of bodies may be the most striking aspect of his 1819 painting titled *The Raft of the Medusa* (fig. 3.44). One struggles to understand the chaotic scene: dead and dying men in various stages of undress crammed on a small haphazard wooden pallet, their muscles sharply defined by the artist’s chiaroscuro. Though the triangular composition is often pointed out (its apex established by the back of a man desperately waving a ragged cloth at a ship in the far distance, anchored by bare torsos at the lower left and right of the composition), the mass of arms and legs twisted and knotted together creates a very dynamic scene that keeps a viewer’s eyes moving.

This painting is based on an actual event. The Medusa disaster occurred off the coast of Mauritania on July 2, 1816. A French ship en route to Senegal to re-establish colonial power, the frigate ran aground. The approximately 400 passengers and crew decided to abandon the ship after three days of unsuccessful attempts to free it; however there were life boats for only about 250 of these people. A large makeshift raft was constructed and the boats initially attempted to tug it to shore, but part of the raft sank under pressure from its human cargo and it was released from the boats. Shockingly, the captain abandoned the raft and left on a life boat. The raft floated for thirteen days. Many passengers died of starvation and exposure and those that remained resorted to cannibalism. The captain of the vessel that eventually discovered them reported that

“Those whom I rescued had been feeding themselves on human flesh for several days
and, when I found them, the ropes [that held the raft together] were covered with human
meat set out to dry. The raft was also strewn with scraps [of flesh].”

Of the fifteen men found on the raft only ten recovered from the ordeal.

The tragedy exploded as a scandal for numerous reasons—most obviously,
because of outrage at the inexperience, neglect, and utter failure on the captain’s part—but, in a larger context, because many saw it as indicative and symbolic of the failure of
the French government. Darcy Grigsby summarizes, “At the cost of the lives, property,
and wellbeing of its citizens, France and its empire were being mismanaged.”

Géricault, like Spero, worked during a period of intense social and political unrest.
Napoleon was defeated in 1814, and the slave trade remained a hotly contested issue long
after the country passed the first laws restricting the trade in 1817.

Géricault experimented with various compositions and sketched different
moments in the narrative before settling on his final nightmarish scene. The painting
turns on its least visible element: the ship that rescued them appears as a tiny triangular
speck on the horizon. The sea is choppy and one enormous wave looming in the
background (its shape mimicked by a single canvas sail) threatens to bring an end to the
desperate situation. Two figures are mere silhouettes in the deep shadows at the center of
the canvas and five appear to be already dead: four in the immediate foreground and one
black man who seems to have recently expired over the legs of a man twisting toward the

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157 Two others followed in 1827 and 1831.
Argus. The eleven remaining men express the widest array of emotion. An older, yet muscular, man with bushy grey hair and a red cloth over his head holds onto a pale corpse—perhaps his son—as he stares in shock or disbelief within the chaotic and noisy setting. Four men strain their arms in desperation toward the Argus, mustering previously unknown energy in a final effort to save themselves. Two men hold clothing or rags high in the air to flag the attention of the passing boat. Both have their backs turned toward the viewer but one is especially prominent because of his placement in the top third of the composition, atop the pyramid of figures. He is further singled out by the fact that he is the only person in the scene who appears undisturbed, physically and psychically, by his predicament. He stands confidently, unwavering and even energetic in contrast to his weak and distraught peers. His act is heroic yet he remains anonymous, one characteristic that makes Géricault’s work different from canonical history painting.

Géricault also defied tradition by focusing on anonymous, lower-class people—individuals thought unworthy of memorialization in such a grand manner. Grigsby describes their status:

[The soldiers] were regularly subjected to recitations of the penal code by their commanding officer. The shipwreck only clarified their subordinate status: few of these men were allowed onto the six lifeboats. As the frequent readings of the penal code attest, these colonial soldiers were not only distained, they were deeply mistrusted. The raft was built in part to prevent their sedition. Rumors of their potential mutiny circulated as soon as the Medusa grounded on the reefs off West Africa. Of the approximately 135 men who died after being abandoned on the raft, the great majority were soldiers. While all of their superior officers survived until rescue (three died thereafter), only one of the soldiers reached Senegal and he died subsequently onshore…Such troops were considered the dregs of the French army: poor, uneducated, undisciplined, even criminal, often foreign.158

158 Grigsby, 171-172.
Survivors Corréard and Savigny, who chronicled their horrific experiences upon return to France, described these men with great distain. “Soldiers—colonial soldiers above all—were subject to denigration as a society unto themselves, a caste that failed to identify with the French citizenry they claimed to defend.” Even so, Géricault did not denigrate them in his painting; in reality the survivors were severely emaciated and burned by the sun, but he paints them as beautiful Greek gods.

Géricault scholar Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer describes his vanguardism motivated by political circumstance:

Géricault’s life and career are woven into the fabric of the political, social and artistic reordering that took place during those years…He shared the idealism of the radical underground and its promotion of humanitarian causes as political tools…Born in a period of contested aesthetics, he consistently sought the new, battling academic tradition and striving for originality at all costs.

Though this description borders on the hagiographic, it helps one to understand how Géricault joined the politically oppositional to the aesthetically experimental. It is part of my argument that Spero’s art similarly moves between particular political causes and more universal humanitarian concerns.

Spero presented revisionist narratives with the aim of altering societal views on women’s place in history. As Kenneth Ames states, “History pictures are statements about the way the world ought to be.” The artist expressed a similar aim in a 1987 interview “in using only images of women, I want to subvert history painting. There is no

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159 Grigsby, 173.
history painting about women.” At the same time, Spero dismantles the notion of history. By this I mean that cultural and political mores may change but some underlying ideologies—in this case, patriarchy and misogyny—are a constant. In presenting images and text from past centuries alongside images and text from her own time, Spero rejects a linear historical trajectory and the notion of progress. What we are left with is a vision of the “continuous present,” Spero’s work demands acknowledgement that misogyny is not a phenomenon of the past but a continuously recurring one.

Considering an artist’s oeuvre thematically reveals connections among works and relationships with other artists that are otherwise easily overlooked. This dissertation focused on three aspects of Spero’s artistic production: her turn to printmaking methods and working on paper, her appropriation of text and play with typography, and her construction of a visual herstory. All are feminist interventions that, in turns, express Spero’s personal frustrations, bring attention to victims of violence, and celebrate women’s resilience in the face of oppression. While the decade of the seventies may still be viewed as one of the most dynamic for the women’s movement, the feminist art developed then and since continues to prove relevant. Spero was acclaimed in her lifetime (something she may not have imagined early in her career), and since her death in 2009 several major museums, including the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona and the Pompidou in Paris, have recognized her achievements with retrospective exhibitions. Spero’s passionate declarations and the intricacies of her collages and installations continue to provoke and question received traditions and histories.

APPENDIX A

EDITED PRINTS BY NANCY SPERO

2007 Maypole
digital print on paper
12” x 12”
edition: unknown
printer: Judith Solodkin/Solo Press, NYC
publisher: Spero, Baer, & Ellen Raye-Media Analysis

2001 Vol
photolithograph
24.5” x 19.5”
edition: 25
printer: Chevanne/Pechman Printshop, Apetlon, Austria
publisher: Mechtild Widrich

2000 Somnambulist
silkscreen on paper
7.75” x 10.5”
edition: 100 (plus 1 printer’s proof, 20 artist’s edition, 2 trial proofs)
publisher: Text zur Kunst, Munich

1998 Explicit Explanation
relief print and silkscreen
17” x 22”
edition: 25
printer: David Procuniar/Procuniar Workshop, NYC

1998 Explicit Explanation
relief print with printed collage and dye resist
100” x 25”
edition: 12 proofs (?)
publisher: David Procuniar/Procuniar Workshop, NYC

1994 Masha Bruskina/Gestapo Victim
handprinting and collage on paper
19” x 26”
edition: unknown
printer: Brand X, NYC
1993 *Fragments*
silkscreen and mixed media on colored paper
3 ¼” x 4 ¾”
edition: 100
publisher: Richard Anderson Gallery, New York

1993 *The Dance*
linocut on 29gsm Japanese Kawanaka paper
13” x 16”
edition: 200 for ICA, 15 APs for Spero (plus 28 unnumbered)
publisher: Institute of Contemporary Arts, London

1992 *We Are Pro-Choice*
silkscreen on Moriki rice paper
16” x 25 ½”
edition: 75
printer: Robert Blanton/Brand X Editions, NYC
publisher: Ronald Feldman

1991 *Ballade von der Judenhure Marie Sanders*
lithograph on Kozo paper
21” x 48”
edition: 70
printer: Judith Solodkin/Solo Press, NYC

1988 *Kill Commies*
lithograph and letterpress
30” x 22”
edition: 50
printer: Judith Solodkin/Solo Press, NYC
publisher: Institute for Media Analysis for Anticommunism
donated for sale at the “Anticommunism and the U.S.: History and Consequences, An International Conference” at Harvard University

1987 Leon Golub and Nancy Spero
*Thou Shalt Not Kill* (part of *The Ten Commandments* portfolio)
silkscreen on Dieu Donne 00 Rag
23 ½” x 17 ¾”
edition: 84
publisher: Art Issue Editions

1984 *The Year of the South African Woman*
poster (part of the *Art Against Apartheid* portfolio)
publisher: Greenville County Museum of Art, Greenville, South Carolina
publisher: San Jose University
other artists include David Anderson, Eleanor Antin, Agnes Denes, Tom Edwards, Ken Feingold, Gerald Gooch, George Herms, John Knight, Alison Knowles, Suzanne Lacy, Sol LeWitt, Adrian Piper, Adam Ramos, Martha Rosler, Jeff Sanders, Willoughby Sharp, Stelarc, and Lawrence Weiner

1975  *Torture In Chile, 1975*
photolithograph
22.25” x 30”
edition: 30
printer: Judith Solodkin/Solo Press, NYC

1972  *The Attica Book: Artworks by Black and White Artists, the Writings of Prison Inmates*
editors: Benny Andrews and Rudolf Baranik
printer: Custom Communication Systems, New Jersey
publisher: Black Emergency Cultural Coalition and Artist and Writers Protest Against the War in Vietnam
with prints by 47 artists including Carl Andre, Romare Bearden, Camille Billops, Vivian Browne, Mel Edwards, Mary Frank, Antonio Frasconi, Leon Golub, Nancy Grossman, Duane Hanson, Jacob Lawrence, Robert Morris, Alice Neel, Faith Ringgold, Sylvia Sleigh, Nicholas Sperakis, and Tecla

1971  Leon Golub and Nancy Spero
*They Will Torture You, My Friend*
part of *Conspiracy, The Artist as Witness* portfolio
silkscreen
18” x 24”
edition: 150
printer: Chron Screen Print, NYC
publisher: David Godine, Center for Constitutional Rights
other contributing artists: Alexander Calder, Larry Poons, Jack Beal, Romare Bearden, Robert Morris, Peter Saul, Raphael Soyer, Frank Stella, Claes Oldenburg, Bridget Riley, and Sol LeWitt
APPENDIX B

TEXT IN CODEX ARTAUD

I.

ALL THE HAZARDOUS SCIENCE OF MEN IS NOT SUPERIOR TO THE DIRECT KNOWLEDGE THAT I HAVE OF MY OWN BEING. I AM SOLE JUDGE OF WHAT IS IN ME. ARTAUD

BACK TO YOUR ATTICS, YOU MEDICAL BEDBUGS, AND YOU TOO MONSIEUR SHEEPLIKE LEGISLATOR. IT IS NOT FOR LOVE OF MEN THAT YOU RAVE. IT’S BY IMBECILE TRADITION. YOUR IGNORANCE OF MAN IS EQUALLED ONLY BY YOUR FOOLISHNESS IN TRYING TO LIMIT HIM. I WISH FOR YOU THAT YOUR LAW BE VISITED UPON YOUR FATHER, YOUR MOTHER, YOUR WIFE, YOUR CHILDREN, AND ALL OF YOUR POSTERITY. AND NOW, SWALLOW YOUR LAW. ARTAUD

BEFORE COMMITTING SUICIDE, I ASK THAT I BE GIVEN SOME ASSURANCE OF BEING ARTAUD

I WOULD LIKE TO BE SURE OF DEATH ARTAUD

II.

POTAM AM CRAM KATAÑAM ANANKRETA KARABAN KRETA TANAMAN ANANGTERA KONAMAN KRETA E PUSTULAM ORENTAM
ANGUISH SEEPING INTO DREAMS, MORE OR LESS AS I IMAGINE AGONY SLIPS IN AND FINALLY ENDS IN DEATH. ARTAUD

III.

MEAT SLAUGHTERED WITH A HAMMER, ITS BLOOD EXTRACTED BY STABS OF A KNIFE ARTAUD

ABOVE ALL LET NO ONE ELECTRO-SHOCK ME ANY LONGER FOR FAILINGS THAT ALL KNOW FULL WELL ARE NOT BEYOND THE CONTROL OF MY OWN WILL, MY LUCIDITY, MY INTELLIGENCE, ENOUGH, ENOUGH, AND ENOUGH OF THIS TRAUMA OF PUNISHMENT. ARTAUD

EACH APPLICATION OF ELECTRO-SHOCK PLUNGED ME IN A TERROR THAT ALWAYS LASTED SEVERAL HOURS. I ANTICIPATED EACH NEW TREATMENT WITH DESPAIR, SINCE I KNEW THAT I WOULD LOSE CONSCIOUSNESS ONCE MORE AND THAT DURING AN ENTIRE DAY I WOULD SEE MYSELF SUFFOCATE IN THE CENTER OF MYSELF KNOWING PERFECTLY WELL THAT I WAS SOMEWHERE ELSE BUT THE DEVIL KNOWS WHERE, AS IF I WERE DEAD. ARTAUD
this century no
longer understands fecal poetry,
the intestine malady of herself,
Madam Death, who since the
age of ages has been sounding the
depths of her dead woman’s column, her dead woman’s
anal column, in the excrement
of an abolished survival,
the corpse too of her abolished
selves.

artaud

(panel IV is missing)

V.

HE HAS DISPOSED OF ME THE POINT OF ABSURDITY, THIS GOD. HE HAS
KEPT ME ALIVE IN A VOID OF NEGATIONS AND RELENTLESS
DENIALS OF SELF; HE HAS DESTROYED IN ME EVEN THE SLIGHTEST
PULSES OF THINKING, SENTIENT LIFE.
HE HAS REDUCED ME TO BEING
LIKE AN AUTOMATON THAT WALKS. BUT WHICH FEELS THE RUPTURE OF
ITS UNCONSCIOUS.

ARTAUD

AND IN THE CIRCLES OF THI IDEA YOU SPIRAL ETERNALLY……..ARTAUD

I HAVE CHOSEN THE DOMAIN OF PAIN AND DARKNESS AS OTHERS HAVE
CHOSEN RADIANCE AND THE PILING UP OF MATTER. ARTAUD

FOR ME THERE IS PERPETUAL PAIN AND DARKNESS. THE NIGHT OF THE
SOUL AND I HAVE NO VOICE WITH WHICH TO SCREAM. ARTAUD
ANGUISH THAT DRIVES MEN MAD.
ANGUISH THAT LEADS TO SUICIDE.
ANGUISH THAT CONDEMNS TO HELL.
ANGUISH UNKNOWN TO MEDICINE.
ANGUISH YOUR DOCTOR DOES NOT HEAR.
ANGUISH THAT RAVAGES LIFE.
ANGUISH THAT CHOKES THE UMBILICAL CORD OF LIFE.

ARTAUD

VI.

I FEEL BETWEEN MY THIGHS THE CHURCH STOPPING ME, COMPLAINING.

ARTAUD

THE SOFT AND PERFECT LIGHT IN WHICH ONE SUFFERS NO LONGER OF THE SOUL, STILL INFESTED WITH EVIL.

ARTAUD

I SAW ONLY A GREAT CALM SPACE IN WHICH THE SHADOWS OF MY DESTINY DISSOLVED

ARTAUD

A MAGNIFI CIEN ABSOLUTE. I HAD NO DOUBT LEARNED TO DRAW NEARER TO DEATH

ARTAUD

I KNEW MY DEATH IN ADVANCE AS THE COMPLETION OF A LIFE THAT WAS AT LAST LEVEL, AND SWEETER THAN MY BEST MEMORIES.

ARTAUD
YOU MUST BE MUCH TOO
LIGHT FOR SPACE
ARTAUD

IN MY MIND’S EYE
YOU ARE WITHOUT LIMITS
OR BOUNDARIES, ABSOLUTELY,
DEEPLY
INCOMPREHENSIBLE.
ARTAUD

RODEZ  7 SEPTEMBER 1945
...I WAS
IDIOTIC ENOUGH
TO SAY THAT
I HAD BEEN CON
VERTED TO JESUS
CHRIST, WHEREAS
CHRIST
IS THE THING THAT I
HAVE ALWAYS
MOST ABOMIN
ATED, AND THIS
CONVERSION
WAS MERELY
THE RESULT
OF A
TERrible
SPELL WHICH
CAUSED ME
TO FORGET MY
OWN NATURE AND
TO SWALLOW IN THE NAME
OF COMMUNION,
HERE AT RODEZ,
A TERRIFYING NUMBER
OF HOSTS INTENDED
TO KEEP ME FOR AS LONG
AS POSSIBLE
AND IF POSSIBLE ETERNALLY
IN A BEING WHICH
IS NOT MY OWN.
BUT IT SO HAPPENED THAT FROM SEPTEMBER 1937 UNTIL TODAY I WAS ARRESTED, IMPRISONED IN DUBLIN, DEPORTED TO FRANCE, INTERNED AT LE HAVRE, TRANSFERRED FROM LE HAVRE TO ROUEN, FROM ROUEN TO SAINTE-ANNE IN PARIS, FROM SAINTE-ANNE TO VILLE-EVRARD, FROM VILLE-EVRARD TO CHEZAL-BENOIT AND FROM CHEZAL-BENOIT TO RODEZ. ALL MY BELONGINGS WERE TAKEN FROM ME BY THE POLICE, AND ALL MY PAPERS WERE LOST.

I HAVE A SERIOUS COMPLAINT AGAINST SOCIETY AND TODAY'S WORLD

VII.
A MAGNIFICENT ABSOLUTE.

I HAD NO DOUBT LEARNED TO DRAW NEARER TO DEATH.

I HAVE A STUNNED IMAGINATION.

<Homage to Leonardo da Vinci

BUT ACTUALLY I MOVE FURTHER
THAN YOU, BEARDED ASSES, PERTINENT PIGS, MASTERS OF DECEIT, PORTRAIT HANGERS, SERIAL SCRIBBLERS, GROUNDLINGS, CATTLE RAISERS, ENTOMOLOGISTS, MY TONGUE’S WOUND.

I NO LONGER HAVE MY TONGUE.

ARTAUD

VIII.

> FROM THIS PAIN ROOTED IN ME LIKE A WEDGE, AT THE CENTER OF MY PUREST REALITY, AT THE POINT OF MY SENSIBILITY WHERE THE TWO WORLDS OF BODY AND MIND ARE JOINED, I LEARN TO DISTRACT MYSELF BY THE EFFECT OF A FALSE SUGGESTION.

ARTAUD

MAY THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH BE CURSED WITH YOU, LUCIFER, JESUS-CHRIST, AND THE INIQUITOUS SPIRIT OF THE VIRGIN WHO STIRRED UP ALL THAT HOLY GHOST SWEAT.

ARTAUD

> BEFORE COMMITTING SUICIDE, I ASK TO BE GIVEN SOME ASSURANCE OF BEING.

ARTAUD

LIKE THE MORAL TINT OF THIS ABYSS

ARTAUD

A TERRIBLE COLD.
AN ATROCIOUS ABSTINENCE.

ARTAUD

ALL
THE
TONGUES
OF
DARKNESS
ARTAUD

THINGS HAVE NO MORE SMELL, NO MORE SEX.       ARTAUD

THIS FLUX, THIS NAUSEA, THESE STRAPS—IT IS IN THESE THAT FIRE
BEINGS, THE
FIRE OF TONGUES. FIRE TWISTED INTO BRAIDS OF TONGUES.       ARTAUD

I am talking, me, about the absence of a pit,
of a kind of cold and imageless suffering.
                      ARTAUD

ABANDONED BY MY BODY,
ARTAUD

A FATIGUE AS OLD AS THE WORLD.
ARTAUD

AND FINALLY NO MORE
FEAR THAT MY TONGUE, MY
GREAT THICK TONGUE, MY
TINY TONGUE WOULD
FORK; I SCARCELY
NEEDED TO STIR MY THOUGHTS.

ARTAUD

MY HEART IS THAT
ETERNAL ROSE COME FROM THE MAGIC
POWER OF THE INITIAL CROSS. HE
WHO CRUCIFIED HIMSELF
NEVER RETURNED TO HIMSELF. NEVER.
FOR HE ALSO SURRENDERED TO
LIFE THE SELF BY WHICH HE SACRIFICED HIMSELF.
AFTER HAVING FORCED IT WITHIN HIMSELF
TO BECOME THE BEING OF HIS OWN LIFE.
                      ARTAUD
FOR THE LAST FIVE DAYS, I HAVEN’T BEEN ALIVE BECAUSE OF YOU. BECAUSE OF YOUR STUPID LETTERS, YOUR LETTERS ABOUT SEX AND NOT THE MIND, YOUR LETTERS FILLED WITH SEX REACTIONS AND NOT RATIONAL THOUGHTS. I AM AT THE END OF MY ROPE, AT MY WITS’ END; INSTEAD OF SPARING ME YOU OVERWHELM ME, YOU OVERWHELM ME BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT CONCERNED WITH TRUTH, YOU NEVER CARED ABOUT TRUTH, YOU ALWAYS JUDGED ME WITH THE BASEST FEMALE SENSIBILITY.

ARTAUD

BECAUSE IT ISN’T IDEAS BUT PHYSICAL BEINGS WHO GO PLOP PLOP IN MY SEXUALITY, AND I WON’T PUT UP FOREVER WITH UNIVERSAL SEXUALITY ENCASING ME AND DRAINING ME FROM HEAD TO FOOT. ARTAUD


ANTONIN ARTAUD

TELL ME IF YOU RECEIVED MY LAST LETTER.

ANTONIN ARTAUD
TELL ME IF YOU RECEIVED MY LAST LETTER.
ANTONIN ARTAUD

TELL ME IF YOU RECEIVED MY LAST LETTER.
ANTONIN ARTAUD

TELL ME IF YOU RECEIVED MY LAST LETTER.
ANTONIN ARTAUD

TELL ME IF YOU RECEIVED MY LAST LETTER.
ANTONIN ARTAUD

TELL ME IF YOU RECEIVED MY LAST LETTER.
ANTONIN ARTAUD

TELL ME IF YOU RECEIVED MY LAST LETTER.
ANTONIN ARTAUD

THIS FLUX, THIS NAUSEA, THESE STRAPS—it is in these that fire begins, the
fire of tongues, fire twisted into braids of tongues.
ARTAUD

IX.

PHRASE FALLEN LIKE A SPECK OF SNUFF FROM THE NOSTRILS OF A PRIG
IN LABOR
ARTAUD

?

UNDER THE CRUSHED BITTER ALMOND IS THE CORPSE OF A DEAD MAN. THIS CORPSE WAS NAMED JACQUES RIVIERE AT THE START OF A STRANGE LIFE: MY OWN.

JACQUES RIVIERE REJECTED MY POEMS, BUT HE DIDN’T REJECT THE LETTERS BY WHICH I DESTROYED THEM, IT HAS ALWAYS STRUCK ME AS CURIOUS THAT HE DIED SHORTLY AFTER PUBLISHING THOSE LETTERS.

ARTAUD
NOT A CROSS

BUT A ROD OF IRON WOOD.
TIED TO A GIGANTIC HORSESHOE
ACROSS WHICH HIS ENTIRE BODY LIES.
HIS BODY HEWED BY A GASH OF BLOOD.
AND THE HORSESHOE IS THERE
LIKE THE JAWS OF A CARCAN
THAT HAVE GRASPED
THE MAN BY HIS BLOODY GASH.

IVRY-SUR-SEINE, FEBRUARY 15, 1948
ARTAUD

ADMIT, I BEG YOU, THE REALITY OF THESE PHENOMENA,
ADMIT THEIR FURITIVENESS, THEIR ETERNAL REPETITION
ARTAUD

X.

I WILL NOT BELIEVE WHAT I HAVE NOT SEEN. SHIT

ARTAUD

I HAVE BEHIND ME TWO OR THREE COFFINS FOR WHICH I WILL NO
LONGER FORGIVE ANYONE.

ARTAUD

I WAS MURDERED IN 1915 IN MARSEILLE, IN THE COURS DEVILLIERS,
IN FRONT OF THE EGLISE DES REFORMES, STABBED WITH A KNIFE IN THE
BACK, FROM WHICH MY BACK BEARS A SCAR. I FELL
DEAD AND RECOVERED IMMEDIATELY, BUT WAS NOT THE SAME,
BECAUSE
IN THIS DEATH MY WOULD WAS CHANGED AND
SINCE THEN I HAVE HAD TO MAKE AN OTHER, WHICH
DIED HERE UNDER ELECTRO-SHOCK IN MAY 1943.
ARIAUD

AND THIS IS NOT THE FIRST RAT SENT BY THIS EARTH FOR MY FOOD AND MY WRITINGS.
ARIAUD

XIIa.

I KEEP IN THE MOST PRECIOUS CORNER OF MY HEAD THIS PREOCCUPATION WITH SEX THAT PETRIFIES ME AND WRINGS OUT MY BLOOD.

ARIAUD

XIIb.

YIELDING
IN THIS TO THE CRAPULOUS SPIRIT AND GENERAL EROTIC PUS WHO HAS NEVER FAILED TO ACCUSE ME OF INSANITY WHEN I ACCUSE HIM, IN ORDER TO KEEP BEING CONTEMPTIBLE UNDER COVER OF THIS COUNTER-CHARGE OF MADNESS WHICH WAS NOTHING BUT AN IMPIOUS EXUSE FOR HIM TO DO EVIL, TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE FACT THAT
I AM CONFINED, AND THAT I CANNOT AT THIS MOMENT STRIKE HIM AS I DID IN DUBLIN OR IN PARIS IN 1927, 1930, 31, 32, 33, 34, (34 ESPECIALLY), 35, 36, AND 1937, WHERE I STRUCK HIM WITH A CANE, FOR DOING EVIL, OPENLY, FOR ALL TO SEE, IN
PARIS
IN
ALL
THE
STREETS
AND
ON
THE
BOULEVARDS.

ARTAUD

IN
ANTIQUITY
REVELATION
DID NOT
OCCUR
EXCEPT
IN
STATES OF
EUPHORIA
AND
INTOXICATION;
TODAY
THERE IS
NO MORE
EUPHORIA
BUT
INSTEAD
SCIENTIFIC
BAGGAGE.

ARTAUD

XII.
I SUFFER BECAUSE THE MIND IS NOT IN LIFE AND
LIFE IS NOT
THE MIND; I SUFFER FROM THE MIND AS ORGAN, THE MIND AS
INTERPRETER,
THE MIND AS INTIMIDATOR OF THINGS
TO FORCE THEM TO ENTER THE MIND. 

ARTAUD

BEFORE ME, I SAW SOME KIND OF BLACK MATTER
POUR OUT OF MANY COFFINS, THE IMMORTAL URINE
OF MUTE BEINGS, WHICH, CRUMB OF MATTER BY CRUMB,
DROP BY DROP, EXTINGUISHED THEMSELVES, THE NAME OF THIS MATTER
IS CACA, AND CACA IS THE MATTER OF THE SOUL; I HAVE SEEN
SO MANY COFFINS POUR OUT THEIR PUDDLES OF IT BEFORE ME.
THE BREATHS OF THE BONES HAS A CENTER AND THAT
CENTER IS THE ABYSS KAH-KAH, THE CORPOREAL
BREATH OF SHIT, WHICH IS THE OPIUM OF ETERNAL SURVIVAL.

ARTAUD

UNDER
THIS
CRUST
OF BONE
AND
OF
SKIN,
WHICH
IS
MY
HEAD,
THERE
IS
A
CONSTANCY
OF ANGUISHES

ARTAUD

XIII. (not translated)
XIV.

I

CREATE

NEITHER

TIME

NOR

PLACE
NOR

THE

CIRCUMSTANCES

OF MY

SUICIDE.

ARTAUD

I DON’T WANT TO EAT MY POEM, BUT I WANT TO GIVE MY HEART TO MY
POEM
AND
WHAT
MY
HEART
IS
TO
MY
POEM.
MY
HEART
IS
THAT
WHICH
IS
NOT
ME.
TO
GIVE
ONE’S SELF
TO
ONE’S
POEM
IS
ALSO
TO
RISK
BEING
VIOLATED
BY
IT.

AND
IF
I
REMAIN
A VIRGIN
FOR
MY
POEM,
IT
OUGHT TO
REMAIN
A VIRGIN
FOR
ME.
ARTAUD

XV.

NICE, MARCH 22, 1929
IT DISTURBES ME TERRIBLY.

BEST WISHES,
A. ARTAUD

FEBRUARY 17, 1932

PSYCHICALLY IT WAS A DEBACLE LIKE THE ONE, IN THE PHYSIOLOGICAL DOMAIN, WHEN THE STOMACH OR THE INTESTINES ARE NO LONGER ABLE TO RETAIN ANYTHING, AND PHYSICALLY I FOUND MYSELF STAGGERINGLY CRUSHED, TORN BETWEEN A SENSATION OF ABSOLUTE NERVOUS EMPTINESS AND MAGNETIC COMPRESSION, OF SCORCHING HEAVINESS, ALSO CARRIED TO THE EXTREME.

ARTAUD

NUNC SALMAVAT

FRIDAY EVENING,
FEBRUARY 19, 1932

THE CUT MOMENTARILY DESTROYS ALL CONSCIOUSNESS

ARTAUD

XVII.

IT TOOK PLACE BETWEEN ELEVEN O’CLOCK AND MIDNIGHT. THE RESULT FOR ME WAS A DEATH AGONY, AND A RAT THAT GOT INSIDE A HUNK OF BREAD WHICH I HAD BESIDE ME ON A
TABLE AND DEVOURED IT FROM WITHIN, COVERING MY BOOKS WITH RAT DROPPINGS. PART OF THIS SPELL IS THE WORK OF A SMALL GROUP OF PEOPLE SITTING AROUND TABLES AT THE DOME, WHO KNOW THE OCCULT MEASUREMENT FROM MY PERINEUM TO MY BRAIN, AND WHO INDULGE IN THE LUXURY OF TASTING ME FROM A DISTANCE WITH THEIR TONGUES WITH ALL THE THICK-LIPPED LIBIDO OF GREEDY GLUTTONY AT THEIR DISPOSAL, TASTING ME LIKE THE FETUS OF A NEWBORN CHILD. THE ONLY DEFENSE DOG, EAT HIS TONGUE, EAT, ETC…

ARTAUD

THE OBSCENE PHALLIC WEIGHT OF A TONGUE THAT PRAYS

ARTAUD

AND I DO NOT ACCEPT THAT THE POET THAT I AM HAS BEEN LOCKED AWAY IN AN INSANE ASYLUM BECAUSE HE WANTED TO CREATE HIS POETRY NATURALLY. ARTAUD

XVIII.

WHEN A MAN DIES HE KINDLES A LIGHT FOR HIMSELF.
LIVING, HE TOUCHES DEATH.
WAKING, HE TOUCHES BEING.
THE SOUL IS FOND OF DEMONS, IT RUNS TO THEM.

ARTAUD
ABANDONED BY MY BODY  ARTAUD

FEAR IS POETTRY.  ARTAUD

THEY WILL TORTURE YOU, MY FRIEND  ARTAUD

YOU HAVE DEPARTED THIS LIFE  ART...

XIX.

TERROR INCREASED BY THIS ABSENCE OF CORRELATION BETWEEN YOUR SENSES AND YOURSELF, THE FACT THAT YOUR FEELINGS DON’T FOLLOW THEIR USUAL PATHS. ARTAUD

XX.

SIR,
YOU ARE ENTITLED TO HAVE FORGOTTEN ME, IN OUR CORRESPONDENCE OF LAST MAY I HAD A LITTLE MENTAL CONFESSION, AND I HAD ASKED YOU A QUESTION, THAT CONFESSION: PERMIT ME TO COMPLETE IT TODAY, TO TAKE IT UP AGAIN, TO PLUMB MY OWN DEPTHS? I AM NOT TRYING TO JUSTIFY MYSELF IN YOUR EYES, IT MEANS LITTLE TO ME WHETHER I SEEM TO ANYONE TO EXIST. I HAVE ALL THE DISTANCE THAT SEPARATES ME FROM MYSELF TO CURE ME OF THE JUDGMENT OF OTHERS....

I WOULD LIKE TO SAY ENOUGH ABOUT IT TO FINALLY BE UNDERSTOOD AND BELIEVED BY YOU.

AND THEREFORE GIVE ME CREDIT. ACKNOWLEDGE, I BEG YOU, THE RELAITY OF THESE PHENOMENA, ADMIT THEIR FURITIVENESS, THEIR
ETERNAL REPETITION, ADMIT THAT THIS LETTER WOULD HAVE BEEN WRITTEN BEFORE TODAY HAD I NOT BEEN IN THIS STATE. AND SO HERE ONCE MORE IS MY QUESTION:

DO YOU KNOW THE SUBLTLETY, THE FRAGILITY OF THE MIND? HAVE I NOT SAID ENOUGH ABOUT IT TO PROVE TO YOU THAT I HAVE A MIND THAT EXISTS LITERARIY AS T. EXISTS. OR E., OR S., OR M.? RESTORE TO MY MIND THE GATHERING OF ITS FORCES, THE COHESION THAT IT LACKS. THE CONSTANCY OF ITS TENSION, THE CONSISTENCY OF ITS OWN SUBSTANCE. (AND ALL THAT, OBJECTIVELY, IS SO LITTLE.) AND TELL ME IF WHAT IS IS LACKING IN MY (OLD) POEMS WOULD NOT THEN BE RESTORED IN ONE SHOT?

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT IN A WELL-ORDERED MIND ACUTENESS GOES TOGETHER WITH EXTREME WEAKNESS, AND THAT ONE CAN BOTH ASTONISH AND DISAPPOINT AT THE SAME TIME? AFTER ALL, THOUGH I CAN JUDGE MY MIND VERY WELL, I CANNOT MINGLE WITH IT IN A KIND OF HAPPY UNCONSCIOUSNESS. THAT WILL BE MY CRITERION.

TO CONCLUDE, THERE, I SEND YOU, I PRESENT TO YOU THE MOST RECENT PRODUCTION OF MY MIND. AS FAR AS I AM CONCERNED IT HAS LITTLE WORTH, THOUGH BETTER ALL THE SAME THAN NOTHINGNESS. IT’S A STOPGAP SOLUTION. FOR ME THE QUESTION IS TO KNOW WHETHER IT’S BETTER TO WRITE THAT OR WRITE NOTHING AT ALL.

YOU WILL BE THE ONE TO ANSWER THIS WHEN YOU ACCEPT OR REJECT THIS LITTLE ESSAY. YOU WILL JUDGE IT, WON’T YOU, FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE ABSOLUTE. BUT I WILL TELL YOU THAT IT WOULD BE A QUITE BEAUTIFUL CONSOLATION TO THINK THAT, WHILE I AM NOT TOTALLY MYSELF, AS TALL, AS DENSE, AS LARGE AS ME, I CAN STILL BE SOMETHING, AND SO, SIR, BE REALLY ABSOLUTE. JUDGE THIS PROSE WITHOUT REGARD TO TENDENCY, TO PRINCIPLES, TO PERSONAL TASTE, JUDGE IT WITH THE CHARITY OF YOUR SOUL, THE ESSENTIAL LUCIDITY OF YOUR MIND, RETHINK IT WITH YOUR HEART.

IT PROBABLY INDICATES A BRAIN, A SOUL THAT EXIST, TO WHICH
A CERTAIN CONSIDERATION IS OWED, IN DEFERENCE TO THE PALPABLE RADIANCE
OF THAT SOUL, DISMISS IT ONLY IF YOUR CONSCIENCE PROTESTS WITH ALL ITS MIGHT,
BUT IF YOU HAVE ANY DOUBT, LET IT BE RESOLVED IN MY FAVOR.

I SUBMIT MYSELF TO YOUR JUDGMENT.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

XXI.

AWAKE,
ALL
THAT
EXISTS
IS
DEAD;
AND
THINGS
DO
NOT
REVEAL
THEIR
FORM.

ONE
MUST
BE
ASLEEP
FOR
THEM
TO
BEGIN
SPEAKING.

ARTAUD

TIME IS WAITING.
WHERE THERE IS NO WAITING THERE IS NO TIME.
WAITING—HOPE,
WAITING—DESPAIR,
ONE FACES FORWARD,
THE OTHER BACKWARD,
ONE SEES WHAT’S COMING,
THE OTHER SEES WHAT HAS PASSED;
BUT WHEN YOU TRY TO FOCUS ON TIME’S PASSING,
TIME DOES NOT PASS,
AND YOU GO NOWHERE,
EVERYTHING REFOCUSES, CONVERGES TOWARD THE CENTER;
WHAT HAPPENS THEN?
NOTHING, CONVENTION UPON CONVENTION,
REPRESENTATION PROPPED UP BY CONVENSION AND VISE VERSA,
BUT IN REALITY, NOTHING, DUST,
DUST, BUT STILL TURNED TERRIBLY INWARD, FOR THEN
CONSCIOUSNESS IS REVEALED, LAYING BARE ITS LIMBS, HOT,
BOILING, IN A DREADFUL SUSPENSE, ONCE
AGAIN WAITING.

ARTAUD

XXII.

ABELARD, BECOME LIKE A DEAD MAN, AND FEELING HIS SKELETON
CRACK AND VITRIFY.

ARTAUD

A ASK NOTHING MORE THAN TO FEEL MY BRAIN. ARTAUD

A AM AMONG NEITHER THE DEAD NOR THE LIVING ARTAUD

UTTERLY OBLIVIOUS TO IDEAS. ARTAUD

PARDON THIS ENIGMATIC LANGUAGE. ARTAUD

A JOKING STYLE THAT IS NO STYLE ARTAUD

this cataclysm that was my body… ARTAUD

ONE SEES GOD WHEN
ONE WANTS TO,
AND TO SEE GOD IS
NOT TO BE SATISFIED
WITH THE LITTLE
ENCLAVE OF EARTHLY
SENSATIONS, WHICH
HAVE NEVER DONE
ANYTHING EXCEPT
WHET THE APPETITE
FOR AN EGO AND FOR
A WHOLE CONSCIOUSNESS
THAT THIS WORLD NEVER
CEASES TO MURDER
AND DECEIVE

ARTAUD

I RENOUNCE BAPTISM

ARTAUD

THE FIRE OF TONGUES, FIRE TWISTED INTO BRAIDS
OF TONGUES.

ARTAUD

XXIII.

AND I NEVER KNEW ANYTHING MORE

ARTAUD

FIRE,
AIR,
WATER,
EARTH,
I TAKE THE LIST
OF ELEMENTS CORRESPONDING
TO THE HIERARCHY OF HERACLITUS;

I FREE THIS
PHILOSOPHY IN ACTION. I RECONSTITUTE THE FOUR MYTHIC IMAGES.

ARTAUD

IN PLAIN LANGUAGE
THE SYMBOLS OF ANCIENT ALCHEMY:
AND MERCURY CORRESPONDS TO MOVEMENT
AND SULVER “ ENERGY
AND SALD “ STABLE MASS.

ARTAUD

AND WHEREVER MATERIAL PROGRESSES, THE
ACHIEVEMENTS OF AN ENTIRELY EXTERNAL PERFECTION IN
WHICH NEITHER OUR HUMAN HEART NOR BODY
CAN PARTICIPATE, WHEREVER EVERYTHING
RELIES AND REFINES ITSELF ON COMMUDIEITES TO THE
EXCLUSION OF ALL INTERIOR PROGRESS, ONE CAN
SAY THAT TRUE CULTURE HAS CEASED TO DEVELOP.

ARTAUD

IT’S ABOUT GIVING ME BACK A LIFE,

AND BESIDES IT SHOULD BE EASY FOR HIM TO DECIDE IF I’M WORTH
PULLING FROM THIS HELL WHERE I’VE ROLLED AROUND YEAR AFTER
YEAR WITH NO WAY OUT AND NO END IN SIGHT.

ARTAUD

XXIV.

A
KIND
OF
HARD

153
COSMIC
HAMMER
OF
DISTORTED
WEIGHT,
WHICH
FELL
AGAIN AND
AGAIN
INTO THE
SPACE
LIKE
A
FOREHEAD.

ARTAUD

BEFORE
COMMITTING
SUICIDE
I
ASK TO BE
GIVE
ASSURANCE
OF
BEING
ARTAUD

THE GASH IS CLEAN, ALL THOUGHTS ARE PROVISIONAL, EXCEPTIONAL,
DETACHED. ARTAUD

WRECKS OF FLOATING THOUGHTS,
EXCERPTS WITH NO POINT, CUT
OFF FROM THEIR ORIGIN.
ARTAUD

I HAVE NOTHING MORE TO SAY
EITHER
AND THE FLUIDS OF MY HEAD ARE DOLLS PULLED OUT OF ME BY
MASTRUBATION.

THE INVERT IS HE WHO EATS HIS SELF TO NOURISH HIS SELF.
SEARCHES IN HIMSELF FOR HIS MOTHER AND WISHES TO POSESS HER
FOR HIMSELF.

THE PRIMITIVE CRIME OF INCEST IS THE ENEMY
OF
POETRY
AND
THE
KILLER
OF
ITS
IMMACULATE
POETRY.

AR TA UD

I DON’T ACCEPT HAVING THE
THOUGHT OF ALL THE PEOPLE OF
THE EARTH IN MY TESTICLES AND
IN MY GENITALS

AR TA UD

AND I ACCEPT EVEN LESS THAT MY
SPERM, NOT WHEN I SLEEP BUT
WHEN I’M AWAKE

AR TA UD

BEYOND, BEYOND, SPIRIT, SPIRIT,
FIRE, TONGUES OF FIRE, FIRE,
FIRE, EAT YOUR TONGUE, OLD
DOG,
I TEAR OUT MY TONGUE.  AR TA UD
I OPIATE MYSELF AS I AM I MYSELF WITHOUT BEING CURED OF MYSELF. TO CEASE DRUGGING MYSELF IS TO DIE. I MEAN TO SAY THAT ONLY DEATH CAN CURE ME OF THE INFERNAL PALLITATIVE OF DRUGS FROM WHICH ONLY A REASONABLE ABSENCE, NOT TO EXTENDED AND NOT TOO FREQUENT, PERMITS ME TO BE WHAT I AM.

I CAN DO NOTHING WITH OPIUM WHICH TRULY IS THE MOST ABOMINABLE LIE, THE MOST FEARSOME INVENTION OF NOTHINGNESS TO HAVE FERTILIZED HUMAN SENSIBILITIES. BUT I CAN DO NOTHING WITHOUT THIS CULTURE OF NOTHINGNESS BEING AT A CERTAIN POINT IN MYSELF.

IT IS NOT OPIUM THAT ENABLES ME TO WORK, BUT IS ABSENCE: AND TO BE AWARE OF ITS ABSENCE, IT IS NECESSARY FOR IT TO BE AVAILABLE FROM TIME TO TIME.

MOREOVER, THIS IS NOT A DEFENSE OF DETOXIFICATION BY AN OPIUM ADDICT NOR AN ATTACK ON OPIUM BY A DETOXIFIED ADDICT. THIS IS A TRUE MEMORY OF A STATE THAT CAN ONLY BE ACCEPTED AND UNDERSTOOD BY ANGELS, INTENDED ONLY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE UNDERSTOOD AND ACCEPTED.

ARTAUD

AND ALL SPACE TREMBLED LIKE A VAGINA BEING PILLAGED BY THE GLOBE OF THE BURNING SKY.
ARTAUD

XXVIIa.

I MOST CERTAINLY DIED LONG AGO.
I AM ALREADY SUICIDED.

ARTAUD

Your ignorance of what a man is is equaled only by your foolishness in limiting him.
ARTAUD
THE APPETITE OF NOT BEING

ARTAUD

XXVIIIb.

This cataclysm that was my body….

Artaud

XXIX.

I SPEAK

THAT IT ACTS

SENSITIVE

BALANCE OF

ARTAUD

XXX.

FOR ONE READS THE MEMOIRS OF DEAD POETES, BUT WHEN THEY WERE ALIVE, ONE WOULDN’T HAVE OFFERED THEM A CUP OF COFFEE OR A GLASS OF OPIUM
FOR COMFORT.

ARTAUD

XXXI.

SOLAGNE SICARD,
LILIANE DONALIN,
LUCIE GREGH,
HUGUETTE PELARDY,
SONIA LEVINE,
COLETTE PROU,
NANE GERMONE,
RAYMOND FAURE,
BARBARA NEEL,
MICHELLE LA HAYE,
NINA SERGIS,
TANIA BALACHOVE

OCTOBER 6, 1935
FOR CECILE

ARTAUD

SONIA,
HUGUETTE
PELARDY,
NINASERGIS,
CECILE SCHRAMME,
SOLANGE SICARD,
TANIA,
LUCIE GREGH,
GEOFFROY,

ARTAUD

XXXII.
I WAS ON GOLGOTHA TWO THOUSAND YEARS AGO AND I WAS STILL CALLED ARTAUD, AND DESPISED PRIESTS AND GOD, AND FOR THAT I WAS CRUCIFIED BY THE PRIESTS OF JEHOVAH, AS A POET AND ENLIGHTENED ONE, AND THEN THROWNE ONTO A DUNGHILL.

ARTAUD

MARCH 22, 1924

MY LETTER DESERVED AT LEAST A REPLY, RETURN, SIR, LETTERS AND MANUSCRIPTS.
I WOULD HAVE LIKED TO FIND SOMETHING INTELLIGENT TO SAY TO YOU, TO CLEARLY MARK WHAT SEPARATES US, BUT IT’S NO USE, I AM A MIND NOT YET FORMED, AN IMBECILE: THINK WHAT YOU WILL OF ME.

ANTONIN ARTAUD
MAY 22, 1924

DEAR SIR,
WHY LIE, WHY TRY TO PUT ON A LITERARY LEVEL SOMETHING THAT IS THE SCREAM OF LIFE ITSELF, WHY GIVE THE APPEARANCES OF FICTION TO THAT WHICH COMES OUT OF THE INERADICABLE SUBSTANCE OF THE SOUL, WHICH IS LIKE THE GROAN OF REALITY?

I’D RATHER SHOW MYSELF AS I AM, IN MY NONEXISTENCE AND MY ROOTLESSNESS...

...A SICKNESS THAT AFFECTS THE SOUL IN ITS MOST PROFOUND REALITY, AND THAT INFECTS ITS MANIFESTATIONS. THE POSION OF BEING. A VERITABLE PARALYSIS, A SICKNESS THAT TAKES AWAY SPEECH, MEMORY, AND WHICH UPROOTS THOUGHT...

SINCERELY YOURS,

ANTONIN ARTAUD
DEAR SIR,

MY MENTAL LIFE IS SHOT THROUGH WITH PETTY DOUBTS
AND PEREMPTORY CERTAINTIES WHICH EXPRESS THEMSELVES
IN LUCID AND COHERENT WORDS. AND MY WEAKNESSES ARE OF A MORE
PRECARIOUS STRUCTURE, THEY ARE THEMSELVES NEBULOUS AND
BADLY
FORMULATED. THEY HAVE LIVING ROOTS. ROOTS OF
ANGUISH WHICH TOUCH THE HEART OF LIFE: BUT THEY
DO NOT POSSESS THE DISORDER OF LIFE, ONE DOES OT FEEL IN THEM
THAT COSMIC BREATH OF A SOUL WHAKEN TO ITS FOUNDATIONS...AND
HERE,
INSEPARABLE REALITY AND THE PHYSICAL CLARITY OF A FEELING,
TO HAVE IT TO SUCH A DEGREE THAT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR IT NOT TO BE
EXPRESSED,
TO HAVE A WEALTH OF WORDS, OF ACQUIRED TURNS OF PHRASE
CAPABLE
OF JOINING THE DANCE, COMING INTO PLAY; AND THE MOMENT THE
SOUL
IS PREPARING TO ORGANIZE ITS WEALTH, ITS DISCOVERIES, THIS
REVELATION. AT THTAT UNCONSCIOUS MOMENT WHEN THE THING IS
ON THE POINT OF COMING FORTH, A SUPERIOR AND EVIL WILL ATTACKS
THE SOUL LIKE A POISON, ATTACKS THE MASS CONSISTING OF WORD AND
IMAGE,
ATTACKS THE MASS OF FEELING, AND LEAVES ME PANTING
AS IF AT THE VERY DOOR OF LIFE.....

BUT ENOUGH ABOUT MYSELF AND MY WORKS TO BE, I NO LONGER ASK
ANYTHING BUT TO FEEL MY BRAIN.

ANTONIN ARTAUD

MAY 1, 1923
SIR,
I REGREAT I AM UNABLE TO PUBLISH YOUR POEMS IN THE NOUVELLE REVUE FRANCAISE. BUT I WAS SUFFICIENTLY INTERESTED IN THEM TO WISH TO MEET THEIR AUTHOR. IF IT WERE POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO COME BY THE REVUE SOME FRIDAY, BETWEEN FOUR AND SIX O’CLOCK, I WOULD BE PLEASED TO SEE YOU.

SINCERELY YOURS,

JACQUES RIVIERE

YES, I AM MADE OF THE SAME ORGANIC MATTER AS ANGELS, BUT I LIKE THIS SUPERIORITY OVER THEM IN THAT I DO NOT BELIEVE MYSELF TO BE ETERNAL IN THIS FORM OF MATTER, THAT IT IS NOT I, TO KNOW AND TO HAVE THE LUXURY OF BEING ABLE TO SPIT ON THE CARRION WHICH I INHABIT AND WHICH LIVES IN ME.

ARTAUD

THERE IS NO LONGER ANYTHING BUT THE IMMENSE SATISFACTION OF INERTS, CATTLE SOULS, SERFS OF THE IMBECILITY THAT OPPRESSES THEM AND WITH WHICH THEY NEVER CEASE COPULATING NIGHT AND DAY, OF SERFS AS FLAT AS THIS LETTER IN WHICH I ATTEMPT TO EXPRESS MY EXASPERATION WITH A LIFE LED BY A BAND OF FOOLS WHO WISHED TO IMPOSE ON EVERYONE THEIR HATRED OF POETRY, THEIR LOVE OF BOURGEOIS INEPTITUDE IN A WORLD THAT HAS BECOME UTTERLY GENTRIFIED.

ARTAUD

XXXIIIa.

DESCRIPTION OF A PHYSICAL STATE

A SHARP BURNING SENSATION IN THE LIMBS.

MUSCLES TWISTED, AS IF FLAYED, THE SENSE OF BEING MADE
OF GLASS AND BREAKABLE, A FEAR, A RECOILING FROM
MOVEMENT AND NOISE. AN UNCONSCIOUS CONFUSION IN WALKING,
GESTURES, MOVEMENTS. A WILL THAT IS PERPETUALLY
STRAINED TO MAKE THE SIMPLEST GESTURES.

RENUNCIATION OF THE SIMPLE GESTURE,

A STAGGERING AND CENTRAL FATIGUE, A KIND OF GASPING
FATIGUE. MOVEMENTS MUST BE RECOMPOSED, A SORT OF DEATHLIKE
FATIGUE, A FATIGUIE OF THE MIND IN CARRYING OUT THE
SIMPLEST MUSCULAR CONTRACTION, THE GESTURE OF GRASPING,
OF UNCONSCIOUSLY CLINGING TO SOMETHING.

MUST BE SUSTAINED BY A CONSTANT EFFORT OF THE WILL.

A FATIGUE AS OLD AS THE WORLD, THE SENSE OF HAVING TO
CARRY ONE’S BODY AROUND, A FEELING OF INCREDIBLE FRAGILITY
WHICH
BECOMES A SHATTERING PAIN.

ARIAUD

????????

XXXIIIb.

THAT IS, I HAVE BEEN SUICIDED
TO DESTROY, NOT TO EXIST
I SUFFER TERRIBLY FROM LIFE
I SUICIDE A SOLUTION

ARIAUD

ARIAUD

ARIAUD

ARIAUD

ARIAUD
XXXIIIc.

IS SUICIDE A SOLUTION ARTAUD

TO DESTROY, NOT TO EXIST ARTAUD

I BELIEVE IN NOTHING ARTAUD

THE APPETITE OF NOT BEING ARTAUD

I SUFFER TERRIBLY FROM LIFE ARTAUD

IS SUICIDE A SOLUTION ARTAUD
1. The nature of torture assumes the involvement of at least two persons, the torturer and the victim, and it carries the further implication that the victim is under the physical control of the torturer. The second element is the basic one of the infliction of acute pain and suffering. It is the means used by the torturer on the victim and the element that distinguishes him from the interrogator. Pain is a subjective concept, internally felt, but is no less real for being subjective.

Definitions that would limit torture to physical assaults on the body exclude ‘mental’ and ‘psychological’ torture which causes acute pain and suffering, and must be incorporated in any definition. The concept of torture does imply a strong degree of suffering which is ‘severe’ or ‘acute.’ One blow is considered to be ‘ill-treatment’ rather than ‘torture’ while continued beatings would be torture. Intensity and degree are factors in judging.

There is implicit in torture the
infliction of pain by the torturer to
make the victim submit, to ‘break him’
or to ‘break her.’ The breaking of
the victim’s will is to destroy the
victim’s humanity.

South Vietnam 1974 Thieu’s police

…They tied her ankles to a chair, tied a
rope around her stomach and blindfolded her.
They had a long rubber baton and they beat
her knee caps. Then they thrust their hands
in under her ribs and pulled them out. They had
had her down and forced soapy water
into her mouth.

They attached one wire to an earlobe and one
to her genital area and then they would crank
When the crank was turned and produced a
burst of electricity she would strain at the
chair and slump back.

The policemen took turns, Mr. Ham recalled.
Some were in uniform and he could see that
they were high-ranking officers—majors and
lieutenants colonels while others were in
civilian clothes or bare-chested.

INHUMAN TREATMENT

EXPLICIT EXPLANATION

This testimony was first published in the
Uruguayan weekly newspaper Marcha on June 30
1973. It was the last copy of the periodical to appear before
its suspension.
On 21 April this year at approximately 11 o’clock I went to the Unidad Millar Batallon de Infanteria No. 8, accompanied by my husband because I had heard that the combined forces had been at my home looking for me. I talked to an officer who told me there was a warrant for my arrest and that I would stay there for four days to be interrogated about the irregularities of the Mayor’s Office. I told him I had nothing against this. I was then blindfolded, and this official gave orders that I be taken to the sala de disciplina (interrogation room). The ‘sala’ was a cell…There they made me stand with legs and arms akimbo and hands against the wall. I stood like that all of that day without eating: I was given water on three occasions, and at about 1 o’clock in the morning a soldier came and said to me ‘Lie down on the bunk’. It was only a mattress.

…The whole of the first day I kept asking them to allow me to take off my contact lenses which were hurting my eyes because of the pressure of the blindfold. They didn’t let me take them off……The following day about 7 I was standing like that until the afternoon when they took me to make my statement………………I said that before answering I requested a lawyer. Then the second gentleman who had spoken to me said: ‘We will show you that we are lawyers, Prosecuters and judges.’ One of them slapped me several times and they punched me in the head and used ndages to tie my hands behind my back. Placing emselves on either side of me, two soldiers took me by the legs and arms and submerged me into a barrel of water which covered my head and up to the middle of my chest. Without asking me any questions they told the soldier to put me back in the same position in my cell, expressing their hope that with this my memory would be refreshed.

When I came back to the cell, I told the policewoman that I was pregnant: then came a soldier who insulted me in sorts of ways and said to me that ‘that was the pretext of all whore….’…That night, like the previous night
they let me lie down a while and the following morning they again took me to make a statement. They questioned me again about Raffaglio, De Mellero and Traico. answered what I know, but this didn’t suit them because they then beat me repeatedly in the face and on the head. They then submerged me again in the same way as on the previous day in a barrel of water four or five times. Before they took me out almost drowned. I was told to on thinking and they put me back in the same position of discipline, as they called it. At this point they stopped even giving me water, and since being there I hadn’t eaten anything.

…The cell to which they transferred me was full of red ants and because of them I couldn’t sleep. I spent all my time killing ants. The following day when they took me from the cell to make my statement I showed them how I was bitten all over by the ants and one of them answered: ‘You wanted to pla s a trick…but we had you bitten by ants and fleas so you couldn’t sleep. They in

MARIA DINA Rogerone de GRECO

URUGUAY
(with my hands behind my back) and one of the soldiers said to me: ‘Now you’re in for it’. They brought another person whom they started to ill-treat and when they started to maltreat him I was held up by the two soldiers gripping my legs and I heard the blows they dealt to my husband: when they put him into the water he himself wept and shouted. Then they asked him to say everything that I, Garrasino and he had stolen, until in the end Greco said anything. They took Greco Greco away, and they removed my gag and submerged me into the water saying: ‘Confess, confess!’ They also directed electricity to my hands and beat me; one of them lifted up my sweater and asked the other one to turn electricity on my stomach, then the problem of pregnancy would be done with and they could do anything to me. …
By now I said everything they wanted because I couldn’t take any more. As a result of these soakings I still have a sort of bronchitis…my whole body, except my face, hands and feet came up in spots…I wasn’t allowed to talk to the doctor—and they gave me some think like ‘Clorotrimetrol’ in intermuscular injections. They continued to soak me as before. They didn’t allow me to stay in bed and I had to go to the prison wall in the ‘positio of discipline’…..Before I came to the judge’s office they had subjected me to an interrogation where the answers were written down without consulting me…/When I read it and said there were a few things I didn’t agree with. They said ‘Sign it or we’ll start all over again. Then I signed.

2.
(no text)

3.
…torture was considered to produce probation probatissimi, ‘the proof of all proofs,’ and its practice was meticulously regulated and codified…the ‘question’ was divided into ordinary, extra ordinary, preparatory, and preliminary torture was administered in a special chamber by a civil servant who also served as the public executioner.

4-5. (continuous panel)
marduk caught tiamat in his net and drove the winds which he had with him into her body and whilst her belly was thus distended he thrust his spear into her and stabbed her to the heart and cut through her bowels and crushed her skull with his club. on her body he took a stand and with his knife he split it like a flat fish into two halves and of one of these he made a covering for the heavens.

6.
URUGUAY

LAURA RAGGIO
20 years old
SILVIA REYES
19 years old
d: 21 april 1974 both students and left wing militants, they were arrested during a house serach in monte video, in the same operation another girl, DIANA MAIDANIK received 35 shots when she opened the door. although the authorities claimed the three girls had died in crossfire, neighbors saw ms. raggio, ms. reyes and two men being carried away by security men the next day, the bodies of the two girls were delivered to the families, showing—besides bullet injuries—signs of beatings and areas of the skull where large strands of hair had been pulled out.

CHILE
MARTA NEIRA, a 29 year old model was arrested last dec. 9 in Santiago by DINA, chile’s brutal secret police. according to a prisoner’s report smuggled out of the
pirque women’s prison, when marta was last seen inside the quilen detention center on Christmas eve 1974, her nose was broken and she had welts all over her. She had been subjected to electric shocks and to sexual abuse.

…this young victim of DINA is among at least 1,500 Chileans who have disappeared since the military, led by general augusto Pinochet ugarte seized power in sept. 1973.

7.
I saw the corpse of my daughter Annie incinerated and her sexual organs squandered and divided after he death by the police of France. Artaud

Torture today is essential a state activity. …the preconditi for torture make it almost the exclusive province of the state. Torture requires that the victim be kept under a physical control of the torturer.

BRAZIL

The methods of torture include the pau de arara (parrot’s perch), setting fire to parts of the body which have been dampened with alcohol, injection of ether under the skin, strong electric shocks combined with near-drowning, forcing objects up the rectum and the vagina of women, and the ‘Christ’s crown’ (a steel ring, applied on the head, which is gradually tightened)
8.
TORTURE IN CHILE

removal of testicles;
ice baths;
manhandling of women;
removal of fingernails;
hanging;
hanging by hands and
feet with ultraviolet
light at head and
humid wet floor below

electric shocks on dif
erent parts of the
body
particularly on gums,
genitals and anus;
blindfolding or hooding
burns with acid or
cigarettes;
immersion in petroleum
or water;
whipping

many women incarcerated
ated in one Santiago
prison showed grave
pathological disorders
as a result of torture.
All became pregnant
during their detention..

Uruguay
whenever prisoners are taken out
of their cells, or other
places of detention,
whether to go to the bathroom, to
undergo interrogation,
to be taken to court or for a visit with relatives—always after long periods of solitary confinement, they are HOODED.

Uruguay

AMELIA LAVAGNA DE TIZZE April 29, 1975 Fifty-eight years old.

Her husband Mr. Jose Pedro Tizze was arrested by the security forces on April 27, 1975 at their home in the city of Manantiales. The next day, the military broke into the house and took Mrs. Tizze. A few hours later, their daughter, Mrs. Amanda Tizze de Rezzano was requested to collect the body of her mother. Official information was that Mrs. Tizze had poisoned herself during the house search. Relatives were forbidden to open the coffin and burial took place immediately. A few hours later, the daughter and her husband, Mr. Hector Ressano—parents of two small children—were also arrested.

9.
(no text)

10. NIBYA SABALSAGARNY
d: 29 June 1974 URUGUAY
a 24 year old teacher, she was arrested in Montevideo on 29 June 1974 and taken to a military unit regimento no. 5 de ingenieros, where she died after being subjected to the ‘dry
submarine’, a method of suffocation with a plastic bag over the head. Ten hours after arrest relatives were informed that she had committed suicide.

11.
(no text)

12.
IRAN

One of these is Atefeh Gorgin, who was imprisoned two years ago for having published an anthology of contemporary Iranian literature. Ms. Gorgin is the widow of a poet, Khosrow Golsorkhi, who was executed last year with the author Karamat Daneshian.

Another is Dr. Simin Salehi. She and her unborn child died in 1974 in Evin prison in Teheran as a result of torture. Chirine Moazed, arrested at the same time as Dr. Salehi, was reported in Oct. 1974 in the European press to be “unconscious, in solitary confinement, with her chest and other parts of her body severely burned.”

Vida Hadjebi Tabrizi, a 36-year-old sociologist and researcher for the University of Theran, was arrested as she drove home one evening in 1972. (The Stockholm daily, Daaens Nyheter, reported in August 1973 that Ms. Tabrizi crime appears to be that she was writing a paper on the living conditions of the peasant population of Iran). Ms. Tabrizi was sentenced at a closed military trial to seven years’ imprisonment. and it is reported that as a result of the torture she has undergone she has developed heart trouble and lost all sense of feeling in her feet and hands.
Ms. Tahereh Sajjadi Teherani, arrested at the same time as Ms. Ashrafzadeh, has been sentenced in a secret trial to fifteen years solitary confinement. 14

When I did not answer, they started threatening me in the following manner. ‘You don’t talk now.’ they would say: ‘in a few minutes, when our hands will start roaming in between your legs, you will be singing like a nightingale’.

AYSE SEMRA EKER
b. Ismir, Turkey 1949

name: Ayse Semra Eker
place and date of birth:
Ismir, Turkey 1949

Date of arrest 18 May 1972

…..After a short while they forced e to take off my skirt and stockings and laid me down on the ground and tied my hands and feet to pegs. A person by the name of Umit Erdal beat the
soles of my feet for about half an hour. As he beat my soles he kept on saying, ‘We made everyone talk here, you think we shall not succeed with you?’ and insulting me. Later, they attached wire to my fingers and toes and passed electric current through my body...

Ayse
Semra
Eker

date of arrest: 18 may 1972

At the same time they kept beating my naked thighs with truncheons. Many people were assisting Umit Erdal in this. After a while, they disconnected the wire from my finger and connected it to my ??? They immediately gave a high dose of electricity. My whole body and head shook in a terrible way. My front teeth started breaking. At the same time my torturers would hold a mirror to my face and say: ‘Look what is happening to your lovely green eyes. Soon you will not be able to see at all. You will lose your mind. You see, you have already started bleeding in your mouth.

Ayse Semra Eker

b. Ismir, Turkey 1949

date of arrest: 18 may 1972

As if all this was not enough Umit Erdal attacked me and forced me to the ground. I fell on my face. He stood on my back, and
with the assistance of somebody else forced a truncheon into my anus. As a struggled to stop he kept on saying ‘You whore!’ See what else we will do to you! first tell me how many people you went to bed with You won’t be able to do it anymore. We shall destroy your womanhood.’

They next made me lie on my back and tied my arms and legs to pegs.

They attached an electric wire to the small toe of my right foot and another to the end of a truncheon. They tried to penetrate my feminine organ with the truncheon. As I resisted they hit my body and legs with a large axehandle.

They soon succeeded in penetrating my sexual organ with the truncheon with the electric wire on it and passed current. I fainted. A little later, the soldiers outside brought in a machine used for pumping air into people and said they would kill me. Then they untied me brought me to my and took me out of the room. With a leather strap, they hanged me from my wrists onto a pipe in the corridor. As I hung half naked, several people beat me with truncheons. I fainted again when I woke, I found myself the same room on a bed. They brought in a doctor to examine me.
They tried to force me to take medicine and eat. I was bleeding a dark thick blooK, sometime later they brough in Nuri Colakogiu, who was in the same building as myself, to put more pressure on me. They wanted to show me into state they had put him. I saw that the nails of his right hand were covered with pus. I realized they had burned him with cigarette butts. They themselves later confirmed this.

The sole of one of his feet was completely black and badly broken. The same night we were transferred to Istanbul together with Nuri Colakoglu. The next morning, the colonel I have already described came into my cell (I do not know where the cell was). He beat me and threatened me. ‘Tonight I shall take you where the dead are. I shall have the corpses of all of you burnt. I will have you hanging from the ceiling and apply salt to your cut soles when he did not like the answers I gave him, he beat me again. then he had my eyes tied and sent me to another building. I was brought into a small room with my eyes tied. I was tied on the ground to pegs from my arms and ankles and electricity was passed thorugh my right hand and foot. They then administered falange during the whole time I was in instanbul my hands were tied tochains. Because of this, and because my tongue was split I could not eat…A doctor would occasionally come look at me and suggest first aid. One night I heard the sound of a gun and the sound of a man fall and die on the ground very close to me I cried out ‘Whom have you killed?’ They answered ‘It is none of your business. We will kill whomever we want and bury him into a hole in the ground. Who would know if we did the same to you?’

…….During the 10 days I stayed at MIT (Turkish Secret Service) the same torture, insults, etc…

Semra  15
13. AT THEIR WORD THE WORD WHICH TORTURES THE SPIRIT
THE SICK WOMAN WAS TURNED INTO A CORPSE
THE CORPSE WAS HUNG FROM A STAKE

14. KNIFE
CUT

FASCIST PIG
APPENDIX D

TEXT IN NOTES IN TIME ON WOMEN

1. sahagun aztec book II: certainly childbirth is our morality, we who are women, for it is our battle.

2. (no text)

3. (no text)

4. (no text)

5. I WILL COUNT THE TREAD OF MY FEET AS A DANCER COUNTS, FASTER OR SLOWER. BUT NEVER CHANGING THE BEAT. THE RHYTHM… H.D.

6. ARTEMIS…bore the epithet APPOLOUSA the destroyer (destructess…)

7. I think we can do that much for our american girls
senator goldwater

SENATE FAVORS BENEFITS FOR WOMEN FERRY PILOTS
WASHINGTON, OCT. 22 UPI—THE SENATE HAS VOTED TO EXTEND VETERANS BENEFITS TO 850 WOMEN WHO FERRED MILITARY AIRCRAFT IN WORLD WAR II.

EXTENSION OF THE BENEFITS TO THE WOMEN PILOTS, KNOWN AS WASPS, WAS INCLUDED IN A BILL PASSED WEDNESDAY TO INCREASE EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS UNDER THE G.I. BILL.

THE AMENDMENT, OFFERED BY SENATOR BARRY GOLDWATER, REPUBLICAN OF ARIONA, WAS P
PASSED OVER THE OPPOSITION OF SENATOR ALAN CRANSTON, DEMOCRAT OF CALIFORNIA, WHO IS CHAIRMAN OF THE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE.

.....

MR. GOLDWATER SAID THAT CONGRESS HAD PASSED LEGISLATION EXTENDING VETERANS BENEFITS TO POLES AND CZECHS WHO FOUGHT FOR THE ALLIES IN WORLD WAR II.

AND LATER BECAME AMERICAN CITIZENS.

I THINK WE CAN DO THAT MUCH FOR OUR AMERICAN GIRLS, HE SAID.

FOLLOW-UP ON THE NEWS

SPACE WOMEN

THE NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION SAID LAST YEAR IT WOULD WELCOME APPLICATIONS FROM WOMEN WHEN IT BEGAN ITS RECRUITMENT DRIVE FOR ASTRONAUTS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SPACESHUTTLE PROGRAM. AT THE END OF JUNE THIS YEAR, THE JOHNSON SPACE CENTER STOPPED ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS AFTER IT HAD RECEIVED 8,097. 1,544 OF THEM FROM WOMEN.

.....

.....

.....

..... NONE OF THE WOMEN HAD SUCH EXPERIENCE [HIGH PERFORMANCE JET AIRCRAFT AND FLIGHT TESTING.] THE SPOKESMAN SAID, AND NONE WERE SELECTED FOR THE PILOT GROUP.
HEAD OF EPISCOPAL CHURCH OFFERS
TO RESIGN OVER WOMEN PRIESTS

BISHOP TROUBLED BY RIFT
AND UNCONVINCED ON ORDINATION

PORT ST. LUCIE, FLA., SEPT 30
THE HEAD OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN
THE UNITED STATES, PRESIDING BISHOP JOHN
M. ALLIN, OFFERED TONIGHT TO RESIGN IF
HIS FELLOW BISHOPS WERE UNWILLING TO AC
CEPT HIS OUTRIGHT OPPOSITION TO ORDAIN
ING WOMEN AS PRIESTS.

.....

.....

.....

TO DATE I REMAIN UNCONVINCED THAT OWMEN
CAN BE PRIESTS, BISHOP ALLIN ASSERTED.
IF IT IS DETERMINED BY PRAYERFUL AUTHOR
ITY THAT THIS LIMIATAION PREVENTS ONE
FROM SERVING AS THE PRESIDING BISHOP OF
THIS CHURCH, I AM WILLING TO RESIGN THE
OFFICE.

I SOMETIMES THINK MEN ARE LIKE LITTLE APARTMENTS __ THERE’S A
CATCH TO EACH OF THEM. SHOULD A MAN BE A TOTAL PUSSYCAT __
ANGEL
WHO NEVER LOOKS AT ANOTHER WOMEN, HE MAY ALSO BE JUST A TINY
BIT LACK
ING IN AMBITION, BUT IF HE IS A TYCOON WHOM OTHER PEOPLE SEEK
OUT, THAT
MAN MAY JUST IGNORE YOU AT PARTIES, ETC. ETC. ETC. ..... 
DESPITE FLAWS, A MAN IS WHAT MAKES LIFE WORTH GETTING UP FOR IN
THE
MORNING...HE ADDS THE DAZZLE, THE DRAMA, THE WARMTH TO YOUR
LIFE.

I GUESS YOU COULD SAY I’M THAT COSMOPOLITAN GIRL.
NEWS SUMMARY
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 1977
THE RATE AT WHICH AMERICAN WOMEN HAVE TAKEN JOBS OUTSIDE THE HOME IN RECENT YEARS HAS SURPASSED ALL LABOR DEPARTMENT PROJECTIONS. AND THE REVOLUTION IN WOMEN'S ROLES THAT THIS CHANGE IN THE LABOR FORCE REPRESENTS WILL HAVE AN EVEN GREATER IMPACT, ACCORDING TO ELI GINZBURG, THE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY AUTHORITY ON MANPOWER, THAN THE RISE OF COMMUNISM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NUCLEAR ENERGY.

And the revolution in women’s roles… will have an even greater impact, according to eli ginzburg, the Columbia university authority on manpower, than the rise of communism and the development of nuclear energy.

WOMAN’S OUSTER by MEDICAL SCHOOL REACHES SUPREME COURT

.....

.....

.....

....

Her personality is cited

“However,’ he (Dr. William T. Sirridge) continued, ‘I think it is essential to acknowledge certain drawbacks. Charlotte, by good or bad
fortune, is a New York Jewess and perhaps her hypercriticality and tendency to complain can be attributed to this heritage. Her personal habits may leave something to be desired by most people. She also has the added burden of being a female with an I.Q. and accomplishment thus far in her career superior to most males who are her superiors by position. The letter closed with Dr. Sirridge’s recommendation that Miss Horowitz be advanced to sixth-year-level of study. Less than a month later she was advised by the dean that she had been placed on probation. The brief filed by the lawyers for the curator explained, “She was deficient in keeping to established schedules, meeting all the clinical responsibilities on time and gracefully, attending carefully to personal appearance including hand washing and grooming, participating appropriately in activities of the school and directing criticisms and suggestions maturely.
ABIGAIL ADAMS TO JOHN ADAMS
BRINTREE MARCH 31, 1776

…..THAT YOUR SEX ARE NATURALLY TYRANNICAL IS A TRUTH SO THOROUGHLY ESTABLISHED AS TO ADMIT OF NO DISPUTE,…..

JOHN ADAMS TO ABIGAIL ADAMS
AP. 14. 1776
…..DEPEND ON IT, WE KNOW BETTER THAN TO REPEAL OUR MASCULINE SYSTEMS…..

8.
KATHLEEN NEWLAND, CO_AUTHOR OF THE SISTERHOOD OF MAN, A WORLD WIDE STUDY OF WOMENS PROGRESS THAT WILL BE PUBLISHED NEXT YEAR, POINTS OUT THAT SOLIDARITY AMONG WOMEN, THE CONCEPT OF SISTERHOOD, HAS BEEN PIONEERED LARGELY BY AMERICAN WOMEN. THEY KNOW THAT AFFLUENCE IS NOT THE SOLUTION TO INEQUALITY. THEIR EXPERIENCE IS A DEMONSTRATION THAT WOMEN HAVE MORE TO STRIVE FOR. AND MANY OF THEIR ISSUES, SUCH AS REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM, ARE CENTRAL ISSUES TO WOMEN IN POOR COUNTRIES TOO.

AT MEXICO CITY MRS. SIPLIA, WHO AS ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL IS THE HIGHEST RANKING WOMAN IN THE UNITED NATIONS, ARGUED THAT THE DENIAL OF EQUAL RIGHTS TO WOMEN WAS AT THE VERY ROOT OF SUCH TROUBLES AS ILLITERACY, MALNUTRITION, AND UNCHECKED POPULATION GROWTH.

THE WORLD’S WOMEN WATCH THE AYES OF TEXAS

HOUSTON __ AT THE INTERNATIONAL WOMENS YEAR CONFERENCE IN MEXICO CITY TWO YEARS AGO, THE UNITED STATES DELEGATION WAS ROUTINELY CRITICIZED BY DELEGATES FROM OTHER NATIONS, ESPECIALLY THE POORER ONES, FOR BEING AT BEST IRRELEVANT AND AT WORST ELITIST.

REPRESENTING ONLY 3 PERCENT OF THE WORLD’S POPULATION, LIVING IN WHAT GLORIA STEINEM CALLED AN OVERDEVELOPED COUNTRY, THE AMERICANS EMBRACED ISSUES THAT SEEMED LIKE ECCENTRIC LUXURIES TO OTHER DELEGATES. THEY
CONSIDERED THE AMERICANS GRASP OF THE CONDITION OF THE WORLD'S FEMALE MAJORITY NAÏVE.

NOT ONLY DO THEY NOT UNDERSTAND IT, THEY ALSO DO NOT SEEM TO BE TERRIBLY INTERESTED IN IT, COMPLAINED PARVATHI KRISHNAN, A MEMBER OF THE INDIAN PARLIAMENT. THERE ARE MORE THAN A BILLION IMPOVERISHED WOMEN, CONSIGNED BECAUSE OF THEIR SEX, SHE SAID, TO THE BOTTOM OF THE HUMAN HEAP IN LIVES MOST AMERICANS DO NOT COMPREHEND. TO HER AND OTHER THIRD_WORLD DELEGATES IN MEXICO CITY, THE UNITED STATES WOMAN'S MOVEMENT AMOUNTED TO LITTLE MORE THAN A MINOR INSURRECTION IN THE GLOBAL PENTHOUSE SUITE. A RICH 3 PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION TRYING TO ACHIEVE EQUALITY WITH ANOTHER RICH 3 PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION, AMERICAN MEN. THUS, THEY SAID, WHAT UNITED STATES WOMEN MIGHT GAIN MEANS LITTLE ELSE_WHERE.

SOJOURNER TRUTH
Fourth National Women’s rights convention
New York City, 1853

Is it not good for me to come and draw forth a spirit, to see what kind of spirit people are of? I see that some of you have got the spirit of a goose, and some have got the spirit of a snake. I feel at home here...I am a citizen of the State of New York; I was born in it and I was a slave in the State of New York; ...I’ve been lookin’ round and watchin’ things, and I know a little mite ‘bout Woman’s Rights, too...to throw in my little mite, to keep the scales a-movin’. I know that it feels a kind o’ hissin’ and ticklin’ like to see a colored woman get up and tell you about things, and Woman’s Rights. We have all...
been thrown down so low that nobody tho
ught we’d ever get up again; but we hav
e been long enough trodden now; we will
come up again, and now I am here.

….But we’ll have our rights; see if
we don’t; and you can’t stop us from th
em; see if you can. You may hiss as mu
ch as you like, but it is comin’. Wome
n don’t get half as much rights as they
ought to; we want more, and we will hav
e it….

….I feel that if I have to answer for
the deeds done in my body just as much a
s a man. There is a great stir a
bout colored men getting their rights,
but not a word about the colored women;
and if colored men get their rights, an
d not colored women theirs, you see the
colored men will be masters over the wo
men, and it will be just as bad as it wa
s before….

….I am above eighty years old; it is
about time for me to be going. I have
been forty years a slave and forty year
s free, and would be here forty years m
ore to have equal rights for all. I su
ppose I am kept here because something
remains for me to do; I suppose I am
yet to help to break the chain. I have
done a great deal of work; as much as a
man, but did not get so much pay. I us
ed to work in the field and bind grain,
keeping up with the cradler; but men do
ing no more, got twice as much pay…w
e do as much, we eat as much, we want
as much….

….I have lived on through all that ha
s taken place these forty years in the
anti-slavery cause, and I have plead wi
th all the force I had that the day mig
ht come that the colored people might o
wn their soul and body. Well, the day h
as come, although it came through blood. It makes no difference how it came—it did come. I am sorry it came in that way. We are not trying for liberty that requires no blood—that women shall have their rights—no rights from you. Give them what belongs to them; they ask it kindly too. I ask it kindly. Now I want it done very quick. It can be done in a few years. How good it would be. I would like to go up to the polls myself….

MOTHER OF BIKOS CHILD UNDAUNTED IN SOUTH AFRICAN EXILE

LENENYE, SOUTH AFRICA, JUNE 25
FOURTEEN MONTHS AGO, A BLACK PHYSICIAN WAS BANISHED FROM THE SOUTHERMOST PART OF THE COUNTRY TO THIS NORTHERN VILLAGE AND ORDERED TO REMAIN HERE AT LEAST FIVE YEARS.

SINCE THEN, HER PLEITHT HAS BEEN OVERSHADOWED BY THE DEATH OF HER FRIEND AND POLITICAL MENTOR, STEPHEN BIKO, FOUNDER OF THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT WHOSE CHILD SHE BORE FIVE MONTHS AGO…THAT WAS FOUR MONTHS AFTER MR. BIKO HAD DIED OF HEAD INJURIES INCURRED DURING INTERROGATION BY THE SECURITY POLICE.

I AM NOT GOING TO SIT HERE FOR FIVE YEARS TWIDDLING MY THUMBS AND HOPEING THAT THEY’RE GOING TO LIFT THE BANNING ORDER, SAID DR. MAMPHELA RAMPHELE, WHO IS 30 YEARS OLD LAST WEEK. THEY’RE NOT. SO I JUST HAVE TO MAKE THE BEST OF IT.

BANISHMENT IS THE MOST SEVERE FORM OF RESTRICTION. SHORT OF DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL THAT THE NATIONAL PARTY GOVERNMENT HAS IMPOSED ON MILITANT OPPONENTS OF APARTHEID. CURRENTLY, 155 PEOPLE, MOSTLY BLACKS, ARE BANNED. A PUNISHMENT THAT INVOLVES TIGHT CURBS ON MOBILITY AND FREE SEPACH [sic], BUT ONLY A HANDFUL OF THESE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN REMOVED FROM THEIR HOME AREAS.

TWO VICTIMS ARE WOMEN.
THE TWO WHO HAVE BEEN EXILES IN THIS MANNER IN RECENT TIMES HAVE BOTH BEEN WOMEN. ONE IS WINNIE MANDELA, WIFE OF THE IMPRISONED NATIONALIST LEADER NELSON MANDELA. SHE WAS BANISHED LAST YEAR FROM SOWETO, THE BLACK RESIDENTIAL AREA OUTSIDE JOHANNESBURG, TO A BLACK TOWNSHIP IN THE ORANGE FREE STATE TOWN OF BRANDFORT. 175 MILES AWAY.

DR. RAMPHELE WAS THE OTHER. SHE WAS TAKEN NEARLY 1,000 MILES FROM THE POLITICAL HOT SPOT OF KING WILLIAMS TOWN, IN EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE, TO THE NAPHUNO DISTRICT OF THE NORTHEASTERN TRANSVAAL, A RURAL BACKWATER.

A VISITOR THIS WEEK FOUND HER SURPRISINGLY BUOYANT AND UNDAUNTED IN THE EXPRESSION OF HER POLITICAL VIEWS.

THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO REASON TO BE MOROSE, DR. RAMPHELE SAID, PLAYING WITH AN UNLIT MATCH AND LAUGHING FREQUENTLY IN THE LIVING ROOM OF HER MODEST HOME IN LENYENYE. SO I JUST HAVE TO MAKE THE BEST OF IT.

POLITICALLY NEUTRALIZED SHE SAID, LAUGHING AGAIN. NO, NO, NOT AT ALL. THE DAY I AM, I THINK THAT’S THE DAY I DIE.

40 PATIENTS A DAY

THE DAUGHTER OF A TEACHER, BORN AND RAISED IN PIETERSBURG, DR. RAMPHELE ATTENDED THE UNIVERSITY OF NATAL MEDICAL SCHOOL, WHERE SHE WAS A FELLOW STUDENT OF MR. BIKO. HE EVENTUALLY DROPPED OUT AND DEVOTED ALL HIS EFFORTS TO POLITICS, BUT DR. RAMPHELE GRADUATED AND IN 1974 WENT TO KING WILLIAMS
TOWN TO HELP THE ZANEMPILO MEDICAL CLINIC.

THE CLINIC WAS BUILT BY BLACK COMMUNITY PROGRAMS LTD., A BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AFFILIATE. WITH THE FINANCIAL BACKING FROM HARRY F. OPPENHEIMERS ANGLO AMERICAN CORPORATION, THE GOLD MINING GIANT. DR. RAMPHELE BECAME MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENT OF THE CLINIC. IN THE HILLS BEHIND KING WILLIAMS TOWN. AND SOON HAD MORE THAN 40 PATIENTS A DAY, MOST OF THEM POOR RURAL BLACKS WHO HAD PREVIOUSLY LACKED MEDICAL CARE.

IN AUGUST 1976, DR. RAMPHELE BECAME INVOLVED IN A CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING THE DEATH IN DETENTION OF MAPETLA MOHAPI, ANOTHER ASSOCIATE OF MR. BIKO. THE POLICE SAID THAT MR. MOHAPI HAD HANGED HIMSELF WITH TWO PAIR OF JEANS, BUT DR. RAMPHELE, ATTENDING THE POST_MORTEM ON BEHALF OF THE FAMILY, SIGNED AN AFFIDAVIT SAYING THAT THE INJURIES WERE INCONSISTENT WITH HANGING. PRIVATELY, SHE TOLD FRIENDS THAT SHE BELIEVED MR. MOHAPI MIGHT HAVE BEEN STRANGLED WITH A TOWEL.


REPUTATION AS A DOCTOR

AFTER HER RELEASE, DR. RAMPHELE RESUMED WORK AT THE CLINIC, WHERE SHE WAS THE ONLY DOCTOR. BUT IN APRIL 1977, A POLICE OFFICER INFORMED HER THAT SHE HAD BEEN BANNED, EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY. TO NAPHUNO, A DISTRICT SHE HAD NEVER HEARD OF. SHE WAS DRIVEN THERE OVERNIGHT WITH NO OPPORTUNITY TO COLLECT HER CLOTHES.

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…..

IN THE CRACKDOWN AFTER THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS LEADERS DEATH, BLACK COMMUNITY PROGRAMS WERE BANNED AND THE ZANEMPILO CLINIC WAS TAKEN OVER
BY THE GOVERNMENT. IN THE MEANTIME, DR. RAMPHALE HAD BEEN GIVEN AN $8,000 BY THE COMMUNITY GROUP TO START AGAIN IN LENYENYE. THE VILLAGE CUPPED AMID CITRUS GROVES ON THE SLOPES OF THE DRAKENSBERG MOUNTAINS, HAD NO PRIVATE DOCTOR. 

……

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……

HER CHILD’S FUTURE

WHEN SHE TALKS ABOUT MR. BIKOS DEATH, IT IS MORE FROM A POLITICAL THAN PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE. THERE WAS TOO MUCH RELIANCE PLACED ON STEVES LEADERSHIP, SHE SAID, SO AFTER HIS DEATH IT REQUIRED A LOT OF REORIENTATION. AND THE REST OF US ARE ONLY NOW LEARNING TO STAND ON OUR OWN FEET.

AMONG WHITE LIBERALS, A VARIETY OF SOLUTIONS FOR THE COUNTRY’S RADICAL CONFLICTS HAVE BEEN PROPOSED, MOST OF THEM INVOLVING A DIVISION OF POWER. BUT DR. RAMPHALE DISMISSES THEM WITH A WAVE OF HER HAND. THERE IS NO OTHER SOLUTION OTHER THAN BLACK MAJORITY RULE, SHE SAID. …… IN FACT ITS ARROGANCE OF THE PART OF WHITES TO SUGGEST ANYTHING ELSE. THEY CAME HERE AND MESSED UP OUR COUNTRY, AND NOW THEY WANT TO BE TREATED AS SPECIAL HUMAN BEINGS, SHE SAID. ITS NONSENSE...

……

……

……

DID SHE BELIEVE, THEN, THAT HER SON MIGHT GROW TO ADULTHOOD IN A WHITE RULLED SOCIETY. AGAIN, THE LAUGH, AND THE TOSS OF THE HEAD. OH, GOOD LORD NO, SHE SAID. ABSOLUTELY NOT.

dr. mamphela ramphele

LYNCHIGN IS THE AFTERMATH OF SLAVERY. THE WHITE MEN WHO SHOOT NEGROES TO DEATH AND FLAY THEM ALIVE, AND THE WHITE WOMEN WHO APPLY FLAMING TORCHES TO THEIR OIL-SOAKED BODIES TODAY, ARE THE SONS
AND DAUGHTERS OF WOMEN WHO HAD BUT LITTLE, IF ANY, COMPASSION ON THE RACE WHEN IT WAS ENSLAVED. THE MEN WHO LYNCH NEGROES TO-DAY ARE, AS A RULE, THE CHILDREN OF WOMEN WHO SAT BY THEIR FIRESIDES HAPPY AND PROUD IN THE POSSESSION AND AFFECTION OF THEIR OWN CHILDREN, WHILE THEY LOOKED WITH UNPITIYING EYE AND ADAMANTINE HEART UPON THE ANGUISH OF SLAVE MOTHERS WhOSE CHILDREN HAD BEEN SOLD AWAY, WHEN NOT OVERTAKEN BY A SADDER FATE...IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO COMPREHEND THE CAUSE OF THE FEROCITY AND BARBARITY WHICH ATTEND THE AVERAGE LYNCHING-BEE WITHOUT TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE BRUTALIZING EFFECT OF SLAVERY UPON THE PEOPLE OF THE SECTION WHERE MOST OF THE LYNCHINGS OCCUR....

9.
ELECTRIC SHOCKS APPLIED TO ALL PARTS OF THE BODY SUBMARINO-IMMERSION IN WATER WITH THE HEAD COVERED BY A CLOTH HOOD WHEN THIS BECOMES WET IT STICKS TO THE NOSE AND MOUTH AND WHEN THE VICTIM IS TAKEN OUT OF THE WATER BREATHING IS PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE BEATING WITH FISTS TRUNCHEONS

DIANA AARON SVIGLSKY DATE OF DETENTION: NOVEMBER 18, 1974 AGE: 23 CIVIL STATUS: UNMARRIED OCCUPATION: JOURNALIST

DIANA AARON WORKED FOR EDITORIAL QUIMANTU AND THE CHILDHELEAN NATIONAL TELEVISION UNDER THE GOVERNMENT OF SALVADO ALLENDE.

SHE WAS ARRESTED ON THE STREET IN BRAOD DAYLIGHT ON NOVEMBER 18, 1974. TWO DINA VEHICLES WERE INVOLVED AND DIANA WAS RECOGNIZED BY A WOMAN ACQUAINTANCE WHO WAS WORKING FOR DINA. WHEN SHE TRIED TO ESCAPE, SHE RECEIVED FOUR BULLETS IN THE BACK. IN THIS CONDITION SHE WAS TAKEN TO VILLA GRIMALDI FOR INTERROGATION AND TORTURE. DUE TO HER GRAVE CONDITION, SHE WAS

SUBSEQUENTLY TRANSFERRED TO A CLANDESTINE DINA
ALL EFFORTS MADE BY DIANAS FAMILY, WHO LIVE IN EXILE, TO OBTAIN INFORMATION, OR CONFIRMATION OF HER DEATH, HAVE PROVED FUTILE.

ALICIA TERESA ISREAL, 24, IS A CRIMINAL LAW SPECIALIST AND A MEMBER OF THE LEGAL COMMISSION OF THE ARGENTINA HUMAN RIGHTS LEAGUE. ON MARCH 8, 1977, TEN ARMED MEN IDENTIFYING THEMSELVES AS A JOINT SQUAD OF ARMED FORCES BURST INTO HER HOUSE AND ABDUCTED HER. EFFORTS TO LOCATE DR. ISREAL SINCE THEN HAVE NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL.

CARMEN BUENO, AN ACTRESS, AND JORGE MULLER, A PHOTOGRAPHER, WERE SEIZED BY DINA IN OCTOBER, 1974. ACCORDING TO A FORMER TRES ALAMOS PRISONER, “THEY HAVE BEEN BRUTALLY TORTURED WITH ELECTRIC CURRENTS…FORCED TO TAKE BATHS IN ELECTRIFIED WATER, AND SUBJECTED TO BEATINGS. CARMEN RECEIVED SPECIAL ATTENTION…FOR SEVERAL WEEKS SHE WAS TAKEN ON A DAILY BASIS TO LONG TORTURE SESSIONS WHERE SHE WAS BRUTALLY RAPED. THEY WOULD BRING HER BACK WITH HER LEGS PARALYZED, AND WE WOULD HEAR HER SCREAMING IN PAIN DAY AND NIGHT.”

INES ROMEU

“‘They have done all of this to me…And they have raped me as well. I didn’t have the strength to react; I couldn’t move. ‘I felt weak; I felt like a worm. He did what he wanted with my body. He used me in the most disgusting, in humane and gross way in the world. When he finished he left me alone. I crawled along the floor: I cried out with all my strength, with all the strength I had left.”

Ines Etienne Romeu, a 31-year-old student militant, is the only woman sentenced to life imprisonment in Brazil. She is in
the Penitenaiaria Talavera Bruce, near Rio de Janeiro, where she is shut up for the better part of the day in a cubicle two meters by one meter. Except for a badly furnished, shabby dentist’s office, which lacks even anesthesia, there are no medical facilities in the prison.

Romeu was arrested on May 5, 1971. Afraid that she would betray political associates under torture, she invented a story about a meeting she had arranged in Rio de Janeiro. A police car took her to the spot. Ines got out as if to meet someone and threw herself onto the pavement, in front of heavy, fast-moving traffic. A car ran over her legs, crushing them.

The police, who wanted her arrest to remain secret, took Romeu to a military hospital where she received care only sufficient to keep her alive.

From there she was taken to the torture chambers reserved for political prisoners. After 100 days of interrogations, simulated deaths, daily torture her weight had dropped to 60 pounds. She knew that there were also other political prisoners there, but she never saw them: she only heard their cries. Romeu received electric shocks. She suffered the pau de arara (parrot’s perch) torture hanging suspended from a wooden pole by her hands and feet. During the pau de arara the police kicked her in the stomach and face, burned her chest with cigarettes, and cut her breasts.

The physical torture—the interrogation, during which Romeo was naked, the blows to the face, to the stomach, the electric shocks over her entire body, even in her vagina—hurt her physically, but she did not feel humiliated…until she was raped. Then she knew the feeling of being an object in the hands of a disgusting execute
on her who was taking advantage of a female
body, who used Ines in any way he wished.
In the beginning they were interested in any
contacts that Romeu could reveal. But she
didn’t say anything despite the torture. Sti
ll they did not stop: they wanted to know
the plan of the political organization to
which she belonged; they wanted her to test
ify against innocent people. She said no
thing…

Several days after her arrest Romeu’s fa
mily began to search for her. The author
ities denied that she had been arrested.
However, in August 1971, a police lieuten
nt from Wings Gerais told her relatives
that she had been dead for forty days. Th
family went to a general and told him tha
t a Lieutenant “X” had confirmed Ines’s
death. That information is not saved
Romeau’s life since the authorities are re
quired to return a prisoner’s body to the
family within forty days of death.

The police informed Romeu that she would
be turned over to her family in Belo Hori
zonte. She was sure it was a trap, that
the police would say she was an escaped
fugitive and would kill her on release.
On August 15, 1971—three months and te
n days after her arrest—they threw her
into the garden of her family’s home.

Ines’s sister found her. She saw the
police surrounding the house and roused
the neighbors to make sure there would
be witnesses to any attack. She turned
on all the lights in the house, called
the other sisters, telephoned friends
and the hospital. An ambulance came
and took Romeu to a clinic. The police
followed, but their plan had failed.

Romeu was hospitalized for two and a
half months. Though only her relatives
were allowed to visit her, two of the
jailers at the torture prison entered her room more than once and threatened her: “You know too much about us; either you work for us or we will kill you one of these days.”

So Romeau wrote to her lawyer, she denounced the threats in the hospital, the authorities who had denied her arrest, and she mentioned a report she had made concerning her torture. The lawyer made five copies of the letter and sent them to five Brazilian military authorities. The government had no choice but to take public notice of Romeu’s arrest and of all she had undergone.

On October 31, 1971, three and a half months after her release from prison, Romeu was served with an official warrant of arrest, charging her in the kidnapping of the Swiss Ambassador. On August 24, 1972 she was sentenced to life imprisonment, convicted by “confession” she had made under torture.

After four months in a military prison Romeau was transferred to the Talaveca Brazil low, anyone should be able to visit her. But the state at Guanahara prison authorities only allow visits from her relatives. Each Saturday from nine until noon, Ines can see three of her relatives. That is her only contact with the outside world.

ARGENTINA

ISABEL GAMBA DE NE SCHOOL TEACHER, WAS ABDUCT TOGETHER WITH HER HUSBAND AND
BUENOS AIRES.

ALTHOUGH SHE TOLD THE PO
SHE WAS THREATENED AND B
WHO SAID THEY WOULD GO A
AND MOTHER. LATER THAT
SPASUS AND BEGAN TO FEEL
HUSBAND SCREMAING.
THE NEXT MORNING, THE WOM

THEY TOOK ME TO ANOTHER
ME AND PUNCHED ME IN TH
DRESSED ME AND BEAT ME
AND SHOULDERS WITH SOMET
THIS LASTED A LONG TIME
TIMES AND THEY MADE ME
PORTING MYSELF ON A TABL
ING ME. WHILE ALL THIS
TO ME. INSULTED ME AND A
DIDN’T KNOW AND THINGS I
PLEADED WITH THEM TO LEAV
WOULD LOSE MY BABY. I
SPEAK, THE PAIN WAS SO B

THEY STARTED TO GIVE
MY BREAST, THE SIDE OF
ARMS. THEY KEPT QUES
ME ELECTRIC SHOCKS IN
PILLOW OVER MY MOUTH T
SOMEONE THEY CALLED THE
THEY WERE GOING TO INC
I TALKED. THEY KEPT THRO
BODY AND APPLYING ELECTI

TWO DAYS LATER SHE MISCAR

WOMEN IMPRISONED

following the coup attempt of 1965,
GERWANI (Gerakan Wanita Indonisia, or
or Indonesian Womens Movement) was amo
ng the large number of mass organization
ns banned together with the Indonesian
Communist party (PKI) for alleged complicity in the activities of that October. Many of the 2,000 women detained without trial were members of this organization and arrested after GERWANI was banned in 1965; many were the wives and daughters of suspected communist or leftists; others, among them girls of thirteen, were victims of circumstance whose arrest defies explanation.

Of all organization, GERWANI was particularly viciously vilified in the anti-communist campaign that followed the coup and counter-coup. The sensational slanders to which it was subjected without the slightest chance of rebuttal were to play an important part in inciting the massacres that occurred in many parts of Indonesia in the last three months of 1965, and on into 1966.

Lubang Buaya

......and a number of women and girls attended courses there (Lubang Buaya) from the middle of 1965 up to the day of the coup attempt.

during the ??? move for power by the insurgents, six generals who had been kidnapped were killed and their bodies found in a disused well at Lubang Buaya. After the bodies were discovered, sensational reports appeared in the press that the sexual organs had been mutilated and the eyes, gouged to add to the horrors, it was said that these atrocities had been committed by the women at camp. The women were reported to have engaged in obscene dancing and to have prostituted themselves in a grotesque manner..
a medical report on the state of the bodies which revealed that no mutilations had taken place… the stories persisted. Newspapers carried lurid reports of confession made by young girls during interrogation by military officers. Behind these sensational reports which had a traumatic effect on Indonesian society, lies a story of torture and sexual abuse of these girls under interrogation.

GERAWANI was accused in the press of having mobilized these girls and of being responsible for the alleged atrocities. Yet, eleven years after the event, there has not been a single trial of any woman who is alleged to have been directly involved in the Lubang Buaya events...in the 800 trials which have taken place, many which related directly to events at Lubang Buaya, there has been no substantiation of the alleged atrocities. Yet hundreds of women and girls said to be responsible for or in directly involved in the incident, are still in prison. Today, GERWANI leaders and functionaries make up a large proportion of women prisoners in Indonesia.

MRS. NURTJAHHA MURAD

INDONESIA

MRS. NURTJAHHA MURAD WAS A TEACHER OF INDONESIAN UNTIL 1959 WHEN SHE OBTAINED A SCHOLARSHIP TO STUDY RUSSIAN AT THE MOSCOW LUMUMBA UNIVERSITY. SHE RETURNED TO INDONESIA JUST A FEW WEEKS BEFORE AN ABORT
ED COUP BY SEVERAL MIDDLE RANKING ARMY OFFICERS. FOLLOWING THE COUP THE GOVERNMENT BANNED THE INDONESIAN COMMUNIST PARTY AND OTHER LEFTWING ORGANIZATIONS. MORE THAN HALF A MILLION PERSONS WERE KILLED AND MORE THAN 100,000 WERE DETAINED. MRS. MURAD’S HUSBAND, YOUNGER BROTHER OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY CHAIRMAN, WAS ARRESTED SOON AFTER THE COUP ATTEMPT. ALTHOUGH SHE WAS NOT POLITICALLY ACTIVE IN EITHER THE USSR OR INDONESIA MRS. MURAD WAS ARRESTED IN SEPTEMBER 1968 AND IS NOW IN A WOMEN’S DETENTION CAMP IN CENTRAL JAVA. NONE OF THE WOMEN PRISONERS HAVE BEEN TRIED AND NONE ARE LIKELY TO EVER BE TRIED. THERE ARE 100,000 POLITICAL PRISONERS IN INDONESIA, MOST OF WHOM HAVE NEITHER BEEN CHARGED NOR TRIED AND BEEN IN DETENTION FOR MORE THAN 10 YEARS…

THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN TO ALL KINDS OF SEXUAL ABUSE INCLUDING RAPE PREGNANT WOMEN HAVE BEEN SO BADLY BEaten THEY HAVE MISCARRIED

ON DECEMBER 8, 1977 AFTER HAVING ATTENDED A MEETING OF RELATIVES OF DISAPPEARED PERSONS, TWO FRENCH NUNS, SISTE

ALICIA DOMON AND LEONIE DUQUET, WERE ABducted. TO DATE, THERE HAS BEEN NO RELIABLE INFORMATION CONCERNING THEIR WHEREABOUTS, DESPITE OFFICIAL INQUIRIES BY THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT.
STUDENT IN CAR (in English)
in April 1972 I was taken by police; . . .
There was a girl in this room and they forced her to watch. For two hours. Then they put electrodes on the
girl. They also beat her. When they finished they pul
led her trousers down. They produced an oil truncheon
with a groove. They put electric wire in the groove, t
hey put this into the vagina of this girl. They brought
a mirror and show to her what they were doing.

Adriana Gatti de Rey
Student
Lived in Argentina

Adriana Gatti de Rey, a seventeen-
year-old and daughter of a prominent
Uruguayan trade unionist Gerardo
Gatti, disappeared in Buenos Aires
on April 9, 1977, almost a year
after the abduction of her father
At the time of her disappearance
she was seven months pregnant.
Her boyfriend, Ricardo Carpintero
had previously disappeared on
March 25, 1977. To date, there
has been no news of their whereab
outs.

GIRL (in Turkish)
Some men came in and blindfolded me. Then electric
wires were attached to my fingers. I can tell exactly
how long the torture lasted because I heard a radio in
the background and I recognized the programme. I work
ed out that it lasted three hours.
First they connected the wires and my body vibrated sud
denly. And then they gave these shocks at short intervals, starting and stopping, starting and stopping, asking the same questions. When they realized that I wouldn’t answer their questions they started making the shocks longer. A strange thing happened with these shocks. First, I felt a metallic taste in my mouth, then my heart started beating very fast. Then all my body started shaking and my fingernails went into my palms. My mouth and eyes I just couldn’t control, they were rolling. It was a very strange sort of pain.

For three hours with long and short intervals they gave me these shocks, with the wires on my fingers. Then they put wires on my ears. I felt a heavy pressure on my brain and my teeth clenched. When they put wires on my head, I was unable to speak. They said ‘answer the question’ but I couldn’t reply. This lasted quite a long time, and I was out of breath and I thought my heart was going to stop. On the thirty-second day they got me

IN VILLA DEVOTO—BUENOS AIRES—IT HAS BEEN ESTATED THAT ABOUT 1,200 FEMALE POLITICAL PRISONER ARE HELD RANGING IN AGE FROM 17 TO 70 YEARS. THE MAJORITY, HOWEVER, ARE YOUNG WOMEN, SOMETIMES THEIR SMALL CHILDREN, FOR WHOM NO FACILITIES EXIST. FOUR WOMEN SHARE A CELL MADE FOR ONE PERSON, VENTILATION IS MINIMAL AND THE SANITARY SYSTEM VIRTUALLY NONEXISTENT. ONE HOURS EXERCISE PER DAY IN AN ENCLOSED CONCRETE YARD IS ALLOWED, BUT THIS PRIVILEGE CAN BE WITHDRAWN AT ANY TIME AS A PUNISHMENT.

A NUMBER OF PETTY PROHIBITIONS ARE IMPOSED ON THE PRISONERS: THEY ARE FORBIDDEN TO SING, TO TALK LOUDLY, TO CELEBRATE BIRTHDAYS, TO DO GYMNASTICS ANY WORK WITH THE HANDS. THE WOMEN ARE SUBJECT TO WEEKLY BODY INSPECTIONS, INCLUDING THE HUMILIATION OF VAGINAL SEARCHES.

MOTHERS WITH INFANTS—THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 25 WOMEN WITH THEIR BABIES—LIVE IN ONE ROOM MEASURING 66 X 30 FEET. THEY SHARE TWO MALFUNCTIONING TOILETS AND ONE COLD WATER SHOWER WITH POOR DRAINAGE. WHEN IT RAINS, THE CLOGGED PIPES CAUSE SEWAGE TO BACK UP.
INTO THE LIVING AREA. ALREADY INFESTED WITH VERMI
POWDERED MILK MUST BE MIXED IN PLASTIC BAGS. SINCE
THE USE OF GLASSES IS FORBIDDEN AND STORED ON THE
FLOOR. THE TOTAL LACK OF SANITARY CONDITIONS CAU
SES SEVERE HEALTH PROBLEMS FOR INFANTS AND MOTHERS
ALIKE.

THE PRISON DIET IS COMPLETELY INADEQUATE AND THE
RESULTING SERIOUS PROTEIN DEFICIENCY AND LACK OF
VITAMINES AND MINERALS RESULT IN GRAVE STOMACH DI
ORDERS AND OTHER NUMEROUS DISEASES. MEDICAL TREAT
MENT IN THE PRISON IS ALMOST NONEXISTENT AND ONE
WOMAN, ALICIA PAIS, DIED LAST OCTOBER WHEN HER ACUTE
BRONCHITIS AND ASTHMA WENT UNTREATED.

PRISONERS HAVE THE RIGHT TO RECEIVE TWO HOURS OF VI
SITS PER WEEK, BUT THEIR CONVERSATIONS ARE RECORDED.
AND EVEN THIS PRIVILEGE IS FREQUENTLY TAKEN AWAY AS
A PUNISHMENT. VISITORS MAY HAVE TO WAIT IN LINE
OUTSIDE THE PRISON 20 HOURS TO ENTER AND ACCORDING
TO TESTIMONIES ARE THEMSELVES SUBJECTED TO DEGRADING
BODY SEARCHES.

FOR INSIGNIFICANT TRANSGRESSIONS AGAINST ARBITRARY
RULES PRISONERS IN VILLA DEVOTO PRISON ARE CONFINED
FOR TWO TO FOUR WEEKS, OR LONGER, TO SMALL DARK CEL
MEASURING THREE BY SEVEN AND ONE_HALF FEET. WITHOUT ANY
SANITARY FACILITIES. ALL PRIVILEGES SUCH AS EXERCISE, VISITS, LETTERS AND EVEN THE MOST RUDIMENTARY
MEDICAL ATTENTION ARE WITHDRAWN. Nevertheless, VILLA DEVOTO PRISON HAS BEEN CONSIDERED BY THE AUTH
ORITY AS A MODEL PRISON.

10.
MALLEUS MALEFICARUM….LIKENED WOMAN TO THE CHIMERA,
A BEAST WITH A LION’S NOBLE HEAD, A VIPER’S TAIL, AND
THE “FILTHY BELLY OF A GOAT.” (FIFTEENTH CENTURY)

…A WOMAN WAS “UNE BESTE IMPARFAICTE, SANS FOY, SANS
LOY, SANS CRAINCTE, SANS CONSTANCE.” (SIXTEENTH CENTURY)

me, Antonin Artaud, born on September 4, 1896 at Marseilles, Jardin des Plantes, ou
t of a uterus I had nothing to do with

Artaud

I know that I was born otherwise, born of my own works and not of a mother

Artaud

woman begats on man an abstract being, a spectral larva which has no more free play.

Artaud

….VIRAGOS HAVE BEEN CROPPED UP AT DIFFERENT TIMES AND IN DIFFERENT PLACES…..THE EPITHE T MEANS A STRONG MASCULINE COMPONENT IN THE MAKEUP OF SUCH WOMEN, AND AN AUTONOMOUS STRENGTH OF CHARACTER…..AT ITS BEST IT IMPLIES HIGHLY MATURE WOMEN WHO FIND THEMSELVES IN UNUSUAL POSITIONS OF POWER AND AUTHORITY IN AN ESSENTIALLY ARISTOCRATIC SOCIETY…..

…..HOWEVER, VIRAGOISM ALSO DEVELOPED SOME HARMFUL SIDE EFFECTS THAT HISTORICALLY SEE M TO OCCUR WHEN THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES BEGINS TO NEGATE HER SEXUAL PERSONALITY AND METAMORPHOSES HERSELF INTO ITS OPPOSITE: THE BEAST OF PREY…..

…..THE VIRAGO GONE WRONG IS A SPECIAL TYPE OF INVERTED FEMALE…..BORDERLINE TYPES, THEY HAVE THAT SETTLED AMBIGUITY CHARACTERISTIC OF ALL THAT IS WILDLY EXTREME-IN THIS CASE, THE PREYING INSTINCT NORMALLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE MALE. ONLY A THE TOP OF THE SOCIAL STRATA ARE SUCH WOMEN TO BE FOUND….SO WE HAVE THE SALOMES AND THE CLE ATRAS AND ELEANORS OF AQUITAINE WHO PROVE MORE RUTHLESS AND DEADLY THAN THE MALE IN THEIR OWN GAME OF POWER POLITICS…..
AND THE VIRAGO’S PERSONALITY UNDERGOES A DANGEROUS MASCULINATION....SEXUALLY NORMAL, WITH NO TRACE OF LESBIANISM, THE VIRAGO IS ODITE PREPARED TO SURRENDER HERSELF—BUT ONLY FULLY TO CREATIONS OF HER EXTRAVAGANT DELUSIONS. USUALLY A FLESH-AND-BLOOD MAN WHO SHE MISUNDERSTANDS COMPLETELY AND PHANTASMAGORICALLY BLOATS TO SUIT HER OWN PSYCHOLOGICAL PURPOSES: AND WOE BE IT TO THE SING MALE WHO ATTRACTS HER FANTASY.

the penetration of criticism by art…
the two still warm female corpses teasing him with their indifference…
offering jean a choice of orifices…

…Bersani describes Jean’s coming of age as a participating sadist, his ecdysis into an artist is effected by the sodomization of a half-dead girl…. Hovering between life and death, Anne retrieves Jean from the devastations of critical reflection by offering an anus all to readily stoppered by a gesture of scenic sodomy. And, inasmuch as in this instance sodomy is the introduction of the scenic self into the anus’ mirror, it may be likened to the penetration of criticism by art.

…we may now return to Jean’s dream. The two still warm female corpses teasing him with their indifference recall the not yet dead Anne in the later scene. Furthermore, the dead girls, “one with her front toward me, the other her back,” are offering Jean a choice of orifices. Although I agree with Bersa
ni that the triangular wounds are emblematic of the vagina, I would suggest that they are also, if only in one of the girls, images of the anus. Not the anus as such, but the anus as simulacrum of the vagina, the anus as simulacrum. As he stares at the two delicious carcasses, Jean is confronted with both “an image of the female genitals as wound” and an image of the female genitals, a wound. Criticism, according to Bersnai, penetrates art by emasculating it with reflection. Critical discourse reduces the scenic heterogeneity of artistic production into a coherent history. Certain violating art, if art is far nly. But in

Indeed anything like Bersani’s model of pre-Oedipal atextuality, criticism is simultaneously assaulted by its own past, a past that is less sharply illuminated sado-masochistic nightmare than a furtive woman who enjoys looking at 0.


MORDER HOFFNUNG DER FR AUEN MURDER HOPE OF
WOMEN  OSKAR KOKOSCHKA 1911

...SCYLLA, THE DEVOURING WHIRLPOOL, HAS THE UPPER PARTS OF A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN, WHILE HER LOWER PARTS CONSIST OF THREE HELLHOUNDS.

WITH HER OUTSPREAD LEGS, THE GORGON (FLAMED BY LIONS, VI CENTURY B.C.) THROTTLING AN ANIMAL TAKES THE SAME POSTURE AS THE EXHIBITIONISTIC GODDESSES. HERE TO BE SURE THE GENITALS ARE CLOTHED AND INVISIBLE, BUT THEY ARE REPRESENTED BY THE TERRIBLE FACE WITH ITS GNASHING TEETH. THE UROBORIC MALE-FEMALE. ACCENT OF THE GORGON IS EVIDENT NOT ONLY FROM THE GLARING TUSKS OF HER WOMB-GULLET BUT ALSO FROM HER OUTSTRETCHED TONGUE, WHICH—IN CONTRAST TO THE FEMININE LIPS—ALWAYS POSSESSES A PHALLIC CHARACTER.


11.
notes in time on women II
WOMEN : APPRAISALS, DANCE, AND ACTIVE HISTORIES
15.
AND HELEN? THE STORY THE HARPER
S TELL
REACHED US, EVEN HERE UPON
LEUKE;
HOW SHE WAS RAPT AWAY
BY HERMES, AT ZEUS’ COMMAND,
HOW SHE RETURNED TO SPARTA,
HOW IN RHODES SHE WAS HANGED
AND THE CORD TURNED TO A RAINBOW.
H.D.

how she was rapt away
by hermes, at zeus’ command,
how she returned to Sparta,
how in rhodes she was hanged
and the cord turned to a rainbow.  h.d.

WHO WILL FORGET HELEN?

AS SHE FLED DOWN THE CORIDOR
THE WOUNDED SENTRY STILL HAD
BREATH
TO HISS, “ADULDRESS”:

WHO WILL FORGET THE VEIL

CAUGHT ON A FALLEN PILASTER.
THE SHOUT, THEN BREATHLESS
SILENCE

AFTER THE GATE FELL.

SILENCE SO IMMINENT.

I HEARD THE VERY STUFF RIP

AS SHE TORE LOOSE AND RAN ;

WHO WILL FORGET HELEN?

WHY DID SHELIMP AND TURN

AT THE STAIR-HEAD AND HALF TURN BACK?

WAS IT A BROKEN SANDAL?

H.D.

16.
could a woman ever
know what the heroes felt,
what spurred them to war and battle,

h.d.

NEVER: THE LAW IS DIFFERENT ;

IF A WOMAN FIGHTS,

SHE MUST FIGHT BY STEALTH.

WITH INVISIBLE GEAR ;

NO SWORD, NO DAGGER, NO SPEAR

IN A WOMAN’S HANDS

CAN MAKE WRONG, RIGHT ;

H.D.
SO THEY FOUGHT, FORGETTING WOMEN,

HERO TO HERO, SWORN BROTHER
AND LOVER,

AND CURSING HELEN THROUGH
ETERNITY.

H.D.

THE OLD ENCHANTMENT HOLDS,

HERE THERE IS PEACE

FOR HELENA, HELEN HATED OF ALL
GREECE.

FOR YOU WERE THE SHIPS BURNT,

O CURSED, O ENVIOUS ISIS.

YOU-YOU-A VULTURE, A HIEROGLYPH

H.D.

17.
the essence of woman…
there is no truth about woman…
…the feminist women…are men
feminism, indeed, is the operation
by which woman wants to come
to resemble man…the whole
virile illusion…feminism
wants castration
even that of
woman. jacques derrida 1971 (?)

The extraction of the tooth, the plucking out o
If we have to keep our distance from the feminine operation (of actio in distans) – which doesn’t amount to simply not approaching it, except at the risk of death itself it is perhaps because woman is not just any thing, not just an identifiably determinate appearance that is imported at a distance from somewhere else, an appearance to draw back from or to approach. Perhaps, as non-identity, non-appearance, simulacrum, she is the abyss of distance, the distancing of distance, the thrust of spacing, distance itself—distance as such, if one could still say that, which is no longer possible.

There is no essence of woman because woman separates, and separates herself off from herself. From the endless, bottomless depths, she submerges all essentiality, all identity, all propriety, and every property. Indeed in such a way, philosophical discourse founders, and is left to dash headlong to its ruin. There is no truth about woman, just because this abysmal separation from truth, this nontruth, is the truth. Woman is the name for this nontruth of truth.

It is ‘man’ who believes in the truth of women in woman truth, and in point of fact, the feminist woman against whom Nietzsche pours out all his sarcasm – are men, Feminism, indeed, is the operation by which woman wants to come to resemble man, the philosophical dogmatist who insists on truth, science, objectivity – together with the whole virile illusion, the whole castration effect that goes with it. Feminism wants castration, even that of woman. It wants to lose its style. Nietzsche strongly denounces this want of style in feminism.

From her (Pandora) has sprung the race of woman kind,
The deadly race and tribes of womankind,
Great pain to mortal men with whom they live,
Helpmeets in surfeit—not in dreadful need.
Just as in ceileded hives the honeybees
Nourish the drones, partners in evil deed.
And all day long, until the sun goes down
They bustle and build up white honeycombs
While those who stay inside the ceileded hives
Fill up their bellies from the other’s work,
So women are a curse to mortal men—
As Zeus ordained—partners in evil deeds.

___Hesiod

On Women
From the beginning the god made the mind
of woman
A think apart. One he made from the long-haired sow,
While she wallows in the mud and rolls about on the ground,
Everything at home lies in a mess,
And she doesn’t take baths but sits about
In the shit in dirty clothes and gest fatter and fatter.
The god made another one from the evil fox,
A woman crafty in all matters—she doesn’t miss a thing.
Bad or good. The things she says are some times good
And just as often bad. Her mood is constantly shifting,
The next one was made from a dog, nimble a bit likes its mother.
And she wants to be in on everything, that’s ever said or done.
Scampering about and nosing into everythi
ng,
She yaps it out even if there’s no one to
listen.
Her husband can’t stop her with threats,
Not if he flies into a rage and knocks her
teeth out with a rock.

Is it not in the worst of taste when woman sets about becoming scientific that way? So far, enlightenment of this sort was fortunately man’s affair. man’s lot. We remained among ourselves in this.

Nietzsche

I am afraid that aged women are more skeptical in the most secret recesses of their hearts than men: they consider the superficiality of existence as its essence, and all virtue and profundity is to them merely a veil over a pudendum—in other words, a matter of modesty and shame, and no more than that!

Nietzsche

The true world—unattainable for now, but promised for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man (for the sinner who repents).
(Progress of the idea: it becomes more subtle, more insidious, incomprehensible—it becomes female…)

Nietzsche

This is part of my Dionysian dowry. Who knows? Perhaps I am the first psychologist of the eternally feminine. They all love me—an old story—not counting abortive females, the emancipated who lack the stuff for children. –Fortunately, I am n
not willing to be torn to pieces, the
perfect woman tears to pieces when
she loves.

Nietzsche

Not if he speaks to her sweetly when they
happen to be s
itting among f
riends,
No, she stubbornly maintains her unmanage
able ways.

Semonides of Amorgos

On Women

Another kind of woman is the wretched mi
serable tribe
that comes fro
m the weasel.
As far as she is concerned, there is noth
ing lovely or
pleasant
Or delightful of desirable in her.
She’s wild over love-making in bed,
But her husband wants to vomit when he co
mes near her.

Semonides of Amorgos

Another one is from the monkey. In this
case Zeus has
outdone himse
lf
In giving husbands the worst kind of evil.
She has the ugliest face imaginable: and
such a woman
Is the laughingstock throughout the town
for everyone.
Her body moves awkwardly all the way up t
o its short ne
ck,
She hardly has an ass and her legs are sk
iny What a
poor wretch is
the husband
Who has to put his arms around such a mes
s!
Like a monkey she knows all kinds of tric
ks

Semonides of Amorgos

On Women

For Zeus designed this as the greate
st of all evil
s
And bound us to it in unbreakable f
etters.

Semonides of Amorgos

18.
KALI HERSELF, IN HER POSITIVE AND NON-TERRIBLE ASPE
CT, IS A SPIRITUAL FIGURE THAT FOR FREEDOM AND IN
PENDENCE HAS NO EQUAL IN THE WEST.

THROUGHOUT MALE LITERARY HISTORY,
GORGONS, SIRENS, MOTHERS OF DEATH,
AND GODDESSES OF NIGHT REPRESENT
WOMEN WHO REJECT PASSIVITY AND
SILENCE.

KALIKALIKALIKALIKALIKALIKALIKALIKALIKALI
‘O Goddess Kali, he who
on a Tuesday midnight
having uttered your mantra, makes an offering to you in the cremation
on ground just once of
(pubic) hair from his female partner (sakti) pulled out by the root,
wet with semen poured from his penis into her menstruating vagina,
becomes a great poet, a Lord of the World, and (like a raja) always travels on elephant-back.

culture culture culture culture
nature nature nature nature

...Kali, one of Siva’s many wives, was sent by the gods to oppose a giant and his army whom the gods could not control. Defeating the giant, Kali performed such a savage killing dance that the earth trembled, and its destruction seemed imminent. Unable to stop her, the gods sent Siva who lay down at her feet. About to step on him; an inexcusable act for the Hindu wife, Kali stopped her rampage and the earth was saved. Her husband had regained control over her.

The benevolent goddesses in the Hindu pantheon are precisely those who transferred control of their sexuality (Power/Nature) to their husbands...

12. There are destructive and malevolent male deities in Hinduism, but they differ from female deities. Male deities and demons seem more logical in the trouble they cause and unlike Kali, are not carried away with the idea of killing....

Kali: The Black One. “Bearing the strange skull topped staff, decorated with a garland of skulls, clad in a tiger’s skin, she is ap paling because of her emaciated flesh, gapin g mouth, lolling tongue, deep-sunk reddish eyes.
She fills the regions of the sky with roars…”

IN HER ‘HIDEOUS ASPECT’ (GHORA-RUPA) THE GODDESS AS KALI, THE ‘DARK ONE,’ RAISES THE SKULL FULL OF S EETHING BLOOD TO HER LIPS: HER DEVOTIONAL IMAGE, S HOWS HER DRESSED IN BLOOD RED, STANDING IN A BOAT F LOATING ON A SEA OF BLOOD: IN THE MIDST OF THE LIF E FLOOD, THE SACRIFICIAL SAP, WHICH SHE REQUIRES T HAT SHE MAY. IN HER GRACIOUS MANIFESTATION ASUNDAR


DANCE PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE. AS EXPRESSION OF THE NATURAL SEIZURE OF EARLY MAN. ORIGINALLY ALL RITU AL WAS A DANCE. IN WHICH THE WHOLE OF THE CORPOREAL PSYCHE WAS LITERALLY ‘SET IN MOTION.’ THUS THE G REAT GODDESS WAS WORSHIPPED IN DANCE, AND MOST OF ALL IN ORGIASTIC DANCE.

The full force of the Judeo-Christian theme of female uncleanness is projected on the aboriginal woman by male anthropologists. Warner states (1937:384) that “masculinity i s inextricably interwoven with ritual cleanliness, and femininity is equally entwined wi
the concept of uncleanliness, the former being the sacred principle and the latter the profane.” The Murngin, according to Warne
r, connect the superordinate status of the males with their sacred cleanliness, as well as their technological superiority, and connect the woman’s subordination with her profane uncleanliness. The ritual cleanliness of the male is made more sacred through continual ceremonial participation, which unifies the male group, while the subordinate female group is unified by exclusion from the ceremonies and by ritual uncleanliness.

Insofar as menstruation is involved with blood and the genitals, it is endowed with powerful magical properties and associate with taboos. Since it is believed that the power of menstrual blood might harm the men, the menstruating women keep unobtrusively out of their way. However, Kaberry reports that the men never expressed disgust for a menstruating woman. They never spoke of her as ‘dirty’ or ‘unclean’ nor was there a term for ‘dirty’ which implied ritual uncleanliness. Particularly significant, says Kaberry (139:238), is the fact that the women never think of themselves as unclean, or of menstruation as shameful, which they would do, as do women in the West, if the men viewed them that way. The women are unified not by ‘their ritual uncleanliness’ or their exclusion from male ceremonies, but by their economic cooperation and their participation in their own secret ceremonies.

BECAUSE THE DECISIVE MOMENTS IN THE LIFE OF THE FEMALE—MENSTRUATION, DEFLOWERING, CONCEPTION, AND CHILDBEARING—are intimately bound up with a sacrifice of blood, the goddess perpetuates life by acting bloody sacrifices that will assure the fertility of game, women, and fields, the rising of the
FOR THIS WOMAN WHO GENERATES LIFE AND ALL LIVING THINGS ON EARTH IS THE SAME WHO TAKES THEM BACK INTO HERSELF, WHO PURSUES HER VICTIMS AND CAPTURES THEM WITH SNARE AND NET. DISEASE, HUNGER, HARDSHIP, WAR ABOVE ALL, ARE HER HELPERS, AND AMONG ALL PEOPLE THE GODDESSES OF WAR AND THE HUNT EXPRESS MAN’S EXPERIENCE OF LIFE AS A FEMALE EXACTING BLOOD. THIS TERRIBLE MOTHER IS THE HUNGRY EARTH, WHICH DEVOURS ITS OWN CHILDREN AND FATTENS THEM ON THEIR CORPSES;

38. Presumably rags or wool were used to absorb menstrual blood. The female genitals were referred to by Aristophanes as *chorios* (pig), and he called a napkin for menstrual blood a *choirokomeian* (a pigpen)…

PLINY…WARNING THAT MENSTRUATING WOMEN COULD

Pliny published a long list of the “virulent effects” of the menstrual discharge. He warned that menstruating women could cause bees to abandon their hives, pregnant mares to miscarry, and fruit to fall from the tree. Further they could blunt the edge of a good razor, sour new wine, and make green grass wither.

…..The Old Testament forbade men to touch a menstruating woman lest they too become “unclean,” and Orthodox Jewish women today must still take a ritual bath, the mikvah, following their periods. Hindu law decreed that a menstruating woman should not look at anyone, even her own children. Zoroaster wrote that a menstruating woman was the work of the devil, and during her “periodical illness” she was not
to gaze upon the sacred fire, behold the sun, or talk to a man. The Koran, the holy book of the Muslims, called the menstruating woman a “pollution.”

CAUSE BEES
TO ABANDON THEIR
HIVES, PREGNANT MARES TO MISCARRY…

19. (no text)

20. (no text)

21. DOGS INDEED COPULATE INDIFFERENTLY AND INDISCRIMINATELY

PROMISCUUM

THAT IS SHE COPULATES INDIFFERENTLY AND INDISCRIMINATELY AS IN CANINE LOVE

DOGS INDEED COPULATE

INDIFFERENTLY AND INDISCRIMINATELY
GRATIAN, , DESCRETUM, 1140

PROMISCUOUS
THAT
IS
SHE
COPULATES
INDIFFERENTLY
AND

DEFENSE D’URINER

OPEN LETTER TO MEN
You play your last card, the lowest yet the strongest, the least elegant, but undoubtedly the best; and weary of all these useless dicussions and futile female pretensions, inept gambler that you are, you sneer and brutally, cynically, you open your pants. That’s it. At last!

“Who gets on top in bed” And who pees against the wall?” you say….And besides, with your mania for orderliness, you’ve written on almost all your walls,

DEFENSE D’URINER

Nevertheless it is true that you pee standing up, and it’s a thing of wonder to see the most intelligent and most cultured men glory in that fact.

Francoise Parturier

Let me quote a phrase of George Bernard Shaw: “A suffragette is a woman who lacks something – nor is it the right to vote.” Today, the entertainer Sasha Distel si...
s, eunuchs, queens, aunties, lowdown buggers.”

Francoise Parturier

Did you ever wonder why some women make crude remarks and lewd gestures as they pass the Temple of Chastity? That’s where they stop every night to relieve themselves—and piss on the goddess. Then they strap a phallus on the statue and take turns riding it. Next morning, some husband on his way to work slips in the puddle.

…Women get all stirred up with wine and wild music; they drive themselves crazy; they shriek and writhe—worshippers of Phallus. And sex. They moan, they quiver with lust; there’s a steady stream running down their legs.

Juvenal

…if they can’t find any men, they raid the stables and rape the donkeys.

Juvenal

(The German women) live with their chastity protected… Adultery is very rare among this large population. Punishment is swift, and is the prerogative of the husband; in the presence of relatives, the husband expels the wife from the house nude, with her hair cut, and drives her through the whole village with a whip.

Tacitus
In the primates, the marked development of the clitoral system, certain secondary sexual characteristics, including skin erotism, and the extreme degree of perineal sexual edema (achieved in part by progesterone with its strong androgenic properties) are combined in various species to produce an intense aggressive sexual drive and an inordinate, insatiable capacity for copulation during periods of heat. The breeding advantage would thus go to the females with the most insatiable sexual capacity. The infrahuman female’s insatiable sexual capacity could evolve only if it did not interfere with maternal care. Maternal care is insured by the existence of the extreme sexual drive only during periods of sexual heat and its absence during the prolonged post-pregnancy period, permitting the mother to devote her full attention to her offspring.

MARY JANE SHERFEY, M.D.

4. THE RISE OF MODERN CIVILIZATION, WHILE RESULTING FROM MANY CAUSES, WAS CONTINGENT ON THE SUPPRESSION OF THE INORDINATE CYCLIC SEXUAL DRIVE OF WOMEN BECAUSE (a) THE TRIPENDOUSLY INCREASED SUPPLY OF HORMONES OF THE EARLY HUMAN FEMALES ASSOCIATED WITH THE HYPERsexual drive and the prolonged pregnancies was an important force in the escape from the strict heat-cycle sexuality and the much more important escape from post-pregnancy diminished sexual desires. Womens’ uncurtailed continuous hypersexuality would drastically interfere with maternal responsibilities and (b) with the rise of the settled agriculture economies, man’s territorialism became expressed in property rights and kinship laws. Large families of known parentage were mandatory and could not evolve until the inordinate s
sexual demands of women were curbed.

MARY JANE SHERFEY, M.D.

There are many indications from the prehistory studies in the Near East that it took perhaps 5,000 years or longer for the subjugation of women to take place. All relevant data from the 12000-to8000 B.C. period indicate that precivilized woman enjoyed full sexual freedom and was often totally incapable of controlling her sexual desire. Therefore, I propose that one of the reasons for the long delay between the earliest development of agriculture (c. 12,000 B.C.) and the rise of urban life and the beginning of recorded knowledge (c. 8000-5000 B.C.) was the ungovernable cyclic sexual drive of women. Not until these drives were gradually brought under control by rigidly enforced social codes could family life become the stabilizing and creative crucible from which modern civilization man could emerge.

MARY JANE SHERFEY, M.D.

The Malleus Maleficarum (Witches’ Hammer) (an inflammatory book written by two Dominican theologians in the fifteenth century)....Their book explained....that women are more superstitious than men weaker in mind and body, and insatiable in their sexuality – vices that made them particularly susceptible to the devil.

WOMAN WAS ENTRUSTED WITH THE CARE OF CAPTIVE YOUNG

22. (no text)

23.
The labia minora and the vestibule of the vagina provide more extensive sensitive areas as in the female than are to be found in any homologous structure of the male.

Any advantage which the larger size of the male phallus may provide is equalled or surpassed by the greater extension of the tactilely sensitive areas in the female genitalia.

SONG FOR A GIRL
ON HER FIRST MENSTRUATION
HOLD, HOLD IT TIGHT.
GRASP THE BLACK CRAYFISH.
HOLD, HOLD IT TIGHT.
GRAB THE WHITE EEL.
SISIRIK, MIAMPA LUMBO
GRASP THE BLACK CRAYFISH
KAYAME PARILUMP
KILL THE WHITE EEL.

ANONYMOUS
NEW GUINEA

SOEUR DE L’APHRODITA, LESBOS, FILLE D L’OUIDE
CONCUE ETRANGEMENT, PLUS TROUBLANTE ET
DIVINE
DE RESTER INCOMPRISE....ISQLEE ANDROGNE
DANS TA PERVERSITE SAVAMMENT INFECONDE

VENGE-TOI DU MEPRIS DE LA LAIDEUR IMMONDE
QUI SE NOMME VERTU, QUE SA LOURDE RACINE
PORTE LE FRUIT PESANT, LAISSANT MA VOIX CALINE
DIRE LES AUTRES MOUERS DE TOUT UN AUTRE
MONDE.

LESBOS, BELLE LESBOS, DE TES LEVRES BLEMIS
REVEILLE LA BEAUTE DE TES AMOURS CELEBRES
LEUR VOLUPTE DEFUNTE ET LEUR GLOIRE OUTRAGEE

POUR TOI JE JEUX CHANTER, AMANTE DES AMIES
ECOUTE MA CHANSON DU LIT BLEU DE L’EGEE
ET SOURIS-MOI, SAPHO, DU FOND DE TES
TENEBRES
(“SONNET”)

NATALIE CLIFFORD BARNEY

INCANTATION BY ISIS
FOR THE REVIVAL OF THE DEAD OSIRIS

COME TO THY BELOVED ONE
BEAUTIFUL BEING TRIFUMPHANT!

COME TO THY SISTER COME TO THY WIFE

ARISE! ARISE! GLORIOUS BROTHER! FROM THY BIER THAT I MAY

HOVER NEAR THY GENITAL FOREVER

BEAUTIFUL BOY MY BROTHER COME TO MY BREASTS
TAKE THERE OF THAT MILK TO THY FILL

THY NUTS WILL GUARD UPON

NOR SHALL THE FIENDS OF DARKNESS TEAR AT YOUR EYE

COME TO YOUR HOUSE COME TO YOUR HOUSE

BEAUTIFUL BEING!BOY BODY!
THAT YOUR COCK GLIDE FORWARD IN RADIANCE TO OUR PAVILION

OSIRIS! OSIRIS! WHEN THE RA-DISC GLIDES ONWARD IN THE SUN-BOAT
FLAMESPORTS SPEW OFF THE PROW

O MAY I CATCH THY SPURTS O BROTHER AS THE SHRIEKING HUMAN
CATCHES THE SUN. EGYPT

collective humiliationcollectivehumiliationcol

One of my first boyfriends felt that I
didn’t appreciate his penis enough. H
e forced me to kneel down so that my f
ace was at eye-level with his penis an
d then made me caress it so that it wo
uld become erect. As it began to rise
close and closer to my face, I was su
posed to tell him how beautiful and p
owerful it was.

My boyfriend wanted me to suck his pen
is. I didn’t like doing it, because it
made me gag. But he would keep pushin
g my face down on it. The only way I was able to do it was to imagine I was standing in a field of carnations so that I could keep my mind off what I was doing. This used to happen a lot.

I was making out with a guy I had been dating for awhile on a deserted island. I had told him that I didn’t want to sleep with him. Suddenly he started taking my underpants off. I told him again, but he wouldn’t stop. I suddenly realized that he was much stronger than me and I panicked. I started crying and yelling and he just fought harder. Finally he stopped and said that he thought I was just teasing and that I had really wanted to screw all along.

collectivehumiliationcollectivehumiliation

The patient was concerned about her lack of a vagina, and wished to have one constructed. But her parents opposed this: she was not married at the time, and they felt it would lead to ‘promiscuity’ – although they knew she could not become pregnant since she had neither womb or ovaries. Their treatment of their ‘daughter’ as a normal female illustrates well the view of sexuality as merely one aspect of gender-appropriate behaviour. This individual was biologically no more female than male but, sin
ce she had been reared
as a female, she wanted
vagina as a confirmat
on of her femininity;
urthmore, everyone ‘k
new’ she was female, so
eminine norms applied
to her behavior – henc
e the ‘double standar
d’ of morality advanced
a reason for delayi
ng surgery, in fact,
he parents were eve
ntually overruled by
edical experts and
he patient got her
agina, slept with h
er boyfriend, married
nd led a normal l
ife as a woman.

KURA SONG FROM TIKOPIA

12
YOUR PENIS, PENIS OF THE HOT CORDYLINE ROOT
YOUR FRUIT—DARK PENIS
THAT LOOKS DARK, LOOKS DARK TO ME
IN FRONT OF YOU
AND DARKER, LIKE A COWRY SHELL
FOR DARKNESS

BRITISH SOLOMON ISLANDS

24.
SONG FOR A YOUNG GIRL’S
PUBERTY CEREMONY

I AM ON MY WAY RUNNING,
I AM ON MY WAY RUNNING,
LOOKING TOWARD ME, IS THE EDGE OF THE WORLD,
I AM TRYING TO REACH IT.
THE EDGE OF THE WORLD DOES NOT LOOK FAR AWAY.
TO THAT I AM ON MY WAY RUNNING.

ANONYMOUS
PAPAGO, NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN

PARTURITION

... I AM CLIMBING A DISTORTED MOUNTAIN OF AGONY
INCIDENTALLY WITH THE EXHAUSTION OF CONTROL

I REACH THE SUMMIT
AND GRADUALLY SUBSIDE INTO ANTICIPATION OF
REPOSE.
WHICH NEVER COMES.

FOR ANOTHER MOUNTAIN IS GROWING UP
WHICH GOADED BY THE UNAVOIDABLE

I MUST TRAVERSE
TRAVERSING MYSELF

MINA LOY  1882_1966

THE ABORTION

I
EAST, WEST, NORTH, SOUTH
TELL ME IN WHICH RIVER
WE SHALL PUT AWAY THE CHILD
WITH ROTTING THATCH BELOW IT
AND JUNGLY SILK ABOVE
WE WILL HAVE IT PUT AWAY
YOU AT THE LOWER STEPS
I AT THE UPPER
WE WILL WASH AND GO TO OUR HOMES
YOU BY THE LOWER PATH
I BY THE UPPER
WE WILL GO TO OUR HOMES
…

INDIA: SANTAL

ROSELLE, ILL.
9/6 – 78

DEAR NANCY,
……
DIVORCE CERTAINLY IS A HORIZON EXPANDER. I NOW DREAM DREAMS, I NEVER KNEW EXISTED. I KEEP HAVING THIS
FEELING LIKE I HAVE WINGS
I WAS ON THE “L” ONE DAY – AND REALLY FELT AS IF IN FLIGHT.. OF COURSE THERE ARE LOTS OF
ROUGH TIMES, BUT LESS OFTEN ALL THE TIME.
……

FONDLY, CAROL HAMICK

DIVORCE 3
…
THE BED IS TOO WIDE NOW.
GIRLFRIENDS LEAVE AT POTATO-BOILING TIME.

FREEDOM COMES FIRST WITH THE NEXT TRAIN AN UNKNOWN
TRAVELER
WHO DOESN’T
LIKE CHILDREN.
THE DOG IS
UNEASY
SNIFFS AT
THE WRONG PANTS LEGS
IS SOON
IN HEAT.
...

TOVE DITLEVSEN
B. 1918
DENMARK
A law was passed in Nuremburg town
Which caused so many women’s tears
Those who’d been lying with the wrong man

refrain:
The people sleeping in their homes
The drums are beating with might!
God in Heaven, just take a good look around
They’ll be here tonight.

Marie Sanders,
your sweetheart’s hair is a shade too black
It is better if you do not go to him today
As you did yesterday

(refrain)

Mother, give me the key
It is not to bad
The moon shines with the same allure.

(refrain)

One early morn at nine
In her slip she rode through town
Round her neck a sign
Her hair was shorn
The crowd was jeering
Her eyes were cold

(refrain)
APPENDIX F

POEMS BY NELLY SACHS AND IRENA KLEPFISZ

That the Persecuted May Not Become the Persecutors

by Nelly Sachs

Footsteps …
In which of Echo's grottoes
are you preserved,
you who once prophesied aloud
the coming of death?

Footsteps …
Neither bird-flight, inspection of entrails,
nor Mars sweating blood
confirmed the oracle's message of death --
only footsteps --

Footsteps
Age-old game of hangman and victim,
Persecutor and persecuted,
Hunter and hunted --

Footsteps
which turn time ravenous
emblazoning the hour with wolves
extinguishing the flight in the fugitive's
blood.

Footsteps
measuring time with screams, groans,
the seeping of blood until it congeals,
heaping up hours of sweaty death --

Steps of hangmen
over the steps of victims,
what black moon pulled with such terror
the sweep-hand in earth's orbit?

Where does your note shrill
in the music of the spheres?

---

death camp¹⁶⁴

by Irena Klepfisz

when they took us to the shower i saw
the rebbitzin her sagging breasts sparse
pubic hairs i knew and remembered
the old rebbe and turned my eyes away
i could still hear her advice a woman
with a husband a scholar

when they turned on the gas i smelled
it first coming at me pressed myself
hard to the wall crying rebbitzin rebbitzin
i am here with you and the advice you gave me
i screamed into the wall as the blood burst from
my lungs cracking her nails in women’s flesh i watched
her capsize beneath me my blood in her mouth i screamed

when they dragged my body into the oven i burned
slowly at first i could smell my own flesh and could
hear them grunt with the weight of the rebbitzin
and they flug her on top of me and i could smell
her hair burning against my stomach

when i pressed through the chimney
it was sunny and clear my smoke
was distinct i rose quiet left her
beneath


Bishop, Caroline. Interview September 26, 2012.


Kunce, Samm. Email correspondence October 27, 2011 and January 22, 2012.


Miscetti, Stefania. Email December 4, 2012.


fig. 1.1  
*Woman Breathing*, 1978  
2 panels, handprinting on paper  
20” x 7’  
The Art Institute of Chicago
fig. 1.2

*Untitled (Lovers)*, 1965

gouache, ink, and watercolor on paper

18 ¾” x 23 ¾”

Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 1.3

*Les Anges, Merde, Fuck You*, 1960

gouache and ink on paper

17 ½” x 22”

Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 1.4
*Sperm Bomb*, 1966
gouache and ink on paper
27” x 34”
Private Collection, Washington, D.C.
fig. 1.5
Bomb and Victims, 1967
gouache and ink on paper
24" x 36"
Vancouver Art Gallery
Clown and Helicopter, 1967
Gouache and ink on paper
24" x 36"
Private Collection, New York
fig. 1.7

*Bomb Shitting*, 1966

gouache and ink on paper

34” x 27”

Hessel Museum of Art, Bard College
Les Bourgeois Passant..., 1968

gouache and ink on paper

24” x 36”

Collection of Philip Golub
fig. 1.9

*Helicopter Blinding Victims*, 1968

gouache and ink on paper

23 ½” x 35 5/8”

Collection of Philip Golub
fig. 1.10

*Smoke Lick*, 1974

handprinting on paper

18 1/8” x 70”

Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 1.11
Ars Sine Scientia Nihil Est, 1974
handprinting on paper
62 1/2" x 12" 
Vancouver Art Gallery
fig. 1.12

*The Burp*, 1948
etching
9 ¾” x 8 ¾”

Estate of Nancy Spero
The Acrobat, 1990

Cut and pasted handprinted paper and handprinting on paper
7 panels, 9’2” x 12’8”

Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts
fig. 1.14
Artemis, Acrobats, Divas and Dancers (detail), 1999-2001
glass and ceramic mosaic
66th Street subway station, New York City
fig. 1.15
2001, 2001

cut and pasted handprinted paper, gouache, and handprinting on paper
49" x 19 ½"

Private Collection, Berlin
fig. 1.16

*Three Figures*, 1956

lithograph

10” x 13 ¾”

Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 1.17
*Bomb Proliferation*, 1966
 gouache and ink on paper
 34” x 27 ¼”

Private Collection, New York
fig. 1.18
*Torture of Women* (panels 7–14), 1976
Cut-and-pasted typed text, painted paper, gouache, and handprinting on paper
14 panels, 20” x 125’
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
fig. 1.19
*Notes in Time on Women* (panels 1, 4, and 6–11), 1976-79
Cut-and-pasted painted paper, gouache, typewriter, and pencil
24 panels, 20” x 210’
Museum of Modern Art, New York
fig. 1.20
Torture of Women (panel 9), 1976
cut-and-pasted typed text, painted paper, gouache, and handprinting on paper
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
fig. 1.21
Christopher Lyon, diagram of *Notes in Time on Women*
fig. 1.22

*Notes in Time on Women* (detail of panels 3-4), 1976-79

cut-and pasted painted paper, handprinting on paper, gouache, typewriter, and pencil

Museum of Modern Art, New York
fig. 1.23

*Notes in Time* (detail of panel 13), 1976-79

cut-and pasted painted paper, handprinting on paper, gouache, typewriter, and pencil

Museum of Modern Art, New York
fig. 1.24
Notes in Time (panel 9), 1979
cut-and-pasted typed text, painted paper, gouache, and handprinting on paper
Museum of Modern Art, New York
fig. 1.25
cut-and-pasted handprinted and painted paper and handprinting on paper
22 panels, 20” x 190’ overall
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
fig. 1.26

*The First Language* (detail of panel 3), 1981
cut-and-pasted handprinted and painted paper and handprinting on paper
22 panels, 20” x 190’
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
fig. 1.27
_Fleeing, Mourning Women/Irradiated_, 1985

cut-and-pasted handprinted paper and handprinting on paper

20” x 53”

Philadelphia Museum of Art
fig. 1.28

The Ballad of Marie Sanders, The Jew's Whore, 1991 (52/70)
lithograph on paper
21” x 48”
The Jewish Museum, New York City
fig. 1.29

*Maypole/Take No Prisoners*, 2007

handprinting on aluminum, steel chain, ribbon, and aluminum pole on steel base
installation, Italia Pavilion, 52nd Venice Biennale

Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 1.30

Kill Commies/Maypole, 1967

gouache and ink on paper

36” x 24”

Estate of Nancy Spero
figs. 1.31 and 1.32

*Maypole/ Take No Prisoners* (details), 2007
handprinting on aluminum, steel chain, ribbon, and aluminum pole on steel base
installation, Italia Pavilion, 52nd Venice Biennale
Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 1.33
*Search and Destroy*, 1967-74
Cut-and-pasted painted paper and handprinting on paper
20” x 13’
Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 1.34
Sheela-na-gig, 1998
handprinting on wall
Festspielhaus Hellerau, Dresden, Germany
fig. 1.35

*Ballad of Marie Sanders* (detail), 1998

handprinting on walls

Festspielhaus Hellerau, Dresden, Germany
fig. 1.36
*Untitled (detail)*, 1998
handprinting on walls
Festspielhaus Hellerau, Dresden, Germany
fig. 1.37

*Untitled* (detail), 1998

handprinting on walls

Festspielhaus Hellerau, Dresden, Germany
fig. 1.38

*Untitled* (detail), 1998

handprinting on walls

Festspielhaus Hellerau, Dresden, Germany
fig. 1.39
*Dreamtime Figures and Mourning Women* (detail), 2004
temporary installation of handprinting on paper
Centro Galego de Arte Contemporânea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain
fig. 1.40

_Dreamtime Figures and Mourning Women_ (detail), 2004
temporary installation of handprinting on paper
Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain
fig. 1.41
*Mourning Women* (detail), 2004
temporary installation of handprinting on paper
Centro Galego de Arte Contemporânea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain
fig. 1.42
*Cri du Coeur* at Galerie Lelong, 2005
temporary installation of handprinting on paper and walls
Galerie Lelong, New York City
fig. 1.43
*Masha Bruskina*, 1993
handprinting on paper
19 ¾” x 24 ½”
Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 1.44
*Masha Bruskina/Gestapo Victim, 1994*
handprinting on paper and collage
18 ¾” x 26”
Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 1.45

Ballad of Marie Sanders, 1991

temporary installation, handprinting on walls

Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts
fig. 1.46

*Masha Bruskina* at the Whitney Biennial, 1993

temporary installation, handprinting on walls

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City
fig. 1.47
*Ballade von der Judenhure* Marie Sanders (Brecht), 1991
permanent installation, handprinting on walls
Von der Heydt Museum, Wuppertal, Germany
fig. 1.48

Ballad of Marie Sanders at Jewish Museum (detail), 1993

handprinting on walls

The Jewish Museum, New York City
fig. 1.49
Der Standard Resistant Project, 1994-95
newsprint, 4 panels
18 ½” x 12 3/8”
printed in Der Standard, Vienna, October 1994-March 1995
fig. 2.1
Jasper Johns
Map, 1961
encaustic, oil, and collage
6' 6" x 10' 3 1/8"
Museum of Modern Art, New York
fig. 2.2
Robert Rauschenberg
*Odalisk* (with detail), 1955-58
oil, watercolor, pencil, fabric, paper, photographs, metal, glass, electric light fixtures, dried grass, steel wool, necktie, on wood structure with four wheels, plus pillow and stuffed rooster
83” x 25 ½” x 25 1/8”
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany
fig. 2.3
John Baldessari
*What Is Painting?*, 1968
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
67 ¾” x 56 ¾”
Museum of Modern Art, New York
fig. 2.4
gouache and ink on paper
36” x 24”
Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Helsinki, Finland
fig. 2.5
gouache and ink on paper
36” x 24”
Private Collection, Paris
fig. 2.6
*Peace*, 1968
gouache and ink on paper
19” x 24”
Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 2.7
*Male Bomb/Swastika*, 1968
gouache and ink on paper
35 7/8” x 23 7/8”
Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 2.8
Eagles, Swastikas, Victims, 1968
gouache and ink on paper
23 7/8" x 35 3/4"
Galerie Lelong, New York City
fig. 2.9
*At Their Word (The Sick Woman)*, 1957-58
oil on canvas
63” x 40 ½”
Philadelphia Museum of Fine Art
fig. 2.10
*suckaprickadildoes*, 1970
gouache and ink on paper
12 ¼” x 25 ½”
Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 2.11

*ALL WRITING IS PIGSHIT*, 1969

gouache on paper

25” x 19 ¼”

Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 2.12
*I also preach total Destruction...*, 1969
gouache and charcoal on paper
25” x 20 ¾”
Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 2.13

*Get back down in your grave god you low down corpse*, 1969

cut-and-pasted paper, gouache, and ink on paper

36” x 23 5/8”

Galerie de France, Paris
fig. 2.14

*I suffer from a frightful disease of the mind. My thought abandons me at all stages* (with detail), 1969
gouache and ink on paper
36” x 24”
Rona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
fig. 2.15

I died at Rodez under electroshock, 1969

cut-and-pasted painted paper, gouache, and watercolor on paper

24 ½” x 19”

Galerie Lelong, New York City
fig. 2.16

_Codex Artaud, 1971-73_
cut-and-pasted typed text and painted paper on paper
20 ½” x 12’6”
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain
fig. 2.17
Codex Artaud panel 7 (with detail of scarab), 1971
cut-and-pasted typed text and painted paper on paper
20 ½” x 12 6”
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain
fig. 2.18
Codex Artaud panel 9 (with detail of eye of Horus), 1971
cut-and-pasted typed text and painted paper on paper
18” x 8’3”
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
fig. 2.19
*Codex Artaud* panel 25 (with detail of 3-headed serpent), 1972
cut-and-pasted typed text and painted paper on paper
24” x 16”
Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts
fig. 2.20

*Codex Artaud* panel 18 (with detail), 1972

cut-and-pasted typed text with painted paper on paper

6’11 ½” x 12 ½”

Collection of Paul Golub, Paris
fig. 2.21
Codex Artaud panel 21, 1972
cut-and-pasted typed text with painted paper on paper
6’11 ½” x 12 ½”
Collection of Paul Golub, Paris
fig. 2.22  
Torture in Chile, 1974  
cut-and-pasted painted paper and handprinting on paper  
310" x 25"  
Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 2.23
Torture of Women panels 4 and 5, 1976
cut-and-pasted typed text, painted paper, gouache, and handprinting on paper
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
fig. 2.24

Torture of Women panel 13, 1976

cut-and-pasted typed text, painted paper, gouache, and handprinting on paper

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
fig. 2.25
*Torture of Women* panel 7 (detail), 1976
cut-and-pasted typed text, painted paper, gouache, and handprinting on paper
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
fig. 2.26
_Torture of Women_ panel 11, 1976
cut-and-pasted typed text, painted paper, gouache, and handprinting on paper
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
figs. 2.27, 2.28

Ballad of Marie Sanders, The Jew’s Whore and Voices: Jewish Women in Time, 1993

temporary installation, handprinting on walls

The Jewish Museum, New York City
fig. 2.29

_Ballad of Marie Sanders and Voices: Jewish Women in Time_, 1993

temporary installation, handprinting on walls

The Jewish Museum, New York City
fig. 2.30

Ballad of Marie Sanders and Voices: Jewish Women in Time (detail), 1993
temporary installation, handprinting on walls
The Jewish Museum, New York City
fig. 2.31
cut-and-pasted handprinted and painted paper and handprinting on paper
22 panels, 20” x 190’ overall
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
fig. 2.32
*The First Language* panels 5 and 6 (with detail of panel 5), 1981
cut-and-pasted handprinted and painted paper and handprinting on paper
22 panels, 20” x 190’ overall
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
fig. 2.33

*The First Language* (panel 18 detail), 1981

cut-and-pasted handprinted and painted paper and handprinting on paper

22 panels, 20” x 190’ overall

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Running women motif

paint on rock, Unbalanya Hill, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia
fig. 2.34

*The First Language* panel 9 (with detail), 1981

cut-and-pasted handprinted and painted paper and handprinting on paper

22 panels, 20” x 190’ overall

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
fig. 2.35
The First Language panel 13, 1981
cut-and-pasted handprinted and painted paper and handprinting on paper
22 panels, 20” x 190’ overall
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
fig. 2.36

*The First Language* panel 18, 1981
cut-and-pasted handprinted and painted paper and handprinting on paper
22 panels, 20” x 190’ overall
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
fig. 2.37


handprinting on walls and base of statue

Circulo de Bellas Artes, Madrid, Spain
fig. 2.38  
*Premiere*, 1993  
handprinting on walls  
Ronacher Theatre, Vienna, Austria
fig. 2.39

*Artemis, Acrobats, Divas and Dancers* (details), 1999-2001

glass and ceramic mosaic

66th Street subway station, New York City
fig. 2.40
Artemis, Acrobat, Divas and Dancers (details), 1999-2001
glass and ceramic mosaic
66th Street subway station, New York City
fig. 3.1
The Brygos Painter
kylix (attic drinking cup) with maenad
painted ceramic
dimensions unavailable
State Collection of Antiquities, Munich, Germany
fig. 3.2
Praxiteles
*Aphrodite of Knidos*, c. 330 B.C.E.
marble
height 6’8”
Glyptothek, Munich, Germany
fig. 3.3
frieze from west pediment of Temple of Aphaia, Aegina, Greece, c. 500 B.C.E.
width 49’
Glyptothek, Munich, Germany
fig. 3.4
Hera Diptych III, 1988 (as installed at the Glyptothek, Munich, 1991)
handprinting and collage on paper
2 panels, each 52” x 213 ½”
Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 3.5
Niobe frieze
marble
exact dimensions unavailable
Glyptothek, Munich, Germany
fig. 3.6

_Hera Diptych III_ (left panel), 1988

handprinting on paper

52” x 213 ½”

Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 3.7
Orestes sarcophagus
marble
exact dimensions unavailable
Glyptothek, Munich, Germany
fig. 3.8

_Hera Diptych III_ (right panel), 1988
handprinting and collage on paper
52” x 213 ½”
Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 3.9
*Aphrodite*, 1990 (as installed at the Glyptothek, Munich, 1991)
handprinting and collage on paper
110” x 20”
Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 3.10
Artemis the Huntress
marble, 1st c.
82 ¾”
The Louvre, Paris, France
fig. 3.11
_Dancing Totem_, 1985
(as installed at the Glyptothek, Munich, 1991)
handprinting and collage on paper
9’ x 1’7”
Estate of Nancy Spero
fig. 3.12
*Elegy II*, 1983
(as installed at the Glyptothek, Munich, 1991)
handprinted collage on paper
each panel 9’3” x 1’7”
Barbara Gross Galerie, Munich
fig. 3.13  
Elegy II (detail), 1983  
handprinted collage on paper
fig. 3.14
John Singer Sargent
*Gassed*, 1919
oil on canvas
91” x 240 ½”
Imperial War Museum, London
fig. 3.15
*Aphrodite Holding a Dove*, c. 460 B.C.E.
bronze
10.7” x 3.5” x 3.2”
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University
fig. 3.16
Cambodian Apsara, late 12th c.
cast bronze
8 7/16” x 3 15/16” x 15/16”
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University
fig. 3.17
hydria (water jar) handle, Kore on Gorgon, 560-550 B.C.E.
leaded bronze
4 5/6” x 3 ¼” x 1 ½”
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University
fig. 3.18

*Raise/Time*, 1995

temporary installation, handprinting on walls

Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University
fig. 3.19

*Raise/Time* (detail), 1995

temporary installation, handprinting on walls

Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University
fig. 3.20

*Raise/Time* (detail), 1995

temporary installation, handprinting on walls

Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University
fig. 3.21

*Raise/Time* (detail), 1995

temporary installation, handprinting on walls

Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University
fig. 3.22
*Cabaret II*, 1993
4 panels, 37” x 194” overall
handprinting and collage on paper
fig. 3.23

*The Black and the Red III*, 1996

temporary installation/digital projection

Parthenon, Rome, Italy
fig. 3.24

*The Black and the Red III*, 1996

temporary installation/digital projection

Parthenon, Rome, Italy
The Black and the Red III, 1994 (as installed at Malmö Konsthall, Sweden in 1994)

handprinting and printed collage on paper
22 panels, each approx. 19 1/2" x 96 1/2"
fig. 3.26
Hymn to Isis I (recto), 2003
handprinting on silk banner
12' 9" x 43 1/2"
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
fig. 3.27
Hymn to Isis I (verso), 2003
handprinting on silk banner
12’ 9” x 43 ½”
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
fig. 3.28
Pierre Biard
*La Renommée*, 1597
bronze
height 5’8”
The Louvre, Paris, France
fig. 3.29
*Hymn to Isis II* (recto), 2003
handprinting on silk banner
11'3" x 63''
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
fig. 3.30
*Hymn to Isis II* (verso), 2003
handprinting on silk banner
11’3” x 63”
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
fig. 3.31
*Notes in Time on Women*, 1976–1979 (as installed at MoMA in 2008)
handprinting, collage, gouache, typewriter and pencil on joined sheets of paper
24 panels, 20” x 210’
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
fig. 3.32

*Notes in Time* (panel 1), 1976–1979

handprinting on paper

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
fig. 3.33

*Notes in Time* (panel 2-5), 1976–1979

handprinting and handpainted collage on paper

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
HIS LACK OF PERMANENT CONNECTION
TO A MALE FIGURE
IS THE KEystone
TO HER INDEPENDENCE
fig. 3.35
*Notes in Time* (panel 7 detail), 1976–1979
handprinting, collage, and typewriter on paper
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
fig. 3.36

*Notes in Time* (panel 9 detail), 1976–1979
handprinting on paper
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
fig. 3.37

Notes in Time (panel 10 detail), 1976–1979
handprinting on paper
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
He was rapt away
in times, at Zeus' command,
he returned to Sparta,
in Rhodes she was hanged
the cord turned to a rainbow.
Notes in Time (panel 19 detail), 1976–1979
handpainted collage on paper
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
fig. 3.40
*Notes in Time* (panels 2-5 detail), 1976–1979
handprinting on paper
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
fig. 3.41
*Notes in Time* (panel 22 detail), 1976–1979
handpainted collage on paper
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
fig. 3.42
*Notes in Time* (panel 23 detail), 1976–1979
handprinting, collage, and typewriter on paper
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
fig. 3.43
*Notes in Time* (panel 23 detail), 1976–1979
typewriting on paper
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
fig. 3.44
Theodore Géricault
The Raft of the Medusa, 1819
oil on canvas
16' 1" x 23' 6"
The Louvre, Paris, France