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Violence

and the

Remaking

of a Self

AFTERMATH

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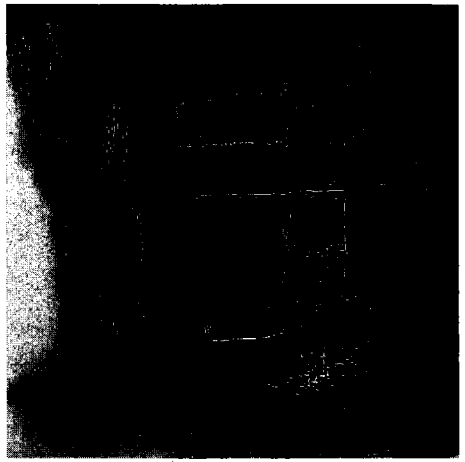


af·ter·math, n. 1. Something that results or follows from an event, esp. one of a disastrous or unfortunate nature. . . . 2. a new growth of grass following one or more mowings.[1]

Preface

Ten years ago, a few months after I had survived a nearly fatal sexual assault and attempted murder in the south of France, I sat down at my computer to write about it for the first time and all I could come up with was a list of paradoxes. Things had stopped making sense. I thought it was quite possible that I was brain-damaged as a result of the head injuries I had sustained. Or perhaps the heightened lucidity I had experienced during the assault remained, giving me a clearer, although profoundly disorienting, picture of the world. I turned to philosophy for meaning and consolation and could find neither. Had my reasoning broken down? Or was it the breakdown of reason? I couldn't explain what had happened to me. I was attacked for no reason. I had ventured outside the human community, landed beyond

the moral universe, beyond the realm of predictable events and comprehensible actions, and I didn't know how to get back.

As a philosopher, I was used to taking something apparently obvious and familiar—the nature of time, say, or the relation between words and things—and making it into something quite puzzling and strange. But now, when I was confronted with the utterly strange and paradoxical, philosophy was of no use in making me feel at home in the world.

After I was rescued and taken to the Grenoble hospital, I was told repeatedly how "lucky" I was to be alive, and for a short while I even believed this myself. At the time I did not yet know how trauma not only haunts the conscious and unconscious mind, but also remains in the body, in each of the senses, ready to resurface whenever something triggers a reliving of the traumatic event. I didn't know that the worst—the unimaginably painful aftermath of violence—was yet to come.

One of the most difficult aspects of my recovery from the assault was the seeming inability of others to remember what had happened, accompanied by their habit of exhorting me, too, to forget. Although I was initially surprised by this response, once I discovered how typical it was, I became more aware of the intense psychological pressures that make it difficult for all of us to empathize with victims of trauma. The prevalent lack of empathy with trauma victims, which is reinforced by the cultural repression of memories of violence and victimization (for example, in the United States about slavery, in Germany and Poland and elsewhere about the Holocaust), results, I realized, not merely from ignorance or indifference, but also from an active fear of identifying with those whose terrifying fate forces us to acknowledge that we are not in control of our own.

Nonetheless, the trauma survivor must find empathic listeners in order to carry on. Piecing together a shattered self requires a process of remembering and working through in which speech and affect converge in a trauma narrative. In this book I explore the performative aspect of speech in testimonies of trauma: how *saying* something about the memory *does* something to it. The communicative act of bearing witness to traumatic events not only transforms traumatic memories into narratives that can then be integrated into the survivor's sense of self and view of the world, but it also reintegrates the survivor into a community, reestablishing bonds of trust and faith in others.

The challenge of finding language that is true to traumatic experience is, however, a daunting one. How can we speak about the unspeakable without attempting to render it intelligible and sayable? The paradoxes of traumatic memory may seem to defy analysis. Our ordinary concepts of time and identity cease to apply, as in the French writer Charlotte Delbo's statement, "I died in Auschwitz, but no one knows it" (1995, 267). For months after my assault, I had to stop myself before saying (what seemed accurate at the time), "I was murdered in France last summer." In this book, I attempt to explain these cryptic observations, and, in so doing, I develop and defend a view of the self as fundamentally relational—capable of being undone by violence, but also of being remade in connection with others.

Since I have found that writing about trauma challenges not only accepted views of the limits of language and logic, but also current assumptions about appropriate scholarly methodology, I have employed a range of what I consider to be complementary methodologies: my own process of "working through," cultural analysis, feminist criticism, philosophical theorizing about the self, and an examination of clinical and neurological studies of trauma. The result is a record of my thinking about trauma and recovery over the past ten years. The chronology of this period, however, is fractured in the telling. Time may be linear (who knows?) but the aftermath was not. There have been many periods of progress and of decline, victories and setbacks, both major and minor. I have changed during this time and so have my views, but, rather than revise my earlier writings in light of more recent understandings, I have tried to convey the trajectory of my ideas. As Ursula Le Guin writes, "It doesn't

seem right or wise to revise an old text severely, as if trying to obliterate it, hiding the evidence that one had to go there to get here. It is rather in the feminist mode to let one's changes of mind, and the processes of change, stand as evidence."[2]

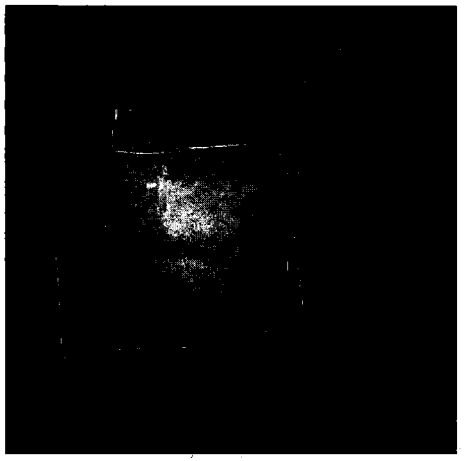
Interwoven with a philosophical examination of violence and its aftermath is a first-person narrative of remaking a self shattered by trauma. Chapter 1, an account of philosophical issues raised by my assault and the immediate aftermath, was written during the two years after my assault. It is an examination of the way trauma shatters one's most fundamental assumptions about the world, including beliefs about our ability to control what happens to us. This chapter would be different in many ways were I to write it now—less angry, less urgent, and somewhat more detached. But I have left it in its original form (except for a few minor stylistic revisions) in order to convey my perspective soon after the event. Chapter 2 is a development and defense of the methodology used throughout the book. In it I argue for the necessity of first-person narratives in facilitating our understanding of trauma and victimization. In chapters 3 and 4 I discuss the therapeutic function of trauma narratives and, in chapter 5, I examine their role in constructing and changing cultural tropes and political norms. In chapter 6, I explore the tensions among the various functions of narrative, in particular, the tension between living to tell and telling to live, that is, between getting (and keeping) the story right in order to bear witness and being able to rewrite the story in ways that enable the survivor to go on with her life.

My assailant was apprehended, convicted of rape and attempted murder, and sentenced to ten years in prison. His sentence is finished today. It's tempting to think, as I release this book into the world, that mine is, too, although I know there will be many returns of the day, more occasions for telling and retelling the story. But right now, as I look out at the freshly mown field behind our house in Vermont, all I see and hear is new life—shoots of grass, lupines, pine trees, fireflies, crickets, frogs, small things singing. And I'm surrounded by the warmth and sweetness of friends and family and music. We may call such things reasons to live, but reason has little to do with it. They are the embodiments of our wishes and passions, the hopes and desires that draw us into the future.

Thetford, Vermont
Independence Day
July 2000

Surviving Sexual Violence

CHAPTER ONE



On July 4, 1990, at 10:30 in the morning, I went for a walk along a peaceful-looking country road in a village outside Grenoble, France. It was a gorgeous day, and I didn't envy my husband, Tom, who had to stay inside and work on a manuscript with a French colleague of his. I sang to myself as I set out, stopping to pet a goat and pick a few wild strawberries along the way. About an hour and a half later, I was lying face down in a muddy creek bed at the bottom of a dark ravine, struggling to stay alive. I had been grabbed from behind, pulled into the bushes, beaten, and sexually assaulted. Feeling absolutely helpless and entirely at my assailant's mercy, I talked to him, calling him "sir." I tried to appeal to his humanity, and, when that failed, I addressed myself to his self-interest. He called me a whore and told me to shut up.

Although I had said I'd do whatever he wanted, as the sexual assault began I instinctively fought back, which so enraged my attacker that he strangled me until I lost consciousness. When I awoke, I was being dragged by my feet down into the ravine. I had often, while dreaming, thought I was awake, but now I was awake and convinced I was having a nightmare. But it was no dream. After ordering me, in a gruff, Gestapo-like voice, to get on my hands and knees, my assailant strangled me again. I wish I could convey the horror of losing consciousness while my animal instincts desperately fought the effects of strangulation. This time I was sure I was dying. But I revived, just in time to see him lunging toward me with a rock. He smashed it into my forehead, knocking me out, and eventually, after another strangulation attempt, he left me for dead.

After my assailant left, I managed to climb out of the ravine, and was rescued by a farmer, who called the police, a doctor, and an ambulance. I was taken to emergency at the Grenoble hospital where I underwent neurological tests, x-rays, blood tests, and a gynecological exam. Leaves and twigs were taken from my hair for evidence, my fingernails were scraped, and my mouth was swabbed for samples. I had multiple head injuries, my eyes were swollen shut, and I had a fractured trachea, which made breathing difficult. I was not permitted to drink or eat anything for the first thirty hours, although Tom, who never left my side, was allowed to dab my blood-encrusted lips with a wet towel. The next day, I was transferred out of emergency and into my own room. But I could not be left alone, even for a few minutes. I was terrified my assailant would find me and finish the job. When someone later brought in the local paper with a story about my attack, I was greatly relieved that it referred to me as *Mlle M. R.* and didn't mention that I was an American. Even by the time I left the hospital, eleven days later, I was so concerned about my assailant tracking me down that I put only my lawyer's address on the hospital records.

Although fears for my safety may have initially explained why I wanted to remain anonymous, by that time my assailant had been apprehended, indicted for rape and attempted murder, and incarcerated without possibility of bail. Still, I didn't want people to know that I had been sexually assaulted. I don't know whether this was because I could still hardly believe it myself, because keeping this information confidential was one of the few ways I could feel in control of my life, or because, in spite of my conviction that I had done nothing wrong, I felt ashamed.

When I started telling people about the attack, I said, simply, that I was the victim of an attempted murder. People typically asked, in horror, "What was the motivation? Were you mugged?" and when I replied, "No, it started as a sexual assault," most inquirers were satisfied with that as an explanation of why some man wanted to murder me. I would have thought that a murder attempt plus a sexual assault would require more, not less, of an explanation than a murder attempt by itself. (After all, there are two criminal acts to explain here.)

One reason sexual violence is taken for granted by many is because it is so very prevalent. The FBI, notorious for underestimating the frequency of sex crimes, notes that, in the United States, a rape occurs on an average of every six

minutes.[1] But this figure covers only the reported cases of rape, and some researchers claim that only about 10 percent of all rapes get reported.[2] Every fifteen seconds, a woman is beaten.[3] The everydayness of sexual violence, as evidenced by these mind-numbing statistics, leads many to think that male violence against women is natural, a given, something not in need of explanation and not amenable to change. And yet, through some extraordinary mental gymnastics, while most people take sexual violence for granted, they simultaneously manage to deny that it really exists—or, rather, that it could happen to them. We continue to think that we—and the women we love—are immune to it, provided, that is, that we don't do anything "foolish." How many of us have swallowed the potentially lethal lie that if you don't do anything wrong, if you're just careful enough, you'll be safe? How many of us have believed its damaging, victim-blaming corollary: if you are attacked, it's because you did something wrong? These are lies, and in telling my story I hope to expose them, as well as to help bridge the gap between those who have been victimized and those who have not.

Sexual violence and its aftermath raise numerous philosophical issues in a variety of areas in our discipline. The disintegration of the self experienced by victims of violence challenges our notions of personal identity over time, a major preoccupation of metaphysics. A victim's seemingly justified skepticism about everyone and everything is pertinent to epistemology, especially if the goal of epistemology is, as Wilfrid Sellars put it, that of feeling at home in the world. In aesthetics, as well as in philosophy of law, the discussion of sexual violence in- or as- art could use the illumination provided by a victim's perspective. Perhaps the most important issues posed by sexual violence are in the areas of social, political, and legal philosophy, and insight into these, as well, requires an understanding of what it's like to be a victim of such violence.

One of the very few articles written by philosophers on violence against women is Ross Harrison's "Rape: A Case Study in Political Philosophy."[4] In this article Harrison argues that not only do utilitarians need to assess the harmfulness of rape in order to decide whether the harm to the victim outweighs the benefit to the rapist, but even on a rights-based approach to criminal justice we need to be able to assess the benefits and harms involved in criminalizing and punishing violent acts such as rape. In his view, it is not always the case, contra Ronald Dworkin, that rights trump considerations of utility, so, even on a rights-based account of justice, we need to give an account of why, in the case of rape, the pleasure gained by the perpetrator (or by multiple perpetrators, in the case of gang-rape) is always outweighed by the harm done to the victim. He points out the peculiar difficulty most of us have in imagining the pleasure a rapist gets out of an assault, but, he asserts confidently, "There is no problem imagining what it is like to be a victim" (Harrison 1986, 51). To his credit, he acknowledges the importance, to political philosophy, of trying to imagine others' experience, for otherwise we could not compare harms and benefits, which he argues must be done even in cases of conflicts of rights in order to decide which of competing rights should take priority. But imagining what it is like to be a rape victim is no simple matter, since much of what a victim goes through is unimaginable. Still, it's essential to try to convey it.

In my efforts to tell the victim's story—my story, our story—I've been inspired and instructed not only by feminist philosophers who have refused to accept the dichotomy between the personal and the political, but also by critical race theorists such as Patricia Williams, Mari Matsuda, and Charles Lawrence, who have incorporated first-person narrative accounts into their discussions of the law. In writing about hate speech, they have argued persuasively that one cannot do justice to the issues involved in debates about restrictions on speech without listening to the victims' stories.[5] In describing the effects of racial harassment on victims, they have departed from the academic convention of speaking in the impersonal, "universal," voice and relate

incidents they themselves experienced. In her groundbreaking book, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (1991), Williams describes how it felt to learn about her great-great-grandmother, who was purchased at age 11 by a slave owner who raped and impregnated her the following year. And in describing instances of everyday racism she herself has lived through, she gives us imaginative access to what it's like to be the victim of racial discrimination. Some may consider such first-person accounts in academic writing to be self-indulgent, but I consider them a welcome antidote to scholarship that, in the guise of universality, tends to silence those who most need to be heard.

Philosophers are far behind legal theorists in acknowledging the need for a diversity of voices. We are trained to write in an abstract, universal voice and to shun first-person narratives as biased and inappropriate for academic discourse. Some topics, however, such as the impact of racial and sexual violence on victims, cannot even be broached unless those affected by such crimes can tell of their experiences in their own words. Unwittingly further illustrating the need for the victim's perspective, Harrison writes, elsewhere in his article on rape, "What principally distinguishes rape from normal sexual activity is the consent of the raped woman" (Harrison 1986, 52). There is no parallel to this in the case of other crimes, such as theft or murder. Try "What principally distinguishes theft from normal gift-giving is the consent of the person stolen from." We don't think of theft as "coerced gift-giving." We don't think of murder as "assisted suicide minus consent." Why not? In the latter case, it could be because assisted suicide is relatively rare (even compared with murder) and so it's odd to use it as the more familiar thing to which we are analogizing. But in the former case, gift-giving is presumably more prevalent than theft (at least in academic circles) and yet it still sounds odd to explicate theft in terms of gift-giving minus consent (or coerced philanthropy). In the cases of both theft and murder, the notion of violation seems built into our conceptions of the physical acts constituting the crimes, so it is inconceivable that one could consent to the act in question. Why is it so easy for a philosopher such as Harrison to think of rape, however, as "normal sexual activity minus consent"? This may be because the nature of the violation in the case of rape hasn't been all that obvious. Witness the phenomenon of rape jokes, the prevalence of pornography glorifying rape, the common attitude that, in the case of women, "no" means "yes," that women really want it.[6]

Since I was assaulted by a stranger, in a "safe" place, and was so visibly injured when I encountered the police and medical personnel, I was, throughout my hospitalization and my dealings with the police, spared the insult, suffered by so many rape victims, of not being believed or of being said to have asked for the attack. However, it became clear to me as I gave my deposition from my hospital bed that this would still be an issue in my assailant's trial. During my deposition, I recalled being on the verge of giving up my struggle to live when I was galvanized by a sudden, piercing image of Tom's future pain on finding my corpse in that ravine. At this point in my deposition, I paused, glanced over at the police officer who was typing the transcript, and asked whether it was appropriate to include this image of my husband in my recounting of the facts. The gendarme replied that it definitely was and that it was a very good thing I mentioned my husband, since my assailant, who had confessed to the sexual assault, was claiming I had provoked it. As serious as the occasion was, and as much as it hurt to laugh, I couldn't help it, the suggestion was so ludicrous. Could it have been those baggy Gap jeans I was wearing that morning? Or was it the heavy sweatshirt? My maddeningly seductive jogging shoes? Or was it simply my walking along minding my own business that had provoked his murderous rage?

After I completed my deposition, which lasted eight hours, the police officer asked me to read and sign the transcript he'd typed to certify that it was accurate. I was surprised to see that it began with the words, "*Comme je suis sportive . . .* " ("Since I am athletic . . . ")—added by the police to explain what possessed me to go for a walk by

myself that fine morning. I was too exhausted by this point to protest "No, I'm not an athlete, I'm a philosophy professor," and I figured the officer knew what he was doing, so I let it stand. That evening, my assailant was formally indicted. I retained a lawyer, and met him along with the investigating magistrate, when I gave my second deposition toward the end of my hospitalization. Although what occurred was officially a crime against the state, not against me, I was advised to pursue a civil suit in order to recover unreimbursed medical expenses, and, in any case, I needed an advocate to explain the French legal system to me. I was told that since this was an "easy" case, the trial would occur within a year. In fact, the trial took place two and a half years after the assault, due to the delaying tactics of my assailant's lawyer, who was trying to get him off on an insanity defense. According to article 64 of the French criminal code, if the defendant is determined to have been insane at the time, then, legally, there was "*ni crime, ni délit*"—neither crime nor offense. The jury, however, did not accept the insanity plea and found my assailant guilty of rape and attempted murder.

As things turned out, my experience with the criminal justice system was better than that of most sexual assault victims. I did, however, occasionally get glimpses of the humiliating insensitivity victims routinely endure. Before I could be released from the hospital, for example, I had to undergo a second forensic examination at a different hospital. I was taken in a wheelchair out to a hospital van, driven to another hospital, taken to an office where there were no receptionists and where I was greeted by two male doctors I had never seen before. When they told me to take off my clothes and stand in the middle of the room, I refused. I had to ask for a hospital gown to put on. For about an hour the two of them went over me like a piece of meat, calling out measurements of bruises and other assessments of damage, as if they were performing an autopsy. This was just the first of many incidents in which I felt as if I was experiencing things posthumously. When the inconceivable happens, one starts to doubt even the most mundane, realistic perceptions. Perhaps I'm not really here, I thought, perhaps I did die in that ravine. The line between life and death, once so clear and sustaining, now seemed carelessly drawn and easily erased.

For the first several months after my attack, I led a spectral existence, not quite sure whether I had died and the world went on without me, or whether I was alive but in a totally alien world. Tom and I returned to the States, and I continued to convalesce, but I felt as though I'd somehow outlived myself. I sat in our apartment and stared outside for hours, through the blur of a detached vitreous, feeling like Robert Lowell's newly widowed mother, described in one of his poems as mooning in a window "as if she had stayed on a train / one stop past her destination."[7]

My sense of unreality was fed by the massive denial of those around me—a reaction I learned is an almost universal response to rape. Where the facts would appear to be incontrovertible, denial takes the shape of attempts to explain the assault in ways that leave the observers' worldview unscathed. Even those who are able to acknowledge the existence of violence try to protect themselves from the realization that the world in which it occurs is their world and so they find it hard to identify with the victim. They cannot allow themselves to imagine the victim's shattered life, or else their illusions about their own safety and control over their own lives might begin to crumble. The most well-meaning individuals, caught up in the myth of their own immunity, can inadvertently add to the victim's suffering by suggesting that the attack was avoidable or somehow her fault. One victims' assistance coordinator, whom I had phoned for legal advice, stressed that she herself had never been a victim and said that I would benefit from the experience by learning not to be so trusting of people and to take basic safety precautions like not going out alone late at night. She didn't pause long enough during her lecture for me to point out that I was attacked suddenly, from behind, in broad daylight.

We are not taught to empathize with victims. In crime novels and detective films, it is the villain, or the one who solves the murder mystery, who attracts our attention; the victim, a merely passive pretext for our entertainment, is conveniently disposed of—and forgotten—early on. We identify with the agents' strength and skill, for good or evil, and join the victim, if at all, only in our nightmares. Although one might say, as did Clarence Thomas, looking at convicted criminals on their way to jail, "but for the grace of God, there go I,"[8] a victim's fate prompts an almost instinctive "it could never happen to me." This may explain why there is, in our criminal justice system, so little concern for justice for victims—especially rape victims. They have no constitutionally protected rights *qua* victims. They have no right to a speedy trial or to compensation for damages (although states have been changing this in recent years), or to privacy vis-à-vis the press. As a result of their victimization, they often lose their jobs, their homes, their spouses—in addition to a great deal of money, time, sleep, self-esteem, and peace of mind. The rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," possessed, in the abstract, by all of us, are of little use to victims who can lose years of their lives, the freedom to move about in the world without debilitating fear, and any hope of returning to the pleasures of life as they once knew it.

People also fail to recognize that if a victim could not have anticipated an attack, she can have no assurance that she will be able to avoid one in the future. More to reassure themselves than to comfort the victim, some deny that such a thing could happen again. One friend, succumbing to the gambler's fallacy, pointed out that my having had such extraordinary bad luck meant that the odds of my being attacked again were now quite slim (as if fate, although not completely benign, would surely give me a break now, perhaps in the interest of fairness). Others thought it would be most comforting to act as if nothing had happened. The first card I received from my mother, while I was still in the hospital, made no mention of the attack or of my pain and featured the "bluebird of happiness," sent to keep me ever cheerful. The second had an illustration of a bright, summery scene with the greeting: "Isn't the sun nice? Isn't the wind nice? Isn't everything nice?" Weeks passed before I learned, what I should have been able to guess, that after she and my father received Tom's first call from the hospital they held each other and sobbed. They didn't want to burden me with their pain—a pain that I now realize must have been greater than my own.

Some devout relatives were quick to give God all the credit for my survival but none of the blame for what I had to endure. Others acknowledged the suffering that had been inflicted on me, but as no more than a blip on the graph of God's benevolence—necessary, fleeting, evil, there to make possible an even greater show of good. An aunt, with whom I had been close since childhood, did not write or call at all until three months after the attack, and then sent a belated birthday card with a note saying that she was sorry to hear about my "horrible experience" but pleased to think that as a result I "will become stronger and will be able to help so many people. A real blessing from above for sure." Such attempts at a theodicy discounted the horror I had to endure. But I learned that everyone needs to try and make sense, in however inadequate a way, of such senseless violence. I watched my own seesawing attempts to find something for which to be grateful, something to redeem the unmitigated awfulness: I was glad I didn't have to reproach myself (or endure others' reproaches) for having done something careless, but I wished I had done something I could consider reckless so that I could simply refrain from doing it in the future. For some time I was glad I did not yet have a child, who would have to grow up with the knowledge that even the protector could not be protected, but I felt an inexpressible loss when I recalled how much Tom and I had wanted a baby and how joyful were our attempts to conceive. It was difficult to imagine getting pregnant, because it was so hard to let even my husband near me, and because I felt it would be harder still to let a child leave my side.

It might be gathered, from this litany of complaints, that I was the recipient of constant, if misguided, attempts at consolation during the first few months of my recovery. This was not the case. It seemed to me that the half-life of most people's concern was less than that of the sleeping pills I took to ward off flashbacks and nightmares—just long enough to allow the construction of a comforting illusion that lulls the shock to sleep. During the first few months after my assault, my close friends, my sister, and my parents were supportive, but most of the aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends of the family notified by my parents almost immediately after the attack didn't phone, write, or even send a get well card, in spite of my extended hospital stay. These are all caring, decent people who would have sent wishes for a speedy recovery if I'd had, say, an appendectomy. Their early lack of response was so striking that I wondered whether it was the result of self-protective denial, a reluctance to mention something so unspeakable, or a symptom of our society's widespread emotional illiteracy that prevents most people from conveying any feeling that can't be expressed in a Hallmark card.

In the case of rape, the intersection of multiple taboos—against talking openly about trauma, about violence, about sex—causes conversational gridlock, paralyzing the would-be supporter. We lack the vocabulary for expressing appropriate concern, and we have no social conventions to ease the awkwardness. Ronald de Sousa (1987) has written persuasively about the importance of grasping paradigm scenarios in early childhood in order to learn appropriate emotional responses to situations. We do not learn—early or later in life—how to react to a rape. What typically results from this ignorance is bewilderment on the part of victims and silence on the part of others, often the result of misguided caution. When, on entering the angry phase of my recovery period, I railed at my parents: "Why haven't my relatives called or written? Why hasn't my own brother phoned?" They replied, "They all expressed their concern to us, but they didn't want to remind you of what happened." Didn't they realize I thought about the attack every minute of every day and that their inability to respond made me feel as though I had, in fact, died and no one had bothered to come to the funeral?

For the next several months, I felt angry, scared, and helpless, and I wished I could blame myself for what had happened so that I would feel less vulnerable, more in control of my life. Those who haven't been sexually violated may have difficulty understanding why women who survive assault often blame themselves, and may wrongly attribute it to a sex-linked trait of masochism or lack of self-esteem. They don't know that it can be less painful to believe that you did something blameworthy than it is to think that you live in a world where you can be attacked at any time, in any place, simply because you are a woman. It is hard to go on after an attack that is both random—and thus completely unpredictable—and not random, that is, a crime of hatred toward the group to which you happen to belong. If I hadn't been the one who was attacked on that road in France, it would have been the next woman to come along. But had my husband walked down that road instead, he would have been safe.

Although I didn't blame myself for the attack, neither could I blame my attacker. Tom wanted to kill him, but I, like other rape victims I came to know, found it almost impossible to get angry with my assailant. I think the terror I still felt precluded the appropriate angry response. It may be that experiencing anger toward an attacker requires imagining oneself in proximity to him, a prospect too frightening for a victim in the early stages of recovery to conjure up. As Aristotle observed in the *Rhetoric*, Book I, "no one grows angry with a person on whom there is no prospect of taking vengeance, and we feel comparatively little anger, or none at all, with those who are much our superiors in power."[8] The anger was still there, but it got directed toward safer targets: my family and closest friends. My anger spread, giving me painful shooting signs that I was coming back to life. I could not accept what had happened to me. What was I supposed

to do now? How could everyone else carry on with their lives when women were dying? How could Tom go on teaching his classes, seeing students, chatting with colleagues . . . and why should he be able to walk down the street when I couldn't?

The incompatibility of fear of my assailant and appropriate anger toward him became most apparent after I began taking a women's self-defense class. It became clear that the way to break out of the double bind of self-blame versus powerlessness was through empowerment—physical as well as political. Learning to fight back is a crucial part of this process, not only because it enables us to experience justified, healing rage, but also because, as Iris Young has observed in her essay "Throwing Like a Girl," "women in sexist society are physically handicapped," moving about hesitantly, fearfully, in a constricted lived space, routinely underestimating what strength we actually have (Young 1990, 153). We have to learn to feel entitled to occupy space, to defend ourselves. The hardest thing for most of the women in my self-defense class to do was simply to yell "No!" Women have been taught not to fight back when being attacked, to rely instead on placating or pleading with one's assailant—strategies that researchers have found to be least effective in resisting rape (Bart and O'Brien 1984).

The instructor of the class, Linda Ramzy Ranson, helped me through the difficult first sessions, through the flashbacks and the fear, and showed me I could be tougher than ever. As I was leaving after one session, I saw a student arrive for the next class—with a guide dog. I was furious that, in addition to everything else this woman had to struggle with, she had to worry about being raped. I thought I understood something of her fear since I felt, for the first time in my life, like I had a perceptual deficit—not the blurred vision from the detached vitreous, but, rather, the more hazardous lack of eyes in the back of my head. I tried to compensate for this on my walks by looking over my shoulder a lot and punctuating my purposeful, straight-ahead stride with an occasional pirouette, which must have made me look more whimsical than terrified.

The confidence I gained from learning how to fight back effectively not only enabled me to walk down the street again, it gave me back my life. But it was a changed life. A paradoxical life. I began to feel stronger than ever before, and more vulnerable, more determined to fight to change the world, but in need of several naps a day. News that friends found distressing in a less visceral way—the racism and sexism in the coverage of the trials of the defendants in the Central Park jogger case and in the trial of the St. John's gang-rape defendants, the rape and murder of Kimberly Rae Harbour in Boston in October 1990 (virtually ignored by the media since the victim was black), the controversy over *American Psycho*, the Gulf War, the Kennedy rape case, the Tyson trial, the fatal stabbing of law professor Mary Joe Frug near Harvard Square, the ax murders of two women graduate students at Dartmouth College (also neglected by all but the local press since the victims were black and from Ethiopia)—triggered debilitating flashbacks in me. Unlike survivors of wars or earthquakes, who inhabit a common shattered world, rape victims face the cataclysmic destruction of their world alone, surrounded by people who find it hard to understand what's so distressing. I realized that I exhibited every symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder—dissociation, flashbacks, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response, sleep disorders, inability to concentrate, diminished interest in significant activities, and a sense of a foreshortened future.[10] I could understand why children exposed to urban violence have such trouble envisioning their futures. Although I had always been career-oriented, always planning for my future, I could no longer imagine how I would get through each day, let alone what I might be doing in a year's time. I didn't think I would ever write or teach philosophy again.

The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* defines post-traumatic stress disorder, in part, as the result of "an event that is outside the range of usual human experience."[11] Because the trauma is, to most people, inconceivable, it's also unspeakable. Even when I managed to find the words and the strength to describe my

ordeal, it was hard for others to hear about it. They would have preferred me to just "buck up," as one friend urged me to do. But it's essential to talk about it, again and again. It's a way of remastering the trauma, although it can be retraumatizing when people refuse to listen. In my case, each time someone failed to respond I felt as though I were alone again in the ravine, dying, screaming. And still no one could hear me. Or, worse, they heard me, but refused to help.

I now know they were trying to help, but that recovering from trauma takes time, patience, and, most of all, determination on the part of the survivor. After about six months, I began to be able to take more responsibility for my own recovery, and stopped expecting others to pull me through. I entered the final stage of my recovery, a period of gradual acknowledgment and integration of what had happened. I joined a rape survivors' support group, I got a great deal of therapy, and I became involved in political activities, such as promoting the Violence against Women Act (which was eventually passed by Congress in 1994).[12] Gradually, I was able to get back to work.

When I resumed teaching at Dartmouth in the fall of 1991, the first student who came to see me in my office during freshman orientation week told me that she had been raped. The following spring, four Dartmouth students reported sexual assaults to the local police. In the aftermath of these recent reports, the women students on my campus were told to use their heads, lock their doors, not go out after dark without a male escort. They were advised: just don't do anything stupid.

Although colleges are eager to "protect" women by hindering their freedom of movement or providing them with male escorts, they continue to be reluctant to teach women how to protect themselves. After months of lobbying the administration at my college, we were able to convince them to offer a women's self-defense and rape prevention course. It was offered in the winter of 1992 as a physical education course, and nearly a hundred students and employees signed up for it. Shortly after the course began, I was informed that the women students were not going to be allowed to get P.E. credit for it, since the administration had determined that it discriminated against men. I was told that granting credit for the course was in violation of Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in education programs receiving federal funding—even though granting credit to men for being on the football team was not, even though Title IX law makes an explicit exception for P.E. classes involving substantial bodily contact, and even though every term the college offers several martial arts courses, for credit, that are open to men, geared to men's physiques and needs, and taken predominantly by men. I was told by an administrator that, even if Title IX permitted it, offering a women's self-defense course for credit violated "the College's non-discrimination clause—a clause which, I hope, all reasonable men and women support as good policy."

The implication that I was not a "reasonable woman" didn't sit well with me as a philosopher, so I wrote a letter to the appropriate administrative committee criticizing my college's position that single-sex sports, male-only fraternities, female-only sororities, and pregnancy leave policies are not discriminatory, in any invidious sense, while a women's self-defense class is. The administration finally agreed to grant P.E. credit for the course, but shortly after that battle was over, I read in the *New York Times* that "a rape prevention ride service offered to women in the city of Madison and on the University of Wisconsin campus may lose its university financing because it discriminates against men."[13] The dean of students at Wisconsin said that this group—the Women's Transit Authority—which has been providing free nighttime rides to women students for nineteen years, must change its policy to allow male drivers and passengers. These are, in my view, examples of the application of what Catharine MacKinnon refers to as "the stupid theory of equality."[14] To argue that rape prevention policies for women discriminate against men is like arguing that money spent making university buildings more accessible to disabled persons discriminates against those able-bodied persons who do not benefit from these improvements.[15]

Sexual violence victimizes not only those women who

are directly attacked, but *all* women. The fear of rape has long functioned to keep women in their place. Whether or not one agrees with the claims of those, such as Susan Brownmiller (1995), who argue that rape is a means by which *all* men keep *all* women subordinate, the fact that all women's lives are restricted by sexual violence is indisputable. The authors of *The Female Fear*, Margaret Gordon and Stephanie Riger, cite studies substantiating what every woman already knows—that the fear of rape prevents women from enjoying what men consider to be their birthright. Fifty percent of women never use public transportation after dark because of fear of rape. Women are eight times more likely than men to avoid walking in their own neighborhoods after dark, for the same reason (Gordon and Riger 1991). In the seminar on Violence against Women that I taught for the first time in the spring of 1992, the men in the class were stunned by the extent to which the women in the class took precautions against assault every day—locking doors and windows, checking the back seat of the car, not walking alone at night, looking in closets on returning home. And this is at a "safe," rural New England campus.

Although women still have their work and leisure opportunities unfairly restricted by their relative lack of safety, paternalistic legislation excluding women from some of the "riskier" forms of employment (e.g., bartending)[16] has, thankfully, disappeared, except, that is, in the military. We are still debating whether women should be permitted to engage in combat, and the latest rationale for keeping women out of battle is that they are more vulnerable than men to sexual violence. Those wanting to limit women's role in the military have used the reported indecent assaults on two female American prisoners of war in Iraq as evidence for women's unsuitability for combat.[17] One might as well argue that the fact that women are much more likely than men to be sexually assaulted on college campuses is evidence that women are not suited to post-secondary education. No one, to my knowledge, has proposed returning Ivy League colleges to their former all-male status as a solution to the problem of campus rape. Some have, however, seriously proposed enacting after-dark curfews for women, in spite of the fact that men are the perpetrators of the assaults. This is yet another indication of how natural it still seems to many people to address the problem of sexual violence by curtailing women's lives. The absurdity of this approach becomes apparent once one realizes that a woman can be sexually assaulted anywhere, at any time—in "safe" places, in broad daylight, even in her own home.

For months after my assault, I was afraid of people finding out about it—afraid of their reactions and of their inability to respond. I was afraid that my professional work would be discredited, that I would be viewed as biased, or, even worse, not properly philosophical. Now I am no longer afraid of what might happen if I speak out about sexual violence. I'm much more afraid of what will continue to happen if I don't. Sexual violence is a problem of catastrophic proportions—a fact obscured by its mundanity, by its relentless occurrence, by the fact that so many of us have been victims of it. Imagine the moral outrage, the emergency response we would surely mobilize, if all of these everyday assaults occurred at the same time or were restricted to one geographical region. But why should the spatiotemporal coordinates of the vast numbers of sexual assaults be considered to be morally relevant? From the victim's point of view, the fact that she is isolated in her rape and her recovery, combined with the ordinariness of the crime that leads to its trivialization, makes the assault and its aftermath even more traumatic.

As devastating as sexual violence is, however, I want to stress that it is possible to survive it, and even to flourish after it, although it doesn't seem that way at the time. Whenever I see a survivor struggling with the overwhelming anger and sadness, I'm reminded of a sweet, motherly, woman in my rape survivors' support group who sat silently throughout the group's first meeting. At the end of the hour she finally asked, softly, through tears: "Can anyone tell me if it ever stops hurting?" At the time I had the same question,

and wasn't satisfied with any answer. Now I can say, yes, it does stop hurting, at least for longer periods of time. A year after my assault, I was pleased to discover that I could go for fifteen minutes without thinking about it. Now I can go for hours at a stretch without a flashback. That's on a good day. On a bad day, I may still take to my bed with lead in my veins, unable to find one good reason to go on.

Our group facilitator, Ann Gaulin, told us that first meeting: "You will never be the same. But you can be better." I protested that I had lost so much: my security, my self-esteem, my love, and my work. I had been happy with the way things were. How could they ever be better now? As a survivor, she knew how I felt, but she also knew that, as she put it, "When your life is shattered, you're forced to pick up the pieces, and you have a chance to stop and examine them. You can say 'I don't want this one anymore' or 'I think I'll work on that one.'" I have had to give up more than I would ever have chosen to. But I have gained important skills and insights, and I no longer feel tainted by my victimization. Granted, those of us who live through sexual assault aren't given ticker-tape parades or the keys to our cities, but it's an honor to be a survivor. Although it's not exactly the sort of thing I can put on my résumé, it's the accomplishment of which I'm most proud.

Two years after the assault, I could speak about it in a philosophical forum. There I could acknowledge the good things that came from the recovery process—the clarity, the confidence, the determination, the many supporters and survivors who had brought meaning back into my world. This was not to say that the attack and its aftermath were, on balance, a good thing or, as my aunt put it, "a real blessing from above." I would rather not have gone down that road. It has been hard for me, as a philosopher, to learn the lesson that knowledge isn't always desirable, that the truth doesn't always set you free. Sometimes, it fills you with incapacitating terror and, then, uncontrollable rage. But I suppose you should embrace it anyway, for the reason Nietzsche exhorts you to love your enemies: if it doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger.

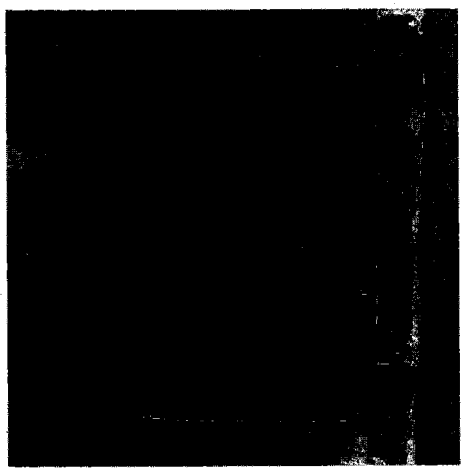
People ask me if I'm recovered now, and I reply that it depends on what that means. If they mean "am I back to where I was before the attack?" I have to say, no, and I never will be. I am not the same person who set off, singing, on that sunny Fourth of July in the French countryside. I left her in a rocky creek bed at the bottom of a ravine. I had to in order to survive. I understand the appropriateness of what a friend described to me as a Jewish custom of giving those who have outlived a brush with death new names. The trauma has changed me forever, and if I insist too often that my friends and family acknowledge it, that's because I'm afraid they don't know who I am.

But if recovery means being able to incorporate this awful knowledge into my life and carry on, then, yes, I'm recovered. I don't wake up each day with a start, thinking, "This can't have happened to me!" It happened. I have no guarantee that it won't happen again, although my self-defense classes have given me the confidence to move about in the world and to go for longer and longer walks—with my two big dogs. Sometimes I even manage to enjoy myself. And I no longer cringe when I see a woman jogging alone on the country road where I live, although I may still have a slight urge to rush out and protect her, to tell her to come inside where she'll be safe. But I catch myself, like a mother learning to let go, and cheer her on, thinking, may she always be so carefree, so at home in her world. She has every right to be.

Like one who seeks to warn the city of an impending flood, but speaks another language. . . . So do we come forward and report that evil has been done us.
—Bertolt Brecht[1]

The Politics of Forgetting

CHAPTER FIVE



A few months before my assailant's trial, I went to Grenoble to look over legal documents and discuss the case with my lawyer. I also met with the *avocat général*, who had possession of the dossier for the case and, with some reluctance, agreed to show it to me. It included depositions, police records, medical reports, psychiatric evaluations, and photos of my bruised, swollen face and battered body, of my assailant's scratched face, which I'd remembered so well, and of his muddied clothes, which I'd never really noticed. There were also photographs of the disturbed underbrush by the roadside, my belt found in the woods, and footprints in the mud at the bottom of the ravine where I had been left for dead. After our discussion of how the case would most likely proceed, as I was about to leave his office, the *avocat général* stunned me with these parting words of advice: "When the trial is over, you must forget that this ever happened."

I protested that forgetting such a traumatic event is not an easy thing for a victim to do. He then looked at me sternly and said, "But, *Madame*, you must make an effort." As if this had been simply an isolated event, of concern only to me. Perhaps *he* could have forgotten, but given the stories of rape I'd grown up with and the ones I'd heard and read about again and again in adulthood, one might say I remembered the rape even before it happened, as a kind of postmemory, to adapt Marianne Hirsch's term, informing the way I lived in my body and moved about in the world.[2] There would be no forgetting it now.

When I wasn't being exhorted to forget the assault, I was often told *how* to remember it. My own lawyer, meeting with me toward the end of my hospitalization in Grenoble, attempted to turn it into an individual, impersonal, as well as apolitical trauma with this unsolicited advice: "Don't think of your assailant as a human being. Think of him as a wild animal, a beast, a lion." I thought of him as a Frenchman, like my lawyer, but I said nothing and he continued: "Every morning when you waken, think of the new day as a gift." (He stopped short of saying "and rejoice and be glad in it," but it was clear that I was supposed to focus, henceforth, on my good fortune.) "Remember," he said, "you're not supposed to be alive."

Such attempts to obliterate (or to appropriate) my memories of the assault, however well-intentioned, collided with my own efforts to come up with a narrative of the trauma. I argued in chapter 2 that understanding trauma, including that of rape, requires one to take survivors' first-person narratives seriously as an essential epistemological tool. In this chapter I discuss the challenges of constructing a first-person rape narrative out of traumatic memories, and I explore some of the moral and political hazards involved in the use—and in the neglect—of such narratives.

Girls in our society are raised with so many cautionary tales about rape that, even if we are not assaulted in childhood, we enter womanhood freighted with postmemories of sexual violence. The postmemory of rape not only haunts the present, however, as do the postmemories of children of Holocaust survivors, but also reaches into the future in the form of fear, a kind of prememory of what, at times, seems almost inevitable: one's own future experience of being raped. Postmemories (of other women's rapes) are transmuted into prememories (of one's own future rape) through early and ongoing socialization of girls and women, and both inflect the actual experiences and memories of rape survivors.

Postmemories of rape are not primarily inherited from one's parents, but, rather, absorbed from the culture. Sometimes, the memory of particular cultural representations of events, as in films or computer imagery, stands in for, and seems more vivid than, the events themselves, as when Hillary Rodham Clinton "said the stories [of ethnic Albanians fleeing Kosovo] echoed images of the Nazi era, as depicted by films like 'Schindler's List' or 'Sophie's Choice.'"[3] Such culturally encoded memories (of sexual violence in film, on TV, in video and computer games, etc.) could play a large role in what I am here labeling the "postmemory" of rape.

Talk of "prememory" of rape is sure to be controversial: the idea is as baffling as that of backwards causation—or

anticipation of the past. Memory follows time's arrow into the past, whereas anticipation, in the form of fear or desire, points to the future. So how could one possibly remember the future? One way of trying to make sense of this paradox is to note that fear is a future-directed state and that it is primarily fear that is instilled by postmemory of rape. The backward-looking postmemory of rape thus, at every moment, turns into the forward-looking prememory of a feared future that someday *will have been*—a temporal correlate to the spatial paradox of the Möbius strip, in which what are apparently two surfaces fuse, at every point, into one.[4]

Although I had been primed, since childhood, for the experience of rape, when I was grabbed from behind and thrown to the ground I initially had no idea what was happening. As I've mentioned earlier, I first experienced the assault as a highly unrealistic nightmare from which I tried to wake up. Then I realized that it was a rape-in-progress and I attempted to enact a range of rape-avoidance scripts I'd read about. After the first murder attempt, I experienced the assault as "torture-resulting-in-murder" and, unconsciously recalling Holocaust testimonies, I heard my assailant speaking in what I later described as a "gruff, Gestapo-like voice." Since I was not familiar with a literature of generic attempted-murder-victim narratives, I framed my experience in terms of a genre with which I *was* familiar.[5]

As long as I could make enough sense of the event to find something to say, I felt I had a chance of surviving. There was even a moment of relieved recognition when my assailant began sexually assaulting me. "OK, I see, this makes (some) sense." It suddenly became oddly familiar. "I've been through this before," I thought, although I hadn't. "Just follow his orders. Give him what he wants and he'll leave me alone." (This strategy didn't work, however, nor did that of fighting back, which was my body's idea.) Even later, when I thought he was going to kill me to prevent me from talking about the rape, I managed to think of things to say, such as the story that I'd been hit by a car and the line that "my friends will come looking for me, and it will be worse for you if they find me dead." But when, after being beaten and choked into unconsciousness several times, I realized that what he wanted was my death, when I pleaded with him not to kill me and he kept repeating "*il le faut*"—"I have to," "It must be done"—there was no more script for me to follow. I had to fight like prey pursued by a stronger predator—outrun him or outwit him, using animal instincts, not reason. After his last strangulation attempt, I played possum and he walked away. (When I could no longer hear his receding footsteps, I climbed up the ravine, hid in the underbrush by the side of the road, and, when a tractor [finally] approached, I stood directly in front of it so that the driver would have to stop for me whether he wanted to give me a ride or not.) As much as I later disagreed with my lawyer's characterization of my assailant as "a wild beast," that is how my body had categorized and responded to my attacker when there was no hope for human communication.

Although I experienced and remembered my assault under a wide variety of descriptions, it was, perhaps because of the cultural context, easiest for me to categorize the assault as a gender-motivated bias crime. Not only did the assault resonate with my postmemory of rape, confirming that, yes, women are all vulnerable to sexual violence, but the immediate aftermath heightened my sense of helplessness as a woman. I was, after climbing out of the ravine, surrounded mainly by men—the farmer driving the tractor, his neighbors, the doctor, the police officer, the ambulance driver, and the rescue personnel. They were all kind and helpful. (I recall especially the gentleness—tenderness, almost—of the young man who held the oxygen mask to my face in the ambulance all the way to the hospital.) At the hospital, more men waited to assist me—doctors, the police, the gendarmes, a prosecutor, a judge, more doctors. I was impressed by the concern, the competence, the solicitousness, of (almost all) the men in charge. But they were men—and they were in charge.[6]

I felt like a pawn—a helpless, passive victim—caught up in a ghastly game in which some men ran around trying to

kill women and others went around trying to save them—rescuing them in tractors and ambulances, pushing them on gurneys, giving them oxygen and injections and pills and examinations, taking depositions, doing detective work, making composite portraits, showing mug shots, tracking down assailants, and writing up news reports. I did see some women: a young mother, at the farmhouse I was taken to, who held me close and tried to comfort me, and, at the hospital, several nurses and a psychiatrist. The nurses treated me tenderly, like a daughter, referring to me as the "*jeune fille*" who'd been attacked. One of them told my husband she thought I was in my early twenties.[7] (I was thirty-five.) I used to think of myself as younger than my chronological age, but, suddenly, having been so close to death, I felt elderly, at the end of my natural life-span. (In my mental snapshot album, I see a series of photos of a vibrant young girl, followed by a group of shots of a careworn old woman, punctuated, in the middle, by a grotesque Cindy Sherman-like photograph of my bruised, swollen face, encrusted with blood and dirt and leaves, looking like that of a corpse.)

Although I experienced the murder attempt as a sexual violation, I was initially reluctant to tell people (other than medical and legal personnel) that I had been raped. Using the word "rape" would have conventionalized what happened to me, denying the particularity of what I had experienced and invoking in others whatever rape scenario they had already constructed. When Tom, who had called my parents to tell them of the assault, was asked by my father if I had been raped, he said "no," largely to protect them. But he had also been taken aback by the question. What difference did *that* make, he thought, since it was not yet clear that I would even survive? My father's question was understandable though—motivated by a need to know *why* I had been attacked.

I later asked Tom not to tell family and friends that I was raped. I still wonder why I wanted the sexual aspect of the assault—so salient to me—kept secret. I was motivated, in part, by shame, I suppose, and I wanted to avoid a too-easy stereotyping of myself-as-victim. I did not want academic work (that I had already done) on pornography and violence against women to be dismissed as the ravings of an "hysterical rape victim." Also, I felt I had very little control over the meaning of the term "rape." People would think they knew what had happened if they labeled the assault that way—their postmemories or the available cultural tropes would fill in the description—but they wouldn't. I later identified myself publicly as a rape survivor, having decided that it was ethically and politically imperative (for me) to do so. But my initial wariness about the use of the term was understandable and, at times, reinforced by others' responses—especially by the sexist characterization of the rape by some in the criminal justice system. Before my assailant's trial, I heard my lawyer conferring with another lawyer on the question of victim's compensation from the state.[8] He said, without irony, that a certain amount was typically awarded for "*un viol gentil*" ("a gentle rape") and a somewhat larger amount (which they would request on my behalf) for "*un viol méchant*" ("a nasty rape").[9]

Not surprisingly, I felt I was taken more seriously as a victim of a near-fatal murder attempt. But that description of the assault provided others with no explanation of what happened, no motivation on the part of my assailant. Later, when people asked me *why* this man tried to kill me, I revealed that the attack began as a sexual assault, and most people were satisfied with this *as an explanation.* It made some kind of sense to them. But it made no sense to me. Although the most succinct and accurate description of what occurred now seems to me to be "attempted sexual murder,"[10] it still makes little sense to me, even though I am now more aware (than I was before the assault) of the genre (of crime, of pornography, of literature, of art) of sexual murder.

I had been aware of the genre of "snuff films" and violently misogynistic cartoons, such as the one that appeared in the May 1983 issue of *Penthouse* depicting a man penetrating a woman from behind and holding a pistol to the

back of her head. The caption reads: "Oh, you don't have to worry about getting pregnant. I've taken all of the precautions."[11] And I had gathered the genre went back at least as far as the middle ages, since I'd learned, as a teenager, such gruesome folk songs (allegedly of medieval origin) as "Pretty Polly." ("I courted Pretty Polly the live-long night [repeat], then left her next morning before it was light" [left her in a shallow grave, that is].)[12] Somehow, it didn't bother me to sing that or other songs of sexual violence (typically sung in the voice of the perpetrator) until I was assaulted. A while afterwards, a friend who was playing folk music with me started to sing "Tom Dooley." ("Met her on the mountain, 'twas there I took her life, met her on the mountain, stabbed her with my knife.") I found I could not sing along. Later I had to drop out of an aerobics class I was taking (to help me regain my strength) when the young female instructor persisted in playing a song I remembered well from my adolescence, with the refrain:

> You better run for your life if you can, little girl,
> Hide your head in the sand, little girl,
> Catch you with another man, that's the end, uh-little girl.

The verses included such lines as "I'd rather see you dead, little girl, than to see you with another man."[13] The cognitive and emotional dissonance of watching a gym full of college-age girls bounce up and down to those lyrics was too much for me to bear.

I know I've become more sensitive to this genre, most broadly described as "sexual murder as entertainment," but sometimes I think it has also become more ubiquitous, more mainstream. In a broadcast the day after the Columbine High School massacre, Howard Stern joked about sexual murder, saying, "There were some really good looking girls running out with their hands over their heads. Did those kids [the suspects] try to have sex with any of the good looking girls? They didn't even do that? At least if you're going to kill yourself and kill all the kids, why wouldn't you have some sex?"[14]

Enough people must find these kinds of comments funny enough to keep Howard Stern on the air. Certainly, many others are revolted by such "humor," but probably most people don't find their brains disordered by such jokes, as I do. After hearing about many women who were killed during sexual assaults, and after getting to know a number of women who survived sexual murder attempts, I can't hear such things without thinking of particular victims, such as the woman who called me several years ago just before she went into the hospital to have a piece of plastic put into her head so that her brain could be protected where part of her skull had been sliced off by her machete-wielding assailant. Just minutes after I'd gotten off the phone with her that morning, I came across a book review in the Sunday *New York Times*. The author of the book was quoted in an interview as saying that the Marquis de Sade "writes about the instinct that makes us watch live footage of a man kill his wife on television, and derive some pleasure from it."[15] (Instinct *in us?* Who does he mean by "us"? Those who enjoy "high culture," who are above chuckling over the likes of Howard Stern?)

Since sexual violence has been considered, in so many different contexts, to be trivial or titillating, it's no wonder that many feminist theorists and legal reformers in the 1970s and 1980s made such an effort to reconceptualize rape as *violence*, not *sex*.[16] The "is rape violence or is it sex?" debate among feminists has always seemed pointless to me, however, and I think that, finally, the rape as sex versus rape as violence dichotomy is increasingly viewed as untenable. Rape is sexual violence. By this I don't mean that it is necessarily arousing (even to the perpetrator) and I don't mean that it is experienced *as sex* by the victim, but it is violence committed (typically) on the basis of sex (or because of the sex of the victim). It is different from other forms of violence in that respect.

Even now, I'm not sure just what led to my publicly calling myself a "rape survivor." It was at least partly motivated by my recognition, during my participation in the Philadelphia rape survivors' support group, of my comparative privilege and credibility. I realized that I had all the advantages, from a public relations point of view, that a rape survivor could have: I'm a white, well-educated, married, middle-aged, financially secure professional, who was wearing baggy jeans and a sweatshirt when attacked in a safe place in broad daylight. I was badly beaten. My assailant was apprehended and had confessed to the crime. It seemed inexcusably selfish to worry about *my* credibility when I compared myself to, say, a young black woman or a heroin addict or a prostitute in my support group. We were all brutally raped. We all thought we were going to die. Their stories were just as credible as mine. But, through no merit of my own, I was in a far better position (than most of the women in the group) to tell my story. Perhaps my telling it—if I could only tell it in the right way—would make it easier, someday, for others to tell theirs.

But, as I mentioned in chapter 2, constructing rape narratives in the first person is fraught with hazards—hazards that are risks of all first-person narratives of group-based trauma. Those of us writing (and using in our scholarship) first-person narratives of group-based traumas have to be careful not to speak only for ourselves, while avoiding speaking, without adequate knowledge or authorization, for others. We also need to question common assumptions about identity and acknowledge our multiple, shifting, intersecting identities. At different times and for different purposes, I have identified myself as a crime (attempted murder) victim, a rape survivor, a hate crime survivor, a person with a disability (PTSD and some other, stress-triggered neurological malfunctions), among other categories. The groups with which I identify expand (from rape survivors to all trauma survivors), contract (victims of attempted sexual murder), expand in other ways (hate crime survivors), contract (rape survivors), and so on, seemingly endlessly. After a period of focusing on trauma in general, I am now focusing, more narrowly, as I did initially, on the sexual aspects of my assault. Yet, at times, I seem to have more in common with some male victims of racist, or of homophobic, violence than I have with some women who have been raped. So much for identity politics. But for me to remember—and to narrate—my assault, it has to be remembered under *some* description or other, and not under all possible ones at once.

I've also found that people from a wide range of different groups identify with me, on reading what I've written about my assault. I've heard not only from rape survivors, but also from men and women who survived other sorts of crimes or debilitating diseases or accidents, from parents whose children have died, and, just recently, from a convicted murderer serving life in prison who (in an eight-page single-spaced letter) argued that he, like me, suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, which supposedly explains why he killed a man without ever having intended to. All of these people found themselves sufficiently *like me*, in their traumatization, to say that my narrative had somehow illuminated their experiences.

If we are socially constructed, as I believe we are, in large part through our group-based narratives,[17] the self is not a single, unified, coherent entity. Its structure is more chaotic, with harmonious and contradictory aspects, like the particles of an atom, attracting and repelling each other, hanging together in a whirling, ever-changing dance that any attempt at observation—or narration—alters.

A further hazard of narrating trauma, is that of perpetuating one's self-definition as victim and others' stereotypes of one's group as weak and helpless.[18] Another way of expressing this hazard, with reference to rape narratives, is that there is a risk of instilling needlessly stifling postmemories in those who hear or read such narratives. Several years ago, numerous self-described feminists lamented the proliferation of rape narratives on the grounds that discussions of violence against women led to exaggerated fear and passivity

on the part of women. I reacted to these writings, first, with disbelief, then with anger. Just when rape survivors were finding their voices, telling their stories (at last), people (feminists!) were telling them to shut up. I'm now more aware of the risk they warned of. I don't want to inflict any unnecessary burdens on women, and I don't want to contribute to the constriction of women's erotic desires or fantasies.

Rape affects the victim's views about sex, about herself as a sexual being, about men in general, about some men in particular. And an encounter with sexual murder (even if merely attempted) can completely (if only temporarily) shatter any assumptions a victim may have had about the connection between sex and love. If even *some* men have sex with women as a prelude to killing them, what does this say about sex? about men? about murder? To say I was put off by sex for a while would be a huge understatement. And my attitude didn't strike me as irrational. I was surprised more women didn't have it by virtue of merely having heard about sexual murder. Imagine, I thought, that I'd learned that some tennis players, after a game, kill their opponents—that something *about the game* seems to precipitate murder in some (not always predictable) circumstances. Why *should* I ever be inclined to play tennis again? Not only would the pleasure of playing not be worth the risk, but it is not clear what pleasure would be left in the game.

The memory of rape can thus make pleasurable erotic anticipation impossible: the past reaches into the present and throttles desire before it can become directed toward the future. I mourned my loss of sexual desire for years before it gradually started to return, as my fear diminished enough to make some psychic space for it. By the time I started speaking out about my rape, I considered telling my story to be a moral imperative (for me, not for every victim); but I also realized there were moral risks in speaking out. For example, why would I want to subject other women to anything like this loss of desire by contributing to their postmemory of rape with a gory trauma narrative of my own? (One might classify the genre of rape memoirs as *anti*-erotica.)

I'm torn between the moral imperative to testify about rape "so it never happens again" (although I know full well it is, at every moment, happening again) and the desire *not* to participate in the instilling of potentially destructive pre-memories. I want to help change the prevailing cultural tropes about sexual violence so that girls don't have to grow up in unduly constricted imaginary and real worlds.

Emmanuel Levinas asks, after discussing the vertigo felt by those who experienced the Holocaust, "Should we insist on bringing into this vertigo a portion of humanity whose memory is not sick from its own memories?" (1996, 120). He answers this question in the affirmative, and I have to agree with him, especially since one must educate future generations about the Holocaust if one is to have a chance of preventing it from happening again. But I remain unsettled by Kaja Silverman's (1996, 189) observation that "If to remember is to provide the disembodied 'wound' with a psychic residence, then to remember other people's memories is to be wounded by their wounds."

Still, I believe there is an imperative to tell my narrative of rape. In not telling one's narrative, one risks acting out the trauma—and causing others to act it out via their post-memories. Telling the narrative is an essential component of working through the trauma. It's not a question, then, of whether to tell, but whom, how, when, where, and—we must be especially aware of this—why. Countering the *avocat général*'s injunction to forget is the political necessity to bear witness to the injustice of sexual violence.

Rape has, all too often and for all too long, been considered a private, personal matter, and thus not worthy of public, political concern.[19] War, on the other hand, has been viewed as a paradigmatic public, political event. The historian Pamela Ballinger, for example, asserts that "war veterans and survivors of the Holocaust and the A-bomb" are distinguished from "survivors of incest and other abuse" by the fact that "[i]n the case of abuse victims, no overarching historical 'event' (particularly that of state-sponsored violence . . .) exists within which individual memories may participate or contest. Rather, the event of abuse took place

privately. Its recollection, however, is facilitated by a broad social environment obsessed with memory and in which groups may jockey for benefits through appeal to collective histories."[20] The moral relevance of such spatiotemporal considerations is never made clear, however. What Ballinger considers "private," that is, sexual, abuse, as opposed to collective violence, can be viewed instead as gender-motivated violence against women, which is perpetrated against women collectively, albeit not all at once and in the same place. The fact that rape occurs all the time, in places all over the world, may render it less noticeable as a collective trauma, but does not make it an exclusively "individual" trauma.

The one exception to the commonly held view of rape as a private, individual matter, has been rape in war. Kuwaiti women being raped by Iraqi soldiers in Kuwait City in 1990 was considered by some (Kuwaitis, pro–Gulf War U.S. lawmakers and citizens) to be a politically very weighty event, and one requiring an international military intervention. (It was *one* factor that was cited, anyway.) That many more women were raped, during that time period, in the United States was not viewed as a politically significant event, but, rather, as simply part of life. The fact that the U.S. rapes occurred (had occurred and would continue to occur) with such frequency and in "our" neighborhoods obscured their political import, making them seem natural, inevitable, and, morally, not so bad.

> When evil-doing comes like falling rain, nobody calls out "stop!"
> When crimes begin to pile up they become invisible. When sufferings become unendurable the cries are no longer heard. The cries, too, fall like rain in summer.
> —Bertolt Brecht[21]

And so we must come forward and report that evil has been done us. Doing so does not turn us—or others—into victims. It may be that the most debilitating postmemories are those instilled by silence.[22] It is only by remembering and narrating the past—telling our stories and listening to others'—that we can participate in an ongoing, active construction of a narrative of liberation, not one that confines us to a limiting past, but one that forms a background from which a freely imagined—and desired—future can emerge.

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Notes

Preface

1. *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 2nd ed., Stuart Berg Flexner, Editor in Chief; Lenore Crary Hawk, Managing Editor (New York: Random House, 1987), 36.

2. Ursula K. LeGuin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (New York: Grove, 1989), 7.

ONE Surviving Sexual Violence

1. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Crime Reports for the United States*, 1989, 6.

2. Robin Warshaw notes that "[g]overnment estimates find that anywhere from three to ten rapes are committed for every one rape reported. And while rapes by strangers are still underreported, rapes by acquaintances are virtually nonreported. Yet, based on intake observations made by staff at various rape counseling centers (where

victims come for treatment, but do not have to file police reports), 70–80 percent of all rape crimes are acquaintance rapes" (Warshaw 1988, 12).

3. National Coalition against Domestic Violence, fact sheet, in "Report on Proposed Legislation S.15: The Violence against Women Act," 9. On file with the Senate Judiciary Committee.

4. Another, much more perceptive, article is Lois Pineau's "Date Rape: A Feminist Analysis" (Pineau 1989). In addition, an excellent book on the causes of male violence was written by a scholar trained as a philosopher, Myriam Miedzian (Miedzian 1991). Philosophical discussions of the problem of evil, even recent ones such as that in Nozick (1989), don't mention the massive problem of sexual violence. Even Nell Noddings' book, *Women and Evil*, which is an "attempt to describe evil from the perspective of women's experience" (Noddings 1989), mentions rape only twice, briefly, and in neither instance from the victim's point of view.

5. See especially Patricia Williams' discussion of the Ujaama House incident in *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Williams 1991, 110–116), Mari Matsuda, "Public Response to Racist Speech: Considering the Victim's Story" (Matsuda 1989), and Charles Lawrence, "If He Hollers, Let Him Go: Regulating Racist Speech on Campus" (Lawrence 1990).

6. As the authors of *The Female Fear* note: "The requirement of proof of the victim's nonconsent is unique to the crime of forcible rape. A robbery victim, for example, is usually not considered as having 'consented' to the crime if he or she hands money over to an assailant [especially if there was use of force or threat of force]" (Gordon and Riger 1991, 59).

7. Robert Lowell, *Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 82.

8. Quoted in the *New York Times*, September 13, 1991, A18. Although Judge Thomas made this statement during his confirmation hearings, Justice Thomas's actions while on the Supreme Court have belied his professed empathy with criminal defendants.

9. Barnes (1984, 2181–2182). I thank John Cooper for drawing my attention to this aspect of Aristotle's theory of the emotions.

10. For a clinical description of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), see *DSM IV* (1994). Excellent discussions of the recovery process undergone by rape survivors can be found in Bard and Sangrey (1986), Benedict (1985), Herman (1992), and Janoff-Bulman (1992). I have also found it very therapeutic to read first-person accounts by rape survivors such as Susan Estrich (Estrich 1987) and Nancy Ziegenmeyer (Ziegenmeyer 1992).

11. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1987) 247. *DSM IV* no longer refers to the precipitating event in this way. Instead, it refers to "an extreme traumatic stressor" (*DSM IV* 1994, 424).

12. I was particularly interested in that section of the act which classified gender-motivated assaults as bias crimes. (This section of the act was, unfortunately, struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in the spring of 2000.) From the victim's perspective this reconceptualization is important. What was most difficult for me to recover from was the knowledge that some man wanted to kill me simply because I am a woman. This aspect of the harm inflicted in hate crimes (or bias crimes) is similar to the harm caused by hate speech. One cannot make a sharp distinction between physical and psychological harm in the case of PTSD sufferers. Most of the symptoms are physiological. I find it odd that in philosophy of law, so many theorists are devoted to a kind of Cartesian dualism that most philosophers of mind rejected long ago. (See Brison 1998.)

13. *New York Times*, April 19, 1992, 36.

14. She characterized a certain theory of equality in this way during the discussion after a Gauss seminar she gave at Princeton University, April 9, 1992.

15. For an illuminating discussion of some of the ways in which we need to treat people differently in order to achieve genuine equality, see Minow (1990).

16. As recently as 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a state law prohibiting the licensing of any woman as a bartender (unless she was the wife or daughter of the bar owner where she was applying to work). *Goesaert v. Cleary*, 335 U.S. 464 (1948).

17. *New York Times*, June 19, 1992, 1, A13.

TWO On the Personal as Philosophical

1. Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 160.

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1966), 13. Orig. pub. 1886. In invoking Nietzsche's view of the autobiographical aspect of philosophy, I do not intend to be taken as endorsing his other philosophical positions.

esteem, both before and after hearing the results of the lottery. Those with bad draft rankings showed lowered self-esteem, while those with good ones showed enhanced self-esteem. This study is discussed in ibid., 140. Of course, depression can also lower self-esteem, and the subjects with bad luck were probably instantly depressed by the news.

18. These observations led me to speculate (in chapter 1) that experiencing anger toward one's attacker is so difficult because it requires imagining oneself in proximity to him, a prospect that is too terrifying if one is still feeling powerless with respect to him.

19. Dale T. Miller and Carol A. Porter (1983, 150) suggest that this splitting of the self may be one way of coping.

20. Patricia A. Resick notes that "two studies have found that rape victims who appraised the situation as 'safe' prior to the assault had greater fear and depressive reactions than women who perceived themselves to be in a dangerous situation prior to the assault (Frank & Stewart, 1984; Scheppele & Bart, 1983)." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (June 1993) 239. If there was nothing victims could have done to prevent the attack, such as avoiding certain dangerous settings or situations, there is nothing they could do to prevent a similar attack in the future. (The complete references to the articles cited by Resick are E. Frank and B. D. Stewart, "Depressive Symptoms in Rape Victims: A Revisit," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 1 [1984]: 77–85; K. L. Scheppele and P. B. Bart, "Through Women's Eyes: Defining Danger in the Wake of Sexual Assault," *Journal of Social Issues* 39 [1983]: 63–81.)

21. See Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *SE*, vol. 18, 31–33, for a psychoanalytic account of this phenomenon.

22. See Bart and O'Brien (1984, 83–101).

23. One group of researchers who studied women students who took a self-defense class "saw them discover that feeling angry was an alternative to feeling fearful or helpless. Learning to become angry with someone else rather than feeling frightened or helpless may enable the students to assume responsibility for the solution without blaming themselves for the problem." Kidder et al. (1983, 167).

24. As C. H. Sparks and Bat-Ami Bar On have argued, self-defense tactics are "stop gap measures which fail to link an attack against one victim with attacks on others." And, as they point out, "[k]nowledge that one can fight if attacked is also a very different kind of security from enjoying a certainty that one will not be attacked at all." C. H. Sparks and B. A. Bar On, "A Social Change Approach to the Prevention of Sexual Violence against Women," Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies, *Work in Progress*, series no. 83–08 (Wellesley, Mass.: Wellesley College, Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies, 1985), 3.

25. Adrienne Rich, "Letters to a Young Poet," in *Midnight Salvage: Poems 1995–1998* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 25.

26. *New York Times*, October 26, 1999, F1.

27. This may be a version of what Jon Elster describes as "adaptive preference formation" in Jon Elser, *Sour Grapes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

FIVE The Politics of Forgetting

1. Bertolt Brecht, *Poems 1913–1956*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (New York: Methuen, 1976), 247.

2. Marianne Hirsch (1997) and "Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy," in Bal et al. (1999; 3–23). Hirsch uses the term "postmemory" to describe the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, "experiences that they 'remember' only as the stories and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right." "Projected Memory," 8.

3. www.CNN.com, May 14, 1999.

4. Pierre Nora describes *les lieux de mémoire* as "enveloped in a Möbius strip of the collective and the individual." Nora (1989, 19). I adapt Nora's metaphor here to suggest that women's postmemories of rape are, paradoxically, enveloped in a Möbius strip merging past and future. This is not the only paradoxical aspect of the postmemory of rape. Somehow, women's sense of the naturalness, ubiquitousness, almost inevitability, of rape is combined with the contradictory attitude of "it could never happen to me."

5. I am not advocating this appropriation of others' trauma narratives and I am aware of the risk of misappropriation, especially of the Holocaust archetype. (For an insightful discussion of the misappropriation of Holocaust narratives, see James E. Young [1988 esp. 83–133].) But it is inevitable that events are experienced and later narrated through available archetypes. These, then, must be subjected to critical analysis.

6. At some point after getting a letter from Tom thanking him for his expert assistance, the chief of police who handled the case replied that he had done nothing particularly praiseworthy, that he was simply acting out of his *honneur d'homme.*

7. There is something infantilizing about being a victim of violence, and young women more neatly fit the stereotype of a rape victim. The newspaper report of my assailant's trial described me as a "young tourist" and Tom, who also testified at the trial, as "an eminent professor at one of the most prestigious universities in the U.S.," even though we were both, by that time, in our late thirties and, I hope I'll be forgiven for saying so, equally uneminent. Perhaps the newspaper emphasized Tom's status to show just whose interests were at stake in this trial, to highlight the class difference between the victim (the wife of an eminent professor) and the defendant (a poor farmer). This kind of class difference makes for a more "newsworthy" rape. See Helen Benedict (1992).

8. In a civil suit, I was awarded a small amount of money to cover some unreimbursed medical bills, legal expenses, and lost income.

9. The terms "*gentil*" and "*méchant*" could also be translated "nice" and "naughty," but I think the principle of charity in translation dictates my choice of English adjectives.

10. But, in a way, no description can completely do justice to the experience—or to its memory. As Charlotte Delbo writes, in the voice of Mado, of telling a narrative about surviving the Holocaust: "The very fact we're here to speak denies what we have to say" (1995, 257). This is not just because those narrating trauma are trying to get their listeners to believe the incredible, but also because, as Delbo writes, "None of us was meant to return" (114).

11. Described by Myrna Kostash in "Second Thoughts," in Varda Burstyn, ed., *Women Against Censorship* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985), 38.

12. Verses include:

1. Oh Willy, Oh Willy, I fear for your way(s?) [2x]
   I fear you will lead my poor body astray.
2. Oh Polly, pretty Polly, you guessed about right [2x]
   I dug on your grave the best part of last night.
3. I stabbed her to the heart and her heart's blood did flow [2x]
   And into her grave Pretty Polly did go.
4. I throwed a little dirt o'er her and started for home [2x]
   Leaving nothing else behind but the wild birds to moan.

13. "Run For Your Life" (Lennon/McCartney) on "Rubber Soul." First issued December 3, 1965—Parlophone PMC 1267 (mono)—Parlophone PCS 3075 (stereo).

14. Broadcast on April 21, 1999. Reported in the *Rocky Mountain News* on April 24, 1999.

15. Sunday *New York Times* Book Review, August 15, 1993.

16. Susan Brownmiller (1975) was one of the best-known proponents of this view.

17. To the extent that we say anything about ourselves, we are using language to categorize ourselves as members of groups. If there are such things as "bare particulars" (particular entities without properties), we cannot speak of them.

18. See Brown (1995, 52–76).

19. For an excellent defense of the opposing view—that rape is a form of collective violence against women—see Claudia Card (1991).

20. Pamela Ballinger, "The Culture of Survivors: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Memory," *History and Memory* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 121–122.

21. Bertolt Brecht, *Poems: 1913–1956*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (New York: Methuen, 1976), 247.

22. For accounts of the harmful effects of "untold stories" on children of survivors of the Holocaust, see Fresco (1984) and Bar-On (1995).

SIX Retellings

1. Samuel Beckett, *Stories and Texts for Nothing* (New York: Grove, 1967), 85, 77.

2. Aristotle, "Poetics" in Aristotle (1984, 2321).

3. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Afterthoughts on Narrative," in *On Narrative*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 228. Since I think narratives can be told to oneself, intrapsychically, I would not, however, stress, as Smith does, that a narrative must be told to "*someone else.*"

4. See, for example, the definitions of "surd" in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

5. Caruth (1995, 1996) and van der Hart and van der Kolk in Caruth (1996) take the involuntariness of traumatic memories to be evidence for their "literality," but it is not clear why. Perhaps it is because, on their account, trauma is not consciously experienced. This view, combined with the (I think, implausible) assumption that only what is conscious is worked over by the mind, could lead to the (I think, false) conclusion that traumatic memories are objective, timeless, and accurate recordings of the traumatic event itself.

6. See Ziegenmeyer (1992), Scherer (1992), Raine (1998), and Francisco (1999). That all of these rape memoirs were written by