



This drawing by Art Spiegelman first appeared in *Tikkun* magazine, accompanying the article "Saying Goodbye to *Maus*."

Introduction

The Demands of Holocaust Representation

As a constellation, theoretical thought circles the concept it would like to unseal, hoping that it may fly open like the lock of a well-guarded safe-deposit box: in response, not to a single key or a single number, but to a combination of numbers.

— THEODOR ADORNO

An illustration by Art Spiegelman poses the question at the heart of this book — how to comprehend the Holocaust and its relationship to contemporary culture. Spiegelman is the author of the best-selling comic-book memoir *Maus*. Using a provocative pictorial vocabulary in which Jews are represented as mice, Germans as cats, and so on, *Maus* tells the story both of Spiegelman's father, Vladek, a Holocaust survivor, and of the artist's relationship to his father's story. In a contribution to the magazine *Tikkun* titled "Saying Goodbye to *Maus*," in which he comments on the success of his memoir, Spiegelman draws his characteristic "Maus" self-portrait standing in front of a smiling Mickey Mouse background and gazing mournfully at a "real" mouse (or is it a rat?) that he cups in his hands.

In this drawing, the events of the Holocaust seem at first absent — there are no Nazi cats or Jewish survivors, no swastikas, and none of the barbed wire and guard tower imagery that powerfully evokes Auschwitz in the *Maus* volumes. But perhaps the very absence of the events signals their overwhelming impact. Through indirect means, Spiegelman evokes the Holocaust as a radical problem for understanding. One quickly notices that the image condenses three levels of representation. In the foreground, the mouse is depicted according to realistic drawing codes. The self-portrait, which occupies the middle of the pictorial field, is done

in Spiegelman's signature "Maus" stylization. The Mickey Mouse backdrop simulates a mass-cultural icon and corporate logo. What does this pastiche of styles have to do with the Holocaust? This image provides an allegory of the contradictory position of the post-Holocaust artist — an artist who produces formally experimental works about genocide for the smiling, two-dimensional face of the entertainment industry, but everywhere confronts the detritus of the real. It could be argued that such post-Holocaust self-consciousness may tell us something about the dilemmas of the postwar world, but tells us nothing about the Nazi genocide itself. Just this argument was made by a historian during a summer seminar I attended of Holocaust scholars. During a discussion of Spiegelman's book, this historian claimed that he "wouldn't touch *Maus* with a ten-foot pole" because it provides no historical evidence. For a variety of reasons, I find this point of view misguided. Besides the fact that *Maus* represents a version of oral history, comparable to various recent Holocaust documentation projects, Spiegelman's drawings clearly seek to provoke everyone interested in the Holocaust to reflect on how we approach the events of the genocide and how we represent them to ourselves and to others. Among the tasks of this book is to argue for the absolutely central and unavoidable need for reflection on the means and modes of representation in all scholarly and lay approaches to the Holocaust.

The Holocaust, in turn, focuses our attention on, and provides new avenues of access to, disparate aspects of twentieth-century culture and central questions of contemporary cultural theory. Providing both a focused account of the psychic, intellectual, and cultural aftermath of the Holocaust and a broad theoretical intervention into post-World War II thought, this book works on multiple levels. Although the implications of the Holocaust have not been fully confronted in the mainstream of humanities research in the last half century, insights from that research can lead to productive new ways of thinking about the fundamental problems raised by the Nazi genocide. At the same time, the analysis of literary, philosophical, and artistic responses to the Holocaust sheds new light on many familiar debates of the recent "theory wars" about the status of postmodernism and the political implications of poststructuralist theories. Furthermore, close study of this particular historical catastrophe helps us reflect on the insistent presence

of related phenomena in our own culture: exploring the recent fascination with the Holocaust means exploring a more general contemporary fascination with trauma, catastrophe, the fragility of memory, and the persistence of ethnic identity. In opening a dialogue between scholars of the Holocaust and cultural theorists I seek to challenge the assumptions of both groups. On the one hand, cultural theorists will find that my insistence on the real of historical catastrophe interrupts the now commonplace insistence on the omnipresence of discourse and the disinterest in questions of reference. On the other hand, I neither retreat to a pretheoretical understanding of the relationship between language and the world nor condone a mystical approach to the uniqueness of the Nazi genocide. Hence, many Holocaust scholars — like the historian in the anecdote about *Maus* — will find themselves confronted with questions of epistemology and cultural critique that they would rather avoid.

The Nazi genocide aimed at a thoroughgoing destruction of both the physical and cultural presence of Jews in Europe — it was, in other words, an "interdisciplinary" project.¹ The near success of the Nazis' murderous program, commonly known in English-speaking countries since the 1960s as the Holocaust, poses problems both familiar and peculiar to attempts at understanding. As such, the Holocaust is best approached through interdisciplinary means. And yet even interdisciplinary approaches to the Holocaust are riven by a series of seemingly irresolvable contradictions: between the event's "uniqueness" and its "typicality," its "extremity" and its "banality," its "incomprehensibility" and its susceptibility to "normal" understanding.² Instead of choosing a side, I seek in this book to preserve the tensions between these conflicting understandings of the significance of the Shoah in order to develop a new way forward in thinking about the relationship of culture and barbarism. It is precisely the simultaneity of mutually exclusive claims made on understanding that constitutes the importance of the Nazi genocide for considerations of the history, culture, and politics of modern societies.³

Within Holocaust studies broadly defined, two approaches to the question of genocide have dominated, which I will call realist and antirealist. By realist I mean both an epistemological claim that the Holocaust is knowable and a representational claim that this knowledge can be translated into a familiar mimetic

universe. The realist approach has characterized the dominant scholarly methodology, that of historians and others who assert the necessity of considering the Holocaust according to "scientific" procedures and inscribing the events within continuous historical narratives. By antirealist I mean both a claim that the Holocaust is not knowable or would be knowable only under radically new regimes of knowledge and that it cannot be captured in traditional representational schemata. The antirealist approach has flourished in more popular discourses, in some survivor testimony and pronouncements, and in many literary, aesthetic, and philosophical considerations of the "uniqueness" of the Shoah. This tendency removes the Holocaust from standard historical, cultural, or autobiographical narratives and situates it as a sublime, unapproachable object beyond discourse and knowledge. In addition to constituting an implicit theory of epistemology and representation, each of these approaches also implies a particular conception of the relationship between the everyday and the extreme, with the realists tending to collapse the two poles or, more often, to situate them on a continuum and the antirealists installing an unbridgeable rupture between the ordinary and the extraordinary.

Emblematic of what I am calling here the realist tendency would be Hannah Arendt's notion of the "banality of evil" — which sought to capture the essence of Nazi genocide in the ordinary figure of the bureaucrat — and her suggestion that "evil is never 'radical,' that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension."⁴ Extremity here is not something that breaks with the ordinary dimensions of the modern world but exists on a continuum with it. As scholars committed to empirical historical and social scientific methodologies, both Christopher Browning, with his notion of "ordinary men," and Daniel Goldhagen, with his provocative indictment of "ordinary Germans," answer to Michael Marrus's plea for a "normalization" of historical scholarship in the treatment of the Holocaust. Even in Goldhagen's case, seemingly radical evil is situated within an explainable tradition and everyday life-world.⁵ Similarly, Zygmunt Bauman's thesis on the "modernity" of the genocide, which is framed as an indictment of the blind spots of a hegemonic sociology, ultimately argues that genocide is indeed explainable with reference to the intersection of very ordinary sociological struc-

tures of the modern world. These positions are all realist in that in calling on concepts such as "banality," "ordinariness," "detached, professional" science, and "modernity," they also suggest that the phenomena they describe (whose horror is in no way minimized by them) may be apprehended and comprehended according to already established techniques of representation and analysis.

Proponents of the antirealist tendency are probably more well known among nonspecialists of the Holocaust and, to a certain extent, shape the dominant popular understanding of the events through their access to the resources of the public sphere. They include such significant figures as Elie Wiesel, who has assiduously defended the uniqueness of the destruction of European Jewry and claimed that "Auschwitz cannot be explained nor can it be visualized. . . . [T]he Holocaust transcends history"; Claude Lanzmann, who asserts that his film *Shoah* forgoes any attempt to represent the Holocaust and declares any attempt to understand the events "obscene"; Arthur Cohen, who gives a theological cast to the discourse with his concept of the "tremendum," a "holocaustal caesura" that renders "[t]hinking and the death camps . . . incommensurable"; and Jean-François Lyotard, who replaces realism with notions of sublimity and the incommensurability of the "differend."⁶ This discourse of "transcendence," "obscurity," "tremendum," and irresolvable "differend" detaches the extreme from the everyday and seeks to disable established modes of representation and understanding.

There are, then, two dramatically different interdisciplinary approaches within Holocaust studies. While all fields of knowledge surely encompass a range of assumptions and arguments, there is something particularly striking about a situation in which two almost entirely incommensurable visions can coexist. Part of the explanation for this fissure lies in the particular "multidisciplinary" structure of Holocaust studies. Multidisciplinarity, as I use it, supposes an institutional umbrella structure that unites scholars from different disciplines, but under which those scholars continue to work according to the procedures and values of their particular fields. Thus, in Holocaust studies, researchers work in history, literature, sociology, psychology, and theology, among other fields. They may read each other's work and sometimes cite it in their own. However, the work that each produces

remains for the most part squarely within the disciplinary boundaries of the traditional "home" discipline. Within the dominant realms of Holocaust studies, there have been few attempts to grasp the Holocaust as an event that fundamentally challenges traditional disciplinary divisions and knowledge. While multidisciplinary Holocaust studies has produced vast amounts of essential knowledge about the events and their effects, the lack of a transdisciplinary space of dialogue has contributed to the strange double vision with which the Nazi genocide is today viewed: trapped between Jewish particularity and universalism; between "normal" and "extraordinary" understandings of methodology and representation; and between emphasizing the extreme and everyday elements of the events. Although not aligned uniquely with any one discipline, each side of the realist/antirealist divide tends to fall into a broad coalition: historians and social scientists representing the realist side, while the more speculative and theoretical practitioners of philosophy, religion, literary theory, and some versions of psychoanalysis line up on the other.⁷ Perhaps the frequently intoned "impossibility" of comprehending the Holocaust arises in part from the preservation of traditional disciplinary boundaries and structures of knowledge. Questioning those structures will not produce some mythical "full" understanding, but it may open up alternative avenues for exploring the intersection of the psychic and the social, the discursive and the material, and the extreme and the everyday.

The coexistence of such contrasting approaches testifies to an instructive problem of interdisciplinary methodology, but it also indicates something about the nature of the events at issue. As I argue in the two central chapters of this book on Holocaust testimonies, the split between the ordinary and the extraordinary found in scholarship reflects essential characteristics of the Nazi genocide itself and corresponds particularly to the structure of what has been called "the concentrationary universe" of the death camps. I would term *traumatic* the peculiar combination of ordinary and extreme elements that seems to characterize the Nazi genocide in these accounts. When used judiciously trauma is a category that can help illuminate the complexity of both events and methodology. While the traumatic combination of the extreme and the everyday blocks traditional claims to synthetic knowledge, attentiveness to its structure can also lead to new forms of knowl-

edge beyond the realist and antirealist positions and outside of traditional disciplines.⁸

Although seemingly distant from scholarly dispute, Spiegelman's drawing focuses our attention on a set of overlapping and conflicting demands that apply not only to Holocaust art, but to all attempts to confront, understand, and represent the events of the Nazi genocide. The mouse in the artist's hands suggests that some confrontation with the reality of the events is unavoidable no matter how far removed one might seem to be from the past. Meanwhile the idiosyncrasy of the Maus figure highlights the difficult search for a visual, narrative form adequate to that reality, and the Disney logo comically calls for acknowledgment of the "economics" or worldly dimension of Holocaust representation. When it comes to understanding an extreme historical event, the dilemmas of artists, depicted so succinctly here by Spiegelman, are not fundamentally different from those of historians, literary critics, or the interested public. In confronting such a history, we all share the need to find an adequate form for narrating and understanding an extraordinary series of events. Furthermore, in an era of evident fascination with trauma, we need to be aware of how such stories and images circulate in the media, in educational institutions, and in popular culture.

In order to provide an overarching framework for thinking through the perplexities of understanding and representing the Holocaust, I have identified three fundamental demands that confronting the Holocaust makes on attempts at comprehension and representation: a demand for documentation, a demand for reflection on the formal limits of representation, and a demand for the risky public circulation of discourses on the events. These demands do not have a mystical or transcendental source but are of a social nature—they arise from efforts of victims, bystanders, and those born after the Holocaust to engage with the legacy of specific historical events. Yet these demands on representation are relevant not only to the study of the Holocaust, but to all confrontations between culture and history. In order to move Holocaust studies into a broader theoretical conversation, I suggest a connection between those demands and the crucial socio-aesthetic categories of realism, modernism, and postmodernism—categories whose status has been so often contested in recent years in the context of interdisciplinary cultural studies.

This correlation between the demands and modalities of representation arises from extensive engagement with all kinds of Holocaust-related texts, including historical works, literary testimonies, philosophical speculations, films, novels, museums, and television broadcasts. I did not come to the texts with a preformed framework for investigation; the tripartite structure of this book emerged over the course of several years and many drafts. To be sure, in approaching such a diverse corpus of materials one risks incurring the wrath of a panoply of specialists justly eager to defend their disciplinary terrain. Yet by crossing boundaries usually left unquestioned fresh insights and new spaces of dialogue can emerge. Because of inclination, training, and a sense that something valuable is to be gained on all sides, I have sought to open a dialogue between Holocaust studies and cultural studies.

Situating debates about the Holocaust in relation to the terms of discussion in cultural studies allows for a productively mutual estrangement between two fields that have rarely been in contact. Drawing on the socio-aesthetic categories of realism, modernism, and postmodernism helps to pinpoint the significance of the Holocaust in terms of contemporary intellectual debates and practices. At the same time, confrontation with an extreme historical event also forces a reconsideration of the terms of cultural studies. In particular, I seek to supplement the fascination of the everyday in cultural studies with a reminder of the need to confront extremity, and I question the privileging of discourse and representation at the expense of the real. Tracking the theoretical effects of the Holocaust on contemporary thought has, for understandable reasons, not been the first priority of scholars of the genocide or of poststructuralist theorists. Both cultural theorists and Holocaust scholars may be surprised to find the Holocaust situated in the context of debates on theory and cultural studies. But this mutual resistance to thinking differently about history and theory indicates that scholars from both groups will benefit from the unexpected illumination provided by such an unfamiliar conjunction.

In this book, I single out in particular the persistence of the question of realism — starkly emblemized by Spiegelman's foregrounding of the "real" mouse — as one of the central problematics that the Holocaust forces back into view. Since the poststructuralist attack on mimesis in the work of Roland Barthes

and the *Tel Quel* group, realism has all but disappeared from theoretical discussion, and, in the 1980s and 1990s, it has been replaced by skirmishes over the distinction between modernism and postmodernism. But the need for a rethinking of realism is signaled by the emergence in the last decades of various new forms of testimonial and documentary art and cultural production. Within cultural studies, this need for further thinking about realism is indicated by the recent obsession with trauma, the body, and extreme historical events and by the impasses of the postmodernism debates. At the center of this book stands the concept of traumatic realism, a concept I derive from Holocaust testimonial writing, but that also has implications for postwar cultural theory.⁹ By focusing attention on the intersection of the everyday and the extreme in the experience and writing of Holocaust survivors, traumatic realism provides an aesthetic and cognitive solution to the conflicting demands inherent in representing and understanding genocide. Traumatic realism mediates between the realist and antirealist positions in Holocaust studies and marks the necessity of considering how the ordinary and extraordinary aspects of genocide intersect and coexist.

Reintroducing the problem of realism — for it is not an answer, but a question — has led me to the realization that the categories of realism, modernism, and postmodernism are best thought of not only as styles and periods, as the dominant paradigms would have it. Rather, realism, modernism, and postmodernism can also be understood as persistent responses to the demands of history. Like the demands themselves, these responses are also social; they provide frameworks for the representation and interpretation of history. In the representation of a historical event, in other words, a text's "realist" component seeks strategies for referring to and documenting the world; its "modernist" side questions its ability to document history transparently; and its "postmodern" moment responds to the economic and political conditions of its emergence and public circulation.

There can be no assumption, of course, of a direct access to history. The critique of representation, which has been a hallmark of postwar literary and cultural theory, has aroused an unavoidable suspicion about naive claims of realism. Such suspicion highlights, for example, the fact that the mouse in Spiegelman's drawing only seems "real" in relation to the modern and postmodern playful-

ness with which it is contrasted within the frame of the image. This overlapping of representational modes points to a second insight that emerges from my bringing together Holocaust studies and cultural studies: the importance of understanding realism, modernism, and postmodernism as relational terms that—at least in a contemporary context—constitute a complex system of understanding.¹⁰ Thinking in terms of relationality and overlap may seem to risk producing an ahistorical account of culture, but in fact it is precisely in the specific modes of interaction between realist, modernist, and postmodernist strategies that historical particularity can be grasped.

The tensions between mouse, Maus, and Mickey Mouse—that is, the relationships between documentation, self-reflexive aesthetic form, and public circulation, or between realism, modernism, and postmodernism—comprise what I call, following Walter Benjamin, a constellation. Benjamin's notion of the constellation—a sort of montage in which diverse elements are brought together through the act of writing—is meant to emphasize the importance of *representation* in the interpretation of history. In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin uses the concept of the constellation in a way that has direct bearing on this project: as the name for the in-between space that ties together the present and past.¹¹ Written on the eve of the "Final Solution" and Benjamin's ill-fated and fatal attempt to escape the grip of National Socialism, the "Theses" seek to expose and replace the concept of history and time underlying the ideology of progress, an ideology that had failed to predict or combat the forces of Nazism. Benjamin traces this failure to modernity's consciousness of time and argues that the culpable Enlightenment belief in the "irresistible" course of the "infinite perfectibility of mankind... cannot be sundered from the concept of [mankind's] progression through a homogenous, empty time" (*Illuminations*, 260–61). The harnessing together of different moments of time in a constellation challenges not just the "progressive" narrative form of modern history, but also its originating gesture. As Michel de Certeau has argued, "modern western history begins with the difference between the *present* and the *past*" (9). This "gesture of division" that historiography repeats everywhere is also the foundation of the concept of historical periods (10). Against the "discourse of separation" (Certeau) that lies behind the concept of "homogenous,

empty time," Benjamin proposes that history be viewed as "the object of a construction [*Gegenstand einer Konstruktion*] whose site is... time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]" (*Illuminations*, 261; translation modified). Through this act of construction, Benjamin's historian "grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one" (263) and is able "to blast open the continuum of history" (262). The present study is premised on the belief that the constellation of elements that makes up modern culture is profitably grasped through the exploration of its extreme moments, the Holocaust prime among them.¹²

The concept of the constellation filled with "the presence of the now," or *Jetztzeit*, also offers an alternative to the periodizing discourse of modern history and opens up the possibility of thinking through the overlapping of historical moments that so many works of Holocaust representation share with Spiegelman's *Maus*. Benjamin's theory of history as constellation also raises the stakes of scholarship because it makes historians and critics accountable for the present as well as the past. In a historical moment—our own—in which genocide seems less a unique event isolatable in the past than an omnipresent possibility, thinking through the constellations that have bound the postwar world to the Holocaust becomes an urgent ethical, political, and, indeed, intellectual task. But, as Spiegelman's drawing also suggests, the "weak Messianic power" posited by Benjamin seems less available after the catastrophe that he only proleptically glimpsed. The past certainly reverberates with the artist's present throughout *Maus* and forms visual constellations of disparate moments in time. Yet these constellations are representative more of history's tendency to weigh on the present than of the historian's revolutionary overcoming of "homogenous, empty time." In this post-Holocaust and post-Marxist period, Benjamin's messianic historian has become an encoder and decoder of constellations that bear witness to the traumatic legacies of modern historical extremity. For better or worse, the expectation of revolution has given way to the more modest, if still elusive, goal of working through—instead of repetitively acting out—the traumas of the past.¹³

With its emphasis on the necessary detour of knowledge through representation and the consequent embeddedness of facts in linguistic, political, and economic structures, cultural studies work inspired by Benjamin helps not only to draw attention to the con-

text in which scholars of the Holocaust write, but also to provide a more integrated approach to an event that was never easily delimitable in time and space.¹⁴ Such a methodology is crucial because, as much recent work has demonstrated, the Holocaust itself has persisted in very real ways beyond the Nazis' own demise, thus throwing into question the easy distinction between events and their aftermaths. This book is thus situated within an emerging interdisciplinary consensus about the importance of taking account of the psychic and social aftermath of genocide, as well as the problem of the transmission of knowledge, in considerations of the Holocaust's significance. While preserving the importance of the events themselves, the shift in focus from events to their transmission and aftermath unsettles the "pastness" of the past. Psychoanalytic research has demonstrated that for the surviving victims of the Nazis the Holocaust has proven to be a traumatic event — that is, according to recent clinical and theoretical perspectives, an event that was not fully experienced at the time of its occurrence and that thus repeatedly returns to haunt the psyches of its victims.¹⁵ Lawrence Langer, in his consideration of the oral testimonies of victims of the Shoah, has radically thrown into question all affirmative accounts of the survival and remembrance of trauma and replaced them with a typology of anguished, humiliated, and unheroic memories that keep the wound of genocide open.¹⁶ In his important study of the history of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Edward Linenthal has provided an analogous typology of forms of public, collective memory and has identified burdensome, treacherous, murderous, and hopeful memories. Others, including James Young and Tom Segev, have looked at the Holocaust's public persistence in postwar societies through a consideration of the memorial, legal, and political processes that not only keep the events present in collective memory, but testify to the active influence of those events in many spheres of contemporary culture.¹⁷

To this growing body of sophisticated interdisciplinary work in Holocaust studies, this book adds a systematic consideration of the constraints, demands, and possibilities of representations of the extreme — a consideration, that is, of some of the key constellations between the genocide and the postwar world, up to and including the present. Because of my conviction that the extreme is always intertwined with normality and the everyday, an argument I make in

the third chapter, these considerations on representation will also have implications for theories of realism, modernism, and postmodernism not directly concerned with the Holocaust or historical extremity. Reading culture through the dim light of the Holocaust provides a new perspective on the fundamental projects, problems, and subjects of realism, modernism, and postmodernism — all of which persist and overlap in a complex constellation. The realist aims at the mimesis of a certain spatial world, but in confronting the structural problem of the relationship between the extreme and the everyday finds herself caught in a traumatic temporality. The modernist, on the other hand, confronts a particular form of progressive time consciousness, but finds his attempt to establish a before and after frustrated as he is pulled back again and again toward the site of a genocidal crime. Finally, the postmodernist interrogates the reign of the pure image or simulacrum and attempts to negotiate between the demands of memory and the omnipresence of mediation and commodification. The constellation of the three categories corresponds to some of the emblematic figures of an era of extreme violence: the survivor, who attempts to document an undocumentable experience; the bystander, who feels impelled to bear an impossible witness to the extreme from a place of relative safety; and the latecomer or representative of the "postmemory" generation, who, like Spiegelman, inherits the detritus of the twentieth century.¹⁸

The tripartite field that is my subject is not presented as starkly in all of the texts I consider as it is Spiegelman's drawing, although it would be fair to say that some version of this constellation is at work in all Holocaust representations (if often in subtextual or even negative form). While it is important to keep this larger system in mind throughout the various chapters of this book, I have found it useful to address the realist, modernist, and postmodernist responses to the demands of history separately, as constellations in their own right. In three sections, each consisting of two chapters, I interrogate the demands that history makes on representation by way of constellations specific to the Nazi genocide. If these constellations lack the power "to blast open the continuum of history," they may at least provide starting points for a more concrete and complex account of what Maurice Blanchot calls "the writing of the disaster."¹⁹

Traumatic Realism opens on a philosophical note and consid-

ers the dominant modernist discourse in which thinking about the Holocaust as a problem of representation first emerged: Theodor Adorno's often cited and often misunderstood pronouncement that "[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric." The first part of the book, "Modernism 'After Auschwitz,'" thus explores the temporal dilemmas of writing in the wake of catastrophe through a close reading and historical contextualization of the very different oeuvres of Adorno and Blanchot, one of the many thinkers who has responded to Adorno. Through a reading of Holocaust memoirs and critical perspectives on them, the second part, "Realism in 'The Concentrationary Universe,'" considers the negotiation between the extreme and the everyday in which accounts of the concentration and extermination camps inevitably engage. In analyzing testimonials by Ruth Klüger and Charlotte Delbo, I develop the concept of traumatic realism, a form of documentation and historical cognition attuned to the demands of extremity. Finally, the chapters comprising the part titled "Post-modernism, or 'The Year of the Holocaust'" explore the dilemmas of the postmodern and highlight the difficult aesthetic, ethical, and political issues involved in the dissemination of knowledge about genocide through mass-cultural forms such as comic books, feature films, and museum exhibits. Works by Philip Roth, Art Spiegelman, Claude Lanzmann, and Steven Spielberg, as well as the exhibit of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, reach a much broader audience than any of the texts discussed in the first two parts and thus necessarily raise issues of publicity and the marketplace often overlooked in discussions of Holocaust representations.

The larger trajectory of the book might then profitably be seen as the tracing of a constellation of constellations — a diagnosis, that is, of the cultural scene "after the 'Final Solution.'" In choosing the latter phrase as the title of my conclusion (and in so doing risking the repetition of a Nazi euphemism), I would like to emphasize the paradoxical nature of our actuality — the sense that after the entry of genocide onto the world stage nothing is the same and yet that history nevertheless continues to follow a deadly course, if now with other victims and perpetrators and a whole globe of CNN-watching bystanders. This double consciousness of the simultaneous novelty and deadly sameness of the postwar world leads me to what I hope is a productively critical stance vis-à-vis

some of the defining concepts of recent cultural theory. The greater part of the postwar period has been characterized in intellectual life by a suspicion of questions of reference and a flight from the links between discourse and the materiality of history — procedures of avoidance that, as productive of insight as they have been, seem also to be symptomatic of submerged traumatic histories, of which the Holocaust is one. Such a post-Holocaust perspective on history and theory is certainly partial, but in its very partiality it provides a focus through which the resources of contemporary culture can be reassessed.