

WOMEN & CHILDREN

by

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(Under the Direction of ANDREW ZAWACKI)

ABSTRACT

Women & Children explores complications of postcolonial representation with particular regard to genre. This collection transcends historical and national perspectives to investigate underrepresented experiences and provides brief impressions of fictive women and children. *Women & Children* lies along the border of documentary poetics and flash lyric fiction, and builds atmospheric vignettes from historical source texts. The collection experiments with multilingualism to explore the relationship of language to subjectivity, culture, and the lyric. Through such linguistic and generic representation, *Women & Children* attempts to chart a poetics of account for lost history in counter to cultural hegemony.

INDEX WORDS: Prose Poetry, Feminist Studies, Gender and History, Phenomenology, Postcolonialism, Trauma Studies

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DEDICATION

To Petra Ejang

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CHAPTER 1

IN SEARCH OF A PHENOMENOLOGICAL HISTORY OF WOMEN & CHILDREN

1.

To attempt a reconciliation of the feminine past: an impossibility. Nevertheless, such attempts at reconciliation are necessary in order to confront the latent absence of the feminine throughout history, to make such silences manifest. To dis-cover gender is to un-cover trauma: a process of constellating the latent and the manifest. What form would such a process take? It would seem to eschew narrative hierarchies, would acknowledge simultaneity as its primary mode of orientation, in order to extend through setting while transcending the fixity of any one place, in order to re-constellate the silent other into fields of perception. It would be, in an embracement of feminine ambiguities, unfinished, open, fragmented, and thereby atemporal despite its search of historicity—a failure, on one hand, of the ability of language to capture historical experience, and, on the other, a delimited horizon of call-and-response.

2.

woman (n.) :

"adult female human," late Old English *wimman*, *wiman* (plural *wimmen*), literally "woman-man," alteration of *wifman* (plural *wifmen*) "woman, female servant" (8c.), a compound of *wif* "woman" (see *wife*) + *man* "human being" (in Old English used in reference to both sexes; see *man* (n.)). Compare Dutch *vrouwmens* "wife," literally "woman-man*."

*It is notable that it was thought necessary to join *wif*, a neuter noun, representing a female person, to *man*, a masc. noun representing either a male or female person, to form a word denoting a female person exclusively. [Century Dictionary]

child (n.) :

Old English *cild* "fetus, infant, unborn or newly born person," from Proto Germanic **kiltham* (source also of Gothic *kilþei* "womb," *inkilþo* "pregnant;" Danish *kuld* "children of the same marriage;" Old Swedish *kulder* "litter;" Old English *cildhama* "womb," lit. "child-home"). "Apparently originally always used in relation to the mother as the 'fruit of the womb'" [Buck].

country (n.) :

mid-13c., "district, native land," from Old French *contree*, from Vulgar Latin **(terra) contrata* "(land) lying opposite," or "(land) spread before one," from Latin *contra* "opposite, against" (see *contra-*).

To return to the origin stories of language, in which "woman" is defined as inseparable from the other, tied in her very definition to a network of mirroring. So too the child's origins lie in primary identification ("fruit of the womb") with the similarly bifurcated mother figure. Woman, child, country: each possessed by, and possessing, the gaze of the other, an expectation, a latent mirroring. I wonder whether such cleaving carries its own latent absence, whether these etymologies trace their absences forward through history, and, in so doing, call the present back.

Woman, child, country: they call back in silence: “primordial silence” (Merleau-Ponty), casting forth in silence the weight of their absences.

3.

“The outsider will say, ‘in fact, as a woman, I have no country.’” —Virginia Woolf

“This sequence is dedicated to those who lost a country, not by history or inheritance, but through a series of questions to which they could find no answer.” —Eavan Boland

The woman’s country: lost in latency, erased through history, addressed in fragments. The woman’s country: primordial, nescient, and above all stolen. When Woolf speaks to the absence of belonging rooted in female subjectivity, still subjectivity must inhabit a landscape. How to render that present absence? And what of the non-present absences? To trace a refraction back to its end: woman (n), an etymology through history, rooted in joining, cleaving, opposition.

4.

In Joseph Campbell’s comparative mythology *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the hero ventures beyond the realm of his known landscape into literal or metaphorical unfamiliar danger. In this new territory, the hero attains some seemingly impossible goal, reaches an epiphany, learns a valuable lesson. This attainment marks the midpoint of the hero-subject’s quest; only the return remains: the hero with his new understanding must bring closure to his journey by sharing that understanding with others. In Campbell’s formulation of the quest, the hero’s victory comes

via breach, through the hero's decision to depart—that is, to rend the fabric of daily life in order to discover.

If the hero's journey is one of ever-expanding concentric movement (the hero breaches the walls of his kingdom, shire, spacecraft), the heroine's journey could be said to be one of absorption: the heroine responds to a domestic rift by staying to reckon. The dragons, in other words, breathe fire into the home; the heroine need not depart to slay them. In the heroine's journey, the threshold is internal, familial, and one of recognition: there have always been dragons, and they may be found as near as one's kitchen.

5.1

There exists no feminine counterpart to *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. We could imagine a twinned inversion: one in which the breach comes not from the heroine's departure into an unknown world, but instead erupts from within the confines of the familiar. The heroine confronts the internal breach even while captive. And where does she take those lessons? With whom does she share them? And who will listen?

Rich:

She goes to poetry or fiction looking for her way of being in the world, since she too has been putting words and images together; she is looking eagerly for guides, maps, possibilities; and over and over in the 'words' masculine persuasive force' of literature she comes up against something that negates...: she meets the image of Woman in books written by men...so what does she do? (315)

Eurocentric accounts of history counterfeit the world, instruct through narrow impersonation. Power binds to power; together, they send their searchlights roving. The remaining majority of the world live under power's competing flashes. In this way colonialism traumatizes, by blinding the subject's experience of the original, by denying the original perception, by destroying the original, by all of the above. The crossed wires resultant of imperial rule highlight certain paradoxes: identity as erasure, war as a stateless experience, economy as the remainder of empire, and elemental mixed states which inform and influence local conditions.

I stepped out of a body of 20th century Anglophone literature and was frustrated by the absence of what I found there, taking solace in exceptions—Jean Rhys, Kate Chopin, Toni Morrison, Maxine Hong Kingston, Rita Dove, Nadine Gordimer, and the voices of other women integral to this meditation—that frustration compounded by the fact of exceptions. How would the constitutive impressions of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman* read? Where were the modern carapaces of the feminine bildungsroman (the actual diffuse exceptions nevertheless never building toward an historical body of *this is what modernity looks like*)? I wanted more literature that complicated and confronted those images of women that Rich alludes to.

And all around, in the postmodern landscape, new convulsions spring up, all leading toward a deep and troubling reinforcement of this intuitive and lived lack. And in this way these new convulsions are simply reiterations of the old and primordial attempts of power to disavow, excise, pervert, distance—that is, to silence—the specific and rooted phenomenology of the feminine.

5.2

21st century convulsions, local and extra-local, grounded in and out of place, factual and impressionistic:

As of November 2017, in statistics compiled by the United Nations, 50.3 percent of Syrian refugees are female, and 51.2 percent of Syrian refugees are children under the age of 17. As in: women and children make up 76.6 percent of Syrian refugees. As in: over 5,000 Syrian schools have been destroyed as of November 2017.

As in: “To bring them here under these circumstances is a suspension of intellect” (a retired neurosurgeon), and “The Statue of Liberty says bring us your tired and your weary. It didn’t say bring us your terrorists and let them come in here and bomb neighborhoods, cafes, and concert halls” (former state senator), and “I’m sending them out if I win” (2016 Presidential Candidate; N.B.: he won).

And won despite the claims of at least fifteen women that he had sexually assaulted them, such assaults including rape, groping of breasts and buttocks through force and coercion, voyeurism of unclothed beauty pageant minors, and lewd comments. And won despite audio/visual evidence of professed sexual assault. And won despite obvious pivots in an attempt to project his sexual violence onto others, re: “26,000 unreported sexual assaults [sic] in the military-only 238 convictions. What did these geniuses expect when they put men & women together?” and, in May 1989, taking out a full-page ad in the *New York Daily News* to comment on the wrongful conviction of the Central Park Five in the rape of a Manhattan jogger: “How can our great

society tolerate the continued brutalization of its citizens by crazed misfits?,” adding: “BRING BACK THE DEATH PENALTY.”

The rape culture that characterizes the United States and much of the world is nothing new; such patriarchal entitlement and claims to ownership over the female body are inscribed into the very origins of history. The ancient Greeks considered rape of women during times of war a legitimate and acceptable practice; rape as a normalized practice of warfare existed during the medieval Arab slave trade, during the reign of Genghis Khan, during the Qing dynasty’s 17th century invasion of Korea, in 17th century Dutch Formosa, during India’s 1857 War of Independence, in German South-West Africa, during World Wars I and II and beyond: in Nanking, Okinawa, Manchuria, Sicily, Belgium, the Netherlands, Kure, Oyle, Poland, Monte Cassino, Hyderabad, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Cypress, Peru, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Yugoslavia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Chechnya, Iran, Darfur, the DRC, Iraq, Libya, throughout the United States’ 1942-1946 Japanese internment, and throughout the 250 years of African American enslavement by the United States government. In a country whose history includes 50 years of rule under slave-owning presidents, the current iterations of racism and misogyny, linked by the common assumption of entitlement to ownership, are natural extensions of that country’s original fabric.

What is newly convulsive in this 21st century are the ways in which those original fabrics have reupholstered their landscapes. Paradox of the contemporary landscape: concomitant fetishism of others’ tragedy and refusal of others’ subjective experience. These impulses tend to effect a kind of defensive voyeurism, in which suffering is best tolerated so long as the focus remains

suffering: as abstraction, cliché, or parable. Such approaches to others' histories place literature in the unique position of translating subjectivity into uncanny resemblances.

Over the course of five years, as many as half a dozen young women have confided to me during office hours that they had been sexually assaulted. At the time of writing this, plans to dismantle Title IX policies and investigations are underway by the current administration. These young women, like so many before them, navigate their landscapes under competing flashes.

Competing flashes: a TV advert for tampons shows a young woman diving in front of a soccer net, successfully blocking the opposing team's kick. The message, in voice-over: outsmart Mother Nature. Competing flashes: the sprawling lawn of a college fraternity house, where music spills over a makeshift barrier, its plywood frame covered with a blackout tarp. Behind the tarp undergrads dance and drink, their animated voices mixing with song lyrics, in which a male voice croons "I hate these blurred lines / You know you want it." Competing flashes: in South Africa, students protest the Pretoria High School for Girls' racist injunction to straighten their hair or be barred from examinations. Competing flashes: in Maryland, a 14-year-old girl is raped in the bathroom of Rockville High School. Competing flashes: in Princes Town, Trinidad and Tobago, a 16-year-old goes missing; she's the third girl to go missing in a handful of weeks. Competing flashes: in Tokyo, police investigate the proliferation of the JK industry, short for *joshi kōsei*, or "high school girls," in which businesses lure underage girls into sex work by promising pay for "tour guides," "cosplay models," or "karaoke outings." An estimated 180 premises run JK services in the Tokyo metro area alone.

Erich Neumann:

An entire ideology of the patriarchy that fundamentally conceives of the Feminine as a 'negative Feminine' is collectively part and parcel of this defensive position in which the man resists the transformative character of the Feminine—that is, he defends against the necessity of his own transformation...Thus the patriarchal culture's separation from the Feminine and from the unconscious becomes one of the essential causes for the crisis of fear in which the patriarchal world now finds itself (262-5).

Negative: that is, absent, and, above all, vulnerable.

6.

Competing flashes: neuronal correlates to consciousness. "The unconscious is structured like a language" (Lacan). The unconscious: the subject's history; its grammar: reflexive. So too in the physical realm of consciousness, where the hall of history stretches on, and mirror neurons signal deep and Lilliputian within the cortex. What's known of them: mirror neurons fire a). when a subject acts and b). when a subject observes the same action performed by an(other).

And what of being acted upon? Do these neurons fire when a subject becomes an object? When an objectified subject witnesses the objectification of another?

7.

On screen, a six-foot-two man stalks a five-foot-five woman around a sizable stage. He's close on her heels. When she pauses, he pauses as well, and looms several feet behind, arms crossed, waiting for his turn to speak.

On stage, a woman in eveningwear attempts to answer, in thirty seconds, a question about how to prevent war. She holds a ray-gun smile and speaks around the topic. Will she be crowned Miss Universe?

On screen, Rosie the Riveter comes to life in a television advert for vacuums.

On stage, Savannah, GA, a woman named Molly walks through paces, her left foot twisting. In the catalogue white men have listed her as chattel no. 6. After several examinations, a man buys her for \$695.

On screen, the stalking man reappears. This time he's seated and fidgeting. He speaks into a mirror only he can see; the effect is splintering. He speaks in pronouns—I/they—never seeming to recognize the history of that pairing.

Anne Boyer:

But you can see some other things, like what they say is a stage is the actual heaving everything of the human everyone [...] You watch the form of men as they act with each other in ritualized oppression to create the illusion that the actors upon the stage are in fact the scene. They've been playing at the same struggle for a long time: to keep the struggle theatrical fixes power. But there is another, real struggle: it's not between actor and actor. It's between actors and the stage (51).

8.

History's hall lined with mirrors. To unlearn its refracted retelling. And in unlearning power's refraction, the return of Boland's "series of questions," and thus a second loss. Such a story

would be a serial one, analogous, seeking in failure the subject for expression rather than the metaphorical qualia of that expression.

The refractory nature of metaphor: powerful. Inherent risk. Able to assume, cleave, cleave to the original. As in: the orange sits heavy in the sky, latent. As in: Agent Orange. As in: Jaffa, the Orange's Clockwork. As in: time is a moving object, or: time is a substance.

Davidson:

And it is in the passage of speech from one interlocutor to another that we can discover what Levinas calls "the absolute meaning of metaphor." [...] A transcendent metaphor does not simply expand thought by leading it to think more; instead it brings about the possibility for thought to go beyond what it can think. By leading thought beyond itself, metaphor opens onto what is absolutely other (370)

The inherent risk of metaphor: configuration beyond recognition. Yet: could such unrecognizable configuration also recover a lost original? I have attempted to whittle possible experience into a series of analogies, to cast into a silent history a chain-linked series of juxtapositions, if only to demonstrate, rather than conclude, the aporetic nature of that silence.

Metaphor and analogy as mirror neurons: analogy extending indefinitely and serially toward identification; metaphor coopting each point along a tangent through symbol and sign. And this too is a failure of language: its inveterate cooptation of sign toward some understanding, as if to say: this is how life is, or is not.

Woolf:

Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being 'like this'. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives myriad impressions [...] from all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there [...] Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end (7).

What constitutes an ordinary day? To be vulnerable under searchlights is its own wound. I think of all the women and children who have walked dizzily through changing landscapes. I can't help asking myself: Who of the world or me is talking to the other? And question the recurrence as a phenomenology: is it pure ungrounded appearance or is there a structure that underlines it and what connection to the end and to the origin does it have?

In its noun form, *place* refers to the intransigent materiality of the speaker's world, a world shaped as much by historical and geographical rationalism as it is by the speaker's subjective interiority. As a verb, *place* suggests an exchange within fields of location, as well as an ability to give, to invest, to recognize—to commune with signified and signifier.

By using place as an aperture through which to project the internal "speech" act, lyric poems can constitute a kind of geo-emotional terrain, a dialogic exchange between the self and the natural world that reflects the distinct yet continuous boundaries among land and consciousness. The lyric *I* then, far from reconciling itself to the impotence of poetic solipsism, functions as a conduit for interpretation and understanding: the lyric is both I and eye as the materiality of place comes to be known as inseparable from the phenomenology of the being in position.

10.

Geoffrey Hartman:

The knowledge of trauma, or the knowledge which comes from that source, is composed of two contradictory elements. One is the traumatic event, registered rather than experienced. It seems to have bypassed perception and consciousness, and falls directly into the psyche. The other is a kind of memory of the event, in the form of a perpetual troping of it by the bypassed or severely split (dissociated) psyche. On the level of poetics, literal and figurative may correspond to these two types of cognition.

And of history's latent irrevocability? At every instance of attempting to confront history's latency one is faced with the impossibility of representation. The latent space of negative presence precludes representation; so then representation, echoic and imprecise, performs its failure of memory, accountability, understanding. If trauma is the limit of the human in the realm of experience, representation can only approach that limit asymptotically, indefinitely, and through fragmentation.

11.

We live, are living, have lived in a hallway of mirrors, the origin of which lies absent. Cathy Caruth: "What does it mean, precisely, for history to be the history of trauma?" To recover a fuller retelling: to point to what is not there. The inaccessible origin of history—history as middle, displaced continually onto itself. History as analogy: Power requires an opponent. This need for binary once established fashions itself as hallway. Reflected in its mirrors: power, and power's opponent, that is, any suggestion to the contrary. Power seeks to deny trauma. One of the ways in which it does this is by appropriating trauma's language. The virus assumes positions of suffering and martyrdom in order to deflect attention from actual injustice. It then denounces

the use of trauma vocabulary by others as unquestionably intolerable. These denouncements often take the form of labels, easy adjectives for quick characterization. Whether the characterization is sensitive, liberal, secular, foreign, emotional, intellectual, or simply confused, the objective of these labels is always the same: to pervert the context of the subject. If history is ruptured by its own irrecoverable absence, how then do we understand the language of history?

Mirror neurons fire: a). during the act; and b). in observation of another's *occupancy* of that act. It seems Plato knew this: when one self moves, another remembers. Conflicting elements; that is, posed oppositely. Mirroring?

A metaphor, to preoccupy the original: if the first neuronal signal sparks a responding one, what might be discovered about the primary identification of that signal? What is a signal-in-itself? What world does that first signal inhabit, and in what place, and in what time? Trauma is the limit of human life in the realm of experience.

12.

The feminine is absorptive, listening. The feminine is intuitive and discerning—at its truest, the feminine holds the unique and vast tapestry of loss and pain and change. For the feminine has been forced to change, and in consequence has grown adaptable. The feminine knows the depths, can hear the call of the deep and wait to dive in again, can tread.

Lorde:

But there are no new ideas waiting in the wings to save us as women, as human. There are only old and forgotten ones, new

combinations, extrapolations and recognitions from within ourselves—along with the renewed courage to try them out. [...] For within living structures defined by profit, by linear power, by institutional dehumanization, our feelings were not meant to survive. Kept around as unavoidable adjuncts or pleasant pastimes, feelings were expected to kneel to thought as women were expected to kneel to men. But women have survived (38-9).

The feminine is that which wants no reins or reign or leverage or dominion over others, which desires instead the sublimity of letting go, of trust. The feminine, in other words, has learned to face death.

13.

Phenomenology and psychoanalysis are not parallel; much better they are both aiming at the same latency. —Merleau-Ponty

It's inevitable that a project centered on the recuperation of feminine and child history is intrinsically concerned with trauma—psychic, collective, covert and overt, sexual, physical—and rather than employ the structures and language of psychoanalysis to investigate that trauma, it seems to me that the attempt to capture phenomenological impressions of time and place would better serve the ethics of this project. Psychoanalysis, after all, carries its own traumatic history of silence and silencing, most overtly in Freud's decision to reassert female hysteria as a wholly subjective and non-externalized phenomenon. In obscuring the sexual violence at the heart of female "neurosis," Freud joined psychoanalysis to the history of patriarchal silencing. Too, psychoanalysis risks cultural and subjective essentialism, and though its insights into the common patterns of human psychology are useful tools for excavation, excavation of a priori causes is not my aim here. Rather, I refer back to Woolf's meditation on modern fiction, and her

observation of the mind as recipient of “myriad impressions” as a corresponding framework to a phenomenological inquiry into trauma.

14.

Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others* begins with an examination of Virginia Woolf’s 1938 anti-war treatise, *Three Guineas*, in which Woolf constructs a hypothetical exchange between herself and an English male lawyer who asks: “how are we to prevent war?” As Sontag notes, Woolf upbraids the man for his presumption of inclusivity; yet Woolf the author simultaneously speaks for him. In short, Sontag claims, Woolf disappears into the presumed “we,” and responds that “No ‘we’ should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people’s pain” (Sontag 7).

Sontag’s claim against assumptive plurality sparks a constellation of analogous and competing approaches to witnessing the pain of others. As in: what of power’s splitting tactic, the divide-and-conquer aim of pitting against? The President: I/they, meant to absolve power of response, responsibility. Or of Audre Lorde’s observations in “Transformation of Silence”:

Where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives. That we not hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own (43)

In Regarding the Pain of Others, Sontag speaks not to the relationship of woman to woman, but of the perceiving subject to the photographed subject, and clearly these relationships differ with

regard to intentionality and a shared latency. Still, I worry about and struggle with the ethics of this project. At what point does representation intersect appropriation? When does appropriation become creation? Is representation itself inherently problematic? Does the subjective element of sensation transcend or bypass representation for something other—enactment, evocation, a calling out, a singing?

And what of the image? *Women & Children* is interrupted by a series of historical photographs, each image depicting the lives of women in motion. I have included them in this project in order to texturize, ground, and startle the hypnotic qualities of the impressionist fragment, but have come to no easy or clear conclusions about the implications of those images' inclusion. Does such inclusion risk conscripting the reader into voyeurism? Do the images work to materialize (falsely) the nonmaterial, or do they ground fictive subjectivities in documented history for the purpose of naturalizing subjective experience? If impressionism aims to capture the atmospheric intensity of a singular moment in time, do images rupture that intensity at the expense of fidelity to the subject? And what of the fictive subject? These are questions I still ask, and ask along the Sontag/Lorde continuum of looking versus sharing, of holding at a distance versus participatory examination.

15.

Lacoue-Labarthe's *Poetry as Experience* addresses the question of a lyric language that would not be the expression of subjectivity. Labarthe confronts the poetic as the movement at and beyond the border of generalizable experience, i.e., as an *experience*, a traversing of a dangerous field, in which language no longer dominates anything, but rather commemorates the voiding of

concepts and the collapse of the constitutive powers of the subject. For Lacoue-Labarthe, poetry after the Shoah, the poetry of bared singularity, is no longer a poetry that would correspond to the *concept* of the subject—or, for that matter, to the concept of poetry—but is rather the language of the *decept*. Only by being *disappointed* of the heroic language of idealistic poetry, and of the mytho-ontological tendencies of philosophy, can the lyric keep open the possibility of another history, another future.

16.

The whole thing—waterfront, war, city,
 sons, daughters, me—
 Must be re-imagined.
 Sun on the orange-red roof.

—Muriel Rukeyser, “Breaking Open”

17.

Women & Children proceeds as a series of contained vignettes—contained so as to mirror the captivity of those voices, serial as the enactment of continual trauma, vignettes like vines, gesturing beyond the walls of their respective gardens. Containers for subversion of female domesticity, entrapment, terrorization. The subjects are singular and plural both. The lyric fragment operates as an emblem of traditional poetic registers, even as anti-Romantic breakages gestures toward speech acts of resistance, including and most especially, silence.

In this work, form arises from content, and while sound often acts as a primary driver for the discrete fragment, theoretical concerns influence holistic linguistic patterns. *Women & Children*, incorporates Arabic, French, Italian, Mandarin, British and American regional speech, and other languages in order to tailor to, texturize, and recognize the context of the subject. The prose poem / lyric hybrid situates its speakers into precise, locatable contexts, and the vignette here frames gendered speech, formally and thematically, as inseparable from geographical, political, cultural, and historical systems of meaning. In response to the blurring demarcations of public and private life, I shape lyric utterances to honor the codes of the singular subject while calling into question, through omission, omission itself.

I have tried to enact this process rather than to describe it, to fall into a chronotope and to come out of it, thus culling and calling into question the methods by which we give voice to the subject's intimate phenomenology.

The serial linkage of subjectivities mirrors the apriority of traumatic experience: that is, despite the fixed container of the vignette, the gaps between these distinct units suggest absence as presence. The lacunae act as the stitching between episodes and fundamentally destabilize the reader's experience of temporal and spatial identity, thus enacting the very destabilization at the heart of the lyric subjects' experiences. Thus *Women & Children* might be understood by its *intrusion* of absence, a double wounding that mimics the Oedipal search for knowledge without prescience of the horizon to come. The compulsion to understand, to piece together disparate units into some transcendental whole therefore contains the unconscious desire to master the absent (traumatic) experience. How then might the open form "break the circuit" in order to

frame acts of consciousness significantly adequate to afford translation onto the reader's subjectivity?

18.

Fernandez:

Transcendental idealism would have us turn a blind eye to the profundity of psychopathology, infancy, and animality [...] if phenomenology itself can discover nature in the contingency and contamination of the transcendental, why would it not also define and delimit this nature that it has discovered? (297-8)

In his essay "Toward a Phenomenological Naturalism," Antonio Vincent Fernandez argues for a new understanding of the transcendental, one mediated and legitimized by the inclusion of natural, non-agented phenomena into the subjective horizon. That such contamination delimits rather than confines, he argues, corresponds to rather than negates Husserl's paradox of subjectivity. Fernandez's allusion to infancy as an a priori state of "contamination," that is, of naturalism, seems also to speak to the condition of history as marked by latency. If so, we might include the processes of discovery and recuperation as contaminants themselves, brought about through a series of analogous and peripatetic awareness into lost subjects.

Ultimately, *Women & Children* never coheres around a central point of refraction, never culminates in a totality of representation, and does not seek to. Though such a project could continue indefinitely, amassing detail and history and specificity, it would nonetheless never achieve totality, precisely because of its lost origins. In deciding what to include and what to leave out, I have proceeded according to available histories and extant documentation of those histories. Often, I have constellated singularities according to what I could not find; more often, I

relied on archival materials to trace subjectivities into their pasts. This decision has not been easy, and yet I have begun with the deliberate aim to counter-focalize the subjectivities of women and children onto the reader, who might then hold the weight of those subjects' absences, ask questions of those absences, and confront for themselves the need to witness, transmit, and uncover.

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