

Guilt rips

Coming
Up
Against
The
Wall

Dick Hebdige

As a Freudian, I believe what Freud said about biographies applies even more to autobiographies, namely that the person who undertakes such a task binds himself to lying, to concealment, to flummery.

Bruno Bettelheim, interview in *Guardian*
published after his death

Regression is not origin but origin is the ideology of regression.

Theodor Adorno, "Perennial Fashion-Jazz,"
in *Prisms*

From out of its cultural unconscious, where the apocalyptic structure of Old Testament journeys jostled with the redemptive allegories of Bunyan, English romanticism produced the archetype of the journey to image the escape from the overknown world back into wild unconsciousness and authenticity. Romantic travel was ecstatic – *ex-stasis* – "Roam-antic."

Peter D. Osborne, "Milton Fiedman's
Smile," in *New Formations*

here is a special
kind of regression
involved in ecstasy
and tourism.

Through organized trips, we go back into a universe made strange not least because everybody in it is suddenly, supposedly benign (hence the special tone of horror when tourists become terrorists' victims, when baggage handlers go on strike, when Romanians have bloody revolutions at Christmas – the first reports from Timosoara were coloured on British news by concern for a group of British schoolgirls on a skiing trip marooned in Bucharest).

Above all else the universe in tourism is a universe blessed – restored to the idealized affability of childhood.



The craze for "Acid House" music which precipitated the latest moral panic about the state of British youth – the focus of concern shifting from abuse of the drug metamphetamine (ecstasy) in 1987 to public health and safety in the Bright Bill currently before parliament – is motivated by the same regressive drives. Acid House ("Acieed") was the first British youth subculture to have its rhizomatic "roots" directly in mass tourism. It was brought back as a stylistic package by package holiday makers returning from Ibiza ("Isle of Love"), the latest product of that traffic between vacationing British youth and "Continental" beach culture that had brought matelot shirts and hipster slacks to English mods in the early 1960s. Acieed, though, has none of mod's fabled "English inhibition." It is instead the postmodern hyperrealization of the brochure promises of limitless mobility, casual beachwear, promiscuous fun: a whole life On The Beach. Acieed raises the adolescent ambition of "having a laugh" to the status of a moral imperative. Adorno would have gone to town on Acid House:

They call themselves jitter bugs, bugs which carry out reflex movements, performers of their own ecstasy...¹

Ecstasy users grin for hours, high on glucose-laden Lucozade and "balearic" rhythms which simulate the pulse of the mother's heartbeat. The Mr. Smiley mask that floated over the "Summer of Love" in 1987 amounted to an invitation issued to the international disco-dancing public to abandon itself to the beat, to regress to a pre-natal state: to plunge back into the pre-Symbolic. (Gregory Bateson, pursuing our cousinship with the aquatic mammals, once suggested in that other Acid Age, the 1960s, that what we recognize and warm to in the dolphin's smile is the human face stretched back, rubbed smooth by oceanic pressure exerted down the aeons.²)

It is no coincidence that the music – snatches of sound from all over the world which have been electronically "sampled": homogenized beneath the gentle amniotic despotism of the beat – is called ("Acid," "Deep") house, for ecstasy makes house into a (mobile) home and home is of course the first place and the safe place. It is the "firm position" (Agnes Heller). Home is "the territorial core and a fixed point of reference" (J. Douglas Porteous). It is "our corner of the world ... our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (Gaston Bachelard). Gathering in their thousands in remote suburban sites in fields and abandoned aircraft hangars on the edge of the orbital roads in response to obscure messages secreted in the music press, on pirate radio broadcasts, in record shops, the revellers form a persecuted but relaxed nucleus which constitutes itself, after its participants have been pursued up and down the motorways by jumpy cops, only to disperse at dawn like a virus attacked by antibodies. Acid is about the triumph of unconstrained mobility. It celebrates the absolute plasticity of filiation. Its lack of edge and corners is what constitutes its threat (for both po-

lice and style watchers who like to know who's where, where they've come from and why they're here not there) because in Acid as in Jericho the walls come tumbling down. It would not be stretching a point to say – *pace* Meaghan Morris – that Acid *subverts* the principle of what Raymond Williams calls "mobile privatization" and that it accomplishes this *subversion* in a truly late 20th-century fashion – one which Baudrillard would no doubt recognize – by inverting the terms, by mobilizing private citizens into a community where each finds safety in the temporary ("weak") formation of an assembled and prohibited mass. Acid House is the West's weak echo of what was being called at the end of last year in Leipzig, Prague, Berlin and Bucharest, "People Power." The game – to keep one step ahead of the cops – has a real stake: the right of individuals to assemble in a crowd. It's about reinventing a utopian public space at a moment when all virtues have been privatized. It is about finding safety in numbers.

Tourism too is about making the world into a place to feel at home in. That see-saw, *fort-da* rhythm where you lose your bearings in foreign cities only to find them again in the guidebook is supposed to be pleasurable: a lullaby on Broadway. In this infantile inversion of everyday order we fall up into the air like a baby heading skyward in an elasticated baby-bouncer – we relish what Barthes described as "the sensation of falling into an easy and opaque world (for the tourist everything is easy)." For Barthes there was a special dispensation in travelling to places where he didn't speak the language because language in those circumstances is utterly reference-free, stripped of all but its poetic functions. Presumably not being able to understand anything means that you don't have to feel responsible for anything either: "the voluptuous immersion in a language ... in which one can only perceive the

sounds ... is an enormously relaxing thing that eliminates any vulgarity, any stupidity, any aggression."³ Blissful *ex-stasis*. The cogency (and candour) of Barthes' remarks are in no way undermined (though his intended drift is nonetheless diverted) if we add that actually it doesn't quite work out like that. The "authentic" journey lurks inside the imaginary of tourism as the "voyage of self-discovery," along with the *derive* waiting to leap out and enclose it no less than the encounter – for which there can be no preparation – with otherness as Other, to turn it back into a guilt trip as the holiday-ordeal, to turn it inside out as the ironized *Bildungsroman*, the Package That Went Wrong. Guilt is the motor of regression: after the summers of love, tales of drug psychosis... London gangsters armed with shotguns and rottweiler dogs are reported to have moved in on big-profit Acid House parties which have become, in the words of one police chief, concerned at the flouting of safety regulations, "Hillsborough disasters waiting to happen." A rumour now circulates that ecstasy use can lead to Parkinson's disease.



The joyful carnival after the Ninth of November will not pass off without a hangover.
Jens Reich, founder of
Neues Forum⁴

The weight of history is heavier, and the scars more visible on the eastern side of the Wall ... entire neighbourhoods and many major buildings have been reconstructed to appear exactly as they did before the War. Post-war areas of the city strive to repudiate the past: the futuristic Alexanderplatz, the sterile apartments, and the mirrored Palast der Republik.... To cross [at Bahnhof Friedrichstrasse], you must take the S-Bahn through the intricate security precautions of the Wall: you will viscerally experience the post-war division of Europe.

Let's Go: 1990 Budget Traveller's Guide to Europe

On a freezing day in February 1983 when there was a Wall I took the S-Bahn from the Bahnhof Zoo to Friedrichstrasse in order to experience the postwar division of Europe viscerally. I went prepared: the day trip east had been written in advance by Deighton and Le Carre as surely as the nightlife scenes in Kreuzberg and the Kurdamn in West Berlin had been lit all week by Hannah Hoch and Isherwood (at least by *Cabaret*). So deeply established is this mythology of the city as a hell-hole that the residents live it out like New Yorkers producing a distinctive brand of "earthy" humour that travel writers describe as "coarse," "debunking," "cynical." If you don't speak the language however you tend to miss the joke...

"First we take Manhattan..."

...so I took the alternative Gothic route across the city moving a trifle mechanically in time to old Kraftwerk records, floundering from scene to scene rather like Paul Hackett, the protagonist in Scorsese's *After Hours*. The simile is obscure enough to need elucidating: *After Hours*, to quote the video blurb, was "without doubt the blackest comedy thriller of 1985. (You never realized your worst nightmares could be so funny.)" Hackett is a sexually retarded data processor who works in Manhattan and whose nocturnal ("after hours") ambition is to "meet a nice girl" – as he euphemistically puts it.

This quest, continually blocked and frustrated, triggers the regression to psychosis which constitutes the "plot" as Hackett moves through a single long dark night on the town. "Berlin" figures in the film as the name of the club where, in the penultimate scene, Hackett seeks refuge from a castrating vigilante mob led by a murderous female Mr. Softee ice cream vendor. ("I mean I just wanted to leave, you know, my apartment: meet a nice girl – and now I've gotta die for it!!!") As the night drags on from one disastrous encounter to the next, the entry price to "Club Berlin" escalates from a compulsory mohawk haircut inflicted on the "hero" by a gang of manic punks ("What the shorn hair [of the modern jazz musician] represents hardly needs elaboration..."⁵) to mummification at the hands of a predatory sculptor/sorceress who turns Paul into an *objet d'art*, crouching for his life encased from head to toe in plaster of Paris (she tapes up his mouth to complete the mummy-fied effect). ("The aim ... is the mechanical reproduction of a regressive moment, a castration symbolism. 'Give up your masculinity, let yourself be castrated.'"⁶) Throughout the film a host of golden succubi float after hours across the zoned expanse of NYC/"Berlin" in the form of a succession of interchangeable screwy blonde stereotypes.

"Then we take..."

Berlin is a city of apocalyptic energy. The best guides to theater, cinema, nightlife and the extremely active musical scene are the biweekly magazines *Tip* (DM 3.40) and the more 'alternative' *Zitty* (DM 2.80). Listings are usually comprehensible to non-German speakers ... *Berlin von hinten* (Berlin from the Rear) is the best guide to gay life.⁷

I had already had the encounter with the Nihilist-who-ate-glass-in-an-all-night-bar. ("Warum?" I'd asked – my first and last attempt at a conversation in German. "Warum nicht," he'd snapped back, spitting bits of wine glass in my face.)

Forty five years after the War, Berlin remains a battleground – if only in its western half...

I had already had the encounter with the beautiful-Hungarian-aristocrat-who-had-come-through-Checkpoint-Charlie-in-the-1960s-in-a-car-boot ("You like?" she'd asked glancing, irritated, at the grey meat dish she'd ordered for me when, fazed by the menu, the Kirchner reproductions, the clumsy failed attempt on my part to find the "right" romantic register, I'd declined to order for myself. "It comes from the" – here she'd paused and, drawing a long red nail across the delicate, pale flesh underneath her chin, made a sudden, rasping, guttural noise – "throat of the pig.")

"In bocca del lupo"

There is a notorious passage in Benjamin's *One Way Street* where the brutal, nihilistic "spirit" of Berlin is condensed into the image of a prostitute standing on a threshold. The redemption of the lost city of Benjamin's childhood turns out to depend – no less than in Grosz's etchings of skeletal street-walkers – on the evocation and consignment to the "void" of an edgy set of paranoid masculine projections:

...the places are countless ... where one stands on the edge of the void, and the whores in the doorways of tenement blocks and on the less sonorous asphalt of railway platforms are like the household goddesses of this cult of nothingness.⁸

For the young Benjamin this double aperture – a woman for sale in a doorway – opens up a beckoning “void.” The budding Cabbalist/Marxist-visionary/philanderer/*flaneur* is stopped in his tracks by this figure standing silhouetted on the threshold, a figure whom we’ve already encountered in the opening pages of *A Berlin Chronicle* as the “Ariadne” who leads the young Benjamin on an educative stroll across “the threshold of class” through the Hohenzollern “labyrinth” which at the turn of the century used to circle back from the Tiergartenstrasse. It is through losing himself on entry to this labyrinth (“to lose one’s way in the city, as one loses one’s way in the forest”) that his “impotence before the city” is eventually exchanged for knowledge: “Whole networks of streets were opened up under the auspices of prostitution...” The prostitute, token of a double degradation – the “fall” into commerce and the flesh – is also the empty medium, the “void” through and against which the writer learns the redemptive power of love:

It is likely that no
one ever masters
anything in which
he has not known impotence: and if you
agree, you will also see that this impotence
comes not at the beginning of or before the
struggle with the subject, but in the heart of
it.⁹

The young Benjamin is pulled back through time into the next, rescued in this dialectical movement from epiphany to loss and back again. And just as these two moments become synchronized by the rhythm of the steps the writer takes on the course of his journey, so are the two terms – loss and revelation – paired and rhymed: getting lost, in fact, is the master key to Benjamin’s romantic eschatology.

It is impossible to get lost in Berlin because
you can always find the Wall.
Taxi driver in Wim Wenders’s
Wings of Desire

Wim Wenders’s *Wings of Desire* is the animated version of *The Berlin Chronicles*, an homage to Benjamin which seeks to transpose his redemptive poetics via film to Berlin in the late 1980s. Much, of course, has changed: the war which took Benjamin’s life has also left devastated his city, now divided by the Wall which is at once the wound, the limit and the axis the film revolves around. Without “Berlin” as the paradigm of post-lapsarian/post-War-space-as-divided-space, *Wings of Desire* would never have gotten off the ground. The Wall here is more than a mere symbol of the universal functioning of difference. It runs like a scar across the body of the film as the trace of a particular historical catastrophe – the old man (“Homer”) who spends his days pouring over history books in the central library trying to bear witness for the times through which he’s lived is constantly drawn back to images of the War. The Wall becomes the cutting edge: the line alongside which the film’s multiple narratives run and towards which they are ultimately oriented, giving meaning and tentative coherence. The Wall is the limit against which desire is mounted and the obstacle in the face of which the will to



▲ still: courtesy Cinematheque Ontario

wholeness that motivates individual action in the film struggles and gets worn away and broken in moments of despair. Searching for the point from which to begin his story, “Homer” the old man of history wanders alongside the Wall searching for the Cafe Josti where he used to sit and watch the crowd only to wind up sitting worn out in an abandoned armchair in the wilderness/rubbish tip that was Pottsdammerplatz. In so far as it acts as the horizon towards and against which all the film’s human characters are in process of becoming, the Berlin Wall is figured here as Wall of Death.

The angels who have gathered in this split or wounded city are nesting in the library. They are text-bound, compassionate recorders of the human scene, incapable of any kind of interested agency within it. Their role is to float across the city’s western half as Berlin chroniclers/invisible *flaneurs* transcribing spatially and logically unrelated incidents, tuning in and out of the vast cacophony of silent monologues that attend the passage through time of the mass of individuals who live or visit there. The questions asked by a child in the film’s opening sequences are repeated at regular intervals:

Why am I me and not you? ... Why am I here
and not there? ... Where did time begin and
where does space end?...

The angels inhabit what is for the viewer a voluptuously freewheeling space drained of all passion and colour where these questions, muttered as it were under the breath of consciousness, can be heard but not directly understood because for the angels they have no existential reference. Instead they float outside the space where difference is supposed to make a difference, beyond the oppositions which make such questions meaningful (which is why, within the film’s self-consciously romantic logic, children can see them and adults can’t). The central narrative revolves around the willed descent of Daniel, one of the angels who is curious to learn what it is to

be divided and to live in time, to be sexed, embodied as a man and to fall in love, for instance, with a woman...with, to substantiate this instance, the high-flying trapeze artist named "Marion" who he's already "clocked" – to use a vulgar Cockney idiom (*clock* vb, to see, to take notice of, to face, to face up to) – working in a circus which is just about to fold because it's out of step with the times. (The naturalizing/universalizing function of this apparently arbitrary but normative "for instance" causes problems for some audiences: see below.) When Daniel falls, he lands of course in no-man's land in the rabbit-run between the eastern and western sectors.

Anyone whose goal is "something higher" must expect someday to suffer vertigo. What is vertigo? Fear of falling? Then why do we feel it even when the observation tower comes equipped with a sturdy handrail? No, vertigo is something other than the fear of falling. It is the voice of the emptiness below us which tempts and lures us, it is the desire to fall, against which, terrified, we defend ourselves.

Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

In the end, Daniel finds Marion again in the near-deserted bar of a nightclub (there's a black leather mass going on on the adjacent stage where a "dark wave" Australian rock band, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, is conjuring up the old Satanic version of "Berlin" which is about to be dismantled in the bar). In what the *City Limits* reviewer described as an "absurdly, irresistibly romantic ending," the two embrace and merge in a kiss. Through this closure the film symbolically reconsecrates heterosexual love as a Holy sacrament – as the "natural" metaphor for the promise of redemption-through-transcendence-of-difference. When I saw the film in a cinema in London I was moved almost (though the hissing of a group of women seated two rows in front rather screwed up the catharsis) to tears.

Where are the angelic men in heavy overcoats going to perch now that the Wall has come down?

Can we really stand the prospect of living without the Wall? It wasn't just a piece of masonry. It was part of a faith for the West as well as for the East with all kinds of ideological tents and bivouacs leaning on it.

Anthony Sampson, *The Observer*
(19 November 1989)

If I could mek the border
If I could step across
Please tek me to the border
I will not count the cost.
'Cos I'm leaving...

Gregory Isaacs, *The Border*

E A S T

The disappearance of the Wall was prefigured in February 1989 when 45 seconds of Austrian TV footage showing Hungarian soldiers tearing down barbed wire on the Austro-Hungarian border was relayed globally via Eurovision. In the summer tens of thousands of mainly young Czechs and East Germans were sucked through the hole made by this puncture in the seal protecting East and Central Europe from contact with the West. The idea of the hermetic seal between the two systems had been exposed as a politburo pipedream ever since Radio Free Europe began broadcasting. So common-

place was access to the West's version of the world via TV in East Berlin that the one corner of the city prevented by chance features of the local topography from receiving West German transmissions was known throughout the neighbourhood as the "Valley of the Unenlightened."

Walking through one street in a residential area in central Warsaw in summer 1988, I counted more than a dozen satellite dishes, their faces like a field of sunflowers craning up to catch the last rays of the sun. Even in Ceausescu's Romania, satellite dishes were in places unofficially tolerated. And this resignation in the face of invasion from the air sits oddly with what we know of censorship and regulative surveillance within the Comintern states before 1989. We could hazard a number of more or less plausible hypotheses as to why TV reception was overlooked in this way. The most likely is that satellite dishes were reserved for the CP elites. Alternatively the blind eye turned to foreign TV watching may have indicated an uneven, residual respect for the antique distinction between public and private space which has been eroded – thanks to TV, marketing, etc. – in the West. (This might also explain the unofficial toleration of *samizdat* reading groups in private flats even – for certain limited periods – in Czechoslovakia.) The most likely explanation is that in societies where "some people pretended to work and other people pretended to pay them," the cynicism had become so rife and had created such inertia that nobody "in surveillance" cared less what the silent masses did so long as they stayed silent.

Either way, Gorbachev's reforms cleared the air(waves) altogether. Just as the ancient frescoes in Fellini's *Roma*, preserved intact in a secret underground chamber, are uncovered by a drilling team in one moment only to be destroyed in the next by the influx of air, so the monumental fabric of "actually existing socialism" was simultaneously revealed and obliterated by the change in atmospheric pressure effected by glasnost. Whatever blooms there were hidden in amongst the weeds soon withered under the arc lights. The decision on the part of Moscow to broadcast throughout the Soviet bloc images of the Wall being breached in November amounted to an official endorsement of Gerasimov's "Sinatra Doctrine (you do it your way)."

Gerasimov's statement in itself marked a major shift in the Kremlin mode of address – combining Western PR values (outgunning Reagan in the speed/skill with which he drew on Americanized popular culture/populist discourse) with heavy

A poignant scene witnessed at the Wall: a young East German, given a banana by a well-wisher, had to be told to peel it first before eating it.

irony (what got ironized of course were postures of "heroic" Cold War resistance to "American cultural imperialism"). It may be that Vaclav Havel – who recently made a speech to an audience of US congressmen (including Dan Quayle) in which he suggested that 1989 had proved Marx wrong because the pattern of protest had shown conclusively that "Consciousness precedes being, not vice versa" – may one day have to learn Gerasimov's lesson.

MEETS

I have lived so long behind high walls that I am afraid to come out into the open.

East German man recovering from a breakdown triggered by last year's events, in a studio discussion in Dresden on East German TV

A brilliant invention. Two containers holding two chemical substances. Each in itself almost harmless. Only when the shell strikes do they react with one another and together turn into a deadly chemical weapon.

Jens Reich, "Germany – A Binary Poison"

I was touched by what they said. But I was a little afraid of them too. They seem so easily disappointed.

West German woman responding to the same Dresden studio discussion which was broadcast in the West

WEST

It would be mistaken to suppose that the catastrophic effects on social and political order, on economic and cultural life manifest within what used to be the "Eastern bloc" will be contained there. Both terms in the equation have been wiped out at a stroke and triumphalist celebrations of the victory of

Capitalism fail to conceal that while market forces have indeed emerged victorious, the specific congealment of forces, and interests drawn together under the name of the Western Alliance and established as a holding operation at the base of the Wall, is in terminal crisis. If crisis is too small a word to designate the implications for that configuration of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, try "catastrophe" ... So vast and irresistible were the forces released in the disintegration of the Soviet empire that to approach them in language meant undergoing a crash course in the new science. Comparisons with global warming, nuclear fission, with processes and principles defined in quantum theory and particle physics ("strange attractors," "butterfly effects," "implosion," "chaos theory" – comparisons explored years earlier in the laboratory of postmodern socio-fiction, in the hyperbolic commentary of people like Virilio and Baudrillard) began appearing in news-

paper editorials as the analogical support for a simple statement of the facts. The night of November 9th when the tidal wave of brushed denim broke across the Berlin Wall begged even these attempts at representing the scale and implications of the changes. The day after the world went flat the prose did too:

**"WHAT A NIGHT!"
"BRAVE NEW WORLD!"
"DAWN OF A NEW ERA!"**

The withdrawal of the "other term" in the bipolar super-power system that had held the West in place as a combination of alliances imagined "in the last instance" as a bounded spatial, socio-cultural, economic, ideological entity which knew itself by knowing what it wasn't, created such profound giddiness, disorientation, *ex-stasis* in the Western media that elation soon gave way to alarm, to vertigo.

Why am I me and not you? ... Why am I here and not there? ... Where did time begin and where does space end?...

When the old geo-political maps were ripped to pieces, the reversibility of binary terms like "left" and "right" was suddenly made public and British Tory party MPs began haranguing the BBC for referring to politburo hard-liners like Ligechev as "conservatives." Further offence was given when Channel 4 TV news described the opening in October 1989 of the first ever televised session of the House of Commons (months behind Moscow) as the "coming of televisual *glasnost* to Westminster." More disturbing still for many established Western politicians of all parties was the implication – there for all to see in the manifestoes of Civic Forum, Neues Forum (and, incidentally, in the statements issued by the students in Tianamen Square) that these people were serious when they used words like "diversity," "pluralism," "democracy" and "freedom," and that they actually intended to effect the radical dispersal of authority that a principled commitment to democracy as a real not simulated value logically entails. (The fate of Neues Forum, swept aside by the influx of hot air emanating from West German pollsters and politicians in the run-up to the 1990 election in the GDR, suggests however that they needn't worry too much.) Elsewhere a more openly warlike posture was adopted: throughout February and early March, Gartmore Unit Trust Euroventures were offering readers of the business sections of Britain's quality papers shares at the knock-down price of 25p (min. investment £1000 with a one percent discount during the three-week fixed-price offer period) under a map which looked like one of Hitler's wish-fulfilment scenarios drawn up on his last day in the Bunker. The map shows Central and Eastern Europe under attack from all sides by the combined forces of Allied and Axis Powers. Czechoslovakia is caught in a pincer movement as an arrow from the East marked Aika, Minolta, Sanyo, Samsung converges on another from the West marked Volkswagen, ICI, Siemens, British Aerospace, etc.

BERLIN [NEWS] CHRONICLE

In Berlin on the day after the Wall came down every major television company in the "Free World" was jostling for the prime spots in front of the Brandenburg Gate: the ideal location for straight-to-camera reports and live interviews thanks to the dramatic (and dramatically lit) architectural backdrop. Hastily erected wooden platforms sprung up like a forest of mushrooms overnight in the shadow of the Wall. Whereas when journalists covering Gorbachev's tour of Honneker's fiefdom on the 40th anniversary of the GDR's foundation in October had complained that it was impossible to get a phone out to the West, by the time of the East German elections in March they were running cables for faxes and satellite links from West Berlin right into the Palast der Republik.

Old East German maps of Berlin end at the wall as if the West did not exist. People today remember with astonishment that they often did not notice the buildings of West Berlin, visible though they always were beyond the Wall.

Guardian (15 March 1990)

Within days you could buy bits of the Wall in sealed plastic bags (prices determined by whether or not graffiti are regarded as "significant"). Within a month the cranes were moving in and sections of the wall were being shipped to New York galleries. By March entrepreneurs were climbing over the pits of Wall still left standing to spray facsimile "protest" messages on the untouched eastern side before chipping chunks off and selling them to tourists on the other side.

In Poland *Politika* reports that unwanted portraits of Karl Marx are being changed into St. Joseph, patron saint of workers. The background is merely repainted to depict a New Testament scene. Artists are enjoying a brisk trade in preparation for St. Joseph's Day on March 19. Meanwhile volumes by Marx, Engels and Lenin, dumped by libraries all over the country are being seized not for the contents but the bindings which tend to be in mint condition as the books have never been read. The bindings are removed to be recycled for prayer books and bibles.

The Sunday Correspondent
(February 1990)

German visitors were photographed in the first days returning home "exhausted but elated" bearing trophies – cosmetics, toiletries, pornography, fluffy toys – captured in exchange for the deutsch-mark voucher issued as a gesture of good will by the West German authorities at the crossing points. By the second week, West Berliners were reported to be violently pushing past the window-shopping East German crowds who were milling at every street corner patiently waiting for the light to change before crossing.

Waiting is a way of life in Romania. Expect long lines in which short tempers are often provoked to violence ... write out as many details of your request as you can or try to find a person in the line who speaks some English. If necessary allow the person behind you to go ahead while you collect your wits. Above all, do not relinquish your place in line.

Let's Go: 1990 Budget Traveller's Guide to Europe

One of the first announcements Helmut Kohl made in the immediate aftermath of the victory in the East German elections was the removal of refugee status, entitlements to jobs, housing and other welfare privileges for those still determined to settle in the GDR.

In Poland, inflation is running at 740%, the cost of registering a car has gone up tenfold ... Lech Walesa has received death threats after it was disclosed that the \$100 million modernisation plan for the Gdansk shipyards accepted from Barbara Piasecka, the Polish American heiress to the Johnson baby products fortune, will entail the sacking of 12,000 workers.

By early 1990 people were driving more carelessly in the GDR, so that traffic accidents were up as were the crime rates (a side-effect, in part, of the emptying of the prisons during the

amnesty). At the Friedrichstrasse station, West German drunks gather to sell used train tickets to East German day trippers and Polish visitors.

On January 31st the world's largest McDonalds will open on Pushkin Square. "It's got to be worse," said one Soviet citizen. However, Moscow City council who control 51% of the management insist that McDonalds' normal catering standards will apply here. The four Soviet managers had had the opportunity to enjoy a year's intensive study at the Institute of Hamburg-erology in Canada.

In November a poignant scene witnessed at the Wall: a young East German, given a banana (a scarce commodity throughout the Eastern bloc) by a well-wisher, had to be told to peel it first before eating it. In early March bananas were still being handed out free by canvassing West German politicians in Leipzig. Dr. Otto Drephal, a Leipzig theologian, described how an unaccompanied child was told he could have a banana only if his parents were present.

To western visitors Eastern societies restrained from free development since the end of the War, come over as uniquely old fashioned: uncomfortable but also charming with their mainly safe streets, small shops and slow food...

City Limits (March 1990)

Film, motor oil, and feminine sanitary products of any sort are completely unavailable. Women running short should ask for cotton wool (*vata*). Bring twice as much toilet paper as you think you'll need and plenty of diarrhoea medication to combat Romanian food. Soap, towels, and toilet paper are not provided in most public bathrooms.

Let's Go: 1990 Budget Traveller's Guide to Europe, Bucharest section

Takings at Costa del la Sol resorts were reported to have dropped drastically in 1989. The decline in revenue from tourism was attributed to a number of factors: the abysmal state of the amenities, declining standards of service, chronic overcrowding and overdevelopment, dirty beaches, pollution from life-threatening holiday traffic clogging up the coastal roads, indifferent catering, inadequate, "jerry-built" accommodation, a much publicized mid-season outbreak of dysentery, the visible presence in the sea of untreated sewage, and in the streets, of the omnipresent hordes of British "lager louts" who had been descending *en masse* on the clubs and bars of what had once been the "picturesque" fishing villages of Benidorm and Lloret-del-Mar year after year throughout the previous two decades. In addition there has been an acceleration trend – even at the bottom end of the intensely competitive pack-



I was coming up against the Wall.

The German Wall, in other words – "The" Wall, "Il" Muro, "Le" Mur, "Ta" Stena – that wonder of the world which is everywhere addressed only as a proper noun...

Jens Reich, 20 October 1989

As the S-Bahn sped along the elevated sections of the track you could look down through the window onto no-man's land... The idea was, I think, redemption through catharsis: to pass like Harry Palmer/Lime through the concentrated point of all that agonistic violence, the point of convergence for all those binary tensions which served not only to authenticate, make whole and wholly different the identities of the two antagonistic Systems which 40 years before had parcelled up this space called Europe but which also seemed to guarantee the more dangerously elastic borderlines between other psychic/sexual territories. Adorno would have no doubt recognized this identity-thinking, this regressive urge to closure as a function of the will

to strengthen and extend down to the very physiology of the subject, the acceptance of a dreamless-realistic world in which all memories of things not wholly integrated have been purged.¹⁰

At every station down the line, I pulled out my passport to check it was still there (vertigo having days before given way to hysteria).

testaceous (zool.) having a shell; shell-like

Passport control and currency exchange generally take 15-90 minutes ... The day visa DM 5 (under 16 free), payable only in Western currency; you also must change DM 25 into Ostmarks (seniors only exchange DM 15, 14-yr olds DM 7.50, ages under 14 exempt). The exchange rate is one to one.

Let's Go: 1990 Budget Traveller's Guide to Europe

The day I went it took 30 minutes. There was some kind of hold-up at the front of the queue.

testament will disposing of property and appointing an executor; covenant between God and Man; each of the two divisions of the Holy Scripture or Bible.

testicle semen-secreting glandular organ of male mammals – testiculus, dim. of testis witness (the organ being evidence of virility)

testify bear witness to

testimony evidence; spec. in Scriptural lang., of the Mosaic law etc.

testis (anat.) testicle, L "witness"

Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology

Under the yellow subway lights a guard was splitting up a group of Gypsy men and women, marked off from the line of tourists by their darker skin, "expansive" body language and "peasant" clothes (the men in cheap suits and trilbies, the

age holiday market – away from the beer-chips-and-suntan model of the annual vacation. The expectations and requirements of the average Northern European holiday maker have been revised upwards in line with rising standards of affluence at home: part of the progressive gentrification of the proletarian imaginary. The days when a crowded hotel swimming pool and bar were regarded as "luxury" are long gone. The buzz words now amongst tour operators are "choice," "sophistication," "adventure," "unspoiled" (even, amongst more "discriminating" middle class consumers, "wilderness") locations. Benidorm, the archetypal destination for the "classic" package in the 1960s and 70s is played out as far as Northern Europeans are concerned. In 1989, hotels boasting "sea-views" were standing empty in the baking August heat as if deserted in the wake of a holocaust. In 1990, 4,000 free holidays for the children of workers in the Neptune shipyard in Rostock were cut – early casualties of the reduction in social welfare expenditure in East Germany, stipulated by Kohl's Christian Democrats as a precondition for reunification. The cuts were reported in the same month that an association of hoteliers in Benidorm backed by the local town council, announced that they were offering 10,000 free holidays to people in Eastern Europe.

There were things I liked: the feeling of solidarity: that money is not the most important thing in the world. There wasn't much crime ... You could lead a life that wasn't hectic. Was it an illusion? Probably, but illusions can be beautiful.

40-year-old teacher from Leipzig

Folklore from the Soviet Union is coming out of my ears. I want to know more about our own history and tradition.

18-year-old Leipzig skinhead, supporter of the Republican Party, *Guardian* (9 March 1990)

All the King's horses and all the King's men
Couldn't ...

women bundled up like bag ladies from their headscarves to their boots). Because of some irregularity in the travel documents, the men were being allowed through but not the women or children. Armed guards stood impassively over the flurry of embraces, the desperate, fumbling sorting out of luggage. Beneath the sodium lights, items of clothing, packages of food, machine parts wrapped in newspaper, a mirror done up with bits of string and cardboard were being transferred from one bag to another. Urgent messages were exchanged in a language I didn't even recognize. After some minutes the men went through the gate. The women, struggling with the children and the plastic bin-liner stuffed with clothes, began to ululate in concert, their cries amplified in the restricted space, building to a brief rhythmic crescendo – a wave of tears breaking on this underground outpost of the Wall. One woman detached herself from the group, called to her husband or brother who wheeled round – Orpheus now to her Eurydice – to pick up the battered cardboard suitcase which she swung across the rail partition. The women turned, now silent, snatching up the children and the bags and walked back past us down towards the trains as we stood in the queue avoiding eye contact, seeking absolution in our blind, devout inspection of guidebooks, maps, passports, papers.

Although membership of the Gypsies in terms of blood is denied by family X, the racial diagnosis as regards the members of family X is undoubtedly "Gypsy" and /or "Gypsy-Negro-Hybrid".

This verdict is based on

1. racial and psychological features
2. anthropological features
3. genealogical data
4. the fact that the family is regarded as Magyar by Hungarians...

These few data are sufficient to be regarded as presumptively Gypsy. Itineracy and unsettled journeying as a family unit are characteristic of Gypsies as far as Central European conditions are concerned. Whereas the external appearance of the members of family X is not entirely Gypsy ... the gestures, affectivity and overall behaviour are not only alien-type but in fact positively indicate Gypsy descent.

Report for Racial Hygiene
Research Centre, Reich Public
Health Office, 10 July 1944¹¹

It occurred to me later that these "presumptive Gypsies" at the Wall might just as well have been Turkish guestworkers from Kreuzburg.

How can a Jew be a Romanian?

Valentin Gavrielescu, spokesman
for the National Peasants' Party,
January 1990

In all spheres of the Russian peoples' life there is but one mission: to repulse the attack of rootless and cosmopolitan elements, to throw off the foreign western forms that have been foisted on the people, and to return to the immemorial origins of Russia.

Michael Antonov, spokesman for
the Union for the Spiritual Revival
of the Fatherland, November
1989

The half million Albanians in Kosovo should be provided with maps, escorted to the frontier and kissed goodbye.

Vuk Draskovic, head of the
Serbian National Renaissance,
February 1990

Who knows what will come
through the hole burned out
of the centre of the
Romanian flag where the
hammer and sickle used to
be. Did we really expect the
dancing to go on forever?

Neal Ascherson,¹² more sensitive than most to that other Orientalism which threatens to collapse the historical and cultural complexities of diverse national and regional traditions into a homogeneous (solidly "despotic") bloc, has nonetheless referred to Eastern Europe as an immense toxic landscape – a vast ecological, ideological, political and administrative disaster zone. The poisons released into the atmosphere in the wake of the Soviet Empire's collapse have been gathering for years. It wasn't just champagne corks that got forced into the air when the Wall came crashing down. Foreigners beaten up by skinheads in Leipzig in the last of the Monday night demonstrations; synagogues in Budapest and Debrecen in Hungary and in Lublin in Poland desecrated; an arson attack on a Jewish rest home outside Warsaw; Jewish cemeteries daubed with obscene graffiti; anti-semitic demonstrations organized by Pamyat (Memory) in Red Square; Armenians massacred in Norodny-Karabec; Azeris murdered in reprisal; ethnic Albanians poisoned in Kosovo; ethnic Hungarians murdered by Romanians in riots led by the far-right Romanian Hearth... Who knows what will come through the hole burned out of the centre of the Romanian flag where the hammer and sickle used to be. Did we really expect the dancing to go on forever?

An even more rhetorical question: which "we" is it that is being addressed here? If it is the "we" into which I am interpellated as "British Citizen" and subject, the designation under which, after all, I am permitted to travel in the first place, to pass "freely without let or hindrance" across borders expecting as of right "such assistance and protection as may be necessary," then this hardly affords access to the high moral ground. What can this "we" say about the resurgence of the language of the pogroms when Britain oversees the incarceration in concentration camps of boat people labelled not as champions of freedom like the escaped prisoners from E. bloc whose flight – at least in the first few months – was represented as the expression of an abstract desire for "more liberty" (Thatcher), but as "economic refugees" – an altogether lower category of persons who are out to "swamp" our culture and steal our wealth? What can this "we" say when the entitlements through which British citizenship is defined are seen in the case of potential Hong Kong immigrants to be calculated on the basis (a) of race (the unspoken "yellow" quota) and (b) professional status? (50,000 British passports are to be offered to eight categories of persons from business men to accountants and doctors.)

But just as there are questions, so too are there questions which are not just rhetorical (concerned merely with the rhetoric of justice). It is no more legitimate to reduce the

problem of our own implication in these issues of politics, ethnicity and culture to a problem within representation – as if our responsibility consisted solely in choosing where “we” stand in the contest of competing rhetorics, externally opposed “position,” “ideologies,” “discourses,” and then “arguing our corner” – than it is to frame the “question” posed at the interface between culture, nationalism and “race” as, say, “the Jewish question” or “the German question,” as if, for example, “the Troubles” in Belfast or on the border between Eire and the northern Counties could be understood as the simple, necessary predicate of something called – in Westminster at least – the “Irish question.”

The issue is partly situated *within rhetoric* (the “politics of discourse” question: “who speaks for whom in whose interest?”) but it is also at the

same time *outside rhetoric* at the limit of our “entitlement” to speak at all on certain subjects at certain times in certain contexts, and ultimately it points beyond even that towards the unstable perimeter which separates what can and can’t be said full stop. The adjudication of these boundaries is not just a question of linguistic etiquette. The issue is not answered by the kind of serial righteousness which disguises its particularistic, interested focus by resorting at strategic points to a simple reading out of lists of supposedly empowered and empowering categories – race *and* class *and* gender – to present an armed-on-all-fronts “Critical” discourse designed to address everyone and to satisfy no one in particular. Nor is it enough in a properly reflexive cultural studies to stand gobstruck or gutted, to use two more vulgar cockney idioms (*gobstruck*, *gutted*; trans. stunned into silence), in the face of the Other conceived as the apotheosis of the principle-of-difference-in-the-abstract. The boundaries drawn around the sayable are proscribed by our *located, lived* relations to concrete, embodied, historically constituted others. The contracts and obligations which bind us to these others are the products of particular historical processes, struggles, settlements. In other words those limits are overdetermined by what Edward Said might call all kinds of *worldly* factors. The other, here, is worldly not other-worldly. It is in fact the point where actually existing others are condemned, expelled, silenced in the name of some invisible Other as founding principle or originary force that the necessary edge which we use to constitute collectivities of any kind – to mark off US (however we define ourselves) from THEM (however we define them) – degenerates into a cutting edge where other people are made to disappear in a willed historical regression which is figured as the vengeful realisation of the “historical destiny” of a “People” and its “culture.”



In official Zionist photos at the beginning of the century, one can see Jewish colonists in European dress, on a deserted beach, holding a few spades, “founding Tel Aviv.” These pictures had to be carefully touched up before they could become part of the official album, in order to remove the Arabs who are visible in

the original photos, to the right and left of the group of pioneers in ties: those who built Tel Aviv and whose houses and tents, simply by being there, turned this “desert” into a building site. This presence everywhere of the Arabs traumatized the territorialists: but, conversely, it seemed natural to the offspring of the *Shtetl*. Their cultural narcissism constituted a mental rampart around the ethnic frontiers of the community and the group. It also constituted a better preparation for the physical expulsion of the Arabs and its legitimation.

Ilan Halevi, *A History of the Jews, Ancient and Modern*¹³

“Unification,” Mr. Modrow insisted last week, “must not be an *Anschluss* – the mere incorporation of East into West Germany. Dr. Kohl has no such scruples. Hans-Jochen Vogel, the leader of the West German social democratic opposition, accused him of brow-beating the GDR into unity, as if it were an ‘ownerless territory.’”

The Sunday Correspondent
(18 February 1990)

In January a photograph appeared in *The Guardian* of a group of three captured “Ceausescu supporters” in their cell at Bucharest police headquarters. Hemmed in by their bunk bed, heads bowed, eyes fixed on the floor, it looks as if they’ve been made to stand for the cameras. Their expressions range from anguish to resignation at the fate which undoubtedly awaits them at the trial “after their arrest for possessing arms.” Their arms hang loosely, hands clasped together in a contrite gesture as if these men had been handcuffed, interrupted in an act of prayer. In their striped prison uniforms, they are being made to wear their guilt for the world. A friend of mine (he happens to be Jewish) pointed at the photo. He didn’t doubt that these men – alleged members of the Securitate – had charges to answer, in all likelihood crimes to answer for. “But why,” he asked, “do they have to be degraded like *that*. What do those uniforms *mean* today?”

In early February it was reported that a new graffiti was cropping up alongside the NPP and NSF slogans and the Ceausescu dummies swinging by their necks in the winter wind from the trees and lampposts of Bucharest. Poster portraits of the prime minister, Petre Roman, were being defaced and two symbols scrawled underneath: a hammer and sickle and a star of David. Sometimes the two had been linked with an = sign.

They were of high quality rayon and cheap, a real bargain. Only one crown for a star made of fine pre-war material. There were six tips and a word on the star, all contorted and twisted, in a foreign language that seemed to make a face at me. I felt for my heart through my coat and marked the place with pins. It beat quite regularly. I looked into the splinter that was my mirror. The black and yellow star looked provocative...

Jiri Weil, *Life With a Star*¹⁴

“Can we too live without the Wall?”

withdraw take back or away, cf. RETIRE, RETRACT

within adv. on the inner side

without adv. outside

witness knowledge, wisdom; attestation of a fact, etc., testimony

The day in July 1988 when I stood before the Wall of Death in Auschwitz was the hottest day of the holiday. People were walking round in their shirt-sleeves and cotton dresses and there were of course – what else would you expect in Poland? – long queues at the drink stand for the thin watery cola concoction they sold in the parks and public squares for a few zloties a shot. The supply of individual paper cups had dried up hours ago so that by now those wanting a drink had to use the metal mug hanging by a chain from the stall. I thought I'd wait till I got back to the bar opposite the bus station at Oswiecim and get a proper can of coke. I might even treat myself to a bottle of Czech beer.

Block 11 was called by the prisoners the "Block of Death." It stood in some isolation, apart from other blocks, was always locked and served as the camp prison. Its yard was surrounded by a high wall. Wooden baskets were affixed to the windows of the block which stood next to it, in order to prevent its inmates from observing what was going on in that yard in which at least 20,000 prisoners were shot under the "Wall of Death." The ground-floor of Block 11, together with the cells in its cellars (so-called bunkers) is preserved intact.

Kazimierz Smolen, *Auschwitz 1940-1945: Guidebook through the Museum*¹⁵

I remember that the air was thick with the fragrance of the flowers that people had laid in heaps, in wreathes, in bunches, single blooms along the base of the wall. I remember that the colours of the flowers stood out against the black square at its centre...

Auschwitz defies imagination and perception: it submits only to memory... Between the dead and the rest of us there exists an abyss that no talent can comprehend... I write to denounce writing. I tell of the impossibility one stumbles upon in trying to tell the tale.
Elie Wiesel¹⁶

I kept looking at my watch. Ari had gone off on her own and we'd arranged to meet at 3:15 outside Block 15 – that way we'd know where we were supposed to be without losing track of the time. The last bus back to Krakow went at 4:15 and we couldn't afford to miss it. It had taken most of the morning to get the woman at the reception desk to agree to let us have the room for one more night. That was the price you paid for not going through Polorbis, the state-run tourist agency. If you didn't submit to their iron-tight schedules and stay at their overpriced "international" hotels, then you just had to queue and barter like everybody else. And it didn't help if, like us, you didn't speak the language or only had, as I did, a smattering of elementary-level German half remembered from lessons lazily attended at school. My "German" had in fact proven to be a real liability. It had only been after I'd run out of change and slammed down the phone at the railway station on that first rainy day in Warsaw after ringing around every hotel in the *Budget Traveller's Guide to Europe* that I'd realized the blunder I'd just made. The German for "room" was *Zimmer*, not *Raum*. No wonder my enquiries had been greeted with silence, incomprehension. Perhaps I'd sensed (though I also thought I might have been imagining it) a muffled kind of rage. "Haben sie Raum?" They must have thought it was some kind of sick...

Most of you know what it means to see a hundred corpses lie side by side, or five hundred, or a thousand. To have stuck this out and – excepting cases of human weakness – to have kept our integrity, that is what has made us

hard. In our history this is an unwritten and never to be written page of glory.

Heinrich Himmler
addressing SS commanders
in October, 1943¹⁷

At Auschwitz you avoid making eye contact with strangers and even friends become strangers there. Each person is engaged in a solitary communion with the dead, turned inwards by the vastness of the slaughter. Family groups and organized parties seem to congregate in silence orbiting the exhibits, each individual locked into a singular trajectory. In the crematorium where the brass loading trays were hung with floral tributes to the dead, I watched a party of young people filing by behind their German-speaking guide like ... I felt the words forming, to be used perhaps in some future piece of writing ... like a group of medieval penitents, like martyrs *en route* to the gallows and I felt ashamed that I had watched their shame as if my guilt for what had happened in this place was somehow less than theirs, that by reducing them to objects in this way, by weighing them in the balance provided by some facile simile I had betrayed some basic covenant imposed at the Gates on anyone who enters. It was I who was diminished by seeking to make less of their pilgrimage, a journey undertaken of necessity in a spirit of atonement, a spirit darkened in the knowledge of what it was that waited for them here, a journey that made my own presence in this place appear by contrast casual, unconsidered. I was older than they. I should have known better. But what was "knowledge" and what did it amount to here? And what in the end did it mean for me to visit this place intent on storing up "observations" as sentences to be fitted into some "future piece of writing" – what did it mean to "make something out of" a day trip to Auschwitz? The very fact that this history is exhibited for our inspection in the Auschwitz museum, is assembled and made legible through photographs, texts, statistics, models, objects in glass cases confronts the visitor in the form of an accusation. What access is there for the living to the place of the Disaster? The Disaster presents only itself and what it presents it also obliterates. At once and absolutely. The "products" of the Disaster – if what lingers in its wake can find a designation – are, as Maurice Blanchot points out, not "knowledge" at all but rather dread and silence:

Knowledge which goes so far as to accept horror in order to know it, reveals the horror of knowledge, its squalor, the discrete complicity which maintains it in a relation with the most insupportable aspects of power... And how, in fact, can one accept not to know? We read books on Auschwitz. The wish of all, in the camps, the last wish: know what happened, do not forget, and at the same time never will you know.¹⁸

While the enormity of "Auschwitz" defies narrativization the camp itself was of course notoriously efficient at keeping its own accounts: "products" at this level can be at least



enumerated. On the coach back to Krakow, I read the guidebook (120 zł) in its porous paper cover turning back from time to time to the blurred grey photographs which haunt the text. I read that camp inmates who cheated the gas chamber worked as slave labour for IG-Farbenindustrie at their factory in Monowice; that Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Schälingsbekämpfung (German Society for Combatting Pests) which produced the Zyclon B used in the gas chambers was a subsidiary of IG-Farben; that other beneficiaries of the slave labour program included Krupps, Hermann Goring-Werke, Siemens, Deutsche aus Rustungswerke, Deutsche Erd-und Steinwerke, Hugo Schneider AG, Heinkel, J.A. Topf & Son.¹⁹ I read that an estimated 30,000 prisoners died in IG-Garbenindustrie in three years and that while estimates of the exact total of deaths is still subject to debate and revision, "no less than 4 million people perished in Auschwitz" (Soviet State Extraordinary Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes), including in addition to the Jews, political prisoners, prisoners of war, gays, religious minorities, 21,000 gypsies. Last week I read that Professor Raoul Thalberg of the University of Vermont and Yehuda Bauer, Director of Holocaust Studies at the Hebrew Institute of Contemporary Jewry in Jerusalem, have revised their estimate downwards in the light of the evidence made available by the Soviets to a figure as low as 1 million to 1.35 million Jews murdered. On the other hand this total is disputed by Rudolf Vrbo, Professor of Pharmacology at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, himself a Jewish prisoner at Auschwitz until his escape in April 1944, whose job it had been to count the number of people arriving each day at the ramps. Vrbo estimates Jewish deaths at approxi-

part of a regular consignment to the Bavarian A. Zinc Co. where it was processed and converted into lining for the greatcoats worn by German soldiers heading for the Eastern front.

I remember stopping in front of a similar exhibit: a whole room, visible behind a sheet of glass, containing a mountain of empty luggage. I remember reading some of the names and addresses written on the sides of the suitcases by people who had come here from every major city in every country in occupied Europe: proof of the gigantic diabolical ruse maintained from start to finish – from the proclamations for the transports to the death pits camouflaged as showers. I imagined men and women in cities as remote as Athens, Berlin, Bucharest laying out the luggage on the floor, kneeling down to paint their names and thereby colluding – discreetly or otherwise, whether knowingly or not – in the orchestrated lie that they were heading for a new life in the East.

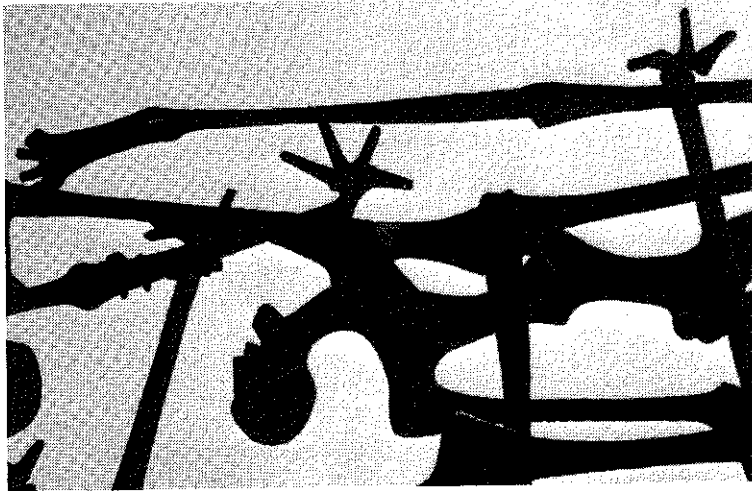
I noticed that women who either guessed or knew what awaited them nevertheless found the courage to joke with the children to encourage them, despite the mortal terror visible in their own eyes...

Rudolph Hoss, *Commandant of Auschwitz: The Authentic Confession of a Mass Murderer*²³

mately 2.5 million.²⁰ By coincidence I also read in the same week an article detailing the controversy over the total number of victims killed under Stalinism where the numbers of those said to be executed together with deportation and famine fatalities vary from 3.5-8 million (Professor Sheila Fitzpatrick, University of Chicago) to 50 million (the *London Sunday Times*), although the writer added that the attempt to establish a median figure around 20-25 million is being resisted by some scholars on the grounds that a possibly inflated final count may have the effect – intentional or not – of effacing the qualitative uniqueness of the Nazi genocide program.²¹

I read in the guidebook that an inventory of items recovered from six storeroom barracks at Auschwitz-Birkenau partially destroyed by fires lit by retreating SS troops included: 348,820 men's suits; 836,820 women's dresses; 5,255 pairs of women's shoes; 38,000 pairs of men's shoes; 13,694 carpets; together with a vast quantity of tooth brushes, shaving brushes, artificial limbs, spectacles, etc.

At the Auschwitz museum I remember filing past a wall of glass which ran the length of an entire waiting room in Block 4. Through the wall the visitor can see, stacked from floor to ceiling, a tangled mess of human hair cut from gassed victims: "7,000 kilograms of human hair, packed in paper bags (average weight of each bag – circa 25 kilograms),"²²



Months before when planning this trip to Eastern Europe I had fished an ancient, battered suitcase out of the basement where it had lain for years filled with old clothes earmarked for some forgotten jumble sale. I remember thinking it was perfect. It fitted in absolutely with the "refugee fantasy" I'd been cultivating ever since we'd struck on the idea of Poland as a possible destination, drawn by the romance of a place that didn't feature on most travel agents' maps. The fantasy had its iconographic origin in a fragment of film footage I remembered from childhood of refugees from Hungary or Poland crossing borders wheeling handcarts and bicycles loaded down with whatever belongings they'd managed to salvage in the face of what was – for them at least – the catastrophe of Yalta. Other elements had been added down the years: images and narratives from spy novels; news reels; the early films of Andrzej Wajda; tales of the Polish resistance and the Warsaw uprising; a phrase from Gregory Corso about the traveller ("after Hiroshima") entering "the modern city with two suitcases filled with despair" ... but at its core that simple image-memory of childhood that remained intact, allergic to these baroque adolescent refinements. The suitcase simply *was* the lost object, the clinching prop for the whole regressive movement.

It was 3:15, time to make the rendezvous...

An exhibition illustrating the history of the occupation in Poland will be housed in Block 15. Its opening is planned for 1979.²⁴

Though open, the exhibition in Block 15 had still not been completed. The work had been held up as a result of the bitter wrangle between Jewish and Polish nationalist groups over whose history should be privileged at Auschwitz. (The question of who has prior claim – and hence authority – over this territory has since taken on an increasingly overt, and ugly, political resonance in the wake of a resurgent Polish national consciousness after Archbishop Glemp made his "Jewish media conspiracy" speech in 1989 in defence of the proposed siting of a Carmelite convent just outside the compound fence.) Unlike the other Blocks which had seemed part of a 19th century "exhibitionary complex" built around a concern

for authenticity, the thing-itself, the muted testimony of material evidence and, quite unlike Auschwitz 11-Birkenay with its sprawling encampment of abandoned barracks, ruined gas chambers and crematoria three kilometres down the road, left as the Russians found it when they liberated Auschwitz in 1945, Block 15 felt like a "contemporary" white wall gallery space. Here display panels were clearly and consecutively laid out. Design values had intervened here to make the exhibition "user friendly." The total effect was nevertheless far from seamless; photographs and text had been arranged in an uneasy narrative sequence which threatened to explode altogether at the point where a shrine to the "Martyrs of the Polish Resistance" flanked by phoenix emblems collided with SS photographs of the "Judgement at the Ramp" and photographs taken secretly by Jewish members of the Sonderkommando details whose job it was to dispose of the dead. The conflict between competing stories, framings, interests was inscribed across the very surface of the walls. Here the war of memory had been spatialized.

The gallows stood there ... Hossler's voice was to be heard ... "all traitors will perish like this..." I was standing between Ela and Lola and thought, "I must see and remember everything." I overcame my weakness and looked towards the gallows, but saw only indistinct shadows...

R. Kagen, Auschwitz inmate²⁵

Block 15 had been laid out – whether by design or because the site itself had become a battlefield – as a nest of defiles, spaces subdivided by partitions, linked by low-ceilinged corridors and narrow staircases down which the visitor is drawn but not directed. Whether intentionally or not what had been constructed here was a kind of maze.

We were cutting it a bit fine; we'd have to get a taxi to the bus station if we were to make it back to Krakow. Getting a taxi could take forever and I couldn't get my head round the exchange rates. What you saw on the clock was just the square root of what you ended up paying – they add a few naughts at the end of every number. When you ask them why, they say (if they speak English that is) "inflation," but they don't even seem to know what their own money's worth, so how are we supposed ... I bet I have to bung the driver a couple of quid to get him to put his foot down except they won't take sterling only dollars – if we get a driver that is.

We had walked into a cul-de-sac; a spare white room closed off at one end. This had to be the end of the exhibition but neither of us could see any exit just a bare white wall in front of which a shrine to the victims of the Holocaust – a plaque and some flowers under heavy glass – had been set into the concrete floor. We hovered over it for a few moments like kids hanging over a pond, conscious of our faces reflected in the glass, distracted by the heat and the pressure of time. There seemed nothing for it but to try to retrace our steps. Acting on impulse or intuition – I never asked her why – just as we were about to turn back, Ari stretched out her hand and placed it in the centre of the wall. Like the secret door in a children's fairy tale the wall swung open onto the courtyard. The concealed exit was another undecidable contrivance like the labyrinth of Block 15 itself: either it was intended (the consequence of some administrative stalemate in the context

of forces that were fighting for possession of this space) or it was deliberate – a lesson imparted in code, a parable built in three dimensions, the key secreted in the very wall itself.

But we shall continue our work, we shall try to preserve all this for the world. We shall simply hide it in the soil. And he who would like to find it, will find it – on the Other side.

This page written by the Auschwitz victim Salmen Lewenthal was found along with the rest of his written testimony buried near the crematorium. It is displayed on the wall adjacent to the hidden door which faces out towards the sunken Holocaust memorial. One touch had been enough to move the wall aside. Like children we stepped out, blinking in the light, relieved to find ourselves outside inside Auschwitz.

One young woman caught my attention particularly as she ran busily hither and thither, helping the smallest of children and the old women to undress. During the selection she had had two small children with her, and her agitated behaviour and appearance had brought her to my notice at once. She did not look in the least like a Jewess. Now her children were no longer with her. She waited until the end, helping the women who were not undressed and who had several children with them, encouraging them and calming the children. She went with the very last ones into the gas chamber. Standing in the doorway, she said:

"I knew all the time that we were being brought to Auschwitz to be gassed. When the selection took place I avoided being put with the able-bodied ones, as I wished to look after the children. I wanted to go through it all, fully conscious of what was happening. I hope that it will be quick. Goodbye."

Rudolph Hoss, *Commandant of Auschwitz: The Authentic Confessions of a Mass Murderer*²⁶



Postscript

On the day before we flew back home I threw the suitcase away. It would be tempting to say I had outgrown it, chastened in the knowledge that all journeys are not the same, have different starting points and different destinations, that there is a line between the poetics and the politics of travel which should not be crossed. After all, at least four distinct orders of travel have been invoked here: the self-authentication voyage, the decentred *derive*, the package tour, and those other mass migrations driven by an altogether other and more terrible force. Perhaps it would be politic (and wise) not to confound them, for these orders, especially the last one, impose specific remits, obligations and entitlements upon any one who tries to write their way into the world. All of this may well be true. But the plain fact is that it was the thing itself that had outgrown me and not vice versa. Browsing through a department store in Prague the day before we were due to take off I'd stumbled on the suitcase of my dreams – rectangular and light, made of thick new cardboard with plastic protectors stapled to each corner and an old-fashioned spring mechanism working the hinge – all for the equivalent of just £1.50 (and that was at the official exchange rate). There was then, in the end, something to be said for the inertia of a command economy where things designed in 1958 are still available,

brand new, unchanged, in their original form 30 years later. "Actually existing socialism" had managed to produce what is, for me, a utopian object: the platonic suitcase. In a less than perfect world, it had nonetheless succeeded in delivering – for once – the Good. ♦

Dick Hebdige teaches sociology at Goldsmith's College in London. He is the author of *Subculture: The Meaning of Style (1978)* and *Hiding in the Light (1988)*.

Guilt Trips was first printed in the May 1990 issue of *Art and Text*. It is reprinted here with Dick Hebdige's permission.

NOTES

"The last thing that readers need is another theory of quotation. Suffice it to say that as far as I can tell, quotation operates throughout this article predominantly though not exclusively in four related modes: (1) as interruption, (2) as intervention, (3) as interference, and (4) as indigestion: "trouble from below."

1. Theodor Adorno, "Perennial Fashion – Jazz" in *Prisms*, Garden City Press, 1967.
2. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Picador, 1973.
3. Roland Barthes, interview with Bernard Henri-Lévy in *Art & Text*, 6 (Summer 1982-83).
4. Jens Reich, "Germany – A Binary Poison" in *New Left Review*, 179 (Jan.-Feb. 1990). All further quotations attributed to Reich are from this text.
5. Adorno, op. cit.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Paul Caleb Deemer, ed., *Let's Go: 1990 Budget Traveller's Guide to Europe*, Pan Books, 1990. All other guidebook references apart from the Auschwitz section are from here.
8. Walter Benjamin, "Berlin Chronicle" in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, Verso, 1979.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Adorno, op. cit.
11. Quoted in Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition and Racism in Everyday Life*, Penguin, 1987.
12. See especially Neal Ascherson, "Eastern Europe on the Move" in S. Hall & M. Jaques, eds., *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990's*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1989; "The Borderlands" in *Granta 30 The New Europe*, Penguin, 1990; and his earlier collection of essays *Games with Shadows*, Radius, 1988.
13. Ilan Halevi, *A History of the Jews, Ancient and Modern*. Zed Books, 1988. Barnett Litvinoff's *The Burning Bush: Antisemitism and World History* (Fontana, 1989) is interesting in so far as the issue is hardly confronted in more than 400 pages.
14. Jiri Weil, *Life with a Star*, Collins, 1989.
15. Kazimierz Smolen, *Auschwitz 1940-1945: Guidebook through the Museum*, Krajowa Agencja, 1981.
16. Elie Wiesel, quoted in Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History*, Penguin 1989.
17. Quoted in above.
18. Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, University of Nebraska Press, 1986.
19. See Marrus, op. cit. and bibliography; for personal experiences of slave labour, for instance, see Primo Levi, *If This is a Man* (Abacus, 1987) and *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York, 1969); Anton Gill, *The Journey Back from Hell: Conversations with Concentration Camp Survivors* (Grafton Books, 1988).
20. *Jewish Times* (8 March 1990); also, e.g. Marrus op. cit.; Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe during the Second World War*.
21. Seumas Milne, "Stalin's Missing Millions" in *Guardian* (10 March, 1990).
22. Smolen, op. cit.
23. Rudolf Hoss, *Commandant of Auschwitz: The Authentic Confessions of a Mass Murderer*, Pan Books, 1959.
24. Smolen, op. cit.
25. R. Kaglan, woman prisoner in Auschwitz quoted above.
26. Hoss, op. cit.