HOLOCAUST AND WOMEN’S STUDIES: AN UNEASY RAPPROCHEMENT

Dalia Ofer and Leonore J. Weitzman (eds)
*Women in the Holocaust*

S. Lillian Kremer
*Women’s Holocaust Writing: Memory and Imagination*

Denise De Costa

Silence shrouds many Shoah victims, and for women perhaps more than men, this muteness is both willed and imposed. Of the extant memoirs, perhaps one-third bear women’s signatures, but judging from anthologies edited by men, testimony flowed in overwhelming torrents from male pens. Lawrence Langer (1975), for instance, floats four female authors among 40 men. Cynthia Haft (1973), doing somewhat better, launches 54 females, but also features 226 men.

Testimony mainly by men in Holocaust studies had long been privileged as representative of the Jewish people, not primarily because anthologists were sexist, but because the overwhelming majority of scholars, women and men, seem to subscribe to the notion that individuals were slaughtered not because they were women, children or men, but because they were Jews. The issue, as debated today even among the most influential women scholars, remains anti-Semitism. This fact having been established, feminist critics and historians such as Marlene Heine-mann, Joan Ringelheim, Marion Kaplan and others are now applying a gendered lens to events, showing that the same hell inflicted different torments, depending on age, class and gender.

A sterling example of attention to gender in Holocaust studies, *Women in the Holocaust*, edited by Dalia Ofer and Leonore J. Weitzman, ‘shows how questions of gender lead us to a richer and more finely nuanced understanding of the Holocaust’ (p. 1). They identify several structural sources of gender distinction during the Shoah: (1) prewar gender roles which equipped the two sexes differently in the struggle for survival; (2) anticipatory judgements based on assumptions of differential treatment accorded the two sexes, namely that Nazi males would continue chivalrous behaviour towards women; and (3) harassment, regulations and work requirements, which sentenced women, and in particular mothers, to death in
different ways to men. The editors also address the sceptics, including many Shoah survivors, who fear a gendered lens. Wherefore their angst? ‘One such concern is that a focus on gender will distract us from the unity of the Nazi assault on all Jews and “make the Holocaust secondary to feminism”’ (p. 1). For others, the threat proceeds from ‘the popularization and banalization of the Holocaust’ (p. 1), thought to play into the hands of vocal Holocaust deniers.

The cutting-edge scholarship in the emerging field of women’s Holocaust studies presented by Ofer and Weitzman weakens any claims from the virulent right, by bringing a feminist vision with concrete and, therefore, convincing detail. The collection lays to rest the risk of disrespect towards those butchered in the war, with all contributors writing primarily to ensure a victimized people’s longevity.

Divided into four sections (‘Before the War’, ‘Life in the Ghettos’, ‘Resistance and Rescue’, ‘Labor Camps and Concentration Camps’), contributions highlight agency as well as impotence, history as well as memory. Yale historian Paula Hyman opens discussion with ‘The Jewish Family in Modern Europe’, charting the assimilated German-Jew’s pioneering of the two-child family (their effective use of birth control predating that of all European Christians but the French by a generation), which freed German-Jewish women to take up charitable work (50,000 had joined the Jüdischer Frauen-Bund [Jewish Women’s Organization] by the end of the 1920s) as well as enter the professions. In Poland, where tradition still held sway, the ideal of male scholarship was complemented by female business acumen: ‘The dominant cultural ideal was the strong, capable working woman’ (p. 32). Marion Kaplan then zeroes in on German soil. Pioneer in the study of Jewish women’s travails under Hitler in the 1930s, in ‘Keeping Calm and Weathering the Storm. Jewish Women’s Responses to Daily Life in Nazi Germany, 1933–1939’, Kaplan asserts, ‘Lawlessness, ostracism, and a loss of rights took their toll on Jews of all sexes and ages’ (p. 40). However, men’s incarceration and unemployment produced different emotions and reactions than did women’s rejection by neighbours or children’s suffering classmates’ taunts. In fact, of the 50 percent of prewar German-Jews who survived abroad, ‘fewer women than men left’ (p. 48), for very gender-specific reasons. While male dismissal soared, women found jobs in Jewish welfare agencies and cultural institutions within the Jewish community. Furthermore, before September 1939, ‘men faced more immediate physical danger than women’ (p. 49), who mistakenly believed their gender would protect them from the worst. Daughters, rather than sons, tended to stay with parents too feeble to travel so that ‘elderly women, in particular, remained behind in disproportionate numbers’ (p. 51) and wound up disproportionately murdered. Kaplan insists, with Mary Felstiner, that ‘Along the stations toward extinction . . . each gender lived its own journey’ (p. 51).

Specific attention to gender guides Gershon Bacon, who analyses activities of Jewish women in Poland in the interwar years. Daniel Blatman amplifies this information in ‘Women in the Jewish Labor Bund in Interwar Poland’, while Gisela Bock provides a needed counterpoint to the dominant perspective of the persecuted. She examines ‘Ordinary Women in Nazi Germany. Perpetrators, Victims, Followers, and Bystanders’, coming to the not unexpected conclusion that the ordinary women in National Socialist Germany, 35 million in 1939, brought forth deplorably few resisters and rescuers and must therefore be consigned to the ranks of active and passive anti-Semites, in case one were tempted to conjure some sort of gender solidarity.

Chapnik’s ‘Life in the Ghettos’, defined as ‘taking potshots at a child, raping a woman, cutting the beard off an old man, humiliating people in the street’ (p. 113), complements the academic slant of the first section, featuring, in addition to essays
on Lodz and Warsaw, an eye-witness account of the ‘Grodno Ghetto and Its Underground’. Novelist Ida Fink’s powerful story ‘The Key Game’, in which a three-year-old is taught to stall, loudly, while pretending to look for a key before opening the door to the Gestapo, has a similar function. While his mother is at work, the boy must cover for his father, who squeezes himself quickly into a bathroom crevice. And when questioned about the parent’s whereabouts, the boy, in practice quite stalwart but inwardly shaken, must learn to announce, ‘my father’s dead’.

The section ‘Resistance and Rescue’ also features a personal narrative (Bronka Libanski’s) as well as accounts of passing on the Aryan side, living among the Forest Partisans and working in the French Underground. In addition, Gisi Fleischmann of Bratislava is accorded a chapter of her own, the only woman in a top community position, which she used with audacity: ‘It is amazing that the underground leadership of a remnant of a Jewish community in a satellite state tried to rescue the Jews of all Nazi-occupied Europe in a daring plan of ransom negotiations with the murderers – and this effort was led by a woman’ (p. 260). Resistance is chronicled in the final part, which is devoted to the 437 labour camps established for Jews in Poland and the scores of concentration camps, among them Auschwitz-Birkenau and Theresienstadt. In Karzysko-Kamienna, for example, ‘one woman torched the machine at which she worked and bribed her Polish supervisor with a bottle of vodka’ (p. 287). Others pilfered food for ‘family’. If the section records more impotence than opposition, however, we find little resignation. Lidia Rosenfeld Vago, among the Hungarian-Jews shipped in the spring of 1944 to Auschwitz, offers in a bitter, ironic ‘Personal Narrative’ details seared into her mind of ‘One Year in the Black Hole of Our Planet Earth’ – its unbearable stench, lascivious eyes and incessant threats: ‘I will send you out of here through the chimney’ (p. 279), her supervisor constantly reminds her.

Yes, death stalked men as well as women, but Myrna Goldenberg contends, in her essay ‘Memoirs of Auschwitz Survivors: The Burden of Gender’, women were more vulnerable to ‘shame and sexual humiliation’ (p. 336) or, as Joan Ringelheim phrases it, ‘the victimization of Jewish men . . . did not usually include their sexual exploitation’ (p. 345). Sexual disadvantage notwithstanding, women seem to have been better able to form surrogate camp families that, without idealizing, increased chances of survival. ‘Such bonding was not exclusive to women, but it is difficult to find consistent evidence of men’s caring about one another to the extent that women did’ (p. 337).

Why, then, look at gender in the Holocaust? As Ringelheim reminds us,

... a line divides what is considered peculiar or specific to women from what has been designated as the proper collective memory of, or narrative about, the Holocaust. The connection between genocide and gender has been difficult to conceive for some; for others, it has been difficult to construct. (p. 344)

And yet, as Ringelheim clearly points out, ‘to the Nazis, Jewish women were not simply Jews; they were Jewish women’ (p. 349). For this reason, Sara R. Horowitz also laments ‘the rarity of women’s voices’ in contemporary Shoah discourse (p. 369). This Yale University tome is offered, in part, as a compensatory gesture. Likewise aware of ‘the near-absence . . . of women’s gender-related Holocaust experience in critically celebrated literature’ (p. 3), in Women's Holocaust Writing, Memory and Imagination, S. Lillian Kremer is among the first to offer a critical study of fiction published in the USA and penned by European survivors with direct camp experience. Concerned with the controversial marshalling of fiction to commemorate historical trauma, Kremer proposes that artists may indeed ‘negotiate ... the complicated interactions among life story, history, and fiction’, allowing
consideration not only of the artifice and art, but also of 'extrinsic contexts of gender and historic imperatives' (p. xi).

Author of *Witness through the Imagination: Jewish American Holocaust Literature* (Kremer, 1989), which is devoted mainly to works by men, Kremer extends her impeccable scholarship to extensive exegesis of novels and short stories by Ilona Karmel, Elzbieta Ettinger, Hana Demetz, Susan Fromberg Schaeffer, Cynthia Ozick, Marge Piercy and Norma Rosen. Kremer's criticism opens new vistas based on interviews with the authors. The ordering of chapters, based on principles derived from Shoah scholarship, highlights, first, the European-born emigré writers Karmel, Ettinger and Demetz, who conflate the victim, eye-witness and chronicler, followed by the 'generation that bears the scar without the wound, sustaining memory without direct experience' (quoting Arthur Cohen, p. 238). All are lauded for honouring 'the biblical mandate to remember' (p. 238). Common to the women, however, are 'topics absent in male writing [namely] the ways female sexuality and motherhood added burdens to the normative Holocaust ordeal, the cooperative networks women prisoners developed, and the manner in which female cooperation and interdependence contributed to survival' (p. 4). Highly useful, too, is Kremer's ability to compare the emphases in men's and women's Shoah narratives, an exemplary contribution to gender studies. For instance, whereas 'male writers portray the tattooing process as emblematic of their characters' vulnerability and impotence ... women pay less heed to tattooing' (p. 10). Rather, they 'privilege verbal and physical sexual abuse and the humiliation associated with shorn hair and exchange of personal clothing for intentionally ill-fitting, mismatched camp garb' (p. 10). Whereas 'male writers convey the effect of starvation and primitive sanitary facilities on their protagonists' strength, health, and feelings of powerlessness ... they do not direct attention to the aesthetic and procreative anxieties of their physical deterioration' (p. 11). Furthermore, pregnancy and motherhood, frequent in women's Holocaust fiction to signal 'female vulnerability' or the wayward 'dominance of the life force' (p. 111), scarcely appear as themes in memoir or fiction by men. And, finally, despite evidence of cooperation on the part of incarcerated men, 'the emphasis women survivors and writers place on bonding and reciprocal support is unparalleled' in the male voice (p. 18).

In sum, Kremer supplies first-rate material to both scholars and teachers. I can easily imagine designing a University of Frankfurt course following Kremer's syllabus, enriched by her thorough and elegant analyses. In contrast, were I to renew my course on women's Holocaust memoirs at the University of Frankfurt, I might be happy to invite Denise De Costa, author of *Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum. Inscribing Spirituality and Sexuality*, to address my students out of my deep respect for her knowledge about Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum. However, I would prefer, quite frankly, that my students not read De Costa's book.

For unlike Ofer, Weitzman and Kremer, De Costa appears to be neither a scholar of Judaism, nor of Jewish feminism. Missing from her bibliography are Liliane Kandel, Selma Leydesdorff and Rita Thalmann, to name only well-known European women having made significant contributions to Jewish and feminist Holocaust studies and whose priorities lie with Jews. De Costa, in contrast, aiming to 'contribute a women's studies perspective' to the study of Frank and Hillesum, defines women's studies as the attempt to 'end ... the absence and/or subordination of women and the feminine in Western culture' (p. 1) – not in Jewish culture which, when addressed by Jewish feminists, easily reveals that women are both absent and present, subordinate and dominant, but in any case cannot be conflated with a totalizing category 'woman'. Intending to avoid this pitfall, De Costa clearly falls into it anyway.
Taking Kremer’s assertion that ‘the authority of the maternal voice in Holocaust writing links it to traditional Jewish writing, which routinely rendered maternal figures and influence affirmatively’ (Kremer, p. 12), the influence on Frank and Hillesum of traditional Jewish texts ought to be explored. Yet chapters on Anne Frank’s relationship to her mother, grandmother and best friend, Hanneli, muster psychoanalysis and semiotics but a dearth of Jewish sources. The closest De Costa comes to a Jewish hermeneutics relates to Anne’s positive evaluation of her menses. Calling this ‘a revolutionary way of thinking in the context of Judaism, the religion in which [Anne] was raised’ (p. 109), the author goes on to point out that

in Judeo-Christian tradition . . . menstruating women are considered unclean. Menstruation is taboo. The book of Leviticus includes a set of special laws for menstruating women, the *nida*, which explicitly links discharges (‘Issues’) with impurity . . . Menstruation is considered proof of otherness, which accounts for a concept of feminine discharges and of woman herself as the opposite of (w)hol(i)ness. This is clearly a case of ‘sexual indifference’. Otherness, the anomaly of womanhood, is not respected but regarded as inferior. I believe that Anne’s writings show traces of sexual difference: In defiance of Western tradition, she regarded her menstruation as a sign of divine completion. (pp. 109–10)

This paragraph, so characteristic of De Costa, takes my breath away. First, the idea of a unified Judeo-Christian culture is itself contested but appears here with a shocking *Selbstverstandlichkeit*. Second, as Biale (1984) has argued,

. . . purity should be understood as a state which permits a person (or object) to approach the place of divine presence such as the Temple. Impurity is a state, caused by numerous factors [listed in Leviticus 11–15] [including touching a corpse, a leper, seminal discharge] which bars a person from approaching or touching anything connected with God’s residence. (p. 148)

What we have then are the laws of *nida* evolving over centuries; where they once governed public behaviour they came to concern private, bedroom practice. Yet De Costa implies stasis – ‘menstruation is taboo’ – despite the fact that not only the laws themselves, but also their interpretations continue in a high state of tension, alive with controversy.

Jewish feminists like Lynn Davidman (1991) or Debra Renee Kaufman (1991), while saddened that laws of *tum’ah* (ritual impurity) and *taharah* (ritual purity) can indeed have ‘insidious dimensions’ (Kaufman, 1991: 74), report on Orthodox women’s revaluation of the *Mitzvah*. Many find that, because ‘tumah/taharah remains one of the few major Jewish symbolisms in which women ha[ve] a place . . . creative interpretation[s] of the tradition that blend . . . elements of contemporary feminism and individualism’ are possible (Davidman, 1991: 161). And as sceptical of *nida* as I may be, I find disappointing De Costa’s indifference to it as a fascinating, equivocal and still dynamic concept Jewish feminists seriously debate.

That De Costa fails to rely on Jewish feminist analysis is all the more ironic since what she highlights throws the gauntlet at the feet of Jewish feminist reform. For instance, she writes:

In the previous chapters, I have shown that Anne Frank’s inner world was a maze of identities in which she was trying to find her way. Neither her
experience of adolescence nor her Jewishness can be seen in isolation from her female subject position. It is apparent from her writings that the other differences are steeped in the man–woman difference. In other words Anne Frank’s oeuvre clearly shows that whatever position of otherness a woman occupies, this otherness is always multiplied by the fact that she is also a woman in a patriarchal society. This means that Anne Frank was an adolescent and a woman, Jewish and a woman. (p. 128)

The point may be to carve out a new niche for women’s studies within a discipline which, De Costa correctly points out, has been hesitant to accept it. But my greatest fear is that, should the very individuals she wishes to persuade actually read her book, the opposite will happen. Jewish feminists and Holocaust scholars alike will find no reason here to apply women’s studies insights to their field, for ultimately, De Costa does not ask, as they do, how a gendered view can create a world more congenial to Jewish survival. Instead, she asks, again and again, how a reading of Frank and Hillesum may support or contradict ‘feminist’ philosophers Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous. In other words, she uses women’s Holocaust memoirs for purposes Jewish scholars, I venture to say, would find offensive.

De Costa’s insistence on the obvious femaleness of Frank and Hillesum hardly innovates Jewish feminist scholarship which begins with the sexual divide and proposes to negotiate it from within. For instance, Blu Greenberg or Tamar El Or, scholars of Orthodox attraction, explain the teshubah’s choice of Orthodoxy in terms of the power of Jewish women within the family. And this power is real, for without the ministrations of the Jewish mother in the home, a Jewish man, commanded by God to marry and have children, cannot live as a Jew! Jewish lesbians, eschewing marriage and traditional family, critique this paradigm for community longevity, joining forces with early Jewish US movement leaders like Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Robin Morgan, Florence Howe or Shulamith Firestone, who found oppressive the price to be paid for domestic majesty.

The grain of truth in stereotypes about Jewish mothers/Jewish women notwithstanding, to conflate Jewish with Gentile women, as Irigaray and De Costa clearly do, when discussing issues of power, powerlessness and mutual respect (or its absence) in gender relations is unacceptable. Yes, the families of both Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum were ‘assimilated’, but to argue from this that Orthodox tradition – even if no longer practised – leaves no trace on interaction between men and women introduces an entirely different debate, and one which clearly privileges the side that stresses continuity. For what role does memory play in Judaism? And is this insistence on memorialization not a motor for Holocaust studies in general? Gender relations within Judaism, whether that practice is Orthodox or Reform, need airing along with consideration of Nazi or other patriarchal systems, in order to understand how the Holocaust did indeed deal differently with men and women. Yet we do this not to elevate the status of feminist studies. The aim is to overcome our – Jewish – trauma.

If I have been unable to avoid an irritated, even angry tone in the review of De Costa’s book, the fault lies in significant measure with the inadequate line editing by Rutgers University Press. I heartily wish I could read the Dutch which, I am convinced, has been betrayed into the present wordy, awkward, often sophomoric English prose, replete with stylistic faults unworthy of an A-level essay.

In conclusion, De Costa reads Frank and Hillesum wrestling with deity and their emerging sexuality in light of Irigaray’s dictum: ‘the task we have to fulfill in our time is to effect sexual difference on earth’ (p. 128). This differentiation is weighted as ‘one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age’ (p. 127). In the context of Holocaust studies, this will not do.
REFERENCES


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FOLLOWING GENDER THROUGH THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

Heide Wunder and Gisela Engel (eds)
Geschlechterperspektiven: Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit (Gender in Perspective: Inquiries on the Early Modern Period)

Research on women and gender has changed the way we approach and interpret the early modern period (1500–1750). Geschlechterperspektiven: Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit, edited by Heide Wunder and Gisela Engel, is an important and stimulating collection of 29 interdisciplinary, or, as the editors specify it in their introduction, ‘transdisciplinary’ essays (in German), centred on the representation of gender in various cultural discourses and artefacts of this period (p. 12). Some of the essays were part of the conference held in Frankfurt 16–19 October 1996, which was also called ‘Geschlechterperspektiven in der Frühen Neuzeit’ (Gender in Perspective). The contributing scholars are working in the field of art history, history, theology and literature.

The essays are organized into six sections: ‘Overviews’ (‘Überblicke’), ‘Religiousness and Spirituality’ (‘Religiosität und Spiritualität’), ‘Gender Slippage’ (‘Das (Ent)Gleitende Geschlecht’), ‘Querelles des femmes’ (‘Der Streit um die Frauen’), ‘Oeconomia: The Order of the House and Village’ (‘Oeconomia: die Ordnungen des Hauses und des Dorfes’) and ‘Metaphors of the Body and the Construction of Power’ (‘Körperbilder und Herrschaftsinszenierung’). In my opinion, these topics are well chosen since they clearly represent important fields for an investigation of the early modern period.

In Section I, as the title suggests, the early modern period is generally reinvigorated. Especially issues of historical periodization (of what is the real stake in the demarcation and naming of a period that is known under such diverse terms like ‘Late Medieval’, ‘Renaissance’ and ‘Early Modern’) are discussed in essays by Natalie Zemon Davis and Valerie Traub. Zemon Davis argues for a further reaching inclusion of, for instance, such an important category like ‘race’ in future.
discussions of the early modern period, and Traub demonstrates how an investigation in female homoeroticism of the early modern period may have been hindered by a prior assumption of the relevance of periodization. Next, Heide Wunder lucidly examines norms and institutions of gender orders at the beginning of the early modern period, and Susan C. Karant-Nunn, drawing on a variety of historical documents, highlights how German women found ‘a place of their own’ in this period. Nanette Salomon offers a compelling reading of the Venus Pudica, the depiction of an idealized female nude who covers her pubis with her hand. Salomon renders visible and denaturalizes the political significance of this subject/pose/gesture in its endless variations in western art and thereby underscores its configuration as an ideological artifice profoundly influencing the construction of female sexuality to the present day.

In Section II, valuable insights in the life and work of the female reformer Katharina Zell are offered in three articles respectively written by Anne Conrad, Ruth Albrecht and Gabriele Jancke. Zell wrote various accounts, in which she expressed her ideas on theology and the politics of the church. As the authors demonstrate, her writings provide information about the way women have been taking part in the Reformation, show the motifs and interests of those women, and most importantly their possibilities to articulate them. Jacques Le Brun discusses Jeanne Guyon’s interpretation of the life and deeds of five female biblical figures. These women could be read as empowering examples for female mystiques like Guyon.

An essay on Catharina Regina von Greiffenberg (1633–94), jointly written by Lynne Tatlock (literary studies), Mary Lindemann (social history of medicine) and Robert Scribner (social history of religion), underlines the transdisciplinary character of the whole collection. The authors investigate two of the 12 meditations that von Greiffenberg published in 1678 as the Allerheiligste Menschwerdung Jesu Christi, namely ‘Von der Empfängnis Christi’ and ‘Von Marien Schwanger-gehen’, in which she explores the rehabilitation of corrupt matter through incarnation. These sections serve as examples of the manner in which a woman writer negotiated her cultural positioning in the 17th-century context.

The next section, with articles by Ina Schabert, Beate Wagner-Hasel and Walter Erhart, considers the instability of gender in the early modern period with reference to the Radigund episode in Edmund Spenser’s The Faerie Queene. By taking the cultural implications of the Hercules and Omphale myth in this work as their starting point, and then combining it with contemporary theories on men’s studies, the authors manage to shed new light on the psychological significance of this myth.

In Section IV Friederike Hassauer reports, in the form of an 11 questions/answers essay, the basic ideas about the Querelles des femmes. This essay can be linked with Andrea Maihofer’s, which also provides a more general summary of the contemporary debate, though both authors offer new theses on this topic. Rebekka Habermas’s interpretation of Friderika Baldinger’s ‘Versuch über meine Verstandeserziehung’ and Lieselotte Steinbrügge’s on Anne Thérèse de Lambert’s Réflexions nouvelles sur les femmes par une Dame de la Cour give the more theoretical frame offered by Hassauer and Maihofer a practical application. Also, in this section Ariane Bürgin discusses configurations of equality and (gender) difference in Hobbes and Rousseau. Finally, Merry Wiesner-Hanks and Gerhild Scholz Williams explore parts of Paracelsus’s works Philosophia Sagax and Opus paramirum, placing them within the context of current discussions of the history of gender, science and ideas of human nature.

Gender relations/orders in the early modern period cannot be discussed without referring to the (gendered) order of the household. Irmintraut Richarz and
Renate Dürr in their two essays aptly demonstrate that the household is a major setting and context for research about the early modern period because it is inexorably linked with power relations and social obligations. The writings of the Florentine scholar Leon-Battista Alberti are the focus of Gisela Ecker’s interesting essay. Alberti was equally famous for his treatise Della famiglia, where he describes how to govern a family, and for his account of central perspective in Della p...
METONYMICAL SUBVERSIONS

Luisa Muraro

Maglia o uncinetto. Racconto linguistico-politico sull’inimicizia tra metafora e metonimia

Published for the first time by Feltrinelli in 1981, Luisa Muraro’s Maglia o uncinetto is now reprinted by Manifestolibri with an introductory essay by Ida Dominijanni, whose in-depth and very interesting reading is a text in its own right, ‘contaminated’ by Muraro’s writing and in its turn contaminating it, thus ‘giving new birth to it’.

Maglia o uncinetto deals neither with pure linguistics nor with pure philosophy. It is not a psychoanalytical tale, nor is it a political treatise. And yet all of these fields are explored: philosophy and psychoanalysis infect each other; the political character of linguistics is revealed. Questions, themes, footprints to be followed, interwoven tracks which the ‘non-experts’ are called to explore: it was perhaps its richness, its exceedingly complex nature that made Maglia o uncinetto a hard – because upsetting – reading 20 years ago.

The book would slip out in different directions and follow its own multiple perspective lines. One had to run after it, but it proved impossible to catch just the same: the birth of a theory of ‘sexual difference’ was unexpected even though everybody was engaged in a massive disruption of the given symbolic order – while all the tesserae (tiles of a mosaic) of our experiences at that time were situated precisely within that order.

But, just as is the case for metonymy, which Muraro discusses at length in this book, so has her work made its way into experience. Reading it again today, one can see that Maglia o uncinetto was ahead of its time, anticipating our present-day experience. As Dominijanni writes in the introduction:

During these twenty years, many issues have come to a head which Muraro had already seen or half seen – from the complicity between the symbolic and the social orders, to the centrality of language in post-Fordist capitalism, to the media-oriented politics of late 20th century democracies.

During the last quarter of the century – dominated by a dematerialized social body – the supremacy of the metonymic axis over the metaphoric one has more and more turned into the subordination of the latter towards the former, in what Muraro calls a ‘hyper-metaphoric régime’. More and more words have been taking the place of things, bodies have ceased to speak for themselves and the proximity of words and things has been discarded; and a consequence, Dominijanni remarks, is ‘an increasingly rarefied experience or rather its codification into pre-constituted meanings. . . . Abstraction, generalization, rationalization, duplication of the world into words and pictures.’

As far as the theory of ‘sexual difference’ is concerned, something else is anticipated in Maglia o uncinetto. Muraro seems to counter in advance future charges, namely the alleged essentialism of this theory, which on the contrary – as this book shows – has been materialistic and anti-metaphysical since its very beginning; grounded on the connections between the symbolic and the social orders, it aims at inscribing both experience and bodies into the symbolic order, before any ‘metaphoric substitution makes them redundant, obvious, sublimate’. Such a theory restores matter’s ability to produce symbols. This fact alone is an answer for all those who are still deceived by the false distinction between ‘symbolic’ and ‘material’.
Today, even more than yesterday, *Maglia o uncinetto* permits to redeem women’s and men’s experiences, which in the given symbolic and social orders will not be represented, from lack of utterance, therefore of meaning: in other words, to redeem the ‘wild social body’ – which has been relegated to silence or conventionality, and whose rebellion is so often ineffectual. Because ‘being/possessing a body’, the condition which the theory of ‘sexual difference’ considers the basis of knowledge and politics, in too many cases is not yet such.

In this respect, *Maglia o uncinetto* is subversive. It shows the deadly connection of the patriarchal symbolic order and the social order, thus pinpointing the ‘mise-en-scène of normality’, explaining why rebellion cannot find ‘form and consequence’. It is subversive because it undermines the (metaphoric) scheme of representation, and overturns it. It calls the represented ones to speak instead of the representatives, the non-experts instead of the experts, the bodies – not reduced to mere matter, but capable of symbolic production – instead of preconstituted words.

By rejecting the representative principle it destroys any identity-oriented logic (be it grounded on gender or ethnicity). And it permits to understand better the present change from representative democracy to democracy of representation, the ‘shift from politics to communication’, both characterized by ‘an inclination to dematerialization, to abstraction of individual and social body, to self-referentiality’.

Such a process is much clearer now than it was 20 years ago. Therefore, the breaking off of the device of metaphoric substitution, ‘which promises to return all, and reduces all to a sign of nothing’, becomes now an urgent and unavoidable necessity. From this point of view, republishing *Maglia o uncinetto* provides an example of the ‘linguistic guerrilla warfare’ which it invites us to carry on inside the metaphoric device: ‘to interrupt it, disturb it, subvert its prescribed meanings and conventional truth’.

Perhaps reading *Maglia o uncinetto* today might permit – now that production processes have become themselves linguistic, widespread and immaterial – to address again, in a materialistic perspective, the labour issue, to investigate concrete bodies, the life/work of women and men beyond the Marxist category of general intellect.

Iaia Vantaggiato
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Steven Friess, When the Holocaust Became the Holocaust. “For decades after the war, the genocide lacked any formal title in English except, perhaps, ‘The Final Solution,’ the term the Nazis used. In Hebrew, the calamity quickly became known ‘Shoah,’ which means ‘the catastrophe.’ But it wasn’t until the 1960s that scholars and writers began to use the term ‘Holocaust,’ and it took the 1978 TV film Holocaust, starring Meryl Streep, to push it into widespread use.” How America talks about the holocaust. Kurt Klein. German born immigrated from Germany parents died in the Holocaust b/c of America. Finian Cunningham writes about German-Russian rapprochement after German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier’s visit to Moscow on October, 25. The visit to Moscow this week by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier heralds a growing rapprochement between the two countries. That’s not just good news for bilateral business ties. It is key to unlocking the dangerous East-West crisis.