Between the Lines

Philip Guston, the Holocaust, and "Bad Painting"

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When God's back parts are toward man, history is [Bergen-] Belsen.[1]

—George Steiner

On the second page of *Maus*, Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize–winning graphic novel about his father, a survivor of Nazi imprisonment at Auschwitz, Spiegelman pays quiet tribute to a different sort of father: to Philip Guston, whose cartoon-like figurative paintings of the 1970s served as a precedent for his own (fig. 1).[2] The panel at the lower center shows a foot pressing down on the pedal of an exercise bike. The shoe and leg, severed visually from the father's torso, resonate with the many shoes, soles, and feet that pile unceremoniously throughout Guston's oeuvre. They suggest not only Spiegelman's debt to Guston but also Spiegelman's deeper reading of Guston as more than the maker of witty, cartoon-inspired paintings. They link Guston's late figurative canvases to Spiegelman's own topic, the Holocaust, and in this way provide a cogent frame for reinterpreting a painter whose comic images tend to be understood more as a reaction against high modernist painting than as a covert response to the horrors of World War II.[3] A little more than two decades later, in 1997, Spiegelman again ensconces Guston in his pantheon of predecessors by featuring Guston's oft-repeated image of himself as an ovoid-shaped face with furrowed brow and overlarge eye—this time in a lithograph anxious about what Spiegelman feared was the impending death of cartooning in America (fig. 2).

The subtitle of *Maus*, volume 1, *My Father Bleeds History*, conjures an image of history as a bruising, if unacknowledged, undercurrent pulsing beneath the surface of everyday events. Spiegelman drives home the point in the long, horizontal panel that appears directly above the image of the father's pedaling foot. We see the artist-narrator (drawn, as all Jews are in Spiegelman's text, as a mouse) framed visually between the forearms of his father, who pedals on his exercise bike while talking to his son. We should note two things about this image: the uncommented numbers on the father's left arm—reminders of the concentration camps—and the hatching that unites the father's arms with the handlebar and renders the two (arms and handlebar) a rectangular frame that surrounds the son's head. Spiegelman is framed and bound by his father's story, literally contained by it, but only we as viewers can see the framing.[4]

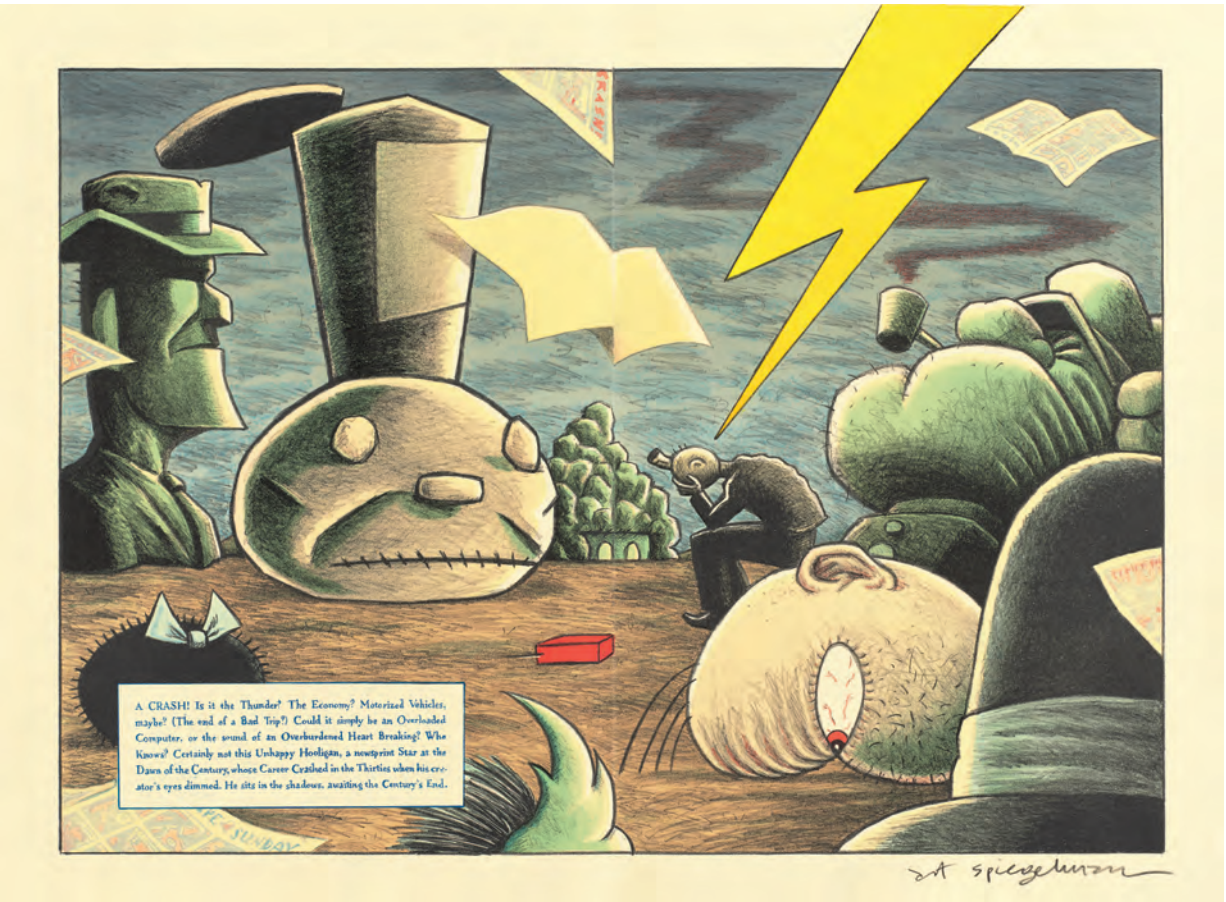
Vol. 34, No. 1

We are witnessing history as it bleeds, virtually unacknowledged, into everyday life: from past to present, from father to son, from one generation to another.[5]

That bleeding is present also in the figurative paintings of Guston. It can be seen in the blood-like markings that appear, unexplained, on his hooded figures (fig. 3). It can be seen in the assorted feet that drag behind his cruising characters, a token of history and the past as they are carried into the present (fig. 8). And it can be seen in a painting like *Pyramid and Shoe*, where the permanence and immobility of the pyramid on the left is counterpointed with the transience and ephemerality of the shoe on the right (fig. 4). We might think of each object—pyramid and shoe—as alternative versions of history, the former defined by its monumentality and endurance, and the latter characterized by its banality and ephemerality. To understand Guston we must begin with that shoe, for Guston's art resists transcendence. His figures renounce immortality for a good pair of boots.[6] And yet they too bleed history. For even as the boots tread carefully through life's follies, they bear witness to something beyond themselves. That boot recalls the mounds of shoes found in 1945 at Auschwitz, Dachau, and Bergen-Belsen. It anticipates later monuments to the Holocaust like one by Gyula Pauer and Can Togay along the Danube in Budapest, where Jews were once lined up and ordered to remove their shoes before being shot (fig. 5). And Guston's shoe appears again, uncommented, toward the end of *Maus*, volume 1, when Spiegelman's father, Vladek, fending off Nazi capture in 1943, is directed to a hidden room concealed behind a large pile of shoes.[7]

That shoe in *Pyramid and Shoe* also suggests its opposite: not just the contrast between Guston's version of history and more monumental versions, but the competition between the two. By placing shoe and pyramid equally along the horizon line, Guston in effect monumentalizes his shoe, setting it against the pyramid as its rival and alternative. In the process, Guston provides us with our first hint of what "bad painting"—his term for his own art—might entail.[8] Guston admired the Russian Jewish writer Isaac Babel, who noted in a lecture to fellow artists in 1934, "The party and the government have given us everything, but have deprived us of one privilege. A

1 Art Spiegelman, *Maus. A Survivor's Tale. I. My Father Bleeds History*, 12. From *Complete Maus* by Art Spiegelman. Copyright © 1973, 1980–1986, 1989–1991, and 1997 by Art Spiegelman, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC, New York



2 Art Spiegelman, *Lead Pipe Sunday #2* (recto), 1997. Color lithograph on folded Rives BFK buff paper, 19⅝ × 27¾ in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Gift of the Collectors Committee. Image courtesy of National Gallery of Art. From *Complete Maus* by Art Spiegelman. Copyright © 1973, 1980–1986, 1989–1991, and 1997 by Art Spiegelman, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC, New York

3 Philip Guston, *Untitled*, 1968. Acrylic on panel, 18 × 20 in. © Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth

4 Philip Guston, *Pyramid and Shoe*, 1977. Oil on canvas, 68 × 116 in. Private collection © Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth

5 Gyula Pauer and Can Togay, *The Shoes on the Danube Promenade*, Budapest, 2005. Photo: Filipp Blyakher

very important privilege, comrades, has been taken away from you. That of writing badly." Guston commented on Babel's speech, "Isn't that beautiful? . . . Doesn't anyone want to paint badly?"[9]

Bad painting, then, for Guston, is what happens when history ruptures impossibly, when traditional narratives splinter into fragments and eloquence gives way to cartooning. That shoe is bad painting. Not because it is poorly described, but because it marks the limits of painting, the most that can be said in a world without transcendence.

Guston's boot also possesses a more private significance. It alludes, as his friend the poet William Corbett has suggested, to Guston's Jewishness.[10] Guston's relation to his Jewish origins is complex: he wandered from those origins when he changed his name from Goldstein to Guston; he wandered again in imagination when he identified with Babel, who, as a young man in Russia had ridden with the fiercely anti-Semitic Cossacks; and he wandered from his own wanderings when he refused, later in life, to allow Dore Ashton, his first biographer, to mention the name change.[11] Critic and scholar David Kaufmann, writing about Guston's Judaism, describes Guston as "aware of himself as a Jew

who lacked the requisite faith."[12] And yet the point is not that Guston turned his back on his Jewishness. To the contrary, Guston appears to have internalized Judaism as a culture of *outliers*. Guston's many shoes and boots carry with them, like soil clinging to the sole, the buried trope of exile and the "wandering Jew."

Guston's shoes, then, provide the viewer with a map for navigating through his late figurative oeuvre. They instruct us in how to tread carefully over surfaces that bleed. They teach us how to attend to the mundane and banal. And—at a larger level—they point beyond themselves to something hovering at the margins: something beyond flatness, beyond abstraction, something buried there between the lines.

Landscape and Loss

Let's begin with an odd comparison. In what ways does Guston's figurative painting of the 1970s resonate with the tradition of landscape art from the previous century? How might images of the landscape enable—one century later—images of memory and loss? Guston's painting *Frame* (fig. 6) may seem at first very far removed from classical nineteenth-century Hudson River School paintings like, for example, Asher B. Durand's *Kindred Spirits* (fig. 7). Where Guston fills his canvas with the broad flat color masses of Abstract Expressionism, Durand revels in the details of trees, rocks, and river. Where Guston's painting stresses the two-dimensional surface of the picture

6 Philip Guston, *Frame*, 1976. Oil on canvas, 74 × 116 in. Collection of Robert Lehrman, Washington, D.C. © Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Alex Delfanne

plane, Durand creates a three-dimensional space that moves illusionistically into the background, ascending as it recedes. Where Guston places a picture frame at the center of his canvas, Durand bestows on the viewer a world of light and space: nature rather than culture.

And yet, Guston's late figurative paintings, hovering somewhere between urban comedy and high modernist malaise, are unthinkable without the conventions of landscape painting that artists like Durand helped invent. Note the three key elements to *Frame*: a tactile foreground world of water, a blackened and abstracted background, and at the center, at the point of intersection between these two realms, a framed picture that not only echoes the upper and lower divisions of the world surrounding it but functions as a point of convergence, a space of "epiphany" or revelation, an endpoint to the viewer's visual voyage through the canvas.

But that is just what *Kindred Spirits* is about: a transition from foreground to background in a visual quest toward a moment of spiritual insight, given to us in the language of light and space, and in the figures of small birds set into the sky, an embodiment of flight and transcendence.[13] Durand finds meaning in nature, while Guston sets his more modernist sights on art itself as a source of salvation.

Lest we miss the point, let us go back to 1970, when Guston first scandalized the New York art world by renouncing abstraction and returning not just to figuration, but to a very cartoonish vision that mixed Ku Klux Klan hoods, idioms of popular culture, and a private vocabulary of cigars, light bulbs, legs, shoes, and other assorted—and often hairy—body parts. *Dawn* presents two hooded artist figures—their identities always masked, and their Klan-like masks always suggesting the artist's involuntary complicity in a world of suffering and pain (fig. 8). Guston's dual figures resemble nothing so much as Durand's two Catskill questers: one holding a cigar rather than a pilgrim's staff, the other pointing toward that orange globe of the sun. Guston's artist carries with him more historical baggage than Durand's figures—we can see, protruding from the back of the car, the painter's easel (a parallel to Thomas Cole's sketchpad) and a series of dismembered feet (an allusion, in part, to the death of Guston's brother from a car accident that had crushed his feet).[14] Those feet conjure images of World War II and the death camps, where, as Corbett notes, they "could be the legs of Auschwitz corpses," "bodiless," "anonymous," and "stacked like logs."[15] They serve as well as a reminder that we are all earth-bound and flat-footed, dragging our mortality behind us wherever we go. Despite this baggage, Guston's characters voyage like Durand's, to a promise of "dawn," a sense of new beginnings that Guston gives to us in the figure of the sun, a visual foil on the left of the canvas for the images of mortality on the right—those limbs trailing from behind the car.[16] By traveling east rather than west, Guston's figures reverse the course of Manifest Destiny and in the process ironize their own relation to history.

7 Asher B. Durand, *Kindred Spirits*, 1849. Oil on canvas, 44 × 36 in. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Ark. Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

8 Philip Guston, *Dawn*, 1970. Oil on canvas, 67¼ × 108 in. Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Md. © Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Genevieve Hanson

Only notice the telephone poles that frame the hooded figures' journey. They remind us that twentieth-century urban culture now separates us from nature, a nature represented in the painting in the orb of the sun and the clustering of birds on the telephone line at the left. Nature is framed by culture, by the signs of modern life. It is not so much a real world of birds and sky that Guston gives us, but a utopian construction, a way of imagining transcendence from within the world of twentieth-century urban history. Guston's painting, in other words, reaches back to nineteenth-century landscape conventions in order both to affirm a continuity with, and to acknowledge the differences between, an older world and our own.

Let us return for a moment to that easel leaning out from the back of the car, the only occasion in *Dawn* when Guston repeats the color orange. This is Guston's way of linking art to nature (painting and sun), his concession to the recurring power of landscape imagery in our culture, even when nature is understood only as a fiction of transcendence in a world desperate to escape all that those framing telephone lines represent: modern life, a sense of enclosure, and an intimation of death (visible in the trailing limbs). *Dawn* thus refuses the very transcendence it pursues. The painting provides Guston instead with a genealogy, a way of burrowing into the past and coming up with a visual tradition, an art history, to call his own. It's a way of short-circuiting, we might say, the dogmas surrounding abstract painting by inventing (or conjuring up) an alternative visual tradition, a way of defeating critics like Clement Greenberg—the high priest of postwar painting in America—by invoking works and visions from an earlier moment in American painting. It does so not by repeating the formulae of nineteenth-century art but by inverting them: we encounter nature only as a fantasy, and we forgo the modernist moment for the quixotic pleasures of the quest.[17]

Dawn recapitulates, in curious fashion, a large welded steel sculpture by David Smith, *Hudson River Landscape* (fig. 9). Guston had seen Smith's work when both

9 David Smith, *Hudson River Landscape*, 1951. Welded painted steel and stainless steel, 48¾ × 72⅛ × 17 5⁄16 in. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, purchase 2020 © Estate of David Smith/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Digital image © Whitney Museum of American Art/Licensed by Scala/Art Resource, New York

artists exhibited together in 1958 at the Whitney Museum of American Art in an exhibition titled *Nature in Abstraction: The Relation of Abstract Painting and Sculpture to Nature in Twentieth-Century American Art*.[18] Smith's sculpture imagines the landscape of the Hudson River Valley between Albany and Poughkeepsie in linear, two-dimensional terms: the landscape as seen through the window of a train. Conceiving of his sculpture as a "drawing in space," Smith riffs on the landscape as a framed vista, from the flattened, rectilinear shape of the sculpture itself to the suggestion of the Hudson River flowing in jagged fashion through the sculpture's lower section, to the two circular, cloud-like formations toward the image's top.[19] The rectilinear shape of *Hudson River Landscape* hints at the pun in the work's title. The sculpture is both a reimagining of an actual landscape as seen through a train window and a sculptural allusion to the act of painting, a framed rectangular vista that never loses track of its own two-dimensionality. It condenses the experience of modernity into a resonant trope: a speeding train and a world seen only as framed. It sets sculpture, as a medium, into a playful and rivalrous relation to painting, and it assumes, as its enabling condition, the *gap* between twentieth-century experience and nineteenth-century life.

These are the terms of Guston's *Dawn*. The artist has substituted a Model T car for a train, and oil and canvas for steel. But he recapitulates Smith's concerns: the gap between modern technology and pre-twentieth-century landscape aesthetics; the focus on framing as a means of calling attention to that gap (what we see is a mediated view rather than a direct encounter with nature itself); and even, in the left quarter of the canvas, a reinvention of the rounded, sun-like orb in the upper quadrant of Smith's sculpture. For Guston as for Smith, the language of "Hudson River Landscape" is an ironic one: a source of both nostalgia for a world available only at a distance—as framed—and a paradoxical affirmation of the ongoing relevance of landscape discourse in the making of contemporary art.

By juxtaposing nineteenth- with twentieth-century imagery, *Dawn* also stands as a form of *remembrance* for those on the wrong side of history—those who know the past only belatedly, as someone else's story. The painting in this way is not so much about its "subject," its overt narrative of a rising sun, hooded figures, and an outmoded car, but at a more latent level, about absence and loss. *Dawn* points to a future (that sun) that is really a past (Hudson River School painting), and in the process, bears witness to Guston's own belatedness. What counts, for Guston, is the painting's poignant recognition that the future, like the present, is always-already haunted: by trailing limbs, a dead brother, and vistas that can only restage the already-seen.

Buried Texts

It peeks out from the lower center of the painting: a rectangle of pinkish white surrounded by the curved forms of what appear to be horseshoes. Some of the horseshoes in *Ancient Wall* (fig. 10) morph into reddish rectangles and ovals that suggest the soles of shoes. Each shoe is outlined by a series of small black circles that stand, in Guston's recurring iconography, for nails. Together the horseshoes and soles form a rounded mound that curves upward from left to right like a small foothill (literally, since they are related to the exposed limbs behind them). Or perhaps they swell gently like another of Guston's recurring motifs: the earth's horizon.

Directly above them a band of skinny legs straddles a red brick wall, and directly above the legs, at the top of the canvas, a layer of thickly applied black pigment suggests both sky and void. Together, Guston's spaces form three distinct planes: a bottom tier of shoes, a middle row of limbs, and above and behind, that evacuated sky. If this were a Hudson River School landscape, we would be looking at foothills (the foreground), mountains (those vertical feet), and sky. Examined more formally, *Ancient Wall* calls to mind the hovering planes in a late Rothko painting: bands of color floating on a shared ground.[20] Only Guston's quiet homage to Rothko turns unexpectedly rude. Rothko's ethereal spaces have been replaced by uncouth body parts. Guston reimagines Rothko's world of abstract forms as a scene of dangling legs and comically mundane objects. Even worse: the high-mindedness of abstract painting—Rothko's desire for what Greenberg repeatedly termed "purity"—dissolves in Guston's canvas into the profane forms of comic books and mass culture.[21] What

10 Philip Guston, *Ancient Wall*, 1976. Oil on linen, 80 × 93⅝ in. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Regents Collection Acquisition Program, 1987 © Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Lee Stalsworth, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

remains is flatness: flat soles, flat-footedness, a flat wall. It is as if the two-dimensional properties of the canvas, a source of almost religious zeal among American painters of the late 1940s and 1950s, have become, in Guston's hands, a bad visual joke, grotesque, puzzling, and in your face.

At the far right of the canvas, a flattened leg has been nailed to the wall. There is no kneecap to mark the leg as human, or to hint at the climbing activity that has brought it—like the other legs to the left—over the wall. It hangs instead like a crucified slab of bacon, pierced and immobilized. The activities that energize Guston's painting—the upward thrust of the mound of shoes, the reach of the legs bending over the wall, the hint of a landscape and a journey—come to a forced halt on the right. If walls are things to be climbed, and feet are instruments for that climbing, then Guston's nailed limb signals an abrupt end to whatever dream of transcendence lies behind—or might empower—those hairy legs.

Back then to that small rectangle of pinkish white with which we began. It is not a horseshoe. It represents instead a book within Guston's world of recurring objects. Guston painted books, both open and closed, with great frequency throughout the 1970s. Note also that the book sits directly below what looks like a painting in Guston's elusive rendering: a stretched canvas (again a right-angled form of pink and white) with a nail binding canvas to stretcher. Book and painting reinforce each other, forming together a self-consciously aesthetic space within Guston's otherwise comically mundane world. In the far right corner of the painting, an eyeball peers out from the bottom edge of the canvas, a recurring image for Guston of introspection and self-awareness. It gazes up into the mounds of shoes, soles, nails, and feet, a stand-in for the viewer facing the canvas. If we think of the eyeball less as a trope for seeing, which of course it is, and more as a mode of spying, which its corner position and upturned gaze also suggest, then we find ourselves suddenly in the midst of a mystery, a puzzle to be solved. From this vantage, the painting and book at the lower center of the canvas take on qualities of hiddenness: they emerge from a mass of forms that they resemble but also differ from, and they hint at a thematics of writing (the book) allied with painting that we must understand as buried, submerged, and only partially visible. We could use a Freudian discourse here to say that we are witnessing a not very successful act of repression, an effort to bury something that is different, or perhaps disturbing, to the larger economy of the painting. Or perhaps we should refine our observations to say that we are viewing instead "the return of the repressed," a concern with writing that partially breaches the mound of shoes around it and appears visually in disguised form. This would explain the slipperiness of what we see: the way that mundane objects like horseshoes and shoe-bottoms mask or overwrite other concerns hinted at in the book and painting. It would also explain that eye, less an object among others to be cataloged within the canvas and more an articulation, an announcement, of a logic of surveillance at play within the painting.[22]

That hidden trope of writing is picked up elsewhere in *Ancient Wall* in the legs that straddle the wall behind them. Seen collectively, the limbs resemble some strange hieroglyphic, an undeciphered set of letters set against a flat surface. That surface, in turn, quickly shifts from a red wall to a lined page, its rows of black horizontal bands, thin and unwavering, transforming the wall into a writing pad, covered now with the strange alphabet of the body: legs and limbs assembling into some mysterious script. A painting about seeing—a painting where the eye in the corner suggests introspection and self-consciousness—now becomes a painting about *writing*, which bleeds onto the canvas as a logic, an impulse, that can't be checked. Which of course is one reason the canvas must be read in an against-the-grain fashion. This is a painting that sets out to

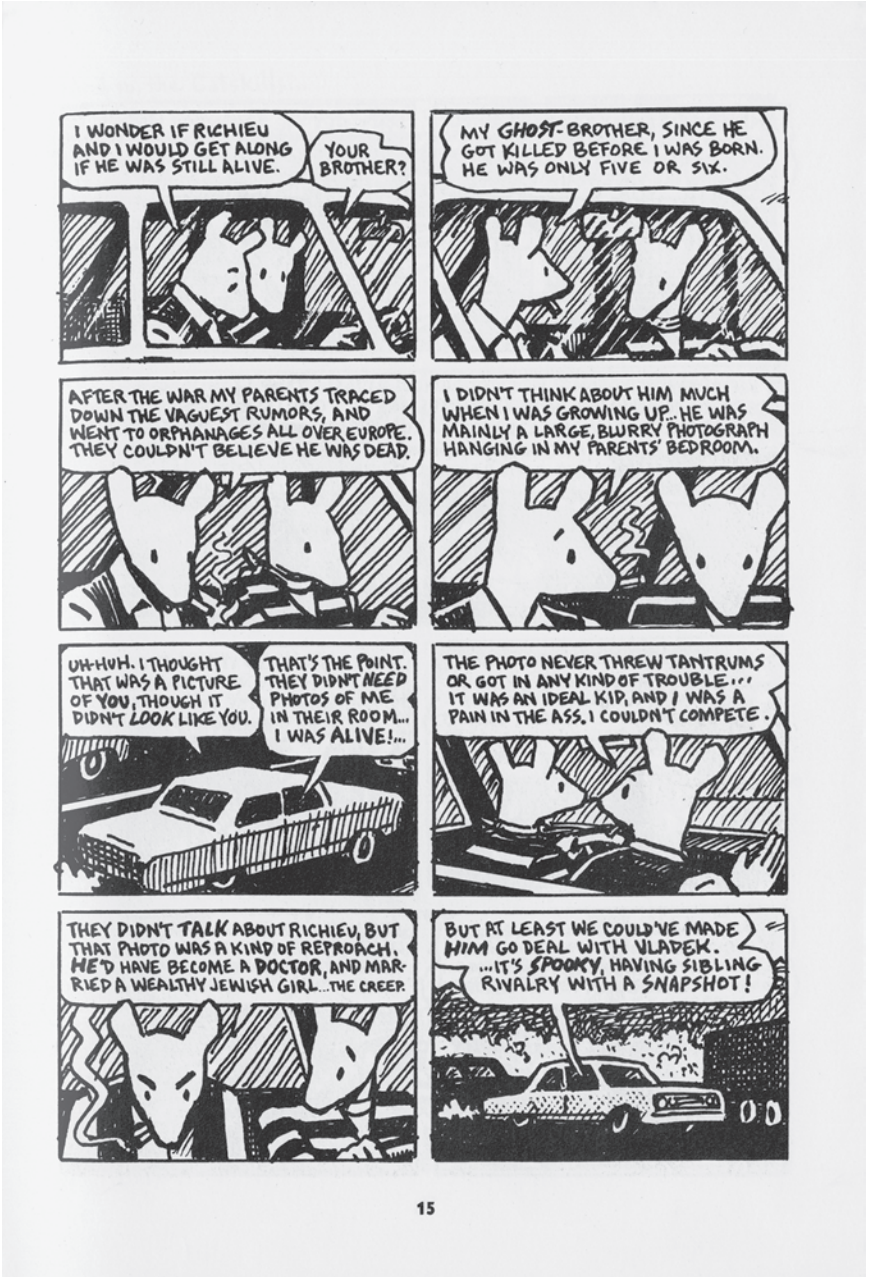
shield what it cannot help expressing. Let us note simply that in the larger composition of Guston's canvas, the body language of skinny feet occupies an in-between space, squeezed visually by the uprising mound of shoes in the foreground and the black plane of sky in the background. There is a now-you-see-it-now-you-don't quality to the hieroglyph-legs. They oscillate between feet and letters, and they appear on what is both a wall and page. In the process, these hieroglyph-legs announce writing not only as the hidden concern of Guston's painting but also as a thematics incomprehensible except as coded and disguised, a way of writing that resists our attention. This concern with writing and textuality—set in problematic relation to vision and opticality—is located compositionally somewhere between foreground and background, eyeball and sky, ascent and descent, a defining moment within a complex visual grammar.

We need to remember that Guston spurned abstract painting in the mid-1960s because he felt, in part, that abstraction had proven antithetical to the work of imagination. "Modern art," he noted, left "nothing hidden, everything exposed." Its very accessibility—its capacity to be seen and digested in one gulp—left the viewer hungry for what Guston termed "the hidden and the masked."[23] The hiddenness, then, that characterizes the book and stretcher in *Ancient Wall* represents more than a moment of visual coyness on Guston's part. That hiddenness is essential to each object's function; it explains why together book and canvas create a self-consciously *aesthetic* space buried at the center of the painting. To recover that space—to name it as hidden—is to recover precisely what abstraction lacks: an attention to meanings that lurk on the other side of visibility, an affirmation of significances that defy immediate intelligibility.[24] Writing provides, for Guston, an alternative aesthetic—a way of highlighting the encoded and the disguised that abstract painting, precisely by its commitment to full and spontaneous apprehension, has either disavowed or lost. That hiddenness lies at the core of Guston's quiet critique of abstract painting. "I don't want to look at beautiful forms," Guston once said, "I want to know what the work means."[25]

The tensions, then, that animate *Ancient Wall* are threefold: the conflict between that which is legible and that which is not; the slippage between painting and writing; and the arrested nature of a yet-unspecified pilgrimage within the painting's landscape format. To help tie these together, we need to return to *Dawn* in order to note a detail there that we missed the first time around. What is that hanging from the telephone wire on the right? What do we make of those four squiggly forms on the underside of the phone line? They appear to be a series of unexplained—what scholars of William James call "unmotivated"—gobs of paint that dangle from the phone line, abstract references to the act of painting itself, until we notice, on the left, not only two other similar drippings but also, next to them, a cluster of birds sitting above the wire.[26] That is not simply paint, then, dripping innocently from the phone lines, but *bird shit*. Those gobs of gray and white have been used by Guston to double ends. They suggest both the gestural brushwork of Abstract Expressionism (pure painting) and the excrement of singing birds. The joke is on us. Or perhaps, to be a bit more historically minded, the joke is on Jackson Pollock, whose paint-spattered canvases now dangle, in comically reduced form, from Philip Guston's long horizontal line. There is an anxiety of influence here, a need on Guston's part to "defeat" Abstract Expressionism by reducing it to a comic, if unseemly, mess, dripping in the background from one of Guston's boundary-shaping lines. Guston's two "hoods," as he termed his masked forms, head to the future in their unwheeled and anachronistic Model T, dragging three histories behind them: the personal allusion to Guston's brother, the tradition of nineteenth-century landscape painting, and (now) a reference to postwar abstract painting in America.[27]

"Keep It Honest"

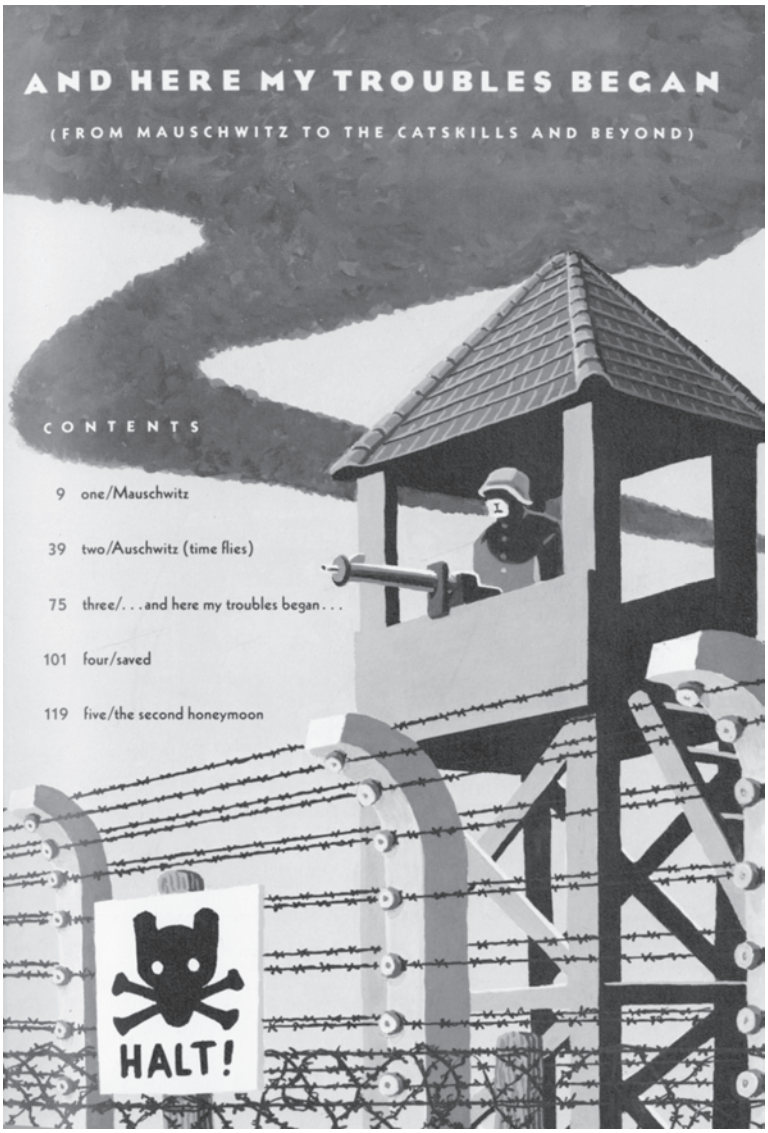
A similar set of concerns animates *Maus*. The adversary, for Spiegelman, is not Pollock, nor even at one level removed, Abstract Expressionism, but the very notion of "high art" itself. Early in volume 2, as "Artie" and his wife Françoise head to the Catskills to comfort Vladek—recently abandoned by his second wife Mala—Spiegelman wonders if he would have gotten along with Richieu, the older brother he never knew (fig. 11). Richieu perished at age "five or six" in the Holocaust. Spiegelman thinks of Richieu as a "ghost-brother," a figure for all that Spiegelman himself never became: "an ideal kid" who "never threw tantrums" and would one day "become a doctor" and marry a "wealthy Jewish girl." A "large, blurry photograph" of Richieu hung in the parents' bedroom throughout Spiegelman's childhood, a constant reproach to the young cartoonist because the photograph, unlike Spiegelman himself, never "got in any kind of trouble." Spiegelman always did: "I was a pain the ass." The page ends in the bottom right panel with Art complaining ". . . it's spooky, having a sibling rivalry with a snapshot!"



11 Art Spiegelman, *Maus. A Survivor's Tale. II. And Here My Troubles Began*, 15. From *Complete Maus* by Art Spiegelman. Copyright © 1973, 1980–1986, 1989–1991, and 1997 by Art Spiegelman, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC, New York

With one word, "snapshot," Spiegelman quietly shifts the frame of reference from his brother to another imagined rival, not a deceased sibling but an alternative medium: photography. There are three photographs interspersed throughout both volumes of *Maus*: an image of Spiegelman's mother Anja in volume 1; a photograph of Richieu that functions as the frontispiece to volume 2; and an image of his father posing in a concentration camp uniform toward the conclusion of *Maus*. In each, as Marianne Hirsch has noted, the contrast between photograph and drawn image sets into play a larger conversation between alternative modes: history, documentation, and the graphic novel itself.[28]

If we shift Hirsch's terms a bit, we can also see a second contrast at work: not so much between history and cartooning (or the Holocaust and Spiegelman's representation of it), but between the graphic novel and forms traditionally associated with high culture. Spiegelman's rivalry is not only with his brother, or even, as he notes, "a snapshot," but with any notion of

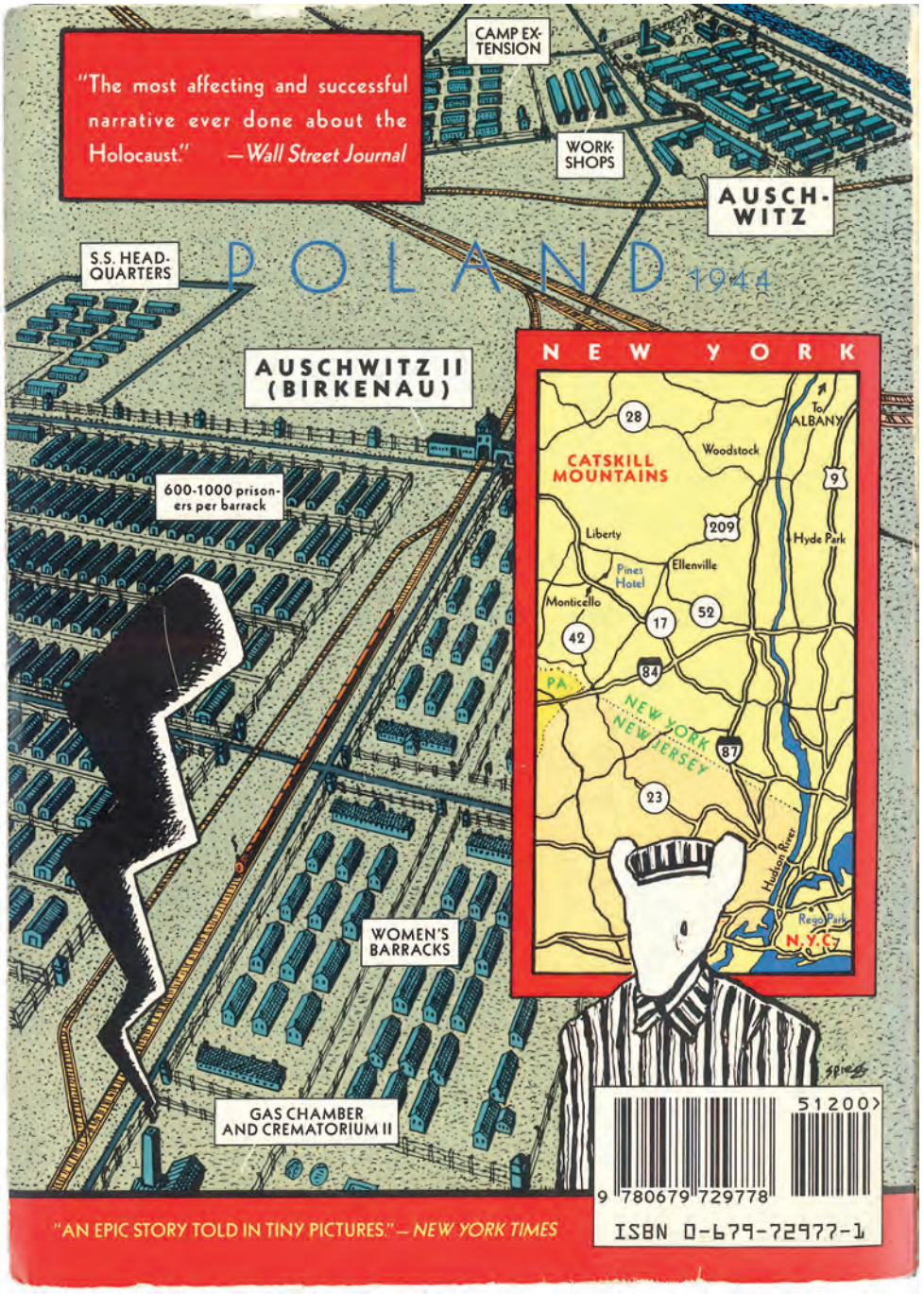


12 Art Spiegelman, *Maus. A Survivor's Tale. II. And Here My Troubles Began*, 7. From *Complete Maus* by Art Spiegelman. Copyright © 1973, 1980–1986, 1989–1991, and 1997 by Art Spiegelman, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC, New York

art grounded in a distinction between "high" and "low." Like Guston's quietly radical plea for the power of ordinary forms and mundane objects (recall the boots in *Pyramid and Shoe*), Spiegelman similarly insists through his competition with a snapshot that his enterprise as graphic novelist possesses equal authority with other—and historically more highly valued—media. It is not Richieu—or even a snapshot—that he ultimately battles with. The enemy instead is Greenberg and a society that elevates painting and sculpture over other graphic forms.[29]

On the following page, Spiegelman confesses his uneasiness about his enterprise. "I feel so inadequate trying to reconstruct a reality that was worse than my darkest dreams. And trying to do it as a comic strip! . . . I mean, reality is too complex for comics . . . so much has to be left out or distorted." Françoise—still driving to Vladek's Catskill cabin—turns to Art and says, "Just keep it honest, honey." But that, one might argue, is precisely what comics do *not* do. Unlike snapshots, they are anything but honest: they stylize, they exaggerate, they distort, they rearrange, they fragment.[30] They do not—as photographs are traditionally thought to do—reproduce the world as we see it. Take, for instance, the table of contents page of *Maus II*. In a full-length illustration, Spiegelman draws a cat (German) guard in a watchtower above an electrified barbed-wire fence, pointing his machine gun menacingly in the direction of unseen others—and implicitly, the reader—on the far side of the page (fig. 12). A large sign in the lower left, affixed to the fence, proclaims "HALT!", while a silhouette of a mouse head with a bone-shaped "X" beneath it, stares forward, a surreal counterpoint to the cat head with the hidden eyes above.

What is not visible on the table of contents is the world *behind* the barbed wire and guard. We see instead a long plume of smoke emerging from the right, beyond the watchtower. The smoke cascades, in a reverse-S form, into a dark cloud filling the entire upper portion of the image. Spiegelman returns to the image at the close of *Maus I*, on the inside flap of the dustcover, where we see once more a watchtower, guard, rifle, and barbed wire—only this time Spiegelman adds a brick smokestack to the scene, its smoke snaking off to the left. This smoke, in turn, forms a revealing contrast with the smoke on the other side of the dust cover: the concluding image of *Maus II* (fig. 13). The viewer sees this time two maps: a large diagram of Auschwitz II (Birkenau), dated 1944, and a modern highway map extending along the Hudson River to the "Catskill Mountains." Standing in front of the two maps—which



13 Art Spiegelman, *Maus. A Survivor's Tale. II. And Here My Troubles Began*, back cover. From *Complete Maus* by Art Spiegelman. Copyright © 1973, 1980–1986, 1989–1991, and 1997 by Art Spiegelman, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC, New York

together counterpoint the past and present that constitute *Maus*'s story—is a mouse figure in a prisoner uniform. Spiegelman signs the back-cover drawing next to the uniformed mouse (no other panels in *Maus* are signed), as if to confirm the mouse's identity as Art Spiegelman, standing before his two worlds like a teacher at a blackboard.

If there is a lesson to be learned, however, it may not be the one Spiegelman or Françoise originally intended. It is certainly not about "honesty." The dominant visual form on the back cover is a cascade of black smoke rising from a small chimney barely visible in the lower left corner of the image. Once again the smoke suggests—as it does throughout *Maus*—the transformation of bodies into ashes, a reminder not only of the slaughter within the death camps, but also of the way that absence can itself be made present. For that is what graphic novels do: they stylize history by converting it into a story, a set of images that recovers what would otherwise be lost. History is resurrected not by hovering, stilled and "honest," in a snapshot, but by being re-imagined and transformed. And that is precisely what Spiegelman's ziggurat smoke achieves. It re-shapes history. It transforms the naturalistic, curvilinear billows of smoke in previous images into a ziggurat: an artificial, geometric, stylized version of itself, a reimagining of the past that announces, through its aestheticization, its *unnaturalness*. The success of *Maus* lies not in its "honesty," but in its artifice, its visual drama. Spiegelman succeeds in imagining the past only by re-imagining it, and in the process alerts his reader to the way that his text is a tale full of sound and fury, signifying everything.

Lines

Let's meditate on *lines* for a moment. If the line represents Guston's answer to Pollock's drip, then we need to understand why. *Drawing for Conspirators*, a pencil, ink, and crayon work created by a seventeen-year-old Guston in 1930—the same year he enrolled in art school—offers a clue (fig. 14). Guston subordinates the lines within this early drawing to the service of perspective. He creates two off-centered Albertian grids, juxtaposing the rectangles of the ground with the bricks of the background wall. The most prominent line

14 Philip Guston, *Drawing for Conspirators*, 1930. Graphite pencil, pen and ink, colored pencil, and wax crayon on paper, sheet 22 11/16 × 14 9/16 in. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Purchase with funds from the Hearst Corporation and the Norman and Rosita Winston Foundation, Inc., 82.80 © Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth. Digital image © Whitney Museum of American Art/Licensed by Scala/Art Resource, New York

15 Philip Guston, *Paw*, 1968. Acrylic on panel, 30 × 32 in. Private collection © Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth

in the drawing, however, is not a line proper, but a rope. The foreground figure kneels with a fragment of rope that appears to have been cut from the larger rope used in the lynching of the black figure in the background. The reference is to the history of Klan attacks on blacks and Jews in 1920s Los Angeles, where Guston—together with Pollock—grew up.[31] But there is a second allusion here. Guston's father had committed suicide in 1924, hanging himself at home from a rafter in a shed. A very young Guston found his father's body and cut him down.[32] That memory insinuates its way into *Drawing for Conspirators*, where the figure of the lifeless black man merges with a different sort of personal trauma.

That rope is talismanic for Guston. It brings the drawing's sad background into the foreground, literally bearing the weight of the past within its coils: the memory of his father, the legacy of race persecution in the 1920s, and, in response to the above, the young Guston's need to bear witness. The gray shading of the rope repeats the gray shading of the skin and figure of the hanged man, rendering the rope the physical extension of a past event into the present.[33] The foreground figure's oversized hands in turn suggest Guston's sense of guilt and complicity, not just for the death of his father (though perhaps that) but for the events of the background, which stand as a reminder of society's limitless capacity for intolerance and cruelty.

That rope will morph over time into Guston's *line*, its limp and sinuous form returning in endless variations. We see it, for example, in Guston's ink studies and images of line-making from the late 1960s during the years he was making his break from abstraction. In *Paw*, Guston's line is produced by a combination of individual strokes rather than a single, continuous flow of ink (fig. 15). Each line is distinguished by its dashed and fragmentary quality, a process that both repeats the disjointed nature of Guston's segmented rope and, at another level, internalizes the gestural forms of Abstract Expressionism. During the same period (1967–68), Guston remarked to his friend, the composer Morton Feldman, that "the strokes in the drawing have to be . . . insistent on their own life."[34] Guston's goal in these works is twofold: to reduce painting to its most fundamental gestures, and to endow it with a genealogy. Figuration, for Guston, begins with the line, and lines in turn are never merely lines. They bear within themselves the burden of modern painting: not, as Greenberg had earlier suggested, to explore the canvas's properties, but as Guston understood, to redeem—or *attempt* to redeem—history. The business of painting for Guston centers on *lines*, rather than, in Pollockian fashion, on drips, because history comes to us most often as an unbidden tale, a mode of storytelling tied necessarily to figuration.[35]

Piles

In 1930, when Guston was seventeen years old, he won a year-long scholarship to the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles. He lasted three months. "There I was, thinking about Michelangelo and Picasso and I had to study anatomy and build clay models of torsos." Unhappy with his classes, and frustrated by a curriculum that seemed to impede rather than advance his progress as a painter, Guston one day "piled up all the plaster casts he could find in a huge mound and began to draw them," an act of comic revenge that anticipated the many mounds, heaps, and piles that would later punctuate his figurative work of the 1970s.[36] Drawing for Guston had less to do with verisimilitude than it did with revenge: refusing an art training (and perhaps an art history) that seemed irrelevant to him and substituting an alternative mode of art-making tied to parody and to an anti-aesthetic vision—piles rather than plasters.

When Guston later abandoned abstraction for figuration in the years after 1967, he resorted, once more, to piles: the accumulation of legs and debris in *Dawn*;

16 Philip Guston, *Painter's Forms II*, 1978. Oil on canvas, 75 × 108 in. Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, Tex., Museum Purchase, Friends of Art Endowment Fund © Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth

the clotted heap of shoe bottoms, horseshoes, and hairy feet in *Ancient Wall*; and, in a work two years before his death, *Painter's Form II*, a Gustonian jumble of legs, feet, soles, and assorted tube-like objects (fig. 16). Whether we understand the objects in *Painter's Form II* as spewing forth from the faceless red mouth that anchors the painting, or as forms it is about to ingest, they resonate in either scenario with the mound of plaster casts from Guston's Otis experience. They clump, like those earlier casts, into a jumble of wayward forms upended from their everyday uses. If Guston's carnivorous mouth is spitting body fragments out into the world (our first reading), then this act of vomiting parodies an older Romantic notion of aesthetics. Imaginative self-expression has been replaced by bodily regurgitation. If (option two) the jumble of forms is being *consumed* rather than spit out, then, Guston appears to suggest, art represents an effort to assimilate and digest precisely what cannot—or should not—be imbibed.

Guston's piles, then, bear resemblance to what the trauma theorist Cathy Caruth calls "unclaimed experiences," experiences that are unassimilable into other events, experiences that disallow notions of temporal continuity and coherence.[37] They are piles of random things precisely because they do not cohere; they cannot be added up; they do not resolve into a familiar object or function. Seen from this vantage, *Painter's Form II* presents two contradictory tales in paradoxical relation. The first concerns art as an effort to digest, to internalize, the body's sad history in the modern world, and the second concerns art's need to repudiate, to refuse, to disallow any hint that the body and its history—the body *in* history—can ever be fully accounted for or accommodated. Certain things cannot be said. Certain histories cannot be represented. And the artist's task in *Painter's Form II* is not to speak the unsayable, but to bear witness to its un-sayability. What started as a rebellion by a seventeen-year-old painter angered by an old-fashioned curriculum and impatient to move forward with his training develops over time into heaps and piles of the unsayable, the unrepresentable, and the unassimilable.[38] The result is "bad painting."

Death of the Tabula Rasa

Let's return to *Ancient Wall*. We need to understand what writing means to Guston: why it should crouch, in disguised form, among all those shoes and feet. And why, when visible, it comes only in undeciphered form: as coded, as a hieroglyph. The key lies in going back, once more, to the nineteenth century, when writing and aesthetics joined forces in unexpected ways. We need to examine a short story by Edgar Allan Poe, whose intellectual distance from Guston is not as far as one might first imagine. Poe—more than any other American writer of the period—created an oeuvre of hidden bodies, covert meanings, false cues, and disguised messages that set American literary history on its irreversible path to modernity. Though the historical pressures joining Poe and Guston were different—Poe confronting an inhospitable publishing industry, Guston addressing unspeakable social horrors—they each transformed the surfeit of texts and terrors surrounding them into an enabling condition of their own art-making. Poe relieved writing from the burden of originality by inventing what might be termed a metaphysics of plagiarism. He created a *palimpsestic* mode of writing that prefigures Guston's own historically layered image-making. Poe thus provides an unusual, if rarely recognized, point of origin for art in a post-Holocaust world.

Poe concerned himself with codes, cryptography, and changes that were occurring in the antebellum publishing industry, changes that affected the very nature of authorship.[39] His fiction makes little sense unless we understand the conditions facing writers in the antebellum era: the lack of an international copyright law; the rise of the penny press; the proliferation of magazines and journals of mass circulation; the birth of a culture industry tied to the circulation of information; and the extension of literacy and reading into ever larger portions of the population. Writing, for Poe, was haunted, not like Guston's oeuvre, by a holocaust of bodies, but by a "holocaust of texts," a term introduced by the literary historian Amy Hungerford.[40]

The tale hinges on international copyright law. There was none in the 1830s and 1840s, a gap in the legal code that allowed American publishers to steal, plagiarize, and otherwise reproduce European writing without payment and without consequence. What proved to be a boon for American publishers turned out to be a nightmare for American authors like Poe. After the Panic of 1837, as the English professor Terence Whalen has noted, writers faced a "catastrophic emergence of information" that "systematically undermined all traditional standards of literary value."[41] They could not sell their stories for decent fees, and they could not compete with texts that circulated freely, that is to say, both widely and without payment.

Poe responded to this situation in three ways. He turned himself into a prophet and chronicler of this new "signifying environment," a world overrun by texts; he labored furiously to survive within it, serving in effect as a one-man publishing industry in an effort to support himself, his teenage wife, and her widowed mother; and he invented new modes of writing, tales of ratiocination and horror that gave birth to the modern short story.[42] But what perhaps goes unrecognized is a different sort of writing: not the detective story, but rather narratives structured as if they were *palimpsests*.[43] In order to conserve the parchment on which they wrote, medieval scribes scraped out whatever text they found on older parchments and then copied alternative texts onto the now-blank surface. Only the surface of a palimpsest is never actually clean. It always betrays traces of prior writing, traces that over time invariably poke through the new text. A palimpsest, then, is a text that is overwritten: its surface is always haunted by the ghosts of earlier texts that invariably erupt into visibility.

For Poe, the model of the palimpsest provided a way of re-imagining writing in a world overrun by foreign texts, a world without adequate copyright protection. Unlike the philosopher John Locke's notion of the mind as a tabula rasa, a blank slate awaiting inscription, the palimpsest instead conjured a world already saturated with writing, a world where new texts were never actually new but only echoes of prior texts, and originality existed as nothing more than a fiction invented by those blind to the fate of writing in the modern world. The lack of copyright turned writers into scriveners rather than prophets, copiers who did nothing more than circulate and re-circulate the words, texts, and documents of others in altered form.

In "William Wilson," a tale from 1839 about doubles and identity, Poe has his narrator recall the look of a classroom from his childhood.

Interspersed about the room, crossing and re-crossing in endless irregularity, were innumerable benches and desks, black, ancient, and time-worn, piled desperately with much-bethumbed books, and so beseamed with initial letters, names at full

length, grotesque figures, and other multiplied efforts of the knife, as to have entirely lost what little of original form might have been their portion in days long departed.[44]

Wilson's description here is less the depiction of a schoolroom than a meditation on authorship in the early-modern world.[45] Note that those "benches and desks" are all facsimiles of, or variations on, the theme of the tabula rasa, the unscarred surface that provides the starting point, the foundational moment, for Lockean epistemology. But also note that they have "entirely lost what little of original form might have been their portion in days long departed." Their surfaces are filled with prior writing. For Poe, then, identity is staked to acts of writing (those "initial letters" and "names at full length"), and writing, in turn, winds up being nothing more than the endless re-arrangement of already extant texts. Poe's narrator affirms the necessarily sadistic nature of such writing. He carves out his identity by defacing, if not wholly erasing, the signatures of those who have come before him. Writing, then, is at once a violent act (those "multiplied efforts of the knife") and an erotic one (the desks are "much-bethumbed" and "beseamed"). For Poe, the image of the palimpsest provides a model, a metaphor, for the conditions that underwrite authorship in a world without copyright, a world where texts, like echoes, bounce endlessly off each other because each repeats, with variation, a prior utterance.

Poe's writing, in other words, is inhabited by voices other than its own; it is haunted by other writers and other texts. The brilliance of "William Wilson" (the story) is that Poe has invented *postmodern* modes of writing, long before modernity itself had been imagined. He has replaced the Romantic image of the artist as prophet and seer, alone with his or her vision, with a far more radical account of writing as necessarily *unoriginal*, a form of plagiarism in a world without blank slates, a post-Lockean universe. Farewell Locke, and farewell originality. Postmodernity begins in a classroom with blackened desks and incised surfaces in a short story by Poe. Postmodernity begins with the death of the tabula rasa.

Which returns us to Guston. Writing is important to Guston because his surfaces, in Poe-like fashion, are palimpsests. They are haunted by forces that lurk about the edges of the canvas, by figures that climb over or around whatever is flat or planar in his art, by adumbrations of something hidden or repressed on the canvas. Writing is important to Guston because it has nothing to do with authors filling blank pages, and everything to do with artists confronting already written texts, already narrated events that peek, poke, or prod through the surface of abstraction. If painting in the era of Pollock has been colonized by languages of abstraction and medium-specificity—by an attention to the two-dimensional properties of the canvas—then writing for Guston is a way of upending all this. Because writing, as palimpsest, provides an alternative model: it substitutes subtext for surface, the partially visible for the fully legible, and in the process it proclaims that what you see is not necessarily what you get. You see flatness, but what you get are ghosts. And history. And "bad painting," which we can now understand as painting that behaves like *writing*.[46] What the palimpsest ultimately provides Guston is a model for remembering, a way of understanding the past as something constructed, retrospectively, in the present. We might put it this way: Guston plays Poe to Pollock's Locke. His allegiance is not to flatness, or abstraction, or blankness, but to the many ways one might disfigure the surface in order to recover, or remember, what lies behind it.[47]

After Auschwitz

In *Rosemary's Baby*, Roman Polanski's haunting film of 1968 (the year following Guston's break with abstraction), Mia Farrow plays a pregnant young wife unaware that she is carrying the devil's baby. Early in the movie, Farrow sits down in her obstetrician's waiting room and picks up a copy of *Time* magazine. The cover proclaims in bold letters, "Is God Dead?," the first cover in the history of *Time* to forgo an image and to front the reader instead with words only.[48] The scene in *Rosemary's Baby* draws on a set of concerns first articulated more than a decade earlier, in 1949, when the Frankfurt School critic Theodor Adorno famously commented, "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric."[49] Adorno's proclamation helped shape a debate in the United States and Europe in the 1950s and 1960s about what sort of language was possible after the Holocaust. The debate was taken up most vigorously by Richard Rubenstein and Emil Fackenheim, both Jewish theologians, and George Steiner, one of the leading literary critics of the day. Rubenstein and Fackenheim were concerned with the "death of God," a reference not to the disappearance of an actual God, but to that moment in human history when the notion of transcendence had lost plausibility. For Rubenstein, the God of transcendence died in the Holocaust. He was replaced by what Rubenstein called the God of "Holy Nothingness," no longer a personal figure but a possibility, a way of naming the numinous and the sacred at the heart of all human striving, however inadequate, however fallen.[50]

Steiner, in turn, was less concerned with God than with language. In *Language and Silence*, his collection of essays from 1967, Steiner meditates on what can and cannot be said in a post-Holocaust world. Can the same language that lent itself to the purposes of Fascism, that debased itself by conspiring with state violence and mass extermination, be reconstituted in any form worth salvaging? Steiner is uncertain. He associates language in its fullness—what he terms "classic literacy"—with the best that has been said and thought in human history.[51] Language was once coextensive with human experience: we could say what we thought, and we used language to bend the world to our vision. From this point of view, *silence* stands on the other side of language as that which is outside—or beyond—rationality, order, and the moral vision of classical culture.

But there is a second version of silence, one necessitated by the Holocaust. This is the silence of refusal. As Steiner cogently phrases it, "We come *after*."[52] Such world-historical belatedness relative to the Holocaust requires a different mode of response, a way not of speaking, but of *not* speaking in the face of history's savagery. Such silence stands as a protest against the cruelty—and anomie—of the modern world. According to Steiner, this other silence finds voice, most powerfully, in writers like Samuel Beckett.

Monsieur Beckett is moving, with unflinching Irish logic, toward a form of drama in which a character, his feet trapped in concrete and mouth gagged, will stare at the audience and say nothing. The imagination has supped its fill of horrors and of the unceremonious trivia through which modern horror is often expressed. As rarely before, poetry is tempted by silence. . . . When the words in the city are full of savagery and lies, nothing speaks louder than the unwritten poem.[53]

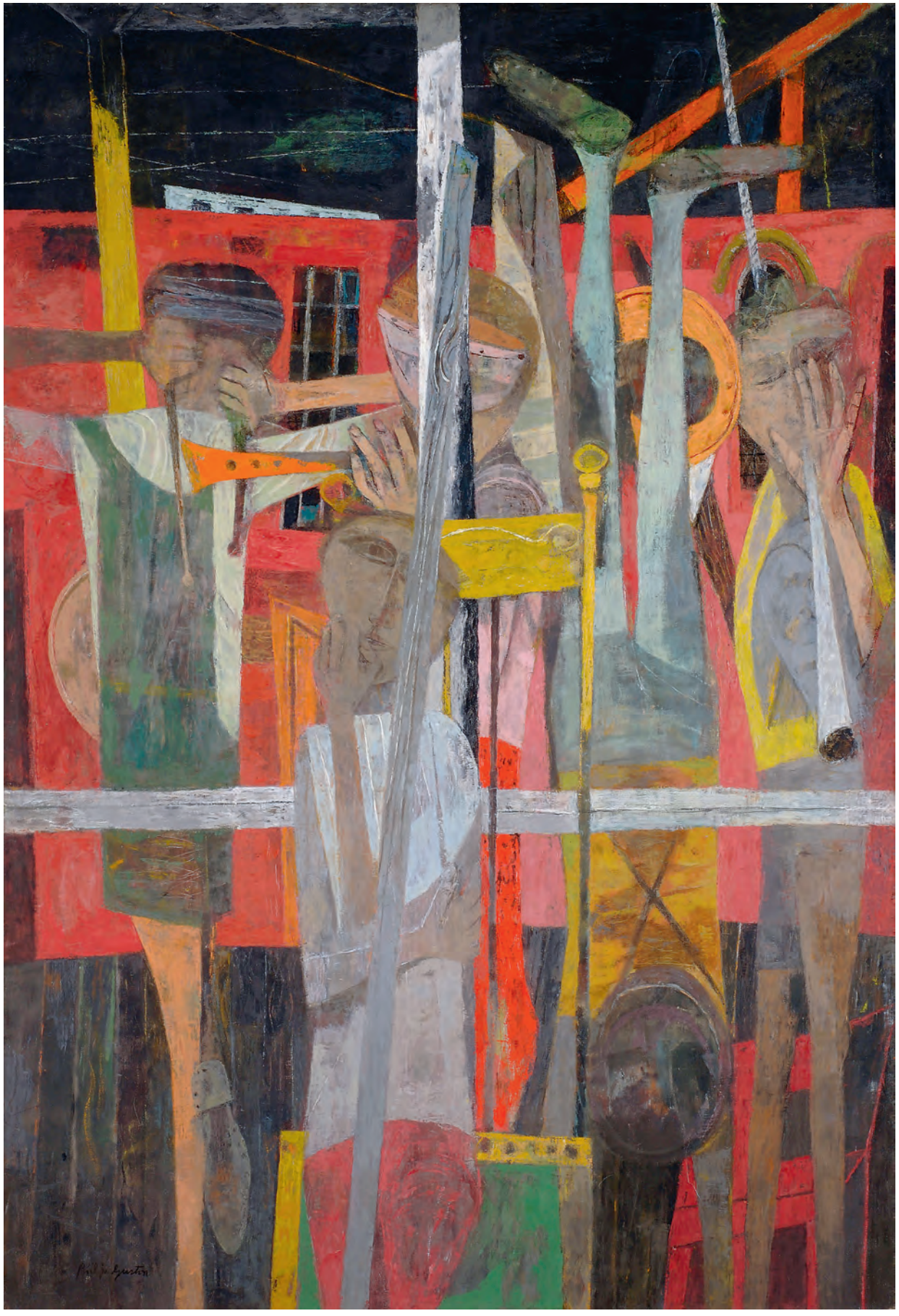
Steiner carries Beckett's writing to its implicit endpoint: characters who no longer wait for Godot, but who instead stare, gagged and speechless, at the audience. Their silence is their weapon in a game of cosmic refusal. In Steiner's world—after Auschwitz—the only honorable action we can perform is to explicate the poem we did not write.

Steiner's musings on things verbal—language, speech, textuality—are balanced by his deep contempt for things visual. He refers to the paintings of Franz Kline as "merely a whorl of paint," and he links Pollock to the "rudimentary pleasures of decoration," characterizing Pollock's pioneering paintings as "vivid wallpaper."[54] For Steiner, modern art—what he terms at one point the realm of the "graphic"—has declared its independence from language and the word, and in the process, has rendered itself susceptible to the very forces that classical language held at bay: feelings and sensations beyond morality and outside rationality.[55] Art has prostituted itself in the twentieth century to totalitarian ends.

Which returns us, again, to Guston. Let us consider Guston's figurative painting as an instance of what Steiner most feared: a mode of debased language. Guston's term for this, his way of describing his own art, as I noted earlier, was "bad painting." By this Guston meant painting that sleeps willingly with the enemy: that nestles among pop and vernacular forms, that renounces sanctity and pureness for the trivial and the tawdry. "Badness" for Guston is the only way we have to keep painting true: true to the media-driven, mass-cultural world we inhabit, and true to what the art historian Robert Slifkin calls the "delirious indeterminacy"—the collapse of stable meanings—within postmodern life.[56] And yet, if Guston's late work represents Steiner's worst nightmare, then it also contains—by virtue of its badness—one of the most formidable responses we possess to Steiner's challenge: how is communication possible in a world after Auschwitz? We need to attend to the capacity of "badness" to address, if not redeem, loss.[57]

Ghosts

Guston made no secret of his interest in the Holocaust.[58] After World War II, he followed closely the stories about the camps that were just then emerging in the media. The liberation of the camps in 1945 brought with it a swift response from the American Jewish community, who began immediately to memorialize the Holocaust through, as the historian Hasia Diner notes, "a jumble of projects": "books, prayers, songs, pageants, poems, articles, ephemera, press releases, pamphlets, and ceremonies."[59] Guston focused his response on children, whom he imagined, as he later stated, "not as children but as lost, agonized beings." In *The Porch II*, painted "after the films of the concentration camps started coming back," five children confront the viewer from the confines of a space whose flatness is reinforced by their own compressed forms (fig. 17).[60] The intersection of vertical and lateral pieces of lumber at the center of the painting creates, in effect, a cross, crucifying the child with the Picasso-derived face. One child dangles upside down, an image suggestive of a hanging or execution (notice the rope behind the shoe to the right), another allusion to Guston's own father. Together the three boys standing upright in the background suggest an oddly cubist version of the adage "See No Evil" (on the right), "Hear No Evil" (on the left), and "Speak No



17 Philip Guston, *The Porch II*, 1947. Oil on canvas, 62½ × 43 in. Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, Utica, N.Y., 48.26 © Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth

Evil" (the child with the pipe-like instrument at the center). This unexpected verbal-visual pun introduces the theme of denial, a point driven home by the way the background figures ignore the form hanging next to them. Though the painting addresses the Holocaust only indirectly, it depends for its effect on imagery of entrapment and confinement tied not only to its compressed spaces but to the fences and barred windows that define those spaces. *The Porch II* is a painting about denial, complicity, and guilt. It marks both Guston's need to bear witness and his sense of separation from the very events that haunt him. We are left, in the end, with a knowing child, a dangling child, and three other children working very hard to refuse any relation to the upside-down figure in their midst. This is a painting not only about denial but also about cognition: what we know and what we may not have known, and when we did not know it. It marks for Guston the end of his—and American—innocence in a post-Holocaust world.

Two decades later, Guston hints again at the Holocaust in an image that only indirectly acknowledges its origins. In 1968 Guston had read Jean-François Steiner's book *Treblinka*, a history by a French Jew about the concentration camp where his parents perished.[61] Guston's response is telling:

So, as I read this, and my mind anyway starts running away with everything I read or touch or see, I began to see all of life really as a vast concentration camp. And everybody is numbed, you know. Then I thought, "Well, that's the only reason to be an artist: to escape, to bear witness to this.[62]

One year after reading *Treblinka*, Guston painted *Blackboard*, an image that is as much about ghosts as it is about the hoods at the center of the canvas (fig. 18).[63] Guston has replaced the Cubist armature of *The Porch II* with a different sort of flatness: that of walls and blackboards. In the process, he introduces a new, post-Cubist way of talking about space: not as a series of collage-like planes (flat shapes pasted to other flat shapes) but through metaphors of writing. The surface of Guston's canvas has become a palimpsest. The painting transposes the loss of innocence that we observed in *The Porch II* into a discourse about *writing*, and in the process, replaces the two-dimensional, Lockean surface of Abstract Expressionism with a haunted space subject to memory and erasure.

Blackboard directs the viewer's attention to a surface inhabited, literally, by three ghosts, images of a past that refuses to stay past. In the lower left foreground Guston paints over forms that may once have been benches or desks, allowing the canvas to highlight, through the vigorous brushwork, its own failed erasures. Those earlier forms—whatever objects they may have once been—push through Guston's spirited brushwork, insisting even in their illegibility that we acknowledge them. They also remind us of the opposite: that memories, like people, can easily disappear. Note, especially, the role played by lines in the painting: the dotted lines on Guston's three hoods, hinting at an undisclosed blueprint or pattern that informs their shape, lines that also, by their very arbitrariness, undercut any order they seem to suggest; the narrow inner line that runs along the inside perimeter of the blackboard, highlighting the framed quality of the image; and the long, unexplained black line that runs the length of the canvas at the top. All of these lines stand in tension with the painterly quality of Guston's surface, with its thickly applied brushstrokes. And yet that surface itself coalesces into a recurring pattern of rectilinear forms that suggest an effort to order, bind, or contain

18 Philip Guston, *Blackboard*, 1969. Oil on canvas, 79½ × 112 in. Private collection ©Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Genevieve Hanson

something—those ghosts, for example—that might otherwise overwhelm the painting's surface. Those lines delimit the abyss, the void of history, at the same time as they permit some deeper, darker mystery to be whispered.

Blackboard, in other words, represents Guston's meditation on painting as an act of writing. And writing, for Guston, is not a Lockean activity of fresh beginnings, but a Gothic enterprise of echoes and memories. Guston's model for this is the palimpsest, which provides him with a way to reimagine painting beyond the language of flatness.[64] The canvas or surface is always already haunted, not only with the ghosts of precursors like Picasso and Pollock, but by something that now, at last, we can name. Guston is haunted by History, with a capital "H," and *Blackboard* (the painting) bears witness to that haunting.[65] It is a painting about three things: History's intrusion on the present (hence those ghosts), the fragility of memory (that trope of erasure), and finally, the machinery by which we remember (the palimpsest). Guston needs the palimpsest because its language of a present invaded by the past, of texts disrupted by earlier texts, provides him with a way of understanding his own situation. We might interpret that small rectangle on the wall to the right of the blackboard in three ways. It exists first as a painting-within-a-painting, a stand-in for abstraction, a flat textured surface that provides a foil for—a contrast with—the world of figuration on the left. It serves also as a reminder that pure painting is never finally "pure," that it must yield ultimately, as Guston believed, to images, to figuration, to the haunting of history that we see at the center of *Blackboard*. And it represents finally the loser in a Bloomian contest between alternative visions of painting: flatness and abstraction on the right and figuration at the canvas's center. The smallness of the rectangle on the right relative to largeness of the blackboard at the center represents Guston's way of measuring the diminished stature of abstraction in a world compelled by other needs: the need to bear witness, for example, and the painter's obligation to tell ghostly stories. For that is what blackboards are about: spaces where writing can occur and where figuration finds sanction. Blackboards belong to classrooms, and we are Guston's pupils, learning from his world of lines and erasures how to remember.

The question then is: *what* to remember?

Postmemory

In 1992, in an essay on *Maus*, Hirsch described a phenomenon she termed "post-memory": the experience of trauma and guilt in second- and third-generation descendants of Holocaust survivors, descendants who were not themselves present at the death camps.[66] Hirsch's original account of post-memory focused on those directly affected by the concentration camps: parents who had experienced the camps personally and children who—while never direct victims of the camps—nonetheless internalized the horror of the camps from their parents as if they had been there themselves. Over time, Hirsch came to modify and expand her notion of post-memory, enlarging its scope from families with direct or indirect experience of the camps to "the relationship that later generations or distant contemporary witnesses bear to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of others." In this expanded notion of post-memory, the trauma of the camps is communicated not through family witness and experience, but by "stories, images, and behaviors."[67]

Postmemory's connection to the past is . . . mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. . . .

"Postmemory" shares the layering and belatedness of these other "posts" [postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism], aligning itself with practices of citation and supplementarity that characterize them. Like the other "posts," "postmemory" reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture.[68]

Hirsch's account resonates in provocative ways with another notion of memory developed a decade later by art historians and film theorists: that of "concentrationary cinema." "Concentrationary," for these critics, has less to do with the concentration and extermination camps of World War II than with the cultural habit of mind, the political logic, that allows deadly and totalitarian logics to exist covertly within everyday social systems.[69] The point has been explored by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who contrasts the historical specificity of the Holocaust with "a more recurrent logic of power that reveals itself as a logic of annihilation hidden within certain 'normal' social rituals and modern spaces"—hence a repeatable logic and social condition internal to modernity. The "concentrationary," from this vantage, characterizes any modern space in which "everyday normalcy co-exists with deadly violence and violation of the human . . . not confined behind barbed wire." It requires in response not only critical habits of memory, but an ongoing political vigilance. It must, in this way, be removed from more ameliorating humanist, individualist, and teleological frames.[70]

Where Hirsch and Agamben converge in their thinking—despite their individual differences—is in their description of how the terror of state violence might be represented and resisted. They each turn to an aesthetics of fragmentation and indirection, a way of addressing both the horrors of the past and the implicit violence of the present by "citation and supplementarity" or, as the scholar Max Silverman describes the process, by "doubling, splitting and overlapping."[71] Their converging approaches, in other words, turn to modernist and postmodernist modes of representation in order to imagine an aesthetics of resistance directed toward—and critical of—the trauma of the "concentrationary." Though they take as their starting point the experience of World War II, each reaches beyond the Holocaust to imagine the ways that unspeakable terror can extend into the smallest crevices of everyday life—as memory (Hirsch) and as politics (Agamben).

"Form Created"

19 Philip Guston, *Outskirts*, 1969. Oil on canvas, 65 × 75 in. Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin (Reg. No. 1985) © Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth. Image courtesy of Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin

20 Philip Guston, *Flatlands*, 1970. Oil on canvas, 70 × 114½ in. Collection of Byron R. Meyer, San Francisco © Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth

In *Outskirts*, painted the same year as *Blackboard*, Guston ventures as close as he would ever get to a direct image of the Holocaust (fig. 19). The painting brings together two motifs that reappear in Guston's painting until his death. The first is the conversation among faceless figures—that congress of hoods—whose world of violence (Guston has scraped out the whip held above the head by the hood to the right of center) continues long after Guston stopped painting the hooded figures themselves. The second, at the top of the painting, is a group of architectural forms with black slits for windows, an image that Guston paints and repaints throughout the 1970s. In the space in-between, that middle ground realm of red, we see a small black train.

Outskirts distills for us on the outside, the outskirts, of World War II a narrative of the camps from the sadism and violence of the human figures in the foreground, to the engine dragging a freight car—filled with what or *whom*—in the middle ground, to the destination point, those buildings whose outsized scale suggests an equally outsized level of horror in the beholder. And there on the right, in the smaller pink building behind the dominant red structure, we see in the right-angle brushstroke rising dramatically from its roof, the suggestion of smoke—the truest, saddest sign that we have entered the realm of bestiality and history. Note the reference again the following year to smoke and crematoria in *Flatlands*, where the chimney and billowing smoke in the bricked structure toward the back of the painting remind us not only of the camps, but, as the pointing hand insists, of the need to remember them (fig. 20).[72] The appearance of red brick buildings with gray clouds in *Dawn*—scattered among pink and white forms—hints, once more, at the ubiquity of the memory of the Holocaust, even in a painting ostensibly about landscape and loss. This is not memory we are witnessing, but *postmemory*: a world of fragments, allusions, and encoded forms that hover in consciousness like so many uninvited thoughts, insisting on acknowledgment in the face of the mind's reluctant witness. Guston's fragments, objects, and body parts form an unholy stream of consciousness. They disperse themselves through everyday life as unwanted visitors from a world less known than imagined: postmemories rather than immediate experiences.

And yet the point, finally, is not one of memory and content—*how* Guston depicted the camps—but of something larger, something tied to the very

notion of history itself, and how we preserve it. Let's conclude our inquiry by talking about *Talking* (fig. 21). Painted one year before his death, *Talking* shows a gesturing arm and hand. The hand points to the right while cradling not one but two cigarettes. A red trail of smoke-puffs rises from one before falling gloriously, voluminously, to the center bottom of the canvas, while circles of orange beads form what might be the metal cord leading to an unseen light bulb. A very Gustonian watch points with its one hand to the left, a baroque counterpoint to the gesture of the hand to the right.

Talking, as a painting, is defined by paradox. It is about the very activity that painting, as a visual form, cannot communicate. It suggests speech that we

21 Philip Guston, *Talking*, 1979. Oil on canvas, 68⅛ × 78¼ in. Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Edward R. Broida © Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy of Hauser & Wirth

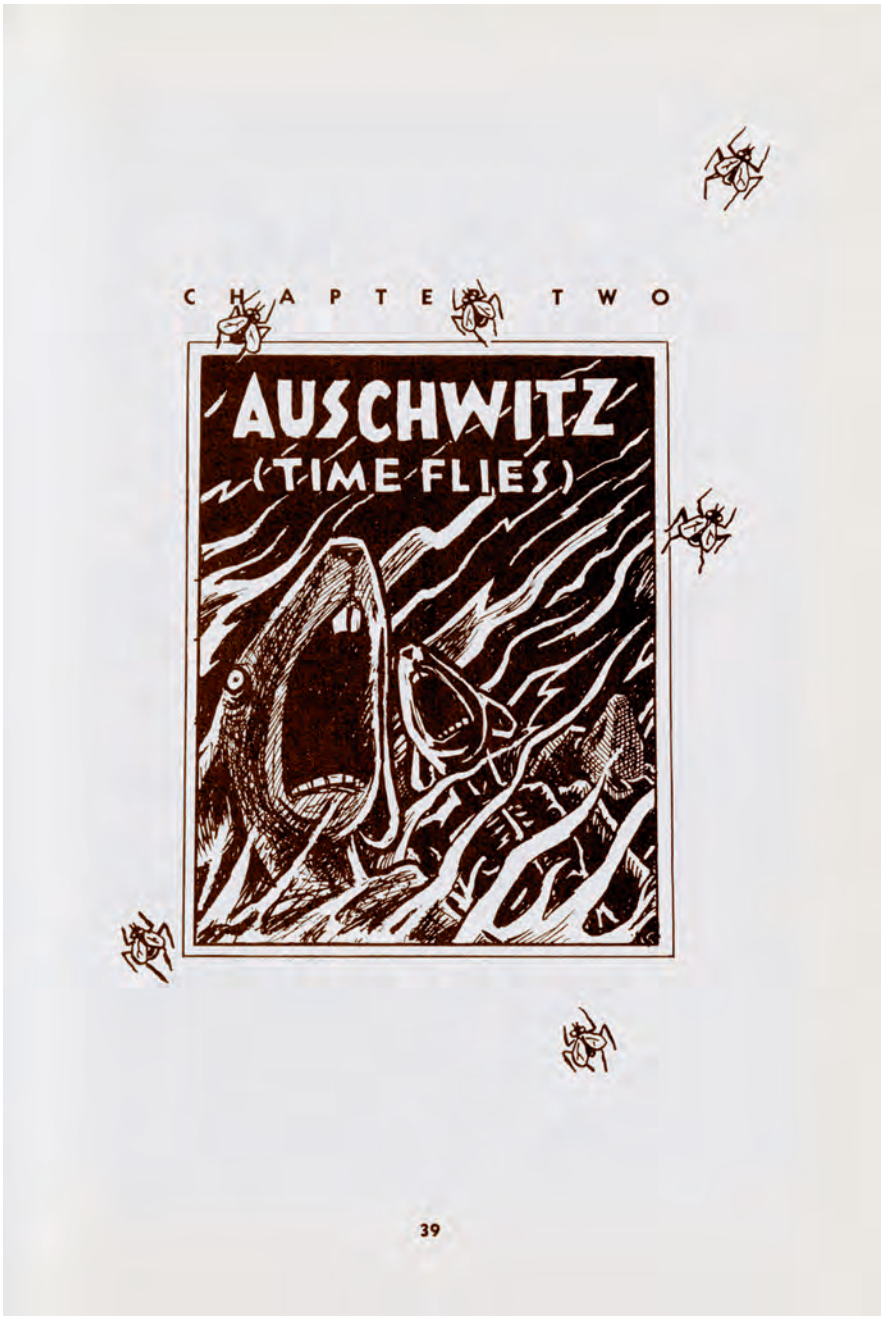
cannot hear. We could say that this is a painting about language and referentiality: that all discourse, all sign-making, all painting, can finally achieve nothing greater than to gesture beyond itself. This could be a painting about transcendence, except that, in its egregious refusal to suggest what it is pointing toward, *Talking* pulls our attention away from *where* it points to and redirects us to *what* it is, to the gesture itself, to that hand defined by a watch, a chain, a cascade of smoke, and a thumb set perpendicularly against the fingers.

This is a painting about painting and its limits. But it is also a painting about painting and its glories. The viewer notices, on closer examination, that the thumb and index finger form the edge of a frame. They create a right angle that resembles the corner of a picture, and in the process, they suggest a painting-within-the-painting that consists of two smoking cigarettes, a rising and then cascading plume of smoke, and the void. That picture-within-a-picture distills the essence of Guston's late figurative art. It is autobiographical (Guston was a chain smoker); it is painterly (the forms are quasi-abstract and quasi-gestural); and it recapitulates an image like *Pyramid and Shoe*, painted two years earlier. It sets a man-made form—those two cigarettes—against the void; it asks us to contrast their bent forms with the nothingness they set off and attempt to redeem; and it redefines, yet again, "bad painting," suggesting this time that bad painting takes the most trivial and banal of subjects and pins our hopes for immortality on them.

And the Holocaust? It's there not as the subject of Guston's painting, but as its enabling condition. I am not referring to the possible echo between smoke and crematoria; nor to the ascending pull-string that reaches toward an absent God; nor to the watch, which suggests, in the backward sweep of its only hand, a past which cannot be forgotten; nor to the cascading smoke that rises first, for one framed and glorious moment, before descending, a model of the true pathos of art-making itself; nor even to the blackness that surrounds all in silence. I am referring instead to *Talking* as a meta-painting, a meditation on paradox and impossibility. The true subject of Guston's painting, another reason that it is "bad," lies in the canvas's failure to step beyond its own frame. We cannot hear what the painting wishes to but can never say directly. This is a painting not about the Holocaust, but about bearing witness to a history that survives now only as a memory. Or rather, as the literary critic Shoshana Felman notes, it is a painting, like so much of Guston's late work, that bears witness to the "failure of witnessing," the inability of representation to present anything more than a record of its own limitations.[73] And it is also Guston's way of reimagining the trope of the palimpsest, not this time as a disfigured surface, but as an endlessly recurring gesture—that pointing hand—forever mocking the void. What can painting as an enterprise provide us but smoke and fire and void? The answer, for the question is not rhetorical, is: a frame. That right angle of thumb and index finger seizes chaos and banality and horror—the forces that Steiner most dreaded—and molds them into a shape, into a meaning, into a framed image, into art. For that is where the Holocaust dwells for Guston: not in the telling, which can never be adequately accomplished, nor in the witnessing, which bears witness only to its own failures, but in the framing—what Guston termed "form created"—for that is what painting provides.[74]

Coda: Time Flies

Let us conclude where we began: with Spiegelman, whose panels create, as he once called them, neat "little boxes" that leap from gutter to gutter (the space in between the frames) in order to narrate history.[75] It's that *leaping* that concerns us—an effort, literally, not to *fill* the void, but to *continue* despite it. At the beginning of chapter two of *Maus II*, "Auschwitz (Time Flies)," Spiegelman frames an image of terrified mice perishing in the midst of fumes that might also be flames (fig. 22). The faces of the mice are defined by voids: the black triangulated holes of their mouths, the empty stare of the foreground mouse, the black skeletal form of the second mouse, and—as a visual counterpoint—the small white spaces of their teeth and one visible eye. Six flies surround the image—three literally touching the frame and three at varying distances from it. They each head upward, echoing in their movement the diagonally ascending fumes-flames. Their presence literalizes the chapter subtitle, "Time Flies," converting what could be a bad pun into a larger meditation on the coruscations of history. Their presence invokes not just temporality, but death and annihilation, for they are the ones who will one day feed on the corpses of the dying mice.



22 Art Spiegelman, *Maus. A Survivor's Tale. II. And Here My Troubles Began*, 39. From *Complete Maus* by Art Spiegelman. Copyright © 1973, 1980–1986, 1989–1991, and 1997 by Art Spiegelman, used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC, New York

And yet, Spiegelman insists, those corpses must be respectfully buried. Not, as once happened, in piles of bodies heaped anonymously into mass graves and burned. But in a different sort of space, the neat "little boxes" of his own comics: rectilinear lines that frame, and thereby preserve, an unspeakable story. Like Guston's right-angled thumb and index finger in *Talking*, Spiegelman's lines frame the void, insisting that there is more to the story than absence, that the gutters of history must be bridged, that the flies will not win. Those boxes are "coffins"—another of Spiegelman's terms for his art—that preserve even as they bury, and they do so, as all stories must, line by line.

Notes

1 George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 142.

2 Art Spiegelman, *Maus. A Survivor's Tale. I. My Father Bleeds History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973, 1986), 12. Spiegelman notes his debt to Guston on numerous occasions. See, for example, Claudia Dreifus, "'Drawing is Always a Struggle': An Interview with Art Spiegelman," *New York Review of Books*, April 13, 2018.

3 See most recently *Go Figure! New Perspectives on Guston*, ed. Peter Benson Miller (New York: New York Review of Books, 2014).

4 I use the first-person plural "we" throughout this essay not to erase differences among readers, but to suggest a community of scholars engaged in a shared effort to read "between the lines."

5 Michael G. Levine interprets the poster of Rudolph Valentino in the background of the facing page (12) as Spiegelman's meditation on the relation between the graphic novel and film. Levine, "Necessary Stains: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and the Bleeding of History," in *Considering* Maus*: Approaches to Art Spiegelman's "Survivor's Tale" of the Holocaust*, ed. Deborah R. Geis (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 2003), 73. See also Gene Kannenberg Jr., "'I Looked Just Like Rudolph Valentino': Identity and Representation in *Maus*," in *The Graphic Novel*, ed. Jan Baetens (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven Univ. Press, 2001), 79–89. Spiegelman appears to be punning with the image in the poster. It references the 1926 film "Son of the Sheik" starring Valentino and Agnes Ayres, a follow up to the 1921 "The Sheik," that is, which propelled Valentino to fame. The visual joke in the poster, then, centers on Art himself as a son of the sheik, that is, Vladek. To compound the joke even further, Valentino played two roles in "The Son of the Sheik": the sheik and his father. In this way, Spiegelman manages to have his cake and eat it at the same time. He becomes both son and father, Art and Vladek. A reproduction of the poster is available at imdb.com/title/tt0017416/.

6 Guston described his fascination with shoes as part of his desire to paint "tangible things" different from the more elevated forms of modern art. His shoes, books, and light bulbs represent efforts to "get rid of art." Philip Guston, "Talk at Yale Summer School of Music and Art" (Yale Summer School of Music and Art, Norfolk, Conn., August 1972), reprinted in *Philip Guston: Collected Writings, Lectures, and Conversations*, ed. Clark Coolidge (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2011), 155.

7 Spiegelman, *Maus I*, 121.

8 Guston coined the phrase "bad painting" during a public lecture in 1978. Philip Guston, "Talk at 'Art/Not Art?' Conference" ("The Big Question: Art/Not Art?" Conference, Univ. of Minnesota, Minneapolis, February 27, 1978), transcribed by Renee McKee, reprinted in Coolidge, *Philip Guston*, 279, quoted in Robert Slifkin, *Out of Time: Philip Guston and the Refiguration of Postwar American Art* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2013), 167. See also Martin Hentschel, "From the Abstract to the Figurative: Philip Guston's Stony Path," in *Philip Guston: Gemälde, 1947–1979* (Ostifildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1999).

9 Guston, "Talk at 'Art/Not Art?' Conference," 280, quoted in Slifkin, *Out of Time*, 167–68. See also Robert Storr, *Philip Guston* (New York: Abbeville Press), 56–57.

10 William Corbett, *Philip Guston's Late Work: A Memoir* (Cambridge, Mass.: Zoland Books, 1994), 60–64.

11 Corbett, *Philip Guston's Late Work*, 60, 62.

12 David Kaufmann, *Telling Stories: Philip Guston's Later Works* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2010), 80.

13 For an extended discussion of *Kindred Spirits*, see Rachael DeLue, "The Challenge of Contemporaneity, or, Thoughts on Art as Culture," and Bryan Wolf, "Response: Writing History, Reading Art," both in *A Companion to American Art*, ed. John Davis, Jennifer A. Greenhill, and Jason D. LaFountain (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 167–90.

14 Guston's daughter, Musa Mayer, relates the story of Guston's brother's death in *Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 17.

15 Corbett, *Philip Guston's Late Work*, 63.

16 Dore Ashton observes that "those hot-dog cars with doughnut wheels" echo the Krazy Kat cartoons that Guston loved throughout his life. Ashton, *Yes, but . . .: A Critical Study of Philip Guston* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 162. In a talk at the Yale Summer School of Music and Art in 1973, Guston cites Herriman's Krazy Kat together with the work of early cartoonists Bud Fisher and Chic Young, as "the masters. . . . I used to love them." Coolidge, *Collected Writings*, 222.

17 Hentschel links Guston's figurative art to landscape traditions in his discussion of *Spleen*, 1975, in "From the Abstract to the Figurative," 52–53.

18 Philip Guston, "Statement in Nature in Abstraction," 1958, quoted by John I. H. Baur, *Nature in Abstraction: The Relation of Abstract Painting and Sculpture to Nature in Twentieth-Century American Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1958), 10, reprinted in Coolidge, *Philip Guston*, 18. It is unclear whether Guston viewed Smith's work in the exhibition or in the exhibition catalog (or both).

19 The phrase "drawing in space" is originally from Julio González, who coined it in 1933 to describe the work of Pablo Picasso.

20 For a discussion of Guston's relation to Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Clyfford Still, see Michael Auping, "Impure Thoughts: On Guston's Abstractions," in *Philip Guston Retrospective* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Museum of Modern Art of Fort Worth, 2003), 37–52.

21 See, for instance, Clement Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 144.

22 The film critic Libby Saxton argues that observing from the sidelines (or, in the case of cinema, the edge of a frame) is never a neutral act. The viewer is always complicit in the scene being observed. Saxton, *Haunted Images: Film, Ethics, Testimony and the Holocaust* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008).

23 Philip Guston quoted in "Conversation with Clark Coolidge," December 8, 1972, Woodstock, N.Y., transcribed in Coolidge, *Philip Guston*, 205.

24 Michael Fried famously argues for the immediate intelligibility of works of abstraction in Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in "American Sculpture," special issue, *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967): 22–23.

25 Philip Guston quoted in Lea Rosson DeLong, *Shifting Visions: O'Keeffe, Guston, Richter* (Des Moines, Iowa: Des Moines Art Center, 1998), 52.

26 Matthew Ratcliffe, "William James on Emotion and Intentionality," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 13, no. 2 (2005): 191.

27 Guston had known Pollock since the 1920s, when both attended—and were expelled from—the Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles. Pollock was subsequently readmitted; Guston never completed high school, going on instead to the Otis Art Institute. Guston, "Talk at Yale Summer School," 1972, 160–61, and "Talk at Yale Summer School," 1973, 214.

28 The photographs appear in *Maus I*, 100 (Anja); Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, vol. 2, *And Here My Troubles Began* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), 5 (Richieu), 134 (Vladek). Marianne Hirsch, "Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning and Post-Memory," in "The Emotions, Gender, and the Politics of Subjectivity," special issue, *Discourse* 15, no. 2 (1992–93): 3–29.

29 In a single-page, multi-panel cartoon published in *Artforum*, Spiegelman lampooned the Museum of Modern Art and its *High and Low* exhibition of 1990 by noting that the show's categories erase the "formal energy" in "popular culture": "'High 'N 'Low' is a question of class/economics—not aesthetics." Art Spiegelman, "High Art Lowdown," *Artforum* 29, no. 4 (December 1990): 115.

30 Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 16; and Deborah R. Geis, introduction to Geis, *Considering* Maus, 3.

31 Guston once displayed some of his early hooded images in the Stanley Rose bookshop in Los Angeles, one of many places he worked as a young man. "Some members of the KKK walked in, took the paintings off the wall, and slashed them. Two were mutilated." Guston, "Talk at 'Art/Not Art' Conference," 282. See also Ashton, *Yes, but . . .*, 18.

32 Mayer, *Night Studio*, 12.

33 I am grateful to Gabriel Wolf for this observation.

34 Philip Guston quoted in "Conversation with Morton Feldman," New York Studio School, October 23, 1968, in Coolidge, *Philip Guston*, 85.

35 According to Hillary L. Chute, Spiegelman first encountered the Holocaust through the "drawn line." As a child, Spiegelman had viewed pamphlets like Paladij Osynka's drawings of Auschwitz, made while Osynka was a prisoner and published in 1946. Spiegelman's mother, Anja, brought Osynka's pamphlet to Sweden and later to the United States. Chute, *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2016), 14.

36 Mayer, *Night Studio*, 14. Philip Guston quoted in Ashton, *Yes, but . . .*, 15. See also Francisco Sousa Lobo, "Lest We Vanish into Meaning: Philip Guston and the Politics of Trash," *Performance Research* 22, no. 8 (2017): 64–67.

37 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1996).

38 For a thoughtful reading of Guston's piles in relation to both Lyotardian theory and Holocaust history, see Jana V. Schmidt, "Philip Guston's Piles," in *Traversals of Affect: On Jean-François Lyotard*, ed. Claire Nouvet, Julie Gaillard, and Mark Stoholski (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), unpaginated.

39 Shawn Rosenheim, *The Cryptographic Imagination: Secret Writing from Edgar Poe to the Internet* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1997). See also John T. Irwin, *American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1980); and Kevin J. Hayes, *Poe and the Printed Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000).

40 The phrase is from Amy Hungerford, *The Holocaust of Texts: Genocide, Literature, and Personification* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003).

41 Terence Whalen, "Edgar Allan Poe and the Horrid Laws of Political Economy," *American Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (September 1992): 384. See also Whalen, *Edgar Allan Poe and the Masses: The Political Economy of Literature in Antebellum America* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1999). For a history of copyright laws prior to Poe, see *English Publishing, the Struggle for Copyright, and the Freedom of the Press: Thirteen Tracts, 1666–1774* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1975); and Joseph William Rogers, *U.S. National Bibliography and the Copyright Law: An Historical Study* (New York: Bowker, 1960).

42 Whalen, "Edgar Allan Poe and the Horrid Laws of Political Economy," 382.

43 Sarah Dillon, *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007). See also Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003).

44 Edgar Allan Poe, "William Wilson," in *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry and Tales*, ed. Patrick F. Quinn (New York: Library of America, 1984), 340.

45 For a political reading of "William Wilson" as a critique of American democracy, see Theron Britt, "The Common Property of the Mob: Democracy and Identity in Poe's 'William Wilson,'" *Mississippi Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 197–210.

46 Slifkin discusses the act of writing and Guston's quest for "semiotic stability" in *Out of Time*, 129, 29–99.

47 Max Silverman invokes the palimpsest as a model for what he terms "concentrationary memory" in Silverman, "Fearful Imagination: *Night and Fog* and Concentrationary Memory," in *Concentrationary Cinema: Aesthetics as Political Resistance in Alain Resnais's* Night and Fog, ed. Griselda Pollock and Silverman (1955; New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 204, 206.

48 *Time*, April 8, 1966. Christopher Hale notes the first use of a text-only cover in *Time*'s history in Hale, "Ideas," *Time*, April 7, 2016.

49 Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (1955; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1967), 34. Adorno's comment—to which he came back several times in later writings—first appeared mid-sentence in "Cultural Critique and Society" (1949) as part of a discussion about the possibility of cultural criticism and lyric poetry in the modern world.

50 Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary*

Judaism, 2nd ed. (1966; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992), xiii, 298–302, 305–306. See also Emil L. Fackenheim, "Transcendence in Contemporary Culture: Philosophical Reflections and a Jewish Testimony," in *Transcendence*, ed. Herbert W. Richardson and Donald R. Cutler (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

51 Steiner, *Language and Silence*, 17.

52 Ibid., ix.

53 Ibid., 7, 54.

54 Ibid., 22–23.

55 Steiner introduces the category of the "graphic" in contradistinction to the verbal in "The Retreat from the Word," ibid., 22.

56 Slifkin, *Out of Time*, 60.

57 Guston's sense that "badness" might be used, paradoxically, to redeem loss stems in part from elements of his Jewish background. Ashton notes that Guston once compared himself to the "Hasidic dancers who get up to dance in the spirit of despair. But they *do* dance." Guston's "badness," I suspect, is his form of dancing. Ashton, *Yes, but . . .*, 178.

58 For a thoughtful account of responses to the Holocaust in contemporary art, see Mark Godfrey, *Abstraction and the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2007). See also Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2000); and Stephen C. Feinstein, ed., *Absence/Presence: Critical Essays on the Artistic Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2005).

59 Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2009), 367. See also Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999); and Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflection on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso, 2000).

60 Guston, "Talk at Yale Summer School," 151. For a discussion of *The Porch* (1945, Krannert Art Museum), an earlier version of *The Porch II*, see Thomas B. Cole, "*The Porch*: Philip Guston," *JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association*, July 12, 2016, 132–33.

61 Jean-François Steiner, *Treblinka*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967).

62 Philip Guston quoted in "Conversation with Morton Feldman," 81.

63 Robert Slifkin provides a compelling interpretation of Guston's hooded forms in their relation to political art of the Great Depression in Slifkin, "Philip Guston's Return to Figuration and the '1930s Renaissance' of the 1960s," *Art Bulletin* 93, no. 2 (June 2011): 220–42.

64 For a rich account of the role of writing within Guston's late figurative painting, see Harry Cooper, "Recognizing Guston," in *Philip Guston: A New Alphabet, The Late Transition*, by Joanna Weber (New Haven: Yale Univ. Art Gallery, 2000), 27–65.

65 Silverman characterizes "History," with a capital "H," as a form of "cultural memory" tied to Walter Benjamin's concept of "dialectics at a standstill." Silverman, "Fearful Imagination," 207–8.

66 Hirsch, "Family Pictures," 3–29.

67 Marianne Hirsch, "Presidential Address 2014: Connective Histories in Vulnerable Times," *PMLA* 129, no. 3 (May 2014): 339.

68 Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2012), 5–6; and Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997).

69 I am grateful to Jana V. Schmidt for introducing me to the term "concentrationary cinema" and referring me to recent scholarship on the "concentrationary."

70 Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman, introduction to Pollock and Silverman, *Concentrationary Cinema*, 14, 15; and Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (1995; Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998), 176.

71 Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 5; and Silverman, "Fearful Imagination," 205.

72 For an extended reading of *Flatlands* in relation to the flatness of Abstract Expressionism and questions of language, see Slifkin, "Philip Guston's Return to Figuration," 220–42.

73 Shoshana Felman, "Crisis of Witnessing: Albert Camus' Postwar Writings," *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 3, no. 2 (Autumn 1991): 230, quoted in Schmidt, "Philip Guston's Piles," 151.

74 Ashton, *Yes, but . . .*, 178.

75 Art Spiegelman quoted in Chute, *Disaster Drawn*, 194.