

**Archiving the Diaspora: A Lesbian Impression of/in Ulrike Ottinger's "Exile Shanghai"**

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M —, I think this is excellent, although long and slow as you said. Interviews go on and on often repeating same information and many Shanghai shots seem pointless. *Still*, it is an important and fascinating chapter in diaspora history. So *yes* [there is a box drawn around “yes”], show it. *No* [there is a box drawn around “no”], not as part of the main series. 4 hours of video day (?) also not certain — that's 1/3 of the day!

We should talk about how to use it.

D —

This note was tucked, accidentally, into my screening copy of Ulrike Ottinger's latest film in release in the United States, *Exil Shanghai* (*Exile Shanghai*, 1997). Its contents occasion more than a programming decision for the 1997 San Francisco Jewish Film Festival. In fact, the note captures in fundamental fashion many of the preoccupations of much of the academic writing on Ottinger's work, including the frequent opacity of her images, the length of her films (particularly the documentaries *China — Die Künste — Der Alltag* [*China — The Arts — Everyday Life*, 1985], *Countdown* [1990], and *Taiga — Eine Reise ins nördliche Land der Mongolen* [*Taiga — A Journey to the Northern Land of the Mongols*, 1992]), the “point of view” of her ethnographic practice, her fascination as indexed by the documentary titles with diaspora and with the Orient, and, more gen-

erally, the sense of urgent debate that accompanies her work. "We should talk about how to use it."<sup>1</sup>

In short, Ottinger's films provoke spirited talk. Since Miriam Hansen's delightful feminist exploration, in this journal, of an "aesthetics of narcissism"<sup>2</sup> in Ottinger's film *Bildnis einer Trinkerin* (*Ticket of No Return*, 1979), the talk has circled around the relationship Hansen explores between Ottinger's aesthetics and her, or our, politics. If, in fact, one is to judge from the predominantly feminist and lesbian reception of her films in the past two decades, it would appear that Ottinger's films audaciously rework central tropes of modernism (the dandy, the travelogue, the sideshow spectacle), furiously experiment with structures of narration (particularly through allegory), and daringly exploit new configurations of marginality and desire, yet all with varying effects. There is no dispute, however, that Ottinger is one of a handful of major lesbian filmmakers of the late century.

1. The phrase "point of view," though commonplace in the study of cinema, is particularly loaded in relation to Ottinger, who has used it to describe the project of her three-part documentary, *China – The Arts – Everyday Life*. She speaks of "visual discourse . . . about exoticism as a question of point of view" (cited in Therese Grisham, "An Interview with Ulrike Ottinger," *Wide Angle* 14.2 [Apr. 1992]:32). Recent discussions of Ottinger's ethnographic documentaries focus on the dynamics of an exoticist point of view and its value for inquiry into globality. For a comprehensive bibliography of Ottinger criticism through 1992, including the largely negative commentary in the German journal *frauen und film*, see Katie Trumpener's "*Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* in the Mirror of *Dorian Gray*: Ethnographic Recordings and the Aesthetics of the Market in the Recent Films of Ulrike Ottinger," *New German Critique* 60 (Fall 1993): 78-79, n3. More recently, the following texts have undertaken to address Ottinger's work: Kristen Whissel, "Racialized Spectacle, Exchange Relations, and the Western in *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*," *Screen* 37.1 (Spring 1996): 41-67; Kay Armitage, "Ethnography and Its Discontents: Ulrike Ottinger's *Taiga*," *Arachne* 3.2 (1996): 31-47; Temby Caprio, "Ulrike Ottinger's *Ticket of No Return*: Drinking, the Masquerade and Subverting Gender Norms," *Arachne* 3.2 (1996): 97-115; Shanta Rao, "Ethno-Documentary Discourse and Cultural Otherness in Ulrike Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*," in *Other Germanies: Questioning Identity in Women's Literature and Art*, ed. Karen Jankowsky and Carla Love (Albany: State U of New York P, 1997); Nora Alter, "Ottinger's Benjamin: *Countdown's* Alternative Take on U nification," *Germanic Review* 73.1 (Winter 1998): 50-69; Nora Alter, "Triangulating Performances: Looking After Genre, After Feature," in *Triangulated Visions: Women in Recent German Cinema*, ed. Ingeborg Majer O'Sickey and Ingeborg von Zadow (Albany: State U of New York P, 1998) 11-27; Julia Knight, "Observing Rituals: Ulrike Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*," in *Triangulated Visions* 103-115; Kaja Silverman, "Narcissism: The Impossible Love," in *Triangulated Visions* 139-152; Alice A. Kuzniar, *The Queer German Cinema* (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2000), 139-156.

2. Miriam Hansen, "Visual Pleasure, Fetishism and the Problem of Feminine/Feminist Discourse: Ulrike Ottinger's *Ticket of No Return*," *New German Critique* 31 (Winter 1984): 108.

To chart those readings of her work briefly, especially for those of us who enter the discussion recently: Ottinger's early films were denigrated, especially in Germany, articles appearing in the journal *frauen und film* rejected Ottinger's anti-illusionism, worlds of fantasy and visual opulence as poor substitutes for social realism. A generation of scholars in the mid-eighties eloquently rescued Ottinger for a more complex and critical feminism. These arguments remain powerful guides for reading Ottinger's films, for reasons upon which I elaborate in the later sections of this essay. Another generation, in the past decade especially, comments from new angles; many wrestle with Ottinger's cultural politics and emphasize her ethnographic eye, even when galvanizing fresh discussion regarding questions of sexuality and sexual difference. These debates, seen as a group, appear to stem just as much from Ottinger's rejection of realism and her refusal to tow the aesthetic line(s) of emancipatory movements<sup>3</sup> (including feminist and lesbian/gay) as from her interest in ethnography and in "the Orient," in particular. This pair intrigues me in *Exile Shanghai*, a film that might not otherwise "lend itself" to feminist or lesbian critical elaboration, since it does not focus explicitly on feminist or lesbian themes or issues. If readings as astute as those by feminist and lesbian scholars who redeemed Ottinger in the first go-round (Hansen, Hake, Mayne, and others) have urged us to see in Ottinger's work a magnificently complicated challenge to orthodoxy (read as visual pleasure, as camp, as narcissism,<sup>4</sup> as marginal lesbianism<sup>5</sup>), they have confronted earlier (ostensibly feminist) dismissals of Ottinger's films and forged a counterdiscourse which I will rely on as I turn to her discourse of ethnography.

For it seems that the more recent assault on Ottinger's aesthetics, or more properly aestheticism, has come from those such as Katie Trumpener who, also writing in *New German Critique*, see in Ottinger's valorization of cultural spectacle yet another form of cultural imperialism, a mode of rendering other cultures (the Mongolians, for example, in *Johanna d'Arc*) static tableaux of Western fantasy. According to such a reading, in *China – The Arts – Everyday Life*, too, Ottinger's orientalism

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3. See Sabine Hake, *Gender and German Cinema, Volume 1: Feminist Interventions*, ed. Sandra Frieden, Richard W. McCormick, Vibeke R. Petersen, and Laura Melissa Vogelsang (Providence and Oxford: Berg, 1993) 182.

4. See Silverman.

5. Mayne's term is "marginality of lesbianism." See Judith Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990) 154.

allows her, in the face of that which she does not or cannot comprehend, to create a realm of pure freedom, without responsibility. The film, claims Trumpener, “celebrates the *exoticisme pur* experienced by the aesthete who enters a deeply foreign culture for the first time and, unable to understand its verbal and visual languages, feels free to hear and see the culture as pure music or pure form.”<sup>6</sup> That Ottinger has publicly expressed her indebtedness to ethnographers Victor Segalen and Michel Leiris may in fact fuel these charges of an expropriative documentary practice.<sup>7</sup> If Ottinger believes herself, in other words, to be raising “exoticism as a question of point of view,” there appear to be at least a vocal few who believe that it has already been answered. Ottinger is thought variously to be a traditional ethnographer, a cultural imperialist, a Westerner fantasizing about the Orient, or a false equalizer of real asymmetry. Does Ottinger now require a theoretical defense, a parry against these charges of ethnographic imperialism, a new discourse of redemption? Or might it be possible to read Ottinger’s documentary differently, following the fissures of precisely the benevolent multiculturalism that produces such charges, and drawing from a different set of critical repertoires?

I propose a bridge, a connection between these two domains – lesbian sexuality and Asia, particularly Shanghai, building on the insight Hake opens but treats very briefly when she seeks to “explore the significance of orientalism in *Madame X* and, even more importantly, to perceive it as part of the film’s distinctly homosexual sensitivity (if one chooses to use that phrase).”<sup>8</sup> *Exile Shanghai* may be understood as a lesbian’s look at the Jewish diaspora in Asia. In what follows, I call these looks not a “homosexual sensitivity,” but a “lesbian impression” (and thus remain indebted to Hake’s formulation), in the spirit of a larger project, i.e., aligning “lesbian” with a critical pliancy in the visual field. Even if it is not “about” lesbians in an obvious way, *Exile Shanghai* nevertheless records a lesbian impression of exile and of history, a lesbian’s impression of the world around her. Moreover, the lesbian impression is inextricable from the affective politics of the archive associated with the extermination of the Jews and others in the “Holocaust” in Europe. By those politics I mean to suggest that the film condenses a number of crucial questions regarding the place of Europe versus the diaspora (the time and attention given to Europe more generally, as opposed to that given to

6. Trumpener 96.

7. Grisham 31.

8. Hake 184.

Asia or elsewhere); the legacy of colonial power in 20th-century international formations (including the international division of labor maintained by post-Fordist *multinational* capitalism); the political economy of hatred (in the comparative calculus of competition among forms of suffering), the insufficiency of “Holocaust” or “Shoah” as general terms to condense the history of Nazi and fascist practices<sup>9</sup>; and, to borrow Marcia Landy’s phrase, the cinematic uses of the past, the World War II, for present politics or to the future.<sup>10</sup>

Ottinger has managed to find a subject, in other words, that seeks to evade the repetition-compulsion indicative of acting out or of the melodramatic pleasure in the familiar, a pleasure not to be dismissed but analyzed which characterizes other popular modes of reckoning with the past or, in the German context, mastering the past. My goal in this essay is to bring to this subject, the Jews of Shanghai, a critical analysis of the specificity of marginality and the possibilities of ethicopolitical alignment, reading their history and *Exile Shanghai* in the context of the archive. What *matters* is precisely the difference lesbian might make, however oblique the *presence* of lesbian might be in its making. I see the archive both in terms of Ottinger’s contribution to an expanded history of Jews, of exile, of diaspora and of the effects of the war, but also in terms of investigating under what system and according to what principles one consigns the Shanghai exiles specifically to a record of persecution or survival. With what interests does Ottinger approach such a task *in terms of a documentary practice*, and how do we gain access to them? I do not here seek to account for Ottinger’s *oeuvre* in its entirety, for others have

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9. A preliminary insufficiency inheres in the listing of those who were branded as social outsiders in Nazi Germany: Jews, Communists, “Gypsies,” foreign workers, prostitutes, criminals, homosexuals, the homeless, Seventh Day Adventists, the unemployed and the chronically ill. When I began research for this article, I reacted especially palpably to the often-used triadic shorthand of “Jews, Gypsies and homosexuals” to denote the combination of anti-Semitism, eugenic programs, and arbitrary persecution that characterized the Third Reich, thinking that this triad and the even briefer shorthand “Jews” tend to eclipse the specificity of persecution each group and each individual faced and thereby obscured even further the tasks of critical understanding. Undergirding that discomfort was the stronger sense that “homosexuals” lay claim constantly to this history under the sign of the pink triangle (arguably now in the process of being replaced by the mundane rainbow) without undertaking the analysis of this history in relation to identity politics. This essay became an attempt, therefore, to work at an alignment between this revised list: German, Jewish, lesbian, feminist, Shanghai.

10. Marcia Landy, *The Cinematic Uses of the Past* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996).

written magnificently about her work from the point of view of authorial study. My aim is a more modest look at this single film in context. To provide that context for the critical analysis of the Shanghai exiles, then, I want first to return to the mundane, even “practical” matters of distribution and exhibition made visible in my epigraph, and then to turn to the time in exile that is the basis for Ottinger’s documentary.

### *Archives and Exhibition*

Many of Ottinger’s films are distributed in the United States by the New York-based Women Make Movies, a nonprofit media arts organization that, unlike most of its counterparts founded in the 1970s, has radiantly survived the assaults on radical culture of the past quarter century. Women Make Movies distributes major feminist and lesbian films and videos. Despite their survival, the public sphere remains under attack, especially in its media vectors.

As Patricia Zimmermann documents, counterattacks, guerilla assaults, media pirates, and critical interventions are also on American screens, and they bear little resemblance to the counterculture for which the left wing frequently harbors nostalgia. For this reason she asks her reader to ricochet *productively* between binarized poles. “We need to explain an intricately layered set of contradictions: the changing transnationalized economic sphere of commercial media on the one hand and the emergence of new technologies, new subjectivities, new discourses, new wars, and new ambushes on the other. These contradictions oscillate between utter despair and ecstatic hope.”<sup>11</sup> In this oscillation, ossified distinctions collapse between “demonized corporate media and sanctified pure independent media,”<sup>12</sup> between analog and digital, indeed, between rigidly separate disciplines and modes of knowledge-production (e. g., making media and making criticism). Our indices of value need to be recalibrated to these risks and possibilities if we are to recognize the transformations of which we are a part, and that recalibration may change our sense regarding which questions matter.<sup>13</sup>

11. Patricia R. Zimmermann, *States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999) xv.

12. Zimmermann 160.

13. The National Association of Media Arts Centers (NAMAC) recently sponsored a digital “salon” devoted precisely to this recalibration, stressing the challenges posed to existing organs of distribution by digital media. See [www.namac.org](http://www.namac.org).

The programmers and activists of the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, like those at their gay and lesbian counterpart festivals, risk extinction.<sup>14</sup> They must base their decisions upon their knowledge of audiences' tolerances, preferences, and histories, and they must rely on ticket sales (despite increasing corporate sponsorships) to stay alive. Distributors similarly respond to their constituents' demands in making acquisition decisions which in turn determine and frequently constrict programmers' choices. *Women Make Movies* survives because it generates (still) the bulk of its profits directly from video sales and rentals rather than from grants and project development.<sup>15</sup> In short: audiences matter. Even though the independent sector of production and distribution reflects far more mingling of genres, lengths and budgets than the commercial mainstream,<sup>16</sup> the film exhibition sector continues to rely on the two-hour slot, standardized by the conversion to multiplex theatres in the commercial sector throughout the late 1960s and adopted by the art house and festival sectors.<sup>17</sup> Reared and naturalized within the practices of the multiplex and the art house, audiences rarely commit to screenings in excess of two hours. The 275-minute *Exile Shanghai* is not distributed by *Women Make Movies*, for reasons to which I will

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14. Patricia White et al., "Queer Publicity: A Dossier on Lesbian and Gay Film Festivals," *GLQ* 5.1 (1999): 73-8.

15. Interview with Vanessa Domico, Marketing Director, *Women Make Movies*, 5 March 2001.

16. This argument is implicit in B. Ruby Rich's coining of the term "new queer cinema," a phrase that deliberately invokes the New American Cinema of the 1970s. The films of Shirley Clarke, Richard Leacock, and Jonas Mekas, to name but three examples, combined in astonishing and surprising ways in terms of genre and form, yet shared enough common ground to inaugurate a short-lived "movement." Neither did the new queer films and videos Rich encountered in 1992 "share a single aesthetic vocabulary or strategy or concern" (163). Rich's attribution of a common style, "Homo Pomo," to these films is no more audacious than any number of critical gestures of the decade finding "postmodernism" or "performativity" wherever they looked. Pratibha Parmar's rejoinder to Rich nonetheless raises crucial questions about the effects of attributing to a wildly differentiated body of work a single aesthetic. Particularly regarding access for lesbians and people of color to festival program slots, this article is in solidarity with Parmar's brief comments, as well as with Rich's efforts toward such access. And as a footnote to a footnote, it is not a coincidence that the New York State Council on the Arts provided Ruby Rich with her training in independent film. See B. Ruby Rich, "Homo Pomo: The New Queer Cinema," in *Women and Film: A Sight and Sound Reader*, ed. Pam Cook and Philip Dodd (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1993) 164-174; and Pratibha Parmar, "Queer Questions: A Response to B. Ruby Rich," in *Women and Film* 174-5.

17. See Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1992) 93-102, 193-95.

turn shortly.<sup>18</sup> Instead, it has been acquired by Atara Releasing, the distribution wing of the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival. Atara permits the exhibition of the film in two chunks of 140 and 135 minutes, respectively. Among its programmers is the author of my epigraph, “D,” and their courtesy allowed me access to the film for close analysis. When few copies are in circulation, academic scrutiny is purchased at the cost of a much more lucrative rental. Writing academic articles with commercially-released videocassettes and DVDs can but ought not obscure our role as intellectuals. My own time with *Exile Shanghai*, on the other hand, cannot escape the circuits of its travel as a commodity in embattled exchange, and it becomes the time of luxury.

The substitution of Atara Releasing for Women Make Movies as distributor might seem to provide material ground for arguing that *Exile Shanghai* be critically realigned neatly with its “parent” organization’s new identity category and that it be seen in the context of “Jewish” film rather than “feminist” or “lesbian” cinema. Indeed, a new audience came to Ottinger’s work through that shift in distribution, an audience for whom Ottinger is (perhaps nothing other than) a “Jewish” filmmaker. To make such a claim, of course, would be necessarily to ground the film and the *oeuvre* to which it belongs in a lineage that is not self-evident but is continually produced and reproduced within antagonisms over what it means to “be” or “represent” Jewish(ness), within the limits of representation itself, and within the histories of institutions. Over and again, we produce and remake “Jewish” film, just as communities, makers, and intellectuals redefine “feminist” or “lesbian” film. On the other hand, to isolate the film for textual analysis without inquiring at all into the circumstances of its movement and, to borrow Marx’s phrase, its “form of appearance,” is to mystify its critical function in the world and to neglect our critical task.

The reason for which Women Make Movies declined to distribute the film is, however, just as tied to residual identity categories: the organization distributes *only* films that are by *and* about women. At the same time, to make the counterclaim that Ottinger’s work *must* be understood as feminist or lesbian would simply be to impose a false coherence through these similarly contested terms, and for obvious reasons.

18. Although a reader of a previous draft of this essay thought my attention to the film’s length extraneous, it remains important to stress the frequency with which the length of Ottinger’s films is mentioned in the critical literature and by audiences. I take it as a real challenge to wonder how to write on a film of this length and density.

*Exile Shanghai*, like Ottinger's previous work, is clearly informed by a host of political and aesthetic determinations and commitments that ought not to be bent to the will of a single signifier.<sup>19</sup> To acknowledge the importance of feminist and lesbian contexts alongside those of Jewish history and Jewish audiences for the present work is quite a different matter than deciding among them, and yet such a proposal raises further questions, affectively laden in relation to a German filmmaker whose "mother is Jewish."<sup>20</sup> In what follows I seek to resist the tug of these identity categories in favor of a different framing of "the Jewish issue" in *Exile Shanghai*. Instead of confirming Ottinger's own romantic conception of "the wandering Jew," I want to demystify that figure through the specificity of the Shanghai exile.<sup>21</sup>

A critical practice informed by the contradictions Zimmermann outlines in *States of Emergency* cannot, however, remain blind to the work of activists and organizers of a festival such as San Francisco's with its annual attendance of 32,000 film-goers.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, our writing and teaching depend upon them. Another reason to have dwelled for a moment on the particular fate for the distribution and exhibition of *Exile Shanghai* in the United States is even more compelling: its travel from the Europe of its director, to the Shanghai of its content, to the San Francisco of its parent organization, mimics precisely the movement of the Jews of Shanghai, to whose story I now turn.

### *The Jews of Shanghai*

Ottinger's film takes as its occasion what hardboiled screenwriters might call a helluva good story, one with which she had become familiar from following the Trans-Siberian railroad for *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*. A landscape yielded for the earlier film a playful lesbian/

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19. I would for this reason take issue with Kuzniar's recent efforts to make the term "queer" manage the tensions others have found powerful in Ottinger's work, particularly in *Dorian Gray im Spiegel der Boulevardpresse* (*Dorian Gray in the Mirror of the Yellow Press*, 1984). See Kuzniar 139-156.

20. Roy Grundmann and Judith Schulevitz, "Minorities and the Majority: An Interview with Ulrike Ottinger," *Cineaste* 18.3 (1991): 16.

21. See Therese Grisham, "An Interview with Ulrike Ottinger," *Wide Angle* 14.2 (Apr. 1992): 26. Nora Alter has also commented on Ottinger's remarks about nomadism in this interview in *Triangulated Visions*. In this contribution Alter finesses questions about Ottinger's point of view and ethical stance through the language of transcendence and hybridization.

22. Promotional material on *Exile Shanghai* courtesy of Atara Releasing.

feminist romp; it now yields a very different story, yet one still tied to its origins in lesbian cultural production, of place. The challenge of this story, for the documentary form in particular, is that its visible evidence has vanished; in some cases, it has been obliterated. Like many World War II survival stories, it is a story of recollection and reconstruction, with its attendant ambiguity and vagueness. Here is that story in its barest, dubiously scientific/historical bones. Documentary “pre-understanding” often begins here, in excavation.<sup>23</sup>

By the time of the World War II, Shanghai was home to a large and variegated Jewish community. In the mid-nineteenth century’s first movement of Jews to the eastern shore of China, Sephardic Jews from the former British colonies, predominantly from India, rushed to capitalize on the opium market, which had been newly sanctioned by the British free trade agreement, the Treaty of Nanking, in 1842. These families (the Sassoons, Harpoons and the Kadoories are the most renowned among them) amassed great fortunes, enormous by present-day standards, but also established the social and cultural hierarchy and infrastructure that would sustain the last ripples of quasi-imperial power through the next century. The second movement of Ashkenazi Jews (Eastern Europeans and White Russians, fleeing pogroms and the Revolution) eased into the slots for professionals and merchants in the thriving and prosperous international colonial outpost in the first decades of the twentieth century. They became a forceful support for the first wave’s social structure, contributing especially to the city’s metropolitan and singular prewar feel. If we are not steeped in that version of Shanghai in more recent films such as Zhang Yimou’s *Shanghai Triad* (1985), it has been memorialized in von Sternberg’s films, *Shanghai Express* (1932) and *The Shanghai Gesture* (1941). It also figures in Orson Welles’s *Lady from Shanghai* (1948), whose tagline was “I told you . . . you know nothing about wickedness.” “Shanghai’ed,” also a title of a Charlie Chaplin short, was widely used as a synonym for kidnapping, a sense bolstered by the city’s aura of danger. In any event – as Geoffrey Heller, one of the interviewees in *Exile Shanghai* often nervously introduces a transition – these two Jewish populations occupied monumental positions and places within the map of decadent “Old Shanghai.” They

23. I borrow the term from Jacques Derrida, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” *Diacritics* 25. 2 (Summer 1995): 52. See also his book, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995). All further citations refer to the *Diacritics* essay.

built hotels and civic and mercantile institutions along The Bund, Shanghai's "Gold Coast" and symbol of its role as financial center of the first part of this century. They designed couture clothes and fitted furs, directing their fortunes toward luxury and philanthropy, though not in equal measure, in horse races, country clubs, aid societies and schools alike.

The Jews, like other colonial settlers, were, in other words, rich, pampered and, adventurous. "Old Shanghai," in its colonial partitions and administration (the International Settlement was comprised of British and American expatriates, the French Concession and the Chinese portions of the city), easily accommodated the Sephardic and Russian Jews in its oxymoronic hierarchy of profit and debauchery, and there the Jews mastered the tongues of international power and mastered the etiquette of a generalized European gentility. There, too, the Jews danced and drank and screwed their way into all but a few of Shanghai's most venerable social organizations (the British Country Club was the most exclusive among them, as it alone restricted its membership to British subjects).

The third movement of Jews into Shanghai began in 1937 and ended in 1941, when 17,000 or more European Jews, in flight from Nazi persecution, entered the last open port of the world after the closing of Palestine. They were largely German and Austrian, and they came "stateless," meaning both "without papers" and with papers stamped with the red "J." They were often literally penniless. Social relief organizations, founded by Sephardic families and fed by White Russian support, attempted to integrate them into the fabric of Shanghai Jewish life, mercantile and cultural, yet the "floods" overwhelmed the structures of benevolence built by a century's investment, and the relief organizations were woefully mismanaged. When the Japanese occupied the city, in late 1942 into 1943, they interned Allied civilians (British and American) and confined the new Jewish exiles to a "segregation area," the former turf of the Americans before they joined the British in the International Settlement and an area heavily bombed by the Japanese in the Sino-Japanese war of the previous decade. Hongkew, or what was only retrospectively called the Jewish ghetto, housed the European Jews. They lived in squalor and with severely restricted movement, while the Sephardic and Russian Jews maintained their relative freedom, though many had to relinquish their living quarters to the Japanese during its wartime occupation of the city. Most of the European Jews suffered tremendously; many died.

The coda to the story in this form is that those surviving Shanghai

Jews of whatever origin fled after the war, many relocating to Israel or to the US, where a dwindling number of former Shanghai residents exists in the San Francisco/Bay Area (following patterns of Asian migration in the Pacific Rim). There they have rekindled a community of exiles *from* Shanghai, meeting for reunions (including one, incongruously, in Las Vegas) and recording their recollections and testimonies of their exile in films such as Ottinger's, Grossman and Rosdy's film, *Port of Last Resort* and the recently-released *Shanghai Ghetto*. Ethnographers from the University of Nevada brought tape recorders to that Nevada reunion to gather oral histories. Several survivors of the exile have written memoirs and historians have documented the complex issues of foreign aid and the administration of the "segregation area" by the Chinese and Japanese during the seven years of the encounter between European Jews and the city of Shanghai.<sup>24</sup>

The commodification of the Jewish exile community continues unabated in Shanghai itself, where tourists may hire, for \$50 US ("directly toward local charity"), a personal tour guide for "The Hongkou Ghetto":

Flora Amiel, a member of our present-day Jewish Community of Shanghai, leads tours throughout the sights of 'Old Jewish Shanghai' in English, Hebrew, Spanish and Portuguese, complete with explanation and vivid description of life during that area. Pointing out the differences in lifestyle between the Jewish refugees and the successful Jewish businessmen, you will get a clear picture of the day to day experiences of life in 'Old Shanghai.'<sup>25</sup>

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24. The authoritative history remains David Kranzler's *Japanese, Nazis and Jews: The Jewish Refugee Community of Shanghai, 1938-1945* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1988). Others have written more anecdotal histories, including James R. Ross, *Escape to Shanghai: A Jewish Community in China* (New York: Free Press, 1994) and Dong's "biography of Shanghai," *Shanghai, 1842-1949: The Rise and Fall of a Decadent City*. Invaluable to the discussion of aid, particularly the role of the American Joint Distribution Committee, are the documents by its wartime Shanghai administrator, Laura Margolis, and her assistant, Manuel Siegel, housed in the archives of the AJDC in New York. Also useful are the many shorter articles, memoirs clippings, and reports amassed by survivors, many of which are cited in Kranzler and Ross. The refugee memoirs are not in wide distribution, with the exception of Ernest G. Heppner, *Shanghai Refuge: A Memoir of the World War II Jewish Ghetto* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1995). He cites Rena Krasno's *Strangers Always* (Berkeley: Pacific View, 1992), which is out of print and difficult to find.

25. "Half Day Tour, 'The Hongkou Ghetto,' with Mrs. Flora Amiel," <http://www.chinajewish.org/flora.html>

Or, in the tourism of the daily news, one can follow former First Lady Hillary Clinton and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to Shanghai, where they visited a restored synagogue early in July, 1999, hailing it “as an example of a new respect in China for religious differences.”<sup>26</sup> Note, though, that the Othel Rachel Synagogue they viewed by was in shambles three months prior to their visit, and that the Chinese had not yet granted official permission to practice the Jewish faith there, much less to worship at this particular synagogue.

These strands of the Jews’ history in Shanghai remain, therefore, alive in the present day, with their attendant contradictions. Each thread is complexly mediated by the vagaries of memory, by the interests of historians, by the discourses of Holocaust studies as well as by the larger discourses of nation and religion in which these histories are enjoined. The lesbian filmmaker encounters this fabric as her archive and records her impression of its texture. The history this lesbian filmmaker confronts is, moreover, inextricable from the *politics* of memory, the ethical necessity for witness. One way, then, of consolidating the problematic for subsequent analysis of the lesbian impression in *Exile Shanghai* is through theorizations of the archive itself.

### *Archive Fever*

Like the question of the proper name, the question of [Jewish] exemplarity. . . situates here the place of all violences. Because if it is just to remember the future and the injunction to remember, namely the archontic injunction to guard and to gather the archive, it is no less just to remember the others, the other others and the others in oneself, and that the other peoples could say the same thing – in another way.<sup>27</sup>

To leap from the Jews of Shanghai to Derrida’s essay, “Archive Fever,” requires explanation, especially since Derrida’s essay helps to guide my reading strategy and lends me my essay’s title. He offers at least a two-fold understanding of the archive: first, as an inscription of all that will have come under the name and authority of Freudian psychoanalysis and, second, following from the first, modes of understanding the function and

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26. “Hillary Visits Synagogue,” by Carol Giacomo (Reuters), ABC News World, 1 July 1999.

27. Derrida, “Archive Fever” 50. Derrida presented these thoughts in a lecture, “Mal d’Archive: une Impression Freudienne,” at a symposium devoted to “Memory: The Question of Archives,” held on June 5, 1994 at the Freud House in London.

processes of the psychic apparatus and of memory as archivization(s).

The first valence encompasses an inquiry into the proper name of Freud, his legacy, his relation in particular to his own father, his Jewishness, "his" science. As Lacan famously quipped, "One has only to remember that Freud's discovery puts truth into question, and there is no one who is not personally concerned with truth."<sup>28</sup> There is indeed no one for whom the archive is not relevant. The second valence, in related but different terms, works toward an understanding of memories both sanctioned and illegitimate, modes of claiming authority not only on behalf of the past but in relation to the future, technologies of inscription that change over time, from Freud's mystic writing pad to e mail, and the ethical-political issues associated with the archive more generally. Enmeshed in this valence are questions having to do with the technologies of memory and of fantasy, the very mechanisms by which the unconscious as well as conscious life archive or store their materials. One obvious arena that interests me in this second valence is the work of documentary cinema in archiving or logging an evanescent experience of exile that leaves traces: distorted, condensed, displaced. Along with Derrida's interest in memory devices, one can note the changing technologies of archivization from latent image-recording (including that done on film) to digital storage; these enter into the calculus of a literal and figurative investment that interested Freud and captures Derrida's rhetorical attention. It also prompts consideration of a filmmaker's investment in her subject, the political economy of filmmaking including the affective value bestowed by a lesbian impression upon the Shanghai exiles.

Derrida's essay takes as one of its organizing ideas the impression left by the Freudian signature. He does not mean, thereby, to restrict himself to the proper name of Freud, as though one could know precisely what is gathered there, how that signature would mark its limits, how one could restrain it to a particular place or location. Rather, he allows that signature to extend to the invention of psychoanalysis as "project of knowledge, of practice and of institution, community, family, domiciliation, consignation, 'house' or 'museum'."<sup>29</sup>

Three meanings are condensed in the word "impression" and in the phrase "Freudian impression," beyond the idea of a signature. First, an

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28. Jacques Lacan, "The Freudian Thing," *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 118.

29. Derrida, "Archive Fever" 11.

impression has a typographic meaning, an inscription on a surface: the foundation, the substrate of the archive, the place of an inscription or a recording. This “typographic” valence also invokes or evokes Freud’s distinction between “repression” and “suppression,” a distinction that directly concerns the psychic apparatus by dint of how we imagine the relationship between conscious processes, the substrate of the unconscious and its relation to displacements of affect in the mechanisms of “suppression.” The second meaning of “impression” opposes it to the robust and formal status of the specifically philosophical Concept (*Begriff*, nowhere in Derrida’s essay in German, however); an impression suggests the “vagueness or the open imprecision, the relative indetermination of . . . a *notion*.”<sup>30</sup> By insisting on the unstable, fleeting or indefinite figure of an impression, Derrida does not mean to diminish its significance, impact, complexity, or urgency. To the contrary, it is central to a deconstructive understanding of the concept in general to mark the founding violence, the irreducible disjunction, and division at its core.

Finally, the third meaning Derrida summons in “impression” has to do with the impression left by Freud, the impression that Freud will have made on “anyone, after him, who speaks *of him* or speaks *to him*, and who must then, accepting it or not, be thus marked.”<sup>31</sup> To speak of Freud is, in other words, to join the Freudian archive, even if or especially if one speaks to deny or denounce.

To speak of a lesbian impression is, first, to speak of an inscription, a recording made “by” a lesbian if not in her name. It is to disseminate the very name *of* lesbian across a textual body that bears a trace but need not limit itself to the meanings tied previously to the signature, for example of “Ulrike Ottinger.” Because this is an Ottinger film, her viewers will keep the lesbian in mind, even when she is not in sight in *Exile Shanghai*. To speak of a lesbian impression is also to notice the force exerted in particular by psychoanalysis, since that science has been vital to delimiting and domesticating lesbian, to consigning lesbian to a certain set of practices and effects. Psychoanalysis, in turn, also bears upon the project of knowledge of “Holocaust studies” by seeing memory as one of the key elements of both, by seeing trauma as fundamental to both, by seeing Freud’s own preoccupation with the question of a “Jewish science” as crucially connected to the history of

30. Derrida, “Archive Fever” 24. Derrida’s emphasis.

31. Derrida, “Archive Fever” 24. Derrida’s emphasis.

the Jews in Europe and, for that matter, to Freud's own history as a writer in exile. To speak of a lesbian impression also means seeing sexual difference and sexuality as crucial to the processes of subjectification and desubjectification which structure memory and history more generally; it is to introduce sexual and gendered being into the meditations on Being meant to drive straight to the core of witness, testimony, and survival. The lesson, after all, of psychoanalysis is that one cannot *not* make such an inflection. In this lesbian impression, then, I seek to realign what appears to be an autonomous inquiry into the Jews of Shanghai with feminist and lesbian interests, with philosophy and with psychoanalysis, asking simply what it means that a feminist/lesbian mark might be part of the project that is *Exile Shanghai*. In this lesbian impression, one can also hear the voices of the Shanghai Jews, as they are deposited in the public documents of official history and in the perhaps private voices of recollection, interspersed with the authoritative commentary of exegesis and theory.

Derrida's metaphors lend themselves to meditations on the role of gender and sexuality in archiving, in memory and in its sciences, since his essay is structured principally around "eco-nomics," literally (*oikos* + *nomos*), the name/law associated with the house (Freud's name and Freud's house), the law of the house, and therefore around the particular distinction we just invoked that has operated around the house in the study of capital: the distinction between the public and the private, and the gendered division which frequently accompanies it. He is interested throughout the essay in the patriarchal (the law or Law in psychoanalysis and in Judaism), in the signature of the patriarch, and in the legacies of the father of psychoanalysis. These oppositions seem to pile up, continually circling around one another in Derrida's text, lending themselves to a number of levels of reading in turn, from the abstractions of the "philosophical" categories an essay such as this one cannot touch, to the notes of a few survivors of exile or a moment of a film about them. Those distinctions, between the secret and the nonsecret, between the public and the private, between the law and the home, can appear in the particular cruelty of a guard or in his kindness, in the banality of a comparison or in its violence, in the far reaches of theology or in the grassroots efforts of a relief committee.

The question of the archive is the question of the outside: "But where does the outside commence?"<sup>32</sup> How does one mark boundaries, cause,

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32. Derrida, "Archive Fever" 12.

effect? Another way to ask that question would be: how is it possible to delineate the interior of the body and the outside, its environment? This is simply the question of memory, of “internal archivization,”<sup>33</sup> its structure and its model. Freud’s own model which, as Derrida reminds us, represents on the outside what memory is doing internally, is the Magic Mystic Pad, *der Wunderblock*. It should not come as a surprise to learn that mechanisms of inscription were at the core of the encounter between the Jews in Shanghai and their Chinese citymates. The following citation returns us to the scene and allows us to see that these developments are not autonomous and discrete but rather shared and inserted into systems of meaning-making elsewhere, “outside” of Europe. A Shanghai exile remembers:

I met two Korean businessmen who were buying supplies and who complained about the shortage and rising prices of paper products. I inquired whether they would be interested in financing a writing pad I knew about, on which one could write without using paper. After several weeks of negotiations we struck a deal giving me a cash advance and obligating me to come up with a sample of this mysterious writing tablet. I was supposed to be paid for my assistance during the manufacturing phase. Liu, the bookkeeper, warned me to be extremely careful. Although Korean and Chinese dialects are quite different, Liu had overheard the men say that they had no intention of paying me; they intended to cheat me out of the balance of the money. I hunted around until I found a waxy substance, blackened it and covered it with cellophane. I had duplicated the magic slate I had used as a boy. You could write on the cellophane cover with any instrument, even your fingernail; when you lifted the cover, the writing would be gone, and the pad could be used again and again. Mindful of Liu’s warning, I negotiated an additional installment, and only after I received the cash did I happily turn the gadget over to the two men, never to see them again.<sup>34</sup>

Derrida’s invocation of the mystic writing pad opens to two related questions: is the psychic apparatus affected by changes in techno-science, i.e., do transformations in the speed of processing of information or changes in the “prostheses of memory” which are meanwhile becoming more “refined, complicated, powerful” change the modes by which

33. Derrida, “Archive Fever” 15.

34. Heppner 65-66.

our internal archivization proceeds? Second, how is psychoanalysis (itself) archived, and has its archivization been similarly determined by states of technology and communication? The larger implication is that our modes of conceiving of memory must respond to changes in “techno-science,” to the ways in which we experience, think, model, survive, the very relation between the outside and the inside. The limit case of that distinction has been marked in the word, Auschwitz, the place, as Arendt put it, where anything is possible. It remains for us to understand how the Shanghai Jews’ exile can be archived alongside that limit case, for the history Ottinger confronts in her lesbian impression is inseparable from “the Holocaust,” bound to its history and its unspeakability, even while she deposits a trace of its effects.

### ***Memory and Official History: The Figure of the Muselmann***

There are links between both the official history of the exile in Shanghai and its popular forms (memoir, tourism, film) with the memorialization of Nazi genocide more generally. These links program the shape of documentary practices, and they set another piece of the background against which Ottinger’s impression of the Shanghai Jews arises. The history of the Shanghai exile, like the history of European Jews and other persecuted groups, lies suspended between Primo Levi’s insistence on the importance of memory<sup>35</sup> and Saul Friedländer’s observation that the proliferation of stories about the Nazi genocide and its traumas obliterates specificity and tends to freeze the past into murky tableaux.<sup>36</sup> Levi, Friedländer, and other survivors and historians writing on the “Shoah” thus struggle against the domestication of the past and the blunting of its impact, for example through a strategy Friedländer calls juxtaposing “entirely different levels of reality – for example high-level anti-Jewish policy debates and decisions next to routine scenes of persecution – with the aim of creating a sense of estrangement counteracting our tendency to “domesticate” that particular past.”<sup>37</sup> Yet, they

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35. “Even in this place one can survive, and therefore one must want to survive, to tell the story, to bear witness.” Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity* (New York: Collier, 1961) 36.

36. Saul Friedländer, *Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993). Note: Friedländer’s name does not have an umlaut in the publication data for this book, but one does appear in the subsequent reference.

37. Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: Volume 1, The Years of Persecution* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997) 5.

recognize that speech itself threatens to negate the very force of the history it seeks to represent. In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Giorgio Agamben condenses this impossibility of speech, what he calls the lacuna in which “the survivors bore testimony to something it is impossible to bear witness to,”<sup>38</sup> into a series of reflections on the concentration camp,<sup>39</sup> and, more particularly, the figure of *der Muselmann*, the “Muslim,” the mummy-man, the living dead. Agamben’s thought transforms the terms under which it is possible to think about Nazi genocide, the work of memory, and the archive of history. One needs to situate Derrida’s formulation of the archive in relation to Agamben’s perhaps “anarchival” understanding of testimony.

A word of caution: it may again appear unnecessary to align a film about Jewish survival far afield from the atrocities of the concentration camps in Europe with theoretical reflection on the limit case the latter illustrates. It is precisely that appearance, however, that *Exile Shanghai* confronts; it is precisely that appearance that determines the choices the film makes about its own inside knowledge and outside stakes, its own authority, its own movement backward as recollection (an archiving prosthesis) and its own look toward the future. To mark the Shanghai exiles as less significant because peripheral is, not to put too fine a point on it, to reduplicate the claims to exemplarity that endanger, for Derrida, our collective future. To overvalue their experiences is, similarly, to evade the atrocious. To understand their “case,” as Agamben suggests, requires the investigation of the limit case, the *Muselmann*. Through that case, one can begin to understand survival itself, and to return to the instance of it Ottinger has recorded.

The *Muselmann* was concentration- and extermination-camp jargon for the inmate on the edge of death, the walking dead or the inhuman human, who had given up on survival and provided the grimmest possible reminder (remainder, example) of the loss of the will to survive and the certain death to come. As such, Agamben claims that the *Muselmann*

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38. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone, 1999) 13.

39. Elsewhere Agamben groups the concentration camp, “a zone of indifference between public and private as well as the hidden matrix of the political space,” with a set of other phenomena that are not usually considered political: the natural life of human beings, the state of exception, the refugee, language and the “sphere of gesture or pure means.” See Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000) ix-x.

the same time, the *Muselmann* reminds us that the survivors are not the true witnesses. This is the paradox of testimony set forth by Levi. The "*Muselmann*," argues Agamben, "is the complete witness," which implies "1) the *Muselmann* is the non-human, the one who could never bear witness, and 2) the one who cannot bear witness is the true witness, the absolute witness."<sup>40</sup> Embedded in this lacuna is a number of meanings:

At times a medical figure or an ethical category, at times a political limit or an anthropological concept, the *Muselmann* is an indefinite being in whom not only humanity and non-humanity, but also vegetative existence and relation, physiology and ethics, medicine and politics, and life and death, continuously pass through each other.<sup>41</sup>

Agamben's analysis calls attention to a number of transformations which make the *Muselmann* a crucial figure for ethical-political engagement. In sum, the *Muselmann* marks the full transition from, as Foucault describes it, the exercise of sovereign power to "biopower" or "biopolitics," but with an extension of Foucault's thesis, wherein what is at stake is no longer the power "to make die and let live,"<sup>42</sup> or even "to make live and let die." In the camps, in the *Muselmann*, Agamben submits, we confront the distillation of survival itself; it is "now" the insignia and task of biopower to "make survive."

Survival, in Agamben's extraordinary series of meditations, must not be understood therefore as extrinsic to life but as interior to it. The witness can survive the inhuman, the *Muselmann*, just as the *Muselmann* can survive the human: "What can be infinitely destroyed is what can infinitely survive."<sup>43</sup> "In our time," Agamben over and again locates his readings and his analysis of the camps and the limit-figure of the *Muselmann* in a "now" that is both after Auschwitz and, to use his language, a remnant of it, as are its witnesses.<sup>44</sup> In the "now" one

40. Agamben, *Remnants* 150.

41. Agamben, *Remnants* 48.

42. Agamben, *Remnants* 155.

43. Agamben, *Remnants* 151.

44. Agamben, *Remnants* 155. "After" is not, therefore, restricted to a linear chronological meaning. A significant element of Agamben's recent arguments, in fact, involves the attempt to risk thought and practices anti-teleologically, without "ends." As I understand his work, "remnant" is but one name for an "irreducible disjunction" (159), an aporia (of testimony and of messianic time, 163) within which subjectivity resides and without which there is no possibility of witness. Dominick LaCapra stresses a similar point regarding the title of his book, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998) 6.

confronts the impossibility of speech, the horrors not of the unsaid but of the unsayable, that which, in his view, cannot be *archived*. For the archive, following Agamben's rereading of linguistic theory, resides in the relationship between *langue* and *parole*. It is the unsaid "inscribed in everything said by virtue of being enunciated; it is the fragment of memory that is always forgotten in the act of saying 'I'."<sup>45</sup> In that gap, in the system of relations between discourse and its taking place, there is the archive. Agamben, however, locates testimony outside the archive, in the relationship instead between *langue* and its taking place, "between a pure possibility of speaking and its existence as such."<sup>46</sup> Within *that* disjunction, not within the archive, is produced the witness; what prevents the cleavage of survival from life is testimony. Otherwise, in the figure of the *Muselmann* one might have seen the essence of "a survival separated from every possibility of testimony, a kind of absolute biopolitical substance that, in its isolation, allows for the attribution of demographic, ethnic, national, and political identity."<sup>47</sup>

Agamben thus resists the cleavage of what he elsewhere calls "naked life" from "forms of life," which are then abstractly coded as "social-juridical identities (the voter, the worker, the journalist, the student, but also the HIV-positive, the transvestite, the porno star, the elderly, the woman)."<sup>48</sup> In *Remnants of Auschwitz* he seeks to strengthen the tie that binds life to form-of-life against modes of power, including fascism, that isolate naked life as "biopolitical substance." Against the attribution of nationality and citizen markers, Agamben is interested in the possibility of non-statist politics and in the figure of the refugee who, like the *Muselmann*, becomes emblematic. Following Arendt, he sees in the refugee the paradigm of a new historical consciousness, yet one need not follow with a reading that merely celebrates the figure of the refugee where he is found. It is possible, instead, to locate that figure more broadly, both conceptually and historically, which is indeed what Ottinger seeks to do.

Agamben's interest in the refugee can be seen to align him with, rather than separate him from, Derrida's considerations in "Archive Fever." Both confront the crucial question of the substance or the substrate on which the inscription (of nationality, of citizenship) takes place, whether

45. Agamben, *Remnants* 144.

46. Agamben, *Remnants* 144.

47. Agamben, *Remnants* 156.

48. Agamben, *Means* 6-7.

that ground is “testimony” that resists the “biopolitical” exercise of power which fragments forms-of-life into refugees, or whether that ground is the affirmative itself, the “yes” that opens to the future and for Derrida is threatened with the horror presented by claims for Jewish exemplarity. In Yerushalmi’s sentence, “Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people.”<sup>49</sup>

Whether finally marked by the language of the unconscious or the language of virtuality, the larger point would appear to be that memory does not stand in transparent relation to the archive, to testimony, to witness. On the contrary, all of these enjoin ethical, political, philosophical and historical reflection. To archive is to enter into a structured and overdetermined field within which one must nonetheless maneuver. To archive the Jewish diaspora during World War II is, moreover, to risk memory in the face of at least one injunction that might have precisely the opposite effect: never to forget.

### ***Documenting Relationships***

To face the story of the Shanghai Jews entails entering this field of history, witness, testimony, affect, identification, memory (conscious and “virtual”), and lineage. It means confronting the question posed by Derrida in *Right of Inspection*: “Who possesses this right, who possesses the other, holding it as the object of its gaze or within its sights?”<sup>50</sup> Ottinger, whose “mother is a Jew,” has inscribed her point of entry by elevating the figure of the wandering Jew to the status of a conceptual ideal, thereby, we might add, elevating herself. It would be possible to read *Exile Shanghai* as a film that romanticizes exile or the figure of the refugee and thereby reinforces the exemplary status of Jewish displacement, were it not also for the fact that Ottinger’s camera resolutely lingers on the Chinese. The film is structured as a series of experiences of Shanghai set in motion by the recollections of surviving Jews, but Ottinger’s camera alone ultimately becomes responsible for the film’s documentary voice. *Exile Shanghai* allows us, as Ottinger has put it, “a certain amount of time to understand the whole system.”<sup>51</sup> Without denying the extent to which she is inserted into that system, Ottinger nonetheless displaces a relation of directly sanctioned authority, while

49. Derrida, “Archive Fever” 50.

50. Derrida, *Right of Inspection*, photographs by Marie-Françoise Plissart, trans. David Wills (New York: Monacelli, 1998) vii.

51. Grundmann and Shulevitz 40.

braiding the strands of testimony and historiographic evidence regarding the Shanghai exiles into a chain made available for our understanding. Ottinger's "method," like Derrida's, is impressionistic. She confronts fragments, using them to craft a commentary on the experience of the Jews in exile.

Ottinger faces a world in which the Jews of Shanghai stand in for the Jews of Europe, but as their shamed or guilty counterparts. Impossibly bound to a metonymic relation, the Jews of Shanghai cannot, however, become synecdoches for the Jews of Europe, for that grammar would obliterate the trace of the latter that archivization seeks to preserve. To analogize suffering and persecution requires a suspension of the conclusive voice:

But he never escaped the fears and nightmares from the Bridge House – they would haunt him for the rest of his life. He woke up Hella on many nights with his screaming and would sometimes run in terror if he saw a Japanese soldier on the streets. He was not a hero, but a surviving victim. Perhaps, some in the community later suggested, Herman Natowic also was a victim of fate, chosen to suffer for the Jews of Hongkew as millions of Jews who remained in Europe suffered far greater horrors.

As in the camps, furthermore, the administrators of the Hongkew segregation area relied upon the Jews to police one another, through a brigade known as the *pao chia*, a border patrol, which "brought out the worst German militarism" of some of the refugees.<sup>52</sup> The *pao chia* thus present an obstacle to idealization. Ottinger puzzles over how to film reluctant analogy and guilty complicity.

Shanghai was a world, like the pre-unification Germany of *Countdown*, where value fluctuated wildly, where the substitution of one thing for another could not be guaranteed by the universal equivalent or by a coherent system of exchange, and where currencies migrated across national borders. Ottinger puzzles further over how to film this abstract but real fluctuation and migration. To get a feel for the "system," it is necessary to think about value as an abstraction, as Ottinger had done in *Countdown*, and to concentrate on the language of hand signs. One could conclude for the present film, as Alter does for *Countdown*, that what distinguishes Ottinger's meditation on value is "the

52. Ross 208.

loving, critical care it takes in its extensive shots of the ‘the people’ – as well as inanimate structures and objects – which. . . stand in for various kinds of animate ‘otherness.’”<sup>53</sup>

Ottinger also confronts the already concrete history of this encounter between the Chinese and the Jews. The Chinese, in Krantzler’s account, are understood to be fully embracing: “The long history of China’s tolerance toward all religions and the generally excellent economic relations which the refugees maintained with their neighbors kept trouble at a minimum,”<sup>54</sup> while the Jews confronted the unsympathetic attitudes of Shanghai’s wealthy quasi-colonialist “international” community:

‘Loss of face’ was suffered in general by the white community with the arrival of the refugees: in a society where the white man was respected only for his power and wealth, manual labor on his part was unthinkable. The impoverished refugees, therefore, lowered the already weakened status of the Occidentals in China.<sup>55</sup>

A number of Japanese, similarly, blamed the Jews for increasing Westernization. In the literature of ultra-nationalist expansionists, the “Jewish vices of the three S’s (Screen, Sex, Sports) eroded traditional morals and corrupted the traditional family and community. These were propagated by students with Western or liberal leanings referred to as the “Karl Marx boys.”<sup>56</sup>

Finally, Ottinger confronts Freud’s relation to Shanghai:

*Die Gelbe Post*, a monthly under the very able journalist A. J. Storfer, who was also a psychologist and a student of Freud, was considered one of the best-edited papers in Asia. Most of its contents were devoted to articles of a cultural nature, as well as political and local news.<sup>57</sup>

Moving from a monthly to a weekly and then a daily, Storfer’s paper began to suffer. He was not geared to the pace of a daily and suffered a heart attack in September, 1940.<sup>58</sup> Ottinger’s shot of the front page

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53. Alter, “Ottinger’s Benjamin” 53.

54. Krantzler 154.

55. Krantzler 155.

56. Krantzler 198.

57. Krantzler 365.

58. Krantzler 365.

captures a headline announcing Freud's interest in the Jewish question.

The closing words of Krantzler's account open onto Ottinger's task: "Like the *Kikayon* plant in the Book of Jonah that grew and blossomed for only one day, the twentieth-century settlement of Jews among the one billion Chinese will have been only an ephemeral phenomenon in the Diaspora history of the Jewish People."<sup>59</sup> In the tense of the archive (the future perfect), Krantzler enjoins the archive in the most predictable fashion possible, urging us to remember, to cherish the document he has bestowed in the place of the *Kikayon*. Ottinger will remember otherwise.

### *Impression, Displacement, Translation*

Ottinger's orchestration of Jewish exiles' recollections with extended glimpses into the life of Shanghai as it is now provides a critical apparatus with which to displace or dislodge the authority of the archive as dead repository and to effect a mode of direct translation from the past to the present, from Europe to Asia, from memory to a kind of documentary presence. It is a film of "live" memory in a rhythm of the future's ground, produced through a lesbian impression. It bears repeating that *Exile Shanghai* is not a film "about" lesbians, but my argument seeks to draw attention to what and how lesbians see and record, or archive, their impressions. By impression I mean "the feeling inspired by this excessive and ultimately gratuitous investment in a perhaps useless archive."<sup>60</sup> *Exile Shanghai* renders the "extraterritorial" status of Shanghai that was bought with a quasi-colonial authority reciprocal, bringing into being a visual counterpart to what Agamben calls "aterritoriality."<sup>61</sup>

The first shot of the film is likely one of the "pointless" ones, though it provides both a point of entry and a point regarding the graphic force and ideological direction of much of the contemporary footage. An endless stream of bicyclists and pedestrians, wearing brightly-colored ponchos, parades in front of Ottinger's camera. While the viewer is to learn of Shanghai's endless rains from other sources, this shot serves no function other than to introduce us to the *mise-en-scène* of the city in what will be its emblematic state: wet, crowded, dense, brimming with beauty (pattern, color, contrast, direction, movement) and with life. It invokes a city-symphonic resonance; it is Joris Ivens's *Rain* (1929) in

59. Krantzler 582.

60. Derrida, "Archive Fever" 12.

61. Agamben, *Means* 24.

brilliant color. The music score echoes the immediate temporal dislocation of a film “about” memories of Shanghai introduced with a direct lingering recording of the city. A faintly “Asian” impression lent by strings gives way to a cartoonish, almost circus-like whistle laid over a waltz, a kind of aural pastiche. And as the score shifts locales and becomes driven by the voice-over of the first interviewee, Rena Krasno, the graphic dimensions of the ponchos yield to Chinese calligraphy, a photograph of the young Rena in Shanghai, and a tale of origins and a postal coincidence. In effect, Rena tells us that she was born and raised in China, a member of a Russian Jewish family. As the camera lingers on a surface of Chinese characters, Rena begins the history of Jews in Shanghai and explains the surprise of such a revelation. A “Shanghai Jew”? One imagines Ottinger’s prompt here (“tell us”); it will be foregrounded in other testimony to reveal the guidance of her authorial hand.

The story of the Shanghai Jews gains momentum as the camera turns to Rena in close-up, whereupon she explains the history of one of Shanghai’s most prominent Jewish families, the Sassoons. David Sassoon, an Iraqi, made a fortune trading with England on the Indian cotton market. In his quirky self-reliance, he went one day to pick up his mail from the post office in Bombay. There he noticed that his competitors were getting letters from China, and he found out that Shanghai was an open port. He immediately sent his son to exploit trade there, and thus, by dint of a secret made non-secret, but not public, was founded the Sephardic Jewish community in Shanghai in the mid-nineteenth century. Rena’s radiant eyes, seen in close-up, register the delight in the story: of deviousness or cleverness, of the coincidence of a mis-routed post, of an improbable origin at the macro-level that ties her micro-history to that of a monumental figure in Shanghai and, more significantly, a striated Jewish community. Ottinger then dissolves to photographs of those early tycoons.

Through this brief introductory sequence, Ottinger provides a tutorial in reading her film. It is not so much that the initial shots of streams of ponchos provide a graphic transition from the new to the old, from the now to the then, as much as they offer a layered reminder of the contradictory dimensions of recollection itself. Rena Krasno’s testimonial, that is, will have been founded on supporting visual evidence, as in the conventional cutaways to old photographs, newspapers, or other documents, *as well as* visual challenges to the legitimacy or coherence of her recollections. Shots of the contemporary city introduce a rebus of

authority that functions politically. Rena's *relative* privilege along with that of many of the other interviewees in relation to the fate of other Jews during the war, her Orientalism (for Jewish Orientalism has its own dense history), her class allegiances, and her cultural snobbery are neither exposed as ideological in the pejorative sense nor are they dialectically set against poverty and despair as, say, in Jean Vigo's *A Propos de Nice*. Instead they are set *trembling* by testimony, reverberating critically in the face of the ethical imperatives to decide, through the dense stream that becomes Shanghai. Tracing further obstacles of recollection and access inherent in the Western encounter with Asia, the film begins with a juxtaposition of the emblematic or the iconographic, insofar as the brightly-colored ponchos as elements of an abstract canvas become emblems of the city's dominant "feel," with the corresponding "unintelligible" calligraphy. Those who cannot read or hear Chinese, those who know little or nothing of Shanghai, or those who know it through the movies, are consigned to swerve between the semiotic registers through which epistemic violence is wrought, "mistaking" the detail as representative, investing in the dream of a universal signification.

To criticize Ottinger's gaze as *exotisme pur* in this instance would be to miss the alignment of gazes in the sequence. The viewer sees not as a distant observer, not through the lens of an authoritative interpretation or an imperializing aestheticism, but rather as the exiles have seen. We reauthorize their mis-recognitions in our own. They perhaps could not have read Chinese, as we perhaps cannot now, and their gazes upon Shanghai may have been awash in color but muted in understanding as ours are certainly in the opening minutes of Ottinger's film. This temporal layering of gazes, the extent to which they refuse the separation of then and now, is sustained throughout *Exile Shanghai*, and in it I discern the outline of a lesbian impression. Ottinger, in other words, refuses the authority of the past as convention (old photographs, maps) but similarly refuses the continuity of the present as identity (we, Jews, then and now). A different ethical alignment is at work, a different coding of affective value, in the disjunction that gives testimony to that which cannot be grasped and instead finds recognition through a swerve. Ottinger's camera records the possibility of a mistake rather than endorsing the orthodoxy of a position. The critical work of Hansen, Hake, Mayne and others would seem to reinforce this strategy of reading against identity-driven certainty, to see Ottinger in a feminist and queer lineage yet as resistant to the aesthetic prescriptions of social movements.

Three further examples illustrate Ottinger's anti-identitarian "take" on cross-cultural exchange and affective alignment. Here is Rena Krasno again, on the encounter between the high cultural sphere of the White Russian emigrés with the Shanghai Chinese:

It was really fantastic because the Chinese are very very gifted. As soon as we saw a nice dress we liked in a movie, we went to our tailor and asked him to copy it. They never needed a pattern, you could explain it to him, and there was this man to whom we spoke pidgin English and he answered in pidgin English, and he knew exactly what we wanted and it would fit. By the way, it was also marvelous with Chinese cooks: that they hated the food that they cooked for us, but they cooked delicious food according to our tastes.

This narration comes before a roughly three-minute take in which Ottinger's camera settles on a cook in a blue-lit backroom in Shanghai now. He begins to manipulate a round of dough, slowly dividing it by pulling it horizontally, then folding the strands vertically to repeat the process. As the strands multiply, the cook allows them to lengthen as well, whipping them like licorice against the floured kneading surface, until he holds in his hands a skein of perfectly even strings. They are, of course, tossed into a pot of simmering liquid, only to become. . . chicken noodle soup? Or its Chinese "equivalent"? It becomes difficult *not* to see the overdetermination at work in the fantasy of an identification between his labor and the old staple of Jewish cuisine. The fantasy is, moreover, neither dismissed by the film nor sanctioned as a "real" equation: it allows us the disjunctive rhythm of recollection and diaspora, at once.

Further examples abound. Rena's story about her experiences as a medical student buying bodies for dissection that had been found on the streets is followed in a manner similar to the noodle store sequence by a roughly five-minute sequence in the interior of a Chinese pharmacy. Where Rena's tone is matter-of-fact mixed with a twinge of shock, Geoffrey Heller's later interview is more poignant: "The things I never got used to were the fact that, on a winter morning, you would leave your little place and you would find people frozen to death in the streets." These bodies, at once an index of the misery, starvation and disease suffered by the Chinese in Shanghai during the war and increasingly by the Jews consigned to the Hongkew "ghetto," have the immanent potential to signify primitivism, lack of civilizing institutions,

and the cannibalizing force of contagion. The sequence answers these under- or overtones in Rena Krasno's description, however, by containing them in a curious distance. Here, says the camera, as the voice-over ceases to focus attention, is Chinese medicine. The shot remains in a pharmacy. Here, in bins and drawers and jars and weights and measures and packets, is a system of medicine. Here is a mixture of herbs, here is chopping; here is a bundle tied with twine. What do you know of it, then or now? And where lies judgment?

***"As Only a 16 Year-Old Can Sleep"***

Part of *Exile Shanghai's* critical force abides in its foregrounding of the distance between the exiles' adolescent experiences and their memories of them as adults, mirroring the distance between images or recollections of Shanghai during the war and Shanghai now. Adolescence is seen as a fertile moment for the imagination, as well as a time when the rearrangement of thought and desire is most possible. One of the film's second set of interviewees, Gertrude Alexander (who appears with her rabbi husband, Theodor), tells a marvelous story of her journey to Shanghai on a boat from London with an itinerary of stops that will become a litany throughout the film: Port Said, the Suez Canal, Capetown, New London, Durbin, Bombay, Colombo, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai. After the story, Gertrude tells us, "Today I can say that I've been to all these places, but I've never seen them. I've never gone ashore." Counter-point/implication: and neither has the viewer gone ashore to Shanghai; have not his/her glimpses, too, been stops on an itinerary of a diaspora that remains at the far side of a docking ramp? At Liverpool, the first port, Gertrude, who had been in London with other children sent from Vienna until the bombing began, awoke suddenly to the sound of an air-raid siren. Panicked, she turned to her shipmates to confirm that they were under fire. Her compatriots, she tells us, laughed and laughed, until they finally could regain the composure to tell her that what she was hearing was the sound of the "all-clear." She had slumbered during the entire harbor raid, "as only a 16 year-old can sleep."

Most of the film's interviewees stress the sense of adventure, the opportunity for exploration and learning, and the pleasure in the new (and the debauched) afforded by the journey to and encounter with Shanghai. Heller and his brother were befriended by a German Jesuit priest who taught them Japanese. His recollection of the journey through the same ports is that "it was magical for a boy of 16: all the

joys of adolescence, the miracle of eating in the dining room [where you could] pick *everything* on the menu, eat yourself under the table. . . We became adults, [we] started smoking at that time.” A few of the interviewees are able to locate their adolescent impressions in another context, as Heller notes:

I’m sure there are other people who had a terrible time in this Shanghai experience. I must say that for me at 17 it was an absolute eye-opener, it was high adventure, it was an unbelievable juxtaposition of exotic and fantastic things. . . It looked to me almost like a mini-United World, with the coexistence of so many nationalities. . . On the other hand, it was not melding. . . The International Settlement was kind of the last ripple of the quasi-colonial period.

Inna Mink, like Rena Krasno of a privileged Russian-Jewish background, is more critical:

It’s strange for me now looking back and seeing things as an adult, not as a kid, how horrible it was for the Chinese people who were very suppressed. Here we were, living in their country in the lap of luxury where they had either everything (only a small percentage of the Chinese people) or nothing at all; who basically waited on us hand and foot, who took care of us, and this is what colonialization was all about. . . I can’t really fathom what the heck was going on with my brains, why I never saw any of it that way then that I see today. It’s just absolutely amazing.

These are moments of self-incrimination, of the adult indicting the excesses and privileges not only of colonial power but of adolescent naiveté or blindness. Rena explicitly tells us, “I think people’s impressions are different according to their age.” The question the film poses, however, is how are we to counter the impressions of age/race/ethnicity/religion/gender/class/sexuality as they are recoded as Jewishness itself in the archive of victimage? Testimony refuses the certainty of such codings.

One strategy the film adopts in this regard is the juxtaposition of images consigned to official history in the dead past with living “translations” into the present. Such images abound, especially in shots of what was the Hongkew “ghetto,” seen through photographs and recollections edited in parallel fashion with its teeming life in the film’s present. In the park with a marker commemorating the Jewish internment, kids play in a

“ball room” filled with plastic brightly-colored balls; men and women in grey garb practice *tai chi*; a band picks up and leaves off. Another sequence answers the wedding stories of the Jewish exiles with a contemporary Shanghai wedding-photo shop. In a passage of almost ten minutes, “pointless” for certain, Ottinger lingers on tawdry vinyl tablecloths, rhinestone pins, outlandish “Western” garb (overdone dresses and the ubiquitous polyester tuxes of the middle class), hairpieces, tired and hapless brides standing before a *Heavenly Creatures* movie poster (the murderous lesbian in the odd detail!). Ottinger discovers here all the detritus of Western culture’s obsession with fabricating the fantasy of the perfect commodity-wedding as it creeps into the everyday of Communist China.

The more powerful method the film invokes of reading the exiles’ adolescent glee and concomitant blindness is the use of the close-up. After five hours of *Exile Shanghai*, one *knows* Rena and Gertrude and Theodor and Inna and Georges and Geoffrey. Lanzmann’s *Shoah* relies on a similar intimacy, a mode of knowing affect, not only in the more melodramatic moments when tears are shed, but in the ties of the face, the strained tale completed. Quirks of speech become familiar, such as Geoffrey Heller’s nervous transitional phrase, “in any event.” Faces reveal themselves in their age and, precisely, in their distance from the events narrated. The affect generated by the knowledge that these are old people is not, in fact, to be dismissed. It is one of several modes of legitimizing the stories “in their own right,” the length of their telling and the need for us to lend an ear, even or especially for five hours. *Exile Shanghai*, however, poses one substantial challenge to the sentimentalizing imperative of the dying Jew. In the interview with Georges Spunt, it recalibrates Shanghai’s sinful pleasures and victimhood through the lens of a gay man, who died in San Francisco in 1996. In conclusion, I turn to his recollections, honing in on the remaining elements in Ottinger’s repertoire for archivization and translation in *Exile Shanghai*. In so doing, my emphasis is on the possibilities of alignment.

### ***And What is a Lady without Her Boudoir?***

The testimony provided by Georges conforms to the film’s tales of the other more privileged Jews of Sephardic and Russian descent. Unlike the recollections of his temporary compatriots, his are, however, nothing if not camp. His Shanghai was divided not by the Garden Bridge that segregated Hongkew, but by movie theaters tied to Hollywood studios. His icon was not the notoriously lesbian Anna Mae Wong, but rather Bette

Davis. The language and style of cinematic life strongly shape his memories of the city. The Paramount nightclub was the hub of gay life before the war, and the Art Deco architecture of Shanghai is lovingly traced. Even while much of gay culture was hidden, "*en cachette*" he tells us, Georges' own affect and descriptions are outrageously queer, tied as they are to a young gay man's fascination with *couture*, with his aunt Lisa's flamboyant femininity: "She was very much a clotheshorse." As much as Georges may provide the obviously queer kernel – melodramatic, fantastic – of *Exile Shanghai*, it is the images of Shanghai accompanying his testimony which produce the force of the film's impression. The "lesbian impression" does not abide in Ottinger's obvious delight in filming the gay man. Her delight in fact extends to all of the interviewees and is palpable in each of the interviews. It is less in the processes of *identification* than in those of alignment, particularly with the Chinese during this segment that Ottinger's intervention is best glimpsed. More than any other, this sequence demonstrate how Ottinger's strategies of juxtaposition and alignment produce the film's lesbian impression.

Two elements dominate this section of the film: a gay "character," in both senses, and a city, edited as complexly as the Potsdamer Platz sequence in *Countdown*. Crucially, many of the exiles' interviews, like Rena Krasno's, are set into motion by courtship and marriage. These rituals, if melodramatized, link Jewish marginalized and/or suffering peoples to their brethren in the heterocentric rest of the West. The narratives both of Georges and the final interviewee, Geoffrey Heller, rely less on recognizable appeals to an ostensibly common bond of love under strenuous conditions than to the strains of experience produced through jobs, leisure, and the intricate nature of survival during wartime. In these strains, for Georges in particular, are production and literal exchange, a scheme of value and a problematic of remembrance. Georges is the only interviewee who directly addresses the status of the Jew in terms of national belonging. Georges's father managed, by way of his financial contributions to the Allied Red Cross, to wrangle for himself and for his child French citizenship. "He wanted to belong to a country, not to a race or religion." Georges was raised as French (hence the "s"), following a French curriculum, living in the French Concession, enlarging his larger sense of European belonging with the study of Italian. That French, unlike British, citizenship could be bought, however, introduces a trembling *leitmotif* of exchange that will be heard throughout Georges's testimony. Shanghai, he tells us, "was not raped like Nanking because the Japanese had a purpose

for Shanghai. They wanted to keep a city where they could make transactions and have sort of a freedom for themselves.” What Georges remembers about the increasing restrictions imposed by the Japanese occupation is similarly tied to transactions and currency. Due to the astonishing rates of inflation, money was carried in bundles rather than in single bills. “A taxi ride cost 5 million CRB” (Chinese Reserve Bank currency).

There are contradictions and condensations in the testimony. Citizenship is traded like commodities, racial/ethnic identities are set in motion in exchange, producing unsettling equivalences. Freedom for the Japanese meant preserving the structures of imperial settlement founded upon expropriation. By implication, the “devil may care” freedom of the gay community rested upon the same scaffolds. The general equivalent, money (currency, wads of bills), veils both the materiality of the signifier *and* the social relations through which such an abstraction is produced. The case of Georges demands that one think about the political economy of gay life, national identity, and Jewish remembrance, but his testimony, it must be stressed, is not presented in a critical light. To the contrary, Georges’ fascination with Shanghai as *mise-en-scène* for a camp reading articulates the pain of nostalgia, of translating despair into an excessive and excessively funny lavishness of description and recollection. The *critical* task falls to Ottinger, in her choice of images. For her, the cinematic production of gayness becomes quite clearly a question of archivization.

One sequence stands out. How can it not, for its “pointless” stream occupies several minutes? While Georges describes his apprenticeship to fashion designers (he was the first to put Dietrich in slacks, he claims against received gossip), we see Chinese couples dancing, Western-style, on the Bund. They are costumed in Maoist grey simplicity; most are middle-aged and most appear slightly disinterested in the orchestrated proceedings. The chord Ottinger strikes in this sequence at first appears to be an analogical one: the Shanghai of Georges’ remembrance (Deco, neon, wild gay nightlife) is to contemporary Shanghai’s regimented and controlled forms of leisure what Orientalism is to Communist “reality.” The film seems to align gayness with Orientalism, just as Ottinger previously revealed a strain of particularly Jewish Orientalism, yielding a “take-home” indictment of Chinese repression counterposed with the excessive opportunities of fading imperial Shanghai, very much in keeping with a nostalgia for Weimar Germany as freedom-before-fascism. Such a critical understanding of gay identity in wartime Shanghai notes the complicity of gayness with so-called larger structures of historical belonging. Yet such a

hasty analogical maneuver would fail to acknowledge the reciprocal nature of exchange. In the sequences of contemporary Shanghai accompanying Georges' recollections, Ottinger demonstrates the extent to which historicizing as archivization yields stasis. Domiciliation and the domestication of historical antagonisms cannot be contained in what she describes as the "live" translation of bodies, if disaffected ones, moving to music in a now that spills onto the archival testimony of the then. This is not to posit an "outside" to archivization or the "meta-archive" denied by Derrida, for the impression left by the Mao-jackets waltzing is precisely the *questioning* of gay bodies dancing in Deco palaces built by Chinese hands. If there is anything to this rhythm, it is a challenge to rote mantras of inclusion, *naturalized* habits of historicization, conventions of reading "gay" as liberatory. If there is no meta-archive, there is an impression.

There are also more conventional relations between recollection and image in the testimony of Georges. His memories of his aunt are accompanied by photographs of her villa (the Villa Mona Lisa) and by glamorous photographs of her as a singer in the early 1920s. His mapping of Shanghai through movie theaters and Deco architecture is answered by images of the city lit by neon, the moon reflecting upon the harbor waters sliced by a boat. One could obviously invoke *Un Chien Andalou* as an inspiration. But we are never certain that these rhythms will not yield to others, challenges to the confirming and conforming laxity of orthodox documentary form.

Whether it is because Geoffrey Heller is the last interviewee and that he provides the final impression, or because his self-presentation is the most awkward, his voice remains with me. Heller, rummaging through his memorabilia in preparation for his appearance, had come upon a book of his father's entitled *Shanghai Country Walks*, written by a "charming, humorous, thoughtful Englishman." Heller had often walked with his father, following the "quite ingenious" maps with their little landmarks of bridges and stones, until their mobility was restricted by the Chinese to Hongkew and to Heller's daily commute across the Garden Bridge. Both the book and the Heller's walks with his father are relegated to the past, to the world of fading imperialism and the sense of mastery and leisure it produced. Insofar as they are beyond retrieval, they mark, as does the film more generally, the contradiction at the heart of the archival project. On the one hand, Heller muses thoughtfully, "the landmarks really worked. We found our way." The sensuous delight Heller takes in the memory of these walks is palpable for the viewer. What a pleasure, for

this young man, to walk with his father and breathe country air, blissfully unaware of the brutality around the corner. And yet, of course, these maps could show him nothing. They reveal nothing to the viewer of the lives of the Chinese in imperial Shanghai or now, much less of the structural relations between the hand that draws on another continent or the persecution awaiting Heller's family in Europe. Ottinger therefore answers twice: first, in another long sequence, this time of rural China, following the verbal cues of Heller's recollection of landmarks that in images become dissociated from the path he had followed and instead come to function as the tracing of a map we will never see. Similar to the sequence of the Chinese pharmacy, it says: "Here is grain sifted in the sun, here are fishing boats, here the fish comes to market." What does one know of these exchanges, what does one exchange for this knowledge? The second answer comes from Heller, in his closing thoughts:

But when I think about the dreadful fate of millions in Europe, it seems so utterly trivial, it seems like a picnic in a way, and I never thought, during these times at least, of myself as a victim other than to be embroiled in the uncertainties and hardships of this dreadful war. Then when the war was over came the discoveries of terrible tales that we had not perhaps been privy to while we were cut off from all news of the world. I discovered that my grandmother had been killed at Auschwitz, my other relatives likewise, my great-aunt, my great-uncle, all sorts of other people. It's very searing, in fact I don't recall quite just how the knowledge of all this ultimately became a reality. It took a *Life* magazine here, and a story there, but those were very terrible times.

How does the knowledge become a reality? Is this not, indeed, the kernel of the question of the prosthesis of the mystic writing pad, the question of the archive coming to be? Heller's narration cannot sustain coherence in the face of these "terrible tales," but not only or simply or even primarily because he confronts atrocity. Instead, what he confronts is the rhythm of a life lived otherwise, wherein all the memories, photographs, newsreels, articles, monographs, official histories, and documentary films cannot stop the trembling of something beyond, from the past and toward the future, "if it will have been." Ottinger's imperative seems to be to keep this trembling alive, even if the translation must of necessity remain incomplete.

## [Footnotes]

<sup>1</sup> **Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia in the Mirror of Dorian Gray: Ethnographic Recordings and the Aesthetics of the Market in the Recent Films of Ulrike Ottinger**

Katie Trumpener

*New German Critique*, No. 60, Special Issue on German Film History. (Autumn, 1993), pp. 77-99.

<sup>2</sup> **Visual Pleasure, Fetishism and the Problem of Feminine/Feminist Discourse: Ulrike Ottinger's Ticket of No Return**

Miriam Hansen

*New German Critique*, No. 31, West German Culture and Politics. (Winter, 1984), pp. 95-108.

<sup>23</sup> **Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression**

Jacques Derrida; Eric Prenowitz

*Diacritics*, Vol. 25, No. 2. (Summer, 1995), pp. 9-63.

**NOTE:** *The reference numbering from the original has been maintained in this citation list.*