1 The Everyday Life of Queer Trauma

Sometimes people say we're living in a trauma culture—that it's a time of crisis, and that the crisis is manifest in people's feelings, whether numbness or anxiety, lack of feeling or too much feeling.[1] And sometimes they say that calling it a trauma culture is a symptom rather than a diagnosis, a quick-fix naming of the zeitgeist that misrecognizes a structural condition as a feeling. A significant body of work within American studies has recently mounted a critique of U.S. culture by describing it as a trauma culture. Wendy Brown speaks about identity politics as a politics of ressentiment in which claims on the state are made by individuals and groups who constitute themselves as injured victims whose grievances demand redress.[2] Mark Seltzer writes about a wound culture, describing the cultural obsession with serial killings and other sites of violence that produces a "pathological public sphere."[3] Lauren Berlant develops the notion of an "intimate public sphere," the result of a process whereby "a citizen is defined as a person traumatized by some aspect of life in the United States."[4] In these analyses, U.S. culture's transformation into a trauma culture is a problem, representing the failure of political culture and its displacement by a sentimental culture of feeling or voyeuristic culture of spectacle.

While such critiques of trauma culture have been indispensable for my thinking about trauma as a category of national, and particularly U.S., public culture, I take them in a different direction by exploring how trauma can be a foundation for creating counterpublic spheres rather than evacuating them. I share these critics' concern with the problem of what Lisa Duggan calls the "incredible shrinking public" where attacks on public institutions, ranging from the arts to education to welfare, along with the effects of privatization and globalization have led to severely diminished resources and arenas for public and democratic debate.[5] But I also want to hold out for the presence and promise of cultural formations

that bring traumatic histories into the public sphere and use accounts of affective experience to transform our sense of what constitutes a public sphere. As Berlant suggests, "In the patriotically permeated pseudopublic sphere of the present tense, national politics does not involve starting with a view of the nation as a space of struggle violently separated by racial, sexual, and economic inequalities that cut across every imaginable kind of social location."[6] By contrast, this book and the public cultures it documents *do* take as a starting point "the nation as a space of struggle," seeking to illuminate the forms of violence that are forgotten or covered over by the amnesiac powers of national culture, which is adept at using one trauma story to suppress another. This version of national trauma doesn't always lend itself to media spectacle since it frequently operates in the less dramatic terrain of everyday experience and involves groups of people who make no claim to being representative citizens. Douglas Crimp, for example, writes about the trauma of AIDS for gay men as residing partly in its invisibility as such to the national culture. Even though AIDS has ultimately received considerable attention in the national public sphere, many of its losses, such as unprotected sex, remain unacknowledged or scorned.[7]

Here, lesbian sites of trauma often fly under the radar screen of national public culture. I don't look to Hollywood blockbusters, media events, or national crises such as the Vietnam War or Kennedy assassination; in fact, I resist the way that trauma can be used to reinforce nationalism when constructed as a wound that must be healed in the name of unity. As Kathleen Stewart does in her exploration of Appalachian culture, I focus on a "a space on the side of the road"—locations of culture that often seem too local or specific to represent the nation; as well, I am alert to the way that transnational perspectives challenge the boundaries of the nation as both geographic and conceptual category. In focusing in particular on lesbian public cultures and other related queer sites, I invoke the categories of identity politics that Wendy Brown critiques, but explore public articulations of trauma that don't look to either identity or the state as a means for the resolution of trauma. Refusing any quick-fix solution to trauma, such as telling the story as a mode of declaring an identity or seeking legal redress, the cases that interest me offer the unpredictable forms of politics that emerge when trauma is kept unrelentingly in view rather than contained within an institutional project. I

keep open the question of how affective experience gives rise to public culture rather than operating with any presumptions about what constitutes culture or politics, or their conjunction. My investigation of trauma thus becomes an inquiry into how affective experience that falls outside of institutionalized or stable forms of identity or politics can form the basis for public culture.

In opening with a discussion of trauma as a social and cultural category, this book signals its recognition that trauma is the subject of a discourse that has a history. My use of the term comes from a tradition that begins in the nineteenth century, when the term *trauma,* which had previously referred to a physical wound, came to be applied to mental or psychic distress. Medical anthropologist Allan Young locates the origins of trauma discourse in the phenomenon of "railway shock": the accidents that were the inevitable by-product of the new technology of the train produced in some victims symptoms of nervous distress that had no apparent physical basis.[8] Trauma and modernity thus can be understood as mutually constitutive categories; trauma is one of the affective experiences, or to use Raymond Williams's phrase, "structures of feeling," that characterizes the lived experience of capitalism. Other Marxist theorists, most notably Walter Benjamin, have taken up the category of *shock* as a way of describing modern life, particularly in urban contexts, in an effort to characterize its effects on the senses.

For the most part, though, sociocultural approaches to trauma have been overshadowed by psychoanalytic and psychiatric discourse, not only in the work of Freud but also in the investigations of nineteenth-century researchers, the theories of Freud's contemporary, Pierre Janet (whose theory of dissociation constitutes an alternative to Freud's notion of repression), and more recently, the development of PTSD as a clinical diagnosis. Indeed, psychoanalysis, like trauma, is constituted by the assumption that illness can be psychic, not just physical, and the close affinity and shared history of the two concepts make it difficult to separate them. I seek to resist this tendency, however, by holding on to trauma's historical embeddedness not just in modernity but in a range of historical phenomena, including not only World War I, the Holocaust, and Vietnam but feminist discourses about sexual violence, experiences of migration, and queer activisms. The clinical definition of trauma as PTSD includes a list of symptoms (hyperarousal, numbing, repetition) and a

description of the kind of event that produces trauma—"outside the range of usual human experience" in the case of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* third edition and revised third edition (DSM–III and IIIR), or involving "actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity" in the case of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* fourth edition (DSM–IV).[9] I treat trauma instead as a social and cultural discourse that emerges in response to the demands of grappling with the psychic consequences of historical events. Defined culturally rather than clinically, trauma studies becomes an interdisciplinary field for exploring the public cultures created around traumatic events. Trauma becomes a central category for looking at the intersections of emotional and social processes along with the intersections of memory and history; it gives rise to what Marita Sturken and others have called "cultural memory."[10]

An exclusively historicist or constructivist approach to trauma will not alone exhaust its meanings or significance, however. Trauma has exerted a powerful hold over cultural theorists because it offers compelling and urgent cases of unrepresentability that confirm the fundamental assumptions of poststructuralist theory. Especially prominent in this respect is the work of Cathy Caruth, who has pointed out that trauma presents an epistemological challenge, standing at the "limits of our understanding" as well as the crossroads of the "complex relation between knowing and not knowing."[11] Caruth's influential definition of trauma as "unclaimed experience" shifts attention away from the specificity of the traumatic event to its structural unknowability. Drawing in particular on deconstructive readings of Freud, Caruth repeatedly emphasizes trauma's paradoxes. With similar results, though using not only psychoanalytic but also Marxist approaches, Mark Seltzer notes that trauma discourse is important precisely because it challenges distinctions between the mental and physical, the psychic and social, and the internal and external as locations or sources of pain. Discourses of trauma serve as a vehicle for sorting through the relation between these categories rather than resolving them in a definition. When trauma becomes too exclusively psychologized or medicalized, its capacity to problematize conceptual schemes, the exploration of which is one of cultural theory's contributions to trauma studies, is lost.

I take a certain distance from Caruth's universalizing form of theo-

rizing about trauma. Her work is quite portable to a range of contexts because of the abstractness of her formulations. By consistently stressing questions of epistemology and trauma as structurally unknowable, she flattens out the specificities of trauma in a given historical and political context. While Caruth does not always acknowledge the historical origins of her work (and resists historicist readings of Freud, for example), her own work is rooted in the texts of Freud and has strong ties to Holocaust studies. Furthermore, Caruth focuses on trauma as catastrophic event rather than on everyday trauma. Drawing on Freud, she uses the example of the "accident" as a way of describing trauma's contingency and lack of agency—a model that may not work well for traumatic histories that emerge from systemic contexts. By contrast, I seek to remain alert to the historical locations out of which theories of trauma arise and the possible limitations of those models for other contexts. This presumption is necessary in order to make room for the category of sexual trauma and the lesbian contexts from which most of my cases are taken—instances that might otherwise seem tangential to a discussion of trauma. Without rejecting the emphasis that Caruth and others place on trauma's unrepresentability, I try to rearticulate that insight through a set of examples that are themselves the locus of new theories of trauma.

A PTSD clinical diagnosis defines trauma as an overwhelming event that produces certain kinds of symptoms in the patient. Poststructuralist theory defines it as an event that is unrepresentable. I want to think about trauma as part of the affective language that describes life under capitalism. I'm interested in how shock and injury are made socially meaningful, paradigmatic even, within cultural experience. I want to focus on how traumatic events refract outward to produce all kinds of affective responses and not just clinical symptoms. Moreover, in contrast to the individualist approaches of clinical psychology, I'm concerned with trauma as a collective experience that generates collective responses. I am compelled by historical understandings of trauma as a way of describing how we live, and especially how we live affectively.

Four theoretical allegiances—feminism, critical race theory, Marxism, and queer theory—each of which offers contributions to and problems for theories of trauma, serve as points of departure for this study. From feminism comes an interest in bridging the sometimes missing intersections between sexual and national traumas, and the sense of trauma as

everyday; from critical race theory, especially African American studies, comes an understanding of trauma as foundational to national histories and passed down through multiple generations; from Marxism comes a dialectical approach to the intersection of lived experience and systemic social structures and to trauma's place in the social history of sensation; and from queer theory comes a critique of pathologizing approaches to trauma and an archive of examples from lesbian public cultures. These theoretical resources have been necessary in order to do justice to a series of cases that never seem to quite measure up to expectations that trauma be catastrophic and extreme; I'm interested instead in the way trauma digs itself in at the level of the everyday, and in the incommensurability of large-scale events and the ongoing material details of experience. Drawing on these theories, I hope to seize authority over trauma discourses from medical and scientific discourse in order to place it back in the hands of those who make culture, as well as to forge new models for how affective life can serve as the foundation for public culture.

Roller Coasters and *Little Women*

When my examples of lesbian trauma culture seem a little too slight or marginal, I remind myself that Lisa Kron approaches the Holocaust in her performance piece *2.5 Minute Ride* by talking about roller coasters and *Little Women.* It's a story about visiting Auschwitz with her survivor father so that he can see the place where his parents were killed, but it's also about how much her father loves to ride the giant roller coaster at the family's annual outing to the Cedar Point Amusement Park in Sandusky, Ohio. Kron talks about being overcome with horror by one of the Auschwitz displays, yet she also describes crying at her brother's wedding in a burst of emotion that reminds her of the women sobbing in the dark during a matinee screening of *Little Women. 2.5 Minute Ride* insists on the queerness of emotional life, documenting unpredictable surges of feeling that fall outside the terrain of the sublime horror of Holocaust testimony or the sentimentality of U.S. popular culture's women's genres.

Like a roller coaster, *2.5 Minute Ride* careens, often wildly, not only between widely disparate stories but between widely disparate affects, taking the audience from humor to traumatic rupture without even pausing for a theatrical beat. Kron stresses the challenge of addressing an audi-

Lisa Kron, performance artist and author of *2.5 Minute Ride.* Photo by Kristina LeGros. Courtesy of Lisa Kron.

ence that comes already equipped with a huge repository of Holocaust representations, which are the product of successful efforts to create a culture around this historical trauma.[12] She painstakingly attempts to avoid some of the affects frequently prompted by such representations, including empty sentimentality and its not-so-distant relation, incapacitating awe. Can a trip to Auschwitz be something other than another version of a trip to an amusement park, where history's terrors are domesticated into safely consumable artifacts and emotions? By juxtaposing stories of these two kinds of visits, Kron forces scrutiny of the limits and inadequacies of the quest for an encounter with trauma, testimony, and the Holocaust that are implicit in trips to both Auschwitz and the theater.

2.5 Minute Ride provokes some of the same questions about sensation as does its namesake, the roller coaster. How is it that extreme sensations, including fear and terror, can be entertaining? Does Lisa's aging and blind father delight in roller coasters out of some version of Freud's repetition compulsion, seeking to replicate extreme terror in order to master it? Or is the thrill one that requires a Marxist explanation of the amusement park, and especially its scary rides, as the utopian domestication of capitalism's industrial technology along with the accidents that are the by-product of speed and novelty? The image of the roller coaster in *2.5*

Minute Ride serves as a cautionary reminder of Kron's desire to avoid representations of horror that serve merely to entertain her audience. The roller coaster is also a resonant figure for exploring trauma, given the centrality of railway travel not only in nineteenth-century discourses of trauma but in memories of the Holocaust.

Challenging stereotypical expectations about the emotional impact of visiting concentration camps, Lisa's biggest fear is that she will feel nothing at Auschwitz, that it will be too structured and too much like a Disneyland-style amusement park for her to be able to get close to what happened to her grandparents. She is also terrified by the responsibility of being a witness to her father's reactions, wondering what will happen if he breaks down and she must comfort him. Witnessing is fraught with ambivalence rather than fulfilling the melodramatic fantasy that the trauma survivor will finally tell all and receive the solace of being heard by a willing and supportive listener. Kron captures the burdens, the everydayness, and also the humor of a witnessing as she and her almost-blind father bumble their way through such material difficulties of tourism in a foreign country as what to eat and how to read signs. In one of her story's most agonizing moments, her father discovers that he has left his eyeglasses inside the camp and they have to go back after closing time to search for them. It's an ordinary and chilling moment simultaneously, exemplifying Kron's attention to the persistence of the everyday in the encounter with trauma.

2.5 Minute Ride's sophisticated approach to the performance of emotion reveals itself in Lisa's experience of being overwhelmed by the emotions she was afraid she wouldn't feel. She says,

> But when I enter the crematorium for the first time in my life I feel horror. Physical repulsion. I can feel my face contort, my lips pull back. In the gas chamber, my father stops to take his 2:00 pill. This breaks my heart. I stand to the side and cry. Hard. I can feel . . . I can feel the bottom. It's clear to me now that everything in my life before has been a shadow. This is the only reality—what happened to my father and his parents fifty years ago.

It's not just the crematorium itself that affects her but the poignancy of her ailing father getting on with the business of survival in the midst of it. Yet rather than following through with the performance of this emotion

or belaboring the sudden shock of an encounter with death, Lisa abruptly interrupts her story. "You know what this looks like already. I don't know why I'm telling you this. Everybody's seen these images. I'm sure you've seen *Sophie's Choice* and *Schindler's List* and the pictures of the bodies and the bulldozers on PBS. It's on every fifteen minutes practically. I don't know why I'm telling you this. I don't need to describe this to you. I feel like a cliché. Ugh." She reminds her audience that stories of the Holocaust now circulate so widely as to verge dangerously on becoming an everyday experience that no longer has the power to affect people.

By refusing to continue in this vein, Kron alerts her audience that *2.5 Minute Ride* is a different kind of Holocaust story, if it is one at all. It is not about Auschwitz, the concentration camps, or even Holocaust survivors; it is about her relationship with a man who is a survivor, but who is also her father. Affectively, *2.5 Minute Ride* gestures at the emotional abyss but won't go there, at least not in the expected way; at the moment of confrontation with the Holocaust's simultaneous unrepresentability and hyperrepresentability, Kron swerves, as though imitating one of the roller coaster's unexpected dips and curves, in another direction. She stresses her father's everyday life: that he shops at the Meijer's superstore in Lansing, Michigan, that he will cook you dinner, and that after exiting from the Mean Streak roller coaster with his terrified daughter in tow, he's ready to ride it again. Kron wants to jolt her audience out of its customary responses, including not only the numbness of no response but also the dutiful feelings of sympathy and horror, in order to confront them with other affects such as humor, the poignancy of everyday life, and the moral uncertainty of her father's claim that he was lucky to have been born a Jew so that he couldn't possibly have become a Nazi. *2.5 Minute Ride* offers unrepresentability not as awe-inspiring but as material necessity. Indeed, the challenge it addresses is how to make room for another kind of story in the face of the hyperrepresentation of the Holocaust and its saturation of the cultural landscape by a proliferation of horrific images. The daughter of the Holocaust survivor faces a dilemma in attempting to document her father's life: "When I try to tell his stories I begin to hyperventilate and I don't know why." By performing the realities of emotions that are varied and that include humor, boredom, and resistance, Kron expands the emotional archive of trauma.

2.5 Minute Ride's unusual approach to affect is especially evident in

its exploration of sentimentality in the story of Lisa's brother's wedding at the Seaview Jewish Center in Canarsie to a woman whom he met online. Just as the juxtaposition of the roller coaster with Auschwitz foregrounded the dangers of sensationalism, this segment uses the wedding to suggest that sentimentality is another kind of popular affect that a trauma culture must circumvent. The critique of the sentimentality of weddings is facilitated by the overt focus on lesbianism and on how Lisa and her girlfriend Peg are subjected to the indignities of being the odd couple at the scene of compulsory heterosexuality. Kron uses humor to gesture at the lived experience of homophobia and its manifestations in family rituals that don't quite know what to make of queer children, even if they don't overtly exclude them. There are no melodramatic scenes of conflict, only the dilemma of figuring out how to explain who your girlfriend is to the friends of the family.

Ambivalent about the wedding, Lisa finds herself unexpectedly crying, responding in spite of herself to the moment when her parents walk her brother to the chuppah. She describes her feelings with reference to one of U.S. sentimental culture's most important texts, *Little Women,* adapted for one of its most important media, the Hollywood film.

> You know a couple of years ago I went to see the movie *Little Women.* And it was in a big theater and there were only about thirty people there and they were all women and were all sitting separately, scattered about in this huge theater. And when Beth dies, all the women in the theater were crying but it wasn't the usual quiet sniffling you hear sometimes in a theater. These women were racked with sobs. All around me I could hear noises like: [Makes huge, hiccuping crying noises]. And that's how I was crying at my brother's wedding.

By making this comparison, Kron opens up the possibility that her response is merely sentimental, but in this instance, the sentimental genre, whether the weepie or the wedding, enables something more. She continues:

> It had never dawned on me in a million years that I would feel anything other than a big, judgey reaction to the whole thing. But when I saw my father all I could see was the soul in this little old man who lost his mother and his father and his country and his culture and it's

> all gone forever and this was the closest he was ever going to come to it again and it didn't feel like enough and it felt like too much for me and so I cried.

At the Seaview Jewish Center as much as at Auschwitz, Lisa is surprised by emotion, experiencing an encounter with the tremendous losses that pervade her father's life. The moment offers testimony to the queer paths taken by trauma's affects. And not one to indulge in sentiment or sobs for too long, Lisa closes the story by reverting to humor: "And so I cried and then I made everyone sitting around me take an oath that they hadn't seen me doing it because I can't be going around crying at weddings." This, too, is part of trauma's affective archive: the resistance to vulnerability for which the dismissal of sentimentality and the canon of women's popular culture serves as a touchstone.

2.5 Minute Ride certainly shares with Seltzer, Berlant, and Brown a critique of sentimental as well as trauma culture in its disdain for easy emotional experiences and its concern with the ultimately deadening circulation of images of the Holocaust. But its reference to *Little Women* cuts both ways, serving not only as a model of what *2.5 Minute Ride* seeks to distance itself from but also as a model for its aspirations to affect its audiences, and to find a way to produce feelings that are unpredictable and difficult. Moreover, in its effort to chronicle everyday emotions and the relation between a father and daughter in order to intervene against clichéd or glib responses to the Holocaust archive, it remains committed to the possibility of performing trauma and emotion in the public sphere. Using the genre of solo performance, one of whose primary resources is autobiography, Kron approaches affective experience as unsettling, unpredictable, and necessary.

For Kron, humor is much easier than tears, and while it often seems to displace other emotions, it would be more accurate to see it as a way of expressing what cannot be expressed otherwise. Humor becomes a way of approaching the Holocaust through indirection, of warding off emotional breakdown with a joke. The suspense of the approach to Auschwitz is produced and disrupted by Kron's sudden switches to the other stories that she is telling; incorporating them into the play gives her a kind of defense strategy, a way of avoiding the topic when it gets too close. The rapid shifts in both narrative and affect have a distancing effect, keeping

the Auschwitz story from becoming too sentimental or horrific, but they also possess their own kind of affective power. The sudden shift to humor is another way of conveying the enormity of the Holocaust. It keeps the roller coaster of affect moving just as it looks like it's about to fall into the abyss, and the rapid transition from horror to humor, from the Holocaust to the everyday, dramatically underscores their incommensurability. There are gaps and silences in *2.5 Minute Ride,* most graphically evident in the slides from the family photographs with which Kron opens the show in mock documentary form. Although Lisa vividly describes the images, the screen is blank. Like the empty slides, *2.5 Minute Ride*'s abrupt transitions between narratives tell a story by not telling it, and the affects it produces are ones the audience may not have been expecting.

Kron sees herself as drawing on a specifically Jewish tradition of performance that includes vaudeville and the borscht belt cabarets with their stand-up comedians. By forging this connection, she indicates that the American Jewish response to the Holocaust is influenced by a culture of Jewish immigration and diaspora in which theater and entertainment public cultures have been central. More generally, her strategy suggests that trauma is affectively negotiated in culturally specific ways. As an approach to the Holocaust, though, humor can seem especially taboo or transgressive—a reminder that responses to trauma are often constrained by (normalizing) demands for appropriate affects.[13] Kron uses her jokes about whether or not to pay for parking at Auschwitz or the intrusions of a group of Israeli tourists there as reminders of the incommensurability between visiting the site as a tourist and having been imprisoned or killed there.

In addition to using Jewish traditions of humor, Kron makes expert use of a genre that has strong ties to queer culture: performance art. Forced to draw on memory and personal experience to construct an archive in the wake of a dominant culture that provides either silence or homophobic representations of their lives, queers have used solo performance as a forum for personal histories that are also social and cultural ones.[14] There is a significant link between performance art and testimony in terms of a shared desire to build culture out of memory. The life stories of performance art are often structured around, if not traumatic experience, moments of intense affect that are transformative or revealing. They also often revolve around family histories, mapping the queer offspring

of heterosexual parents and cultural traditions; in this respect, solo performance is well situated to contribute to the current need to explore the transgenerational transmission of the Holocaust to the children of survivors, which has produced new and unusual approaches ranging from Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory to Art Spiegelman's use of the comic book form in *Maus*.[15] Kron closes *2.5 Minute Ride* with a metaphor from the theater. Mentioning how putting your hand on a chair can make you seem bigger on stage, she states, "I put my hand on my father's life." In the end, she cannot tell her father's story or an Auschwitz one; she can best represent these through roller coaster rides and wedding sentiments, told in her own queer way.

I've begun with an example that occupies the terrain of both queer culture and the Holocaust to highlight the differences between this book and the more customary sites of trauma studies. The cultural texts explored here are more like *2.5 Minute Ride* than Holocaust testimony, occupying a frequently oblique relation both in content and genre to historical sites of trauma. Not only is this often the condition of lesbian representations of trauma and responses to trauma but this obliqueness or tangentialness can also be described as queer. It produces a different theory of trauma than work rooted in the example of the Holocaust, which has been a key reference point for the most influential trauma theory in cultural studies. For instance, Caruth's theory of trauma as "unclaimed experience" has circulated within a milieu that includes work by Geoffrey Hartman, Dominick LaCapra, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Lawrence Langer, and others that is centered on the Holocaust.[16] Indeed, some theorists, such as LaCapra, have suggested that the Holocaust stands as the repressed event that guides poststructuralist theory, particularly in its European contexts—a historical locatedness that is especially likely to be lost in the translation to a U.S. context. Perhaps the turn to the specificity of the Holocaust on the part of some of these theorists represents the recognition of this repressed history, but it is also, I think, motivated by debates specific to poststructuralist theory's status in the U.S. academy and especially the vexed question of the politics of theory.[17] The Holocaust offers validation of theory's applicability to concrete and pressing historical circumstances, and it serves as a compelling example that unrepresentability and aporia can be integral to lived experience rather than the deconstruction of experience. Recognizing the significance of the Holo-

caust in this body of trauma theory is crucial to evaluating its historical specificity and the possible limits of its applicability to other contexts.

Yet even as the sites of trauma explored here are not comparable to the Holocaust, they are certainly informed by Holocaust studies and memory. Testimony, in particular, serves as an important example of the radical approach to the archive that trauma can demand. Such repositories as the Yale Fortunoff Archive and the Shoah History Foundation seek not just to produce a document or record but to create new forms of historical memory. Especially prominent is the resistance to redemption in such work as Claude Lanzmann's 1985 documentary film *Shoah* and Lawrence Langer's *Holocaust Testimonies.*[18] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's work in *Testimony* speaks to the specificity of testimony as cultural and historical genre, an event that seeks a witness but may not find one, an interactive occasion in which the relation between speaker and hearer is crucial to the narrative, which becomes performative rather than constative.[19] This process of testimony has implications for understanding history, raising questions about the role of memory; for understanding therapy, opening up the possibility of a public form of storytelling, but one that involves the work of psychoanalysis; and for understanding culture, since the mode of representation of trauma is complex and challenges the very possibility of representation.

There are certainly resonant sympathies between the approach to testimony and representation in Holocaust culture and Kron's oblique approach in *2.5 Minute Ride.* Kron's sensibility is echoed in Lanzmann's interest in the material details that draw out the embeddedness of Holocaust experience in everyday life, such as Abraham Bomba's experience of cutting hair in the gas chambers, or survivor Simon Srebnik's return to Poland and the casual anti-Semitism of the Poles' ongoing memories of life when the Jews were still present in their towns.[20] Like Kron, Lanzmann journeys to the present sites of the concentration camps in search of the traces of traumatic history; her roller coaster ride finds its counterpart in his images of railroad tracks and the re-creation of the train's approach to the camps. Moreover, her interest in addressing the Holocaust through her own experience of her relation to her father and in getting her father's story shares with archives of testimony an interest in history from the vantage point of memory and experience.

Thus, the queer sensibility I find in Kron's work is not an exclusive

property of lesbian or gay culture. It can be found in other places as well, including one of the most significant texts of Holocaust culture. Indeed, the links between them are a reflection of my use of both a minoritizing approach, exploring the specificity of lesbian texts, and a universalizing one, emphasizing their continuities with other texts of trauma.[21] While linked to Holocaust testimony, *2.5 Minute Ride*'s use of performance and memoir is distinctive because it tackles questions about the intergenerational transmission of Holocaust memory. Kron's efforts to grapple with the story of being the lesbian daughter of a father who is a survivor suggest that there are many Holocaust stories to be told, particularly as the original survivors die and the Holocaust lives on through intergenerational forms of transmission and testimony. Marianne Hirsch speaks of the phenomenon of postmemory as it applies to the children of survivors, who have an uncanny relation to their parents' experience, which continues to mark subsequent generations.[22] It is this subject position, more than that of survivors, that often informs my project. I thus look at lesbians who are AIDS activists and caretakers rather than themselves HIV+. I look at the effects of colonialism on those who are immigrants to the United States or whose parents were, and at how migrations of all kinds are the scene for traumas of cultural diaspora. I explore how trauma manifests itself in everyday sexual lives in which the vulnerability of bodies and psyches is negotiated. I examine the force field around trauma, the low-level "insidious" way that it continues to make itself felt even at a remove from the experience itself. Roller coasters and *Little Women* are as much a part of these trauma stories as the death camps.

Feminism and Sexual Trauma

Although my approach to trauma as everyday and not just catastrophic can be gleaned from Holocaust culture, it emerges more directly from my interest in the contested status of sexual trauma, which has been the focus of both feminist critiques of definitions of trauma and significant controversies *within* feminism. One goal here is to show how a queer perspective more attuned to the vagaries of sexuality can resolve some of the conundrums sexual trauma has posed for feminists in their efforts to give it a central place within clinical definitions of trauma. Although the experience of Vietnam War veterans was instrumental in the estab-

lishment of PTSD as a diagnosis in the third edition of the DSM in 1980, increasing attention to rape, sexual abuse, and domestic violence, especially from feminist psychologists, also played a key role in the call for a clinical diagnosis.[23] At the same time, sexual trauma seems to be in danger of invisibility, especially due to the gendered divide between private and public spheres. As Judith Herman, one of the most important feminist experts on trauma, puts it, "Not until the women's liberation movement of the 1970s was it recognized that the most common posttraumatic stress disorders are those not of men in war but of women in civilian life. The real conditions of women's lives are hidden in the sphere of the personal, in private life."[24] Yet as Herman herself notes, Freud addressed both forms of trauma, although there are tensions between his account of the event-based reality of shell shock as a form of traumatic neurosis and his controversial abandonment of the seduction theory in favor of an understanding of the origins of childhood trauma in fantasy. Whether acknowledged or not, embedded within the history of trauma discourse are debates about gender and sexuality as well as about the relation between private and public spheres that have preoccupied feminist theorists. The insights of feminist theory thus have important implications for trauma theories, and moreover, controversies over the truth of recovered memory have created a situation in which the status of feminism is bound up with sexual trauma.

Especially powerful because of its combination of popular psychology's accessibility, clinical psychology's authority, and a feminist commitment to social change, Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* uses the language of separate spheres to describe the challenge of integrating the feminine world of sexual trauma with the masculine one of war trauma. Although Herman's book doesn't have the exercises or lengthy personal narratives of *The Courage to Heal,* it outlines the symptoms of trauma and steps toward recovery in a way that can aid readers to diagnose and understand themselves, and it includes personal testimony from trauma survivors. The author of one of the earliest and most influential books on incest, *Father-Daughter Incest,* Herman makes a bid in *Trauma and Recovery* to bring a feminist perspective to trauma in a global context and to write a book that will be accessible to a general readership.[25] Tracing the history of discussions of trauma over the last century, Herman locates watershed moments: Freud's discovery of hysteria, the diagnosis of PTSD

and its inclusion in the DSM after the Vietnam War, and feminist attention to sexual abuse. Herman's historicizing approach to trauma, which is somewhat unexpected for an analysis based in scientific research, stems from her feminist politics; one of the book's claims is that attention to trauma has only been achieved when accompanied by a social movement, such as feminism or the antiwar movement. She therefore leaves room for the political and social in trauma cultures, especially evident in her insistence on the need for collective and social forms of recovery in addition to individual therapy. In its synthesizing approach, Herman's book certainly deserves its wide reputation.

But although Herman's historical account is suggestive, it is not quite historical enough given its appeal to a teleological narrative about the progress manifest in the political and social recognition of trauma. She tends to view "trauma" as a discovery rather than an invention, and even though she assigns great importance to social institutions and political movements in addressing trauma, she also appeals to science and medicine to establish its characteristics. Most significantly, in her effort to link war trauma with sexual trauma, Herman naturalizes trauma even as she historicizes it. In order to equate its different forms, she emphasizes psychic reality as a common denominator, outlining the symptoms of traumatic response—such as hyperarousal, intrusion (including flashbacks), and constriction or numbing—that are found in all cases of PTSD.[26] This search for the core symptoms of PTSD reflects the tendency of clinical psychology to medicalize psychic pain, another exemplary case of which is the contemporary zeal for pharmacological treatment of depression.[27] Herman articulates a model of trauma's effects and its stages of recovery that is common to all traumatic experience, seeking to equalize the differences that distinctions between the private and public spheres foster. "The hysteria of women and the combat neurosis of men are one. Recognizing the commonality of affliction may even make it possible at times to transcend the immense gulf that separates the public sphere of war and politics—the world of men—and the private sphere of domestic life—the world of women."[28]

While Herman's approach has considerable strength, I depart from it in crucial ways. First, I reject the search for a universal model of trauma because it runs the risk of erasing essential differences between traumatic experiences, differences of historical context and geopolitical location,

as well as the specificities of individual experiences that can be lost in a diagnosis that finds the same symptoms everywhere. Second, in recognition that the model of separate spheres can reproduce the very split it attempts to analyze, I question the relegation of the sexual to the domain of the private sphere, looking instead for the public dimensions of sexual trauma. As Cathy Davidson suggests in her introduction to the tellingly titled collection "No More Separate Spheres!" it is no longer useful to presume that sexuality, intimacy, affect, and other categories of experience typically assigned to the private sphere do not also pervade public life.[29] My efforts to apply this perspective to trauma studies are informed by recent thinking not only in feminist but queer theory, too. For example, queer understandings of public sex indicate that the public/private divide warrants reconceptualization.[30]

One of the most useful contributions of a feminist approach to trauma, and one that I endorse, is the focus on trauma as everyday that unravels definitions of the term. Herman's work, for instance, strains the boundaries of a universal model of trauma when she argues for the creation of a new diagnostic category, "complex post-traumatic stress disorder," to describe the effects of repeated abuse, such as those suffered by children in violent families. Although her argument is grounded in problematic equations between the trauma of enforced captivity in circumstances of war and torture and the more invisible yet no less significant forms of captivity that abused children and battered wives may experience in the home, her attempt to call attention to the latter is an important project for trauma studies. More persuasively, Laura Brown's crucial formulation of "insidious" trauma to describe the everyday experiences of sexism that add to the effects of more punctual traumatic experiences, such as rape, forges connections between trauma and more systemic forms of oppression.[31] The definition of trauma begins to invert itself when Brown suggests that the diagnostic stipulation that trauma must be "an event outside the range of human experience" excludes insidious forms of trauma that are all too often persistent and normalized. Even though both Brown and Herman continue to work with the categories of trauma and PTSD, their critiques are significant. (Indeed, the most recent edition of the DSM has altered the definition of trauma to remove the stipulation that trauma be outside the bounds of the usual or normal.)[32]

Fundamental to my inquiry is the conviction that insidious or every-

day forms of trauma, especially those emerging from systemic forms of oppression, ultimately demand an understanding of trauma that moves beyond medicalized constructions of PTSD. More so than distinctions between private and public trauma, those between trauma as everyday and ongoing and trauma as a discrete event may be the most profound consequence of a gendered approach. The challenge of insidious trauma or chronic PTSD (although this category may contain it again in the confines of a diagnosis) is that it resists the melodramatic structure of an easily identifiable origin of trauma. Once the causes of trauma become more diffuse, so too do the cures, opening up the need to change social structures more broadly rather than just fix individual people. Yet as the links between sexual abuse and sexism show, event trauma can play a prominent role in drawing attention to more insidious forms of trauma. In the chapters that follow, experiences that are connected to trauma but may not necessarily themselves be traumatic—such as sex acts, immigration, activism, and caretaking—will be explored in order to move beyond the expectation that trauma will be a catastrophic event. Remaining alert to the category of insidious trauma helps to avoid the rigid binarisms of gendered distinctions between private and public trauma or between sexual and national trauma that can often be reproduced even in feminist work that seeks to transcend the separate spheres paradigm.[33]

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Feminist efforts to foreground sexual trauma have had a controversial and vexed history over the last couple of decades, raising questions about the strategic value of forging a feminist politics around this issue. The heated debates during the 1990s about recovered memory suggest that the risks of such a strategy are high. On the one side, feminists argue that memories of sexual abuse should be taken seriously as the origin of women's problems, and on the other side, parents and clinicians speak of false memory syndrome in asserting that recovered memories of sexual abuse can be implanted in overly suggestible clients. Feminists themselves have also maintained that one of the hazards of the recovery movement has been a shift from movement politics toward therapeutic culture as the means to a transformation that has become personal rather than social.[34] Fierce debates about recovered memory and ritual abuse have produced their own versions of a backlash that has been directed at both therapeutic

practice and feminism.[35] In a provocative critique of the debates, which includes criticism of both Herman's trauma theory and *The Courage to Heal*'s fundamentalist feminism, Janice Haaken argues that a more nuanced psychotherapy is demanded if sexual abuse and recovered memories are understood as part of a more pervasive sexism.[36] Haaken proposes that feminism may have seized on sexual trauma as a way of conveniently locating the evils of sexism. Intimations of sexual abuse have become the sensational evidence for a feminism that looks for literal and incontrovertible proof of sexism. Drawing on feminist psychoanalytic theory, Haaken claims that memories of abuse can be understood as fantasies that are not "false" in any empirical sense but that provide a vehicle for the articulation of sexism and forms of sexual trauma that may not be as overt as the fantasy scenarios. Boldly combining feminist clinical psychology and poststructuralist feminism, Haaken renegotiates feminism's still intensely contested relation to Freud's seduction theory. Like her, I am wary of the possible hazards for feminism of focusing too exclusively on sexual victimhood and abuse. It can be difficult to articulate this concern in a way that does not capitulate to the forces of backlash. But there must be room for a critique that far from dismissing feminism for making women into victims, in fact seeks a more robust and radical version of feminism.

This book forges a way out of the impasse that pervades the recovered memory debate through the combined power of the insights of queer theory and the practices of lesbian public cultures. As influential as Herman's book might be in calling attention to sexual trauma, it leaves little space for sexual practices that have flourished within lesbian publics, such as S/M and butch-femme sexuality as well as sex-positive discourses more generally. Herman belongs more to the antipornography than the pro-sex feminists; she implies, for example, that S/M fantasies are a repetition of trauma rather than a possible cure when she briefly mentions a client who considered her S/M fantasies to be an identification with the perpetrator.[37] Haaken touches briefly on S/M and sex radicalism, which could well bolster her position, but she also implies that this sex culture may be only a reaction against the sexual repressiveness of the women's movement—a kind of acting out against the mothers. There is a missed opportunity here for understanding the possible contributions of sex radicalism to a more general conception of trauma, and it is a con-

tribution that I seek to make here. In chapters on butch-femme sexuality and incest, I will scrutinize texts and practices that give rise to new theoretical articulations of the relation between sex and trauma as forms of bodily violation that destroy the self's integrity. Sexual discourses that fearlessly and shamelessly explore the imbrications of pleasure and danger in sexual practice provide a model for approaches to trauma that resist pathologizing judgments.

A related agenda in exploring lesbian public sex cultures is to respond to feminist critiques of therapeutic culture, and popular culture more generally, as well as to the more sympathetic approaches of cultural studies, which has examined a range of genres including self-help groups, talk shows, melodramas, and pharmacology. Lesbian culture offers suggestive examples for analysis because it circulates within already formed publics, thereby addressing the concerns of reception studies, which in its search for resistance, has often run aground on the individualized nature of consumption. The intimacies of sexuality have been the material for a range of lesbian public cultures, including a print culture of books about sex, consumer stores such as Good Vibrations and Toys in Babeland that are as much community centers as (thriving) businesses, performance cultures, and sexual subcultures organized around an increasing proliferation of sexual practices.

"What is the story I will not tell? The story I do not tell is the only one that is a lie. It is the story of the life I do not lead, without complication, mystery, courage, or the transfiguration of the flesh."[38] The feminist movement could not have a better spokesperson for the power of giving voice to incest than Dorothy Allison, who believes in speaking the truth. Allison refuses, though, to erase the rough edges from her experience. She offers an uncompromising picture of how her history of sexual abuse is inseparable from her southern white trash origins, and her experience of lesbian butch-femme culture informs her willingness to represent a sexuality that incorporates danger, anger, and revenge without fearing it as trauma's pathological symptom. She resists oversimplified stories about incest in part because she resists reductive stories about class:

> The stories other people would tell about my life, my mother's life, my sisters', uncles', cousins', and lost girlfriends'—those are the stories that could destroy me, erase me, mock and deny me. I tell my stories

> louder all the time: mean and ugly stories, funny, almost bitter stories; passionate, desperate stories—all of them have to be told in order not to tell the one the world wants, the story of us broken, the story of us never laughing out loud, never learning to enjoy sex, never being able to love or trust love again, the story in which all that survives is the flesh.[39]

Integral to Allison's project of writing a different story of sexual trauma is her attention to class and to the project of rewriting U.S. cultural history to incorporate her version of white trash culture. In its use of the tools of queer theory to give sexual trauma a more vivid presence in and intervention into trauma studies, her work exemplifies what it means not to settle for a simple or narrow account of sexual trauma. So often manifesting itself as insidious trauma, sexual trauma seeps into other categories. One of this book's projects, then, is to situate sexual trauma in relation to trauma as a national category as well as to incorporate it into national and transnational histories that address the question of trauma.

National Trauma

Whether it is the Holocaust claimed as a pivotal event of twentieth-century Western European history, the Vietnam War claimed as a crisis in U.S. national history, or slavery and diaspora claimed as fundamental to modernity, trauma histories are frequently taken up as national urgencies, histories that must be remembered and resolved in order for the nation to survive a crisis or sustain its integrity. Although I earlier mentioned critiques of U.S. culture as a trauma culture, it is also the case that constructing the history of the United States from the vantage point of trauma produces a critical American studies, one that revises a celebratory account of the nation and instead illuminates its emergence from a history that includes capitalism and economic exploitation, war, colonialism and the genocide of native peoples, and slavery, diaspora, and migration. This version of American studies converges with transnational approaches to the United States, making it possible to explore the tenuous borders (both literal and ideological) of the United States as a nation along with the violences that sustain, defend, and/or expand its borders.[40] The intersections of trauma studies and American studies are visible in

the work of cultural critics such as Kali Tal and Marita Sturken, both of whom explore how the United States negotiates the memory of the Vietnam War in a range of ways that include the experiences of Vietnam veterans, antiwar protesters, and citizens at home.[41] Events are claimed as national trauma only through cultural and political work. This production of a public culture frequently privileges some experiences and excludes others; Lisa Lowe, for example, opens her investigation of Asian American identity in *Immigrant Acts* by invoking the trauma of the Vietnam War alongside the tensions between remembering U.S. experiences and erasing other experiences such as those of the Vietnamese.[42]

A notable feature of the project of examining national history as trauma history is the emphasis on the role of personal memory in the construction of public histories and memorials. For instance, Sturken uses the concept of "cultural memory" to explain the mechanisms by which public life operates not just in the political arena but in the production of cultural forms such as films, memorials, and oral histories.[43] The turn to memory is also a turn to the affective or felt experience of history as central to the construction of public cultures, to give a range of people the authority to represent historical experience, and often implicitly to suggest a plurality of points of view. Yet questions remain about what counts as a trauma history and whose feelings matter in the national public sphere.

Indeed, there are many forgotten histories that have yet to receive full attention within trauma studies even as they have begun to transform American studies. A necessary agenda for the intersection of trauma studies and American studies is a fuller examination of racialized histories of genocide, colonization, slavery, and migration that are part of the violences of modernity, and whose multigenerational legacies require new vocabularies of trauma. Particularly inspiring for this book has been African American and African diaspora studies, which even when it has addressed trauma only implicitly has done so in powerful ways. For example, abolitionist movements offer an important way of historicizing the field of trauma studies, representing an early instance of the discourses of human rights that ultimately ground a post–World War II, post–United Nations perspective on global human rights abuses, which are the public arena of transnational trauma discourse. The

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century genres of slave narrative and sentimental novel, which sought to publicize and mobilize political action around slavery through accounts of individual experience, are valuable for trauma studies because their complex rhetorical strategies and modes of production are a reminder that there is no transparent representation of trauma nor any straightforward context of reception. The debates generated by this textual history, including critiques of sentimentality, discussions of the role of white abolitionists in presenting slave narrative, and the strategic performances of slave testimony, have been instructive background for my own inquiry.[44] Also influential has been the return to the history of slavery within contemporary culture, in novels such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* or Octavia Butler's *Kindred,* or in legal scholar Patricia Williams's essays about her inheritance as the descendant of both a slave-owning lawyer and a slave.[45] This work unveils another version of insidious trauma, by tracking how contemporary experiences of racism rest on the foundation of traumatic events such as slavery, lynching, and harassment. It demands models that can explain the links between trauma and everyday experience, the intergenerational transmission from past to present, and the cultural memory of trauma as central to the formation of identities and publics.

To return to the traumatic history of slavery and African diaspora as an explanatory context for contemporary racisms and antiracisms is to acknowledge that this history continues to have a legacy in the present, and to grapple also with an equally powerful legacy of its forgetting. Unlike more recent trauma histories where there are still living survivors, the history of slavery presents the challenge of a missing archive, not only because of its generational distance but also because even in its time it was inadequately documented, or more precisely, systematically undocumented given restrictions on literacy for slaves, and governed subsequently by racisms that have suppressed subaltern knowledges. This traumatic history necessarily demands unusual strategies of representation. An excellent example is Avery Gordon's concept of haunting, which offers a compelling account of how the past remains simultaneously hidden and present in both material practices and the psyche, in both visible and invisible places.[46] The project of addressing the past is a risky one when haunting is its mode of appearance, and Gordon's work reckons with both the necessity and dangers of trafficking with ghosts. This trauma archive

Carmelita Tropicana, performance artist and author of *Milk of Amnesia.* Courtesy of Carmelita Tropicana.

offers new approaches to national history and requires acknowledgment of affective experience as a mode of participation in public life.

The history of the African diaspora and slavery is not only a U.S. one but a transnational history of the Americas and the black Atlantic. I would argue more generally that an investigation of national history as trauma history tends to strain at the boundaries of the nation and necessarily opens up a transnational perspective. Although this book does not focus directly on the history of slavery and African diaspora, it contributes to the project of investigating racialized trauma histories by exploring how contemporary queer diasporic publics address and make use of the traumatic aspects of transnational migration histories. As an example of this phenomenon, I turn to another piece of solo performance art, Carmelita Tropicana's experience of Collective Unconscious Memory Appropriation Attack (CUMAA) in *Milk of Amnesia.* The alter ego of Cuban American performance artist Alina Troyano, Carmelita Tropicana, a regular fixture of downtown New York's performance scene, is an extravagant diva whose camp humor and expressiveness embody a queer ethnicity. Like *2.5 Minute Ride, Milk of Amnesia* is the story of a

journey to a site of memory; having left Cuba for the United States at the age of seven, Carmelita returns to the island with hopes of recovering the memories that have been lost to her while living in exile and that have left her confused about her cultural citizenship. Her assimilation into U.S. culture and her forced separation from Cuba have produced a loss of memory that can be trauma's symptom.

Unfortunately, Carmelita's attempt to recover her past turns out to be harder than she expected. Wandering the streets and culture of Havana in a state of expectation, she fails to experience the floods of memory that will return her to herself. Finally, though, when she visits the graveyard of some of her ancestors, she is overcome by a flashback. But it is not her own memory that comes to her. She instead channels the memories of a horse that belonged to a Spanish conquistador and made one of the first exploratory journeys to the Americas. In an echo of the Middle Passage, the horse remembers the terrible conditions of the boat, the beauty of the island not yet transformed by contact, and the genocide of the native peoples through enforced labor and disease. Carmelita has fallen prey to CUMAA. In the absence of her own memories, she has borrowed someone else's, not even a person's but an animal's. Yet these memories are also partly her own, for her contemporary queer Cuban American identity can trace its lineage back to a transnational history of colonization and genocide that is as much a structuring condition of her life as is Cuba's subsequent history of U.S. neocolonialism, revolution, and the debilitating effects of the U.S. trade embargo and restrictions on travel and immigration. Carmelita's queer and traumatized relation to Cuba is not hers alone, and her susceptibility to and dependence on CUMAA as a way of accessing memory is one of the conditions of exile. Moreover, it is a version of exile that must assert what José Muñoz, one of Tropicana's most astute critics, has called "disidentification," articulating its relation to Cuba in a way that does not play into U.S. or neoconservative Cuban American positions.[47] Carmelita's access to her memory aims to intervene in amnesiac stories of assimilation or immigration that uncritically celebrate the U.S. and American national identity or that assume a simplistic position either for or against Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution.

After her CUMAA experience, Carmelita has somewhat greater success in her search for flashbacks, visiting the house where she lived as a child

(and reassuring the current occupants that she is not there to reclaim it) and then being reminded by the blue tiles in a Havana hotel of her childhood tonsil operation. This recollection is mingled with the story of a domestic pig who is about to have its throat slit by a Cuban family experiencing food shortages during the Special Period. Carmelita concludes that "we are all connected, not through AT&T, e-mail, Internet, or the information superhighway, but through memory, history, herstory, horsetory." Her amnesia is gone, and she can "drink two kinds of milk. The sweet condensed milk of Cuba and the pasteurized homo kind from America."[48] But the hybrid identity she develops is shot through with loss and longing, and the unresolved state of the Cuban Revolution and U.S. foreign policy remains. Carmelita's CUMAA makes an important contribution to trauma theory. Like Lisa Kron, Carmelita insists that trauma stories be told in the register of the everyday, and she uses performance and humor to stage the recovery of memory as a process whose results are ultimately fragmented, incomplete, and fictional. Queer performance gives expression to the cultural memory that is otherwise lost to amnesia. The flamboyant Carmelita, as well as Troyano's other drag character, Pingalito Betancourt, a camp version of Cuban masculinity, bear the extravagant marks of Cuban identity that are less visible in Troyano's own more subdued (and hence assimilated) self-presentation. Her use of humor gently mocks psychiatric methods for the recovery of memory and suggests that recovery is not a literal process. Carmelita's recovery of cultural rather than personal memories is a reminder that the trauma that separates her from Cuba is far more extensive than her own history or even the recent history of the Revolution, that it is part of a transnational trauma of long historical duration. There may be no ready cure for this trauma, especially since the recovery of its memory is a collective process. Through stories of pigs and horses, of tonsils and school lunches, Carmelita builds an archive of memory that ruptures the bounded category of the nation and the conceptions of citizenship to which it gives rise. She performs one piece of the transnational American trauma history that is more than five hundred years old and does so in a way that can incorporate queer feelings as an index of this trauma.

Marxism and the Sensations of Everyday Life

Marxism, at least as much as psychoanalysis, which is more usually understood to be the primary point of origin for theories of trauma, is a crucial resource for my understanding of trauma. In "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Walter Benjamin explores how Charles Baudelaire's poetics emerge from the experience of modern urban life as a form of shock. Although he draws on Freud's model (from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) of trauma as the rupture or penetration of the psyche's protective shield (likened to an organism's cortical layer), Benjamin finds shock or a new form of sensational experience to be embedded in such activities as encountering the mass crowds of urban life, working in the factory, or even watching a film, whose editing process mimics the shock of modern life.[49] Benjamin's extraordinary brand of spiritual materialism seeks the logic of capital in the sensory encounter of the critic as flaneur with its material evidence in architectural spaces, commodities, and cultural objects. The aim is to transform the abstract and pervasive power of capitalism into something that can be felt, and shock or trauma becomes the paradigmatic sensation of everyday life under capitalism. For example, Wolfgang Schivelbusch's historical analysis of railway travel, inspired by a Benjaminian materialism, retraces the origins of traumatic neurosis in the medical diagnosis of the effects of the railway accidents that were one of the by-products of industrialization.[50] Traumatic shock becomes a register of the effects of living within industrialized society—a local experience of shock that registers the more diffuse experience of social life.

Although Benjamin's relation to Marxism is often understood to be idiosyncratic, there is a strong link between Karl Marx's own concern with the relation between systemic exploitation and lived experiences of pain, most notably in the case of the worker in the factory, and this ongoing tradition of inquiry into what it feels like to live within the systemic violence of capitalism.[51] In *Capital,* Marx sets out not only to develop a theory of surplus value that can explain where exploitation comes from but to document the nature of labor. He describes the effects of the long working day, cramped and inhumane workplaces, and the monotony of mechanized mass production in graphic terms. As I have argued elsewhere, although Marx insists on the need for a theoretical and concep-

tual analysis of commodity production, he is also drawn to sensational representation and to capitalism as felt experience.[52]

There is a significant tradition of "sensational" Marxism, one that includes Benjamin and Georg Simmel, and more recently, cultural theorists such as Michael Taussig and Fredric Jameson, who emphasize shock and sensation as markers of shifting economic modes of production because of capitalism's ability to reshape the very structure of everyday experience.[53] Within a Marxist approach to the history of sensation, trauma can be understood as sign or symptom of a broader systemic problem, a moment in which abstract social systems can actually be felt or sensed. But traumatic experience and its aftermath can be characterized not just by too much feeling, or hyperarousal, but also by an absence of feeling, or numbness. Furthermore, the feeling of life under capitalism may manifest as much in the dull drama of everyday life as in cataclysmic or punctual events. When serving as a point of entry into understanding the affective life of social systems, trauma must be seen to inhabit both intense sensation and numbness, both everyday and extreme circumstances.

It is important to pay attention, though, to whose sensory experience is presumed to manifest the zeitgeist. Benjamin's flaneur experiencing the shock of urban life, and even Marx's worker in the factory, represent only some of many social positions that bear the marks of systemic violence. And the archive of this trauma can be an elusive one, not always a matter of sensational self-evidence. When one takes capitalism as a framework for violence, rather than ostensibly more circumscribed events such as war, or considers slavery within the context of persistent forms of racism, the task of locating such violence may be more difficult because it doesn't always take the form of visible or punctual events.

A Marxism interested in trauma and sensations is certainly consonant with materialist inquiry, but it also intervenes against the abstractions of systemic analysis that can be one of Marxism's characteristic tendencies. Trauma, like Avery Gordon's conception of haunting, is a form of mediation, "which occurs on the terrain situated between our ability to conclusively describe the logic of Capitalism and State Terror, for example, and the various experiences of this logic, experiences that are more than not partial, coded, symptomatic, contradictory, ambiguous."[54] Rather than offering an analysis that uses generalizations about capitalism, racism, or globalization, Gordon instead conjures ghosts who demand not just

that something be known but that something be felt and done. Representing ghosts requires a language of graphic and affective specificity, yet because ghosts are both visible and invisible, the local evidence they provide is not just empirical. And what Kathleen Stewart says about "monstrosity stories" could also be claimed of trauma stories: they "fascinate because they dramatize odd moments when latent possibilities materialize without warning and effects hidden from the view of a center in denial suddenly grow tactile."[55] But she warns against simply decoding such moments through ideology critique, "which assumes that by definition things are not what they seem and expressive forms are effects of a deeper and more true and usually diabolical (or at least depressing and constraining) structure."[56]

It is in the spirit of this search for innovative ways of mapping global histories in terms of lived experiences and capturing the disjunctions between the two that I stress the need for sensational stories as an alternative form of knowledge to the abstractions of systemic analysis. This tradition of sensational Marxism more often has an implicit rather than explicit presence in the chapters that follow, but it remains a crucial inspiration for my commitment to recognizing the connections between traumatic experience and broader as well as more amorphous social problems that are not always experienced as such. Like the insidious trauma that feminist theorists track, the affective nature of everyday experiences of systemic violence may only sometimes be manifest as trauma. Moreover, a traumatic event may function as a symptom whose meaning is unclear without contextualization. The mediated relation between trauma and systems of social violence thus requires modes of analysis that don't take trauma at face value. But attention to the sensational and traumatic manifestations of social systems also requires a suspicion of abstractions and generalizations that can obscure the lived specificity of trauma. Indeed, trauma itself can be one such generalization, reducing the felt urgencies of experience to a medicalized diagnosis of symptoms.

Queer Theory

I am especially wary of the pathologization of trauma because of its similarity to the pathologization of sexual perversity and sexual identities in the name of constructing normative identities. The shared origins of

trauma and sexual identity in discourses of psychoanalysis suggest the links between the two. The history of gay and lesbian identity formations has shown that medical diagnoses have wide-ranging social and political consequences, in addition to their immediate practical effects; a landmark in gay and lesbian history was its removal from classification as a disease by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973. Although it can be argued that sexology produced modern homosexuality as much as it problematically labeled it deviant or perverse, it has been nonetheless important to wrest it from the hands of the doctors and scientists who first "invented" it. The same might ultimately prove true for PTSD, which if overmedicalized, produces a hall of mirrors in which social problems are reduced to diseases in need of ever refined diagnoses. It is necessary to approach medicalization as a strategy whose effects can't be determined in advance. For example, the inclusion of PTSD in the DSM–III in 1980 arguably had the beneficial effect of making medical treatment available for the psychic as well as physical symptoms of combat for Vietnam War veterans. At the same time, however, it was an unpopular war that brought attention to PTSD, and the traumas of the Vietnam War include militarism and U.S. foreign policy not just the experiences of individual soldiers.

The parallels with the history of homosexuality serve as a reminder that even if the PTSD diagnosis has certain strategic merits, it is wise to remain vigilant about the hazards of converting a social problem into a medical one. There is a tendency for medical research to become obsessed with scientifically describing PTSD and its symptoms, including biomedical research on the changes in the brain that would serve as evidence of the damage caused by trauma. Although it can spotlight problems that might otherwise be misrecognized or unrecognized, medical diagnosis too often stops precisely where a more exacting analysis is warranted. I say this with respect for the practical exigencies of working with traumatized groups—Holocaust survivors, war veterans, refugees from violence and political torture, victims of battery and assault—for whom help is urgently needed. Many of the psychiatrists who treat them are well aware of the social and political conditions that turn people into patients. As such, there is room for the insights of cultural and social theory within therapeutic practice. Studies of how homosexual identity is as much created as oppressed in the "repressive" Victorian era can serve as an instructive model for inquiry into the history of constructions of trauma over

the last hundred years. The analytic endeavor of historicizing trauma can find inspiration in historicizing work on the combined and related "discoveries," through discourses of psychoanalysis and sexuality, of a wide range of sexual and affective "perversions," of which homosexuality, hysteria, and incest are only a few. Such work has required careful attention to the differences among sexual identities, acts, and behaviors.

There are further resources that queer theory and gay and lesbian studies can offer to trauma studies. Whether overtly or not, many of the key texts and critics in the field of queer theory have made use of the category of trauma in mounting critiques of normativity. Judith Butler's notion of gender identification as located in melancholic repudiation of the other gender along with her account of abjection's role in the formation of both individual and collective identity places trauma at the origins of subject formation.[57] Even though Butler doesn't name it as such, the normalization of sex and gender identities can be seen as a form of insidious trauma, which is effective precisely because it often leaves no sign of a problem. Queer theorists such as Leo Bersani and Michael Warner also embrace the antinormative dimensions of sexual perversities and queer cultural formations, although whereas Warner proposes a politics grounded in antinormativity, Bersani sees it as the undoing of politics in part because of his commitment to a conception of sexuality as fundamentally traumatic and hence anticommunal.[58] Furthermore, when Biddy Martin critiques the antinormativity of queer theory on the grounds that the embrace of the perverse leaves no room for ordinary lives, she invokes both trauma and affect. Martin uses the traumatic narrative of her brother's death to describe the possibilities of embracing "attachment, investment, and even love" as the foundation for queer social formations. As she puts it, "Part of the critique of totalizing views requires that we also keep alive not only transgressive desires but also emotional attachments, pleasures, fascinations, and curiosities that do not necessarily reproduce, reflect, or line up neatly with political ideologies or oppositional movements."[59] Trauma thus stands on both sides of a debate about queer theory's critique of normativity. For Bersani, sexuality's traumatic dimensions and the scene of gay male cruising prevent any pastoral vision of sexual liberation. For Martin, the hard-won forms of love and attachment that emerge from the trauma of her brother's death as well as from her family's ways of excluding their les-

bian daughter unsettle the "self-evidence of supposedly normal families" (Martin 14). Despite their considerable differences, Bersani and Martin share the conviction that the unpredictability and contingency of affective life trouble any systematic presumptions about identity and politics, including models of political liberation that depend on the repudiation of the normal or the embrace of it. An important agenda for queer studies, then, is an inquiry into the nuances and idiosyncrasies of how people actually live their sexual and emotional lives.

Thinking about trauma from the same depathologizing perspective that has animated queer understandings of sexuality opens up possibilities for understanding traumatic feelings not as a medical problem in search of a cure but as felt experiences that can be mobilized in a range of directions, including the construction of cultures and publics. Queer theory offers a resource for thinking about affect, emotion, and feeling; indeed, in investigating sexuality, it is also often investigating affect, capturing the sensibilities and desires that circulate in the vicinity of sexual acts, practices, and cultures. For example, Eve Sedgwick links sexuality and emotion in using the category of shame to suggest that traumatic experiences of rejection and humiliation are connected to identity formations that are more than just reaction formations.[60] As Sedgwick and others have noted, the reclamation of shame constitutes an alternative to the model of gay pride, carving out new possibilities for claiming queer, gay, and lesbian identities that don't involve a repudiation of the affects brought into being by homophobia.[61]

Catalyzed in part by the AIDS crisis, queer scholars have also investigated the nexus of mourning and melancholy.[62] Observations about how mourning is different for queers, as well as reconsiderations of melancholy as a form of mourning that should not be pathologized, have produced understandings of collective affective formations that break through the presumptively privatized nature of affective experience. Especially valuable in this respect has been work by José Muñoz and David Eng, which is also inflected by an interest in how affective experience differs according to race and ethnicity.[63] Muñoz writes about melancholy in works by African American gay men as a "depathologized structure of feeling," suggesting that the ambivalences of disidentification, far from disabling cultural production, are a rich resource. His use of Raymond Williams confirms the resources of Marxism for tracking the

intersections of affective experience and social and cultural formations. In these projects, affect is a way of charting cultural contexts that might otherwise remain ephemeral because they haven't solidified into a visible public culture.[64] Affects that serve as an index of how social life is felt become the raw material for cultural formations that are unpredictable and varied.

Trauma, then, serves as a site for exploring the convergence of affect and sexuality as categories of analysis for queer theory.[65] In the course of looking at sexual trauma, I often cast a wide net by considering trauma as a category that embraces a range of affects, including not just loss and mourning but also anger, shame, humor, sentimentality, and more. I do not presume in advance a particular affective experience associated with trauma, but open up a way to examine historical and social experience in affective terms. Queer approaches to trauma can appreciate the creative ways in which people respond to it. Moreover, queer theory and trauma theory are fellow travelers because they seek ways to build not just sexuality but emotional and personal life into models of political life and its transformation.