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The Rosenberg story(ies): A literary history

Carmichael, Virginia, Ph.D.
Rice University, 1991

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THE ROSENBERG STORY(IES): A LITERARY HISTORY

by

VIRGINIA CARMICHAEL

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

Walter Isle, Chair
Department of English

Elizabeth Lang, Associate Professor
Department of Sociology

Wesley Morris, Professor
Department of English

Houston, Texas

May, 1991
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VIRGINIA CARMICHAEL

1991
THE ROSENBERG STORY(IES): A LITERARY HISTORY

Virginia Carmichael

ABSTRACT

The 1950-1953 story of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg's trial, conviction, and execution for allegedly giving away the atomic bomb "secret" demonstrates an oscillation and reciprocity between material history and its motivated and collaborative narrative construction. An examination of government documents, court records, print media, letters, diaries, historiographies, biographies, and FBI and Department of Justice files released since the 1974 FOI Act, reveals the intertextual, formal, and rhetorical operations involved in the construction of the official Rosenberg story. These documents also reveal the extent to which the outcome of that story depended upon race, class, and gender.

The coherent official version manifests a polarized conflictual plot, a cause-effect narrative line, and the most definitive ending available in fiction or history--death as retribution and redemption--despite documented government uncertainties. Operating in excess of any concept of the "real" story, the elaboration of the official version over time also gives voice to its historical context and motivations, demonstrating political positionality as prior
to any telling of the Rosenberg story. It developed as an embedded narrative in the frame narrative of the cold war, and was intended to force Julius to tell the story of an FBI-alleged Atomic Spy Ring. But the desired official story stopped with the Rosenbergs' deaths, and instead a cultural re-telling began, using the Rosenbergs as the occasion for an historical interrogation of the function of narrative in history-masking and/or -making.

E. L. Doctorow's 1971 Book of Daniel and Robert Coover's 1977 Public Burning offer fictional/factual critiques of the Rosenberg story, its historical frame narrative, cold war ideology, and of a twentieth-century capitalist, masculist society which Coover figures as operating according to the binary logic and obsessions of early anality. These postmodern anti-narrative novels figure, dramatize, and formally enact the potentials for and limits to contemporary oppositional cultural political work—a homeopathic and often sacrificial practice of narrating to undo narrative, of positing narrative sequences and relationships masked by narrative sequences and relationships, and of resisting closure in order to remain open to narrative/historical transformation. In this, the postmodern artist and critic may share the same purpose.
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MOTIVES OF NARRATIVE

Every discourse has its own selfish and biased proprietor; there are no words with meanings shared by all, no words "belonging to no one." . . . When we seek to understand a word, what matters is not the direct meaning the word gives to objects and emotions--this is the false front of the word; what matters is rather the actual and always self-interested use to which this meaning is put and the way it is expressed by the speaker, a use determined by the speaker's position and by the concrete situation. Who speaks and under what conditions he speaks: this is what determines the word's actual meaning. All direct meanings and direct expressions are false, and this is especially true of emotional meanings and expressions. M. M. Bakhtin¹


Since 1952 the Rosenbergs have also been the occasion for and subject of musical compositions, poems, plays, sculpture, documentary and commercial films, public forums, newspaper and periodical articles, visual and multimedia arts, as well as a number of historiographical books, articles, and biographies. But despite this recurrent working of the Rosenberg story in the consciousnesses of our cultural and academic intelligentsia, most people consider the case closed: Who needs another book about the Rosenbergs?2

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Yet the Rosenberg story provides a particularly apt occasion for a consideration of the function of storytelling—of narrative—in material and cultural history. It was a social drama, providing a starting point for an elaboration of many stories serving various and multiple functions. This social drama, while dismissed by many as finished business, is still unresolved. It partially fulfilled the function defined in Victor Turner's description of the dynamic operation of social drama, of producing social reconciliation around crucial issues—in this case issues of United States postwar foreign and military policy. But it also produced the alternative and opposite outcome, that of social schism; it played a crucial symbolic role in the postwar split of the domestic left. And the Rosenberg story's resistance to closure manifest in its repeated tellings in historiography, biography, literature, and the visual and performing arts suggests an ongoing cultural function working the space of an unresolved breach in the national narrative. This activity might be an extension of Turner's category of potentiality he calls liminality. It might also represent a reaction to a liminality which was prematurely foreclosed by the social forces of information

4 Turner defines liminality as a moment in which "the possibility exists of standing aside not only from one's own social position but from all social positions and of formulating a potentially unlimited series of alternative social arrangements," 13.
management. But in both cases, the Rosenberg story continues to work under the sign of injustice.

The story is a knowable but unknown historical story, which makes the theoretical issues around the mutual interactions of history and culture (material and symbolic fields of human interaction through time knowable only through historiography and other cultural texts or artifacts) prominent and insistent in any consideration of a particular version of the Rosenberg story. The reception of any one version is—or should be— inseparable from a consideration of the possible conditions and motives of its production. Short of a full release of FBI and related documents, or an unexpected "confession" from someone with the debatable authority to know the "real" story, the elaboration of the historical version of the story has gone about as far as it can go. That most people take absolutely for granted the Rosenbergs' guilt as atom spies in some indeterminate magnitude of seriousness illustrates the thoroughness of the constitutive activities of our consciousness-making.

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institutions and agencies. The Rosenberg story remains--to
date--an undecidable one. The primary subjects did not and
now cannot talk. And the informant of "unimpeachable
reliability," who originally established in the mind of J.
Edgar Hoover Julius Rosenberg's titular role in a still
undiscovered atomic spy ring, "is not available under any
circumstances." 6 Even after the release of perhaps half of
the related government documents under the Freedom of
Information Act of 1974, no one knows the Rosenberg story,
although its official, public version elaborated itself as
discoverable, knowable, and true, with real effects. 7

The Rosenberg story displays the politics of writing and
reading. If analyzed through the grid of structuralist
narratology, the story could be considered as having a deep
structure--mythic or historical, depending on one's critical
positioning--with hundreds of textual variations. But the
Rosenberg story foregrounds the inevitability of having
assumed a political orientation prior to the articulation of

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6 From Hoover memo, quoted in Department of Justice memo Hall to Tomkins
7 "The difficulty, of course, is that in matters of espionage,
information is always released selectively, is frequently at three
removes, and involves anonymous informants, double agents, the dead, the
defected, the disappeared, the disinfomed. In such circumstances there
may be no single heart of the matter, certainly no discoverable heart,
other than the credibility of the principals" (Victor Navasky,
"Weinstein, Hiss, and the Transformation of Historical Ambiguity into
Cold War Verity," Beyond the Hiss Case: The FBI, Congress, and the Cold
War, ed. Athan G. Theoharis. [Philadelphia: Temple University Press,
1982], 224.
any one version. This is a provocative detail, since poststructuralist and materialist critics of culture and ideology insist that political positioning can be determined as prior to any story, including the ur-stories posited by structuralists such as Greimas and Propp. Accordingly, the Rosenberg story is either, in mythic terms, a story of the betrayal of the patriarchal father (the nation-state, or perhaps civil society at large) by the children, in which case agency and guilt lie with the children, or it is a story of the patriarchal father's allaying of guilt and fear of retribution through the ritual of scapegoating sacrifice. Or the originating story is undecidable (which it still is), more complicated and non-mythic than either of these polarities. Or it is an undecidable story that should be read nevertheless as having shaped history and produced unambiguous material effects. That is, its undecidability did not stop its narratability as a highly motivated narrative construction of an unknown story, with real effects.

These four rehearsals of the structure of the "original" story manifest four historically specific political positions with respect to any version of the story: right, left, poststructuralist, and materialist. These are not mutually

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exclusive categories, although the arguments of a number of prominent political theorists, literary critics, and historians would lead us to believe they are. Demonstrating language use as symbolic action that does work and has effect requires the use of multiple methodological strategies, stopping short of—or going farther than—the limits of the poststructuralist language and identity problematic, while avoiding an absolute theoretical pluralism. In analyzing the narrative productions of the Rosenberg story it will be necessary to speculate on probable or possible narrative motivations, intentions, and effects, grounding such speculations insofar as that is possible; to analyze the ways

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in which the rhetorical construction begins to operate on its own, separately from sociopolitical data; to evaluate posited subjectivity as effective and strategic, as manipulated and imposed, or as self-defeating political positionality; and to critique essentialist assumptions and the dichotomized positions they entail in terms of the kinds of political and social work they accomplish. It will be necessary to consider formal qualities in relation to the issues being addressed, and to employ value-loaded terms, in order to use the various versions of the Rosenberg story as an occasion for thinking through specific historic, social, and cultural issues.

David Riesman and Nathan Glazer said in 1955 that whereas the Sacco and Vanzetti case united the left, the Rosenberg case divided it.\textsuperscript{10} The Rosenberg case was a symbolic watershed especially for those New York Jewish intellectuals who became ex-communist cultural nationalists, disassociating themselves from liberal and socialist programs of the left.\textsuperscript{11} The manner in which the government developed and prosecuted the case dramatized for the left at large the extreme dangers of present and past association with such views, especially for former members of the communist party.


A conjunction of wartime and postwar political events, alignments, and strategies was producing an increasing polarization of complex political and economic issues into questions of nationalism or internationalism, capitalism or socialism. And the totalizing ideology of anti-communism was proving useful as a method for managing all left dissent from the conservative, nationalist agenda on these issues.

Those who aligned themselves with nationalist democratic capitalism, or who in justifiable outrage spurned Stalinism (and in doing so spurned socialism, conflating it in theory with the particular experiment of Stalinism) found themselves rhetorically aligned with religious anti-communists, racists, anti-unionists, and business, military, and industrial interests. Those who continued to argue for international negotiations and reformist or systemic changes in United States domestic economic and social policies found themselves aligned with Stalinism and Communism and subject to employment and social discrimination and criminal prosecution. Any more complicated positions between these two extremes, having lost a political base, became increasingly difficult to maintain and express. This division of a previously unified left manifested itself directly in the split response to the Rosenberg story as its official version unfolded. The nationalist and ex-communist left, blinded by the communist affiliations of the Rosenbergs, found it difficult to maintain a critical view of
the juridical and extra-judicial operations of the system
they espoused over and against communism.12

The larger betrayal operative in the Rosenberg story,
that between the state and its citizens, was virtually
unknown and/or ignored at the time or uncontested through

12 In the writings of liberal and left Jewish intellectuals (notably in
the work of Leslie Fiedler and Robert Warshow) the analysis of the
Rosenbergs, based on the media reports of the trial and their prison
letters, was carried on in terms of Stalinized bourgeois kitsch, taste,
and style, as well as in terms of their failures of heroism and
masculinity. By not openly espousing their principles, "[T]hey failed
in the end to become martyrs or heroes, or even men [sic]." (Leslie
Fiedler, "A Postscript to the Rosenberg Case," published initially in
the first issue of Encounter in 1953, the journal of the CIA-funded
American Committee for Cultural Freedom, 21; and published also as
"Afterthoughts on the Rosenbergs," in the Collected Essays of Leslie
Fiedler, vol. 1 [New York: Stein, 1971], 45. See also Robert Warshow,
"The Idealism of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg," originally published in
Commentary, 16, no. 5 [November, 1953]: 413-418, and published also in
Warshow, The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre and Other
Aspects of Modern Culture [Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company,
1964], 33-43.) This attack on the Rosenbergs was part of a larger
activity of ex-communist intellectual analysis of postwar politics and
events in terms of high and low culture and the Stalinist "estrangement
of cultural life from direct experience" (Andrew Ross, "Intellectuals
and Ordinary People: Reading the Rosenberg Letters," Cultural Critique 9
(Spring 1988): 73). The effort was to make the strained artifice,
polemics, and tone of the death house letters stand for the fundamental
failures of communism. The rhetorical connections are there to be made,
but a potentially political critique was thus aestheticized, moralized
and at the same time effectively displaced from the space of any
domestic political-juridical realm. This kind of displacement was one
of the greatest costs of anti-communism. See Morris Dickstein, "Cold
Culture in the 60s (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 25-50. See also
Andrew Ross, "Intellectuals and Ordinary People: Reading the Rosenberg
Letters," Cultural Critique 9 (Spring 1988): 55-86; "Containing Culture
in the Cold War," Cultural Studies 1, 3 (Winter 1987): 328-348; and
"Reading the Rosenberg Letters," No Respect: Intellectuals and Pop
fear. The major exception to general media acquiescence to and affirmation of the official government story was a well-researched series of investigative articles begun in August, 1951, by William Reuben in the National Guardian after the death sentences had been issued. But immediately preceding and following the Rosenberg executions their story became the subject of revisionist historiography and mythologizing by the communist left in the pages of both the National Guardian and the Daily Worker, in a repetition of party-line Stalinist rhetoric so extreme as to counter the credibility and possible effects of Reuben's solid investigative journalism.

The 1955 book that Reuben based on his articles was the first attempt at a more objective rehearsal of the historical context, ambiguities, anomalies, and irrationalities of the official story, beginning a still open series of reconsiderations and interpretations of that story. The 1986 publication of an updated version of Robert and Michael Meeropol's 1975 We Are Your Sons; an exhibition of Rosenberg art, "Unknown Secrets: Art and the Rosenberg Era," appearing at major museums throughout the country from 1989 through 1991; and Joseph Sharlitt's 1989 book, Fatal Error, about the last frantic week of appeals before the Rosenberg executions all manifest the ongoing and current interest in the Rosenberg story.

The particular historical conjuncture of the late 1980s-early 1990s produced, along with a nostalgic cultural return
to the 1950s, a newly articulated nostalgia for the
securities of cold war foreign policy despite the perceived
end of that war. The momentous world-wide political and
economic changes of the late 1980s and 1990s have opened up
possibilities for new orders of economic, social, and
international relationships, potentials threatened by a
persistent return on the part of political, business, and
military leaders to a repetition of the anachronistic
rhetoric and policies of the fifties, utilizing dichotomized
projections to support economically-motivated agendas for the
maintenance of the status quo. The cold war mentality has

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14 Note the political effects of George Bush's strategy during the 1988 Presidential campaign of repeatedly "accusing" his Democratic opponent of being "liberal," a "card-carrying member of the ACLU," and soft on (black) criminals. In foreign policy, members of the Bush administration repeatedly articulated a preference for cold war stability. "For all its risks and uncertainties, the cold war was characterized by a remarkably stable and predictable set of relations among the great powers. . . . [Because of cold war stability] Europe has had peace for some 40 years now, and if you look at your textbooks, why you'll see that that's a long time in an area of the world that has been troubled by conflict, in an area of the world that has involved us in this century in two massive wars" (Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger and President George Bush, New York Times, 16 September 1989). George Bush's cautions in early 1990 that military spending must not and would not decrease to the benefit of domestic social programs, despite the drastic reduction of Soviet forces and arms, echo exactly in tone and diction similar reassurances and cautions following World War II when conservatives feared demilitarization while liberals and progressives hoped for a re-allocation of resources to critical domestic needs. The events of the development of the US degree of involvement in the Korean war under questionable sanctions of legality in the early fifties seemed also in resonant ways to be repeating themselves as Bush and his military and diplomatic advisors struggled in late 1990 to
been a controlling ideology in foreign affairs for the past forty-five years; it continues functioning rhetorically to permeate domestic politics and policies, as well as to provide the local rationales for specific social and economic relationships, despite changes in its justifying historical conditions. Some on the left invoke the Rosenberg case as a reminder of the use of a totalizing explanatory narrative for the purposes of an ideologically enforced popular quiescence and adherence to one agenda in a time of liminality. The story is recalled and rehearsed in the Reagan/Bush era perhaps in order to awaken dormant dissent and activism in another period of potential liminality like that following World War II.

It is difficult, therefore, to elaborate a history of the continual retellings of the Rosenberg story without feeling the attractions and implications of another story: the history of and potentials for cultural resistance to official explanatory narratives—a story of dissent and opposition as cultural practice, in particular a story of the achievements of and potentials for United States oppositional cultural practice in the second half of the twentieth century. An examination of the Rosenberg stories also yields a critical object of analysis in their particular response

provide a believable narrative rationale for his massive build-up of United States forces and materiel in the Middle East following that summer's Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.
to, instrumentalization of, and fascination with masculinity and femininity, specifically as they are inscribed in relational practices of power. This is true of the official story as well as of the cultural re-presentations of that story. And since the fictional narratives concerning the Rosenbergs are postmodern, the Rosenberg story provides the occasion for a study of the relations of gender to power and of oppositional practice as represented in specific postmodern forms of articulation.

Theorizing the relationship of culture to history is not within my ken. Fredric Jameson says that for him "the problem of homology (and the unsatisfactory nature of these parallels or analogies between levels)" is a constant theoretical concern. There are enormous difficulties in attempting a correlation between somewhat autonomous fields in all their heterogeneity and overdetermination. And yet it is imperative to critical cultural work to devise methods, albeit imperfect or theoretically problematic ones, for using one (partially knowable) object to comment on another (partially knowable) object, or for using the perceived interrelationship of both "to get a mental grasp of something else which one cannot represent or imagine."^{15}

These problems certainly exist for this analysis of the Rosenberg stories, with the most immediate difficulty inhering in the desire to keep textuality open between literature and historiography—that is, to study the reciprocal relationships and intersections of the two within the field of symbol-making. The purpose of my analysis of

16 There is a spectrum of thought on this relationship which bears on my project: that of Kenneth Burke, Mikhail Bakhtin, Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Fredric Jameson, Frank Lentricchia, Hayden White and Dominique LaCapra. Bakhtin considered discursive signification "translinguistically," as partaking of its concrete historical situation but never in a simply reiterative way. Benjamin in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," notes the extent to which there is a continuity of dominant power within history and accordingly within the symbolic realm of art and culture, a continuity one must stand apart from in order to practice a materialist historiography, in order to refuse the replication of that power realized by historicism. Burke is always concerned with the motivations and real effects of the use of words, as well as with the shaping power of a binary language in the exercise of dominion. Barthes, Foucault, LaCapra and White, concerned with the ideological and material effects of discourse, and oriented either more toward language or toward history, call into question the distinction between historical and fictional discourse without conflating them; Barthes focuses on rhetoric and semiotics, White on tropology and narrativity, Foucault on the historical discursively organized spatial discontinuities that disperse and reproduce power, and LaCapra on the textual workings of historiography and literature. Jameson and Lentricchia privilege History and work the interface between culture and history to discover articulations that touch that horizon. All, in their concern with the conditions of production and the political work of cultural texts, tend toward the use of more or less abstract categories of oppression, usually based on concepts of class. Notably absent from their theoretical and analytic cultural criticism is the concept or analysis of gender as a primary category structuring power relations. To the extent that gender is occluded their work remains insufficiently theorized, as well as inadequate and distorting to their object of study...Feminist-materialist critics, while never achieving an impossibly "complete" theory or practice, by privileging gender as a category of analysis in
the Rosenberg story is to explore the narrative structurations and political operations of language as deriving from, discontinuous with, and generative of historical circumstances. Without being able fully to theorize these relationships, I attempt provisionally to suggest the relationships between the ongoing Rosenberg story(ies) and the operations of power by and practices of dissent within the United States using Jameson's comment that a given cultural phenomenon--postmodern fiction, for example--is articulating something that is going on.[in the material world] 

What interests me, in short, is that the Rosenberg stories are "articulating something that is going on" in excess of any notion of the original or real story, whatever that may be construed to be. And that excess can be seen as

their cultural criticism have the potential for critical work that is more fully adequate to its object. The purpose of my analysis of the Rosenberg story is to explore the narrative structurations and political operations of language as deriving from, discontinuous with, and generative of historical circumstances. In this I am influenced by the work of all these people, but since gender is throughout an unavoidable critical analytic category, I closely identify this project with the practice of materialist-feminist criticism. See "Introduction: Toward a Materialist-Feminist Criticism," Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture, ed. Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt (New York: Methuen, 1985), xv-xxxix. See also Tzvetan Todorov, Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle, trans. Wlad Godzich Theory and History of Literature, vol. 13 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 24-27; Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1968), 253-264.

variously motivated by specific and determined political interests--interests such as the government stake in proving the communism-treason link; Doctorow's interest in a critique of the domestic left; Coover's critical interrogation of contemporary relationships between gender, class, myth, and power; or my own interest in rhetorically unpacking and speculating on the motives for and construction of a specific history. So my focus will be on the historical production and literary uses of the Rosenbergs and the Rosenberg story with the understanding that scrutiny of my version of these stories would reveal its own excess.18

I know of no more illustrative example than the Rosenberg story of a rhetorical elaboration and production of events to serve political and personal agendas, constructions which somehow, with indeterminate agency, manage to draw into their inscription the witting and unwitting contributions of the whole complex of juridical, political, military, scientific, religious and tele-communications institutions. The Rosenberg story thus serves as a synecdoche of the larger poetics of the formation of cold war ideology. The effect of

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18 Since words like "use" and "excess" evoke for any student of Marx concepts of use- and exchange-value, I am indebted to Gayatri Spivak for having already textualized this difference. Her analysis allows me to bypass that problematic, as interpreted from Marx, in favor of a reading that shows any communicable use-value to be already a motivated and elaborated excess in the form of social value. Gayatri Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value," In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (New York: Methuen, 1987), 154-75.
reading the official Rosenberg story is a feeling of multiple and systemic agency and authorship, rather than of a single narrative voice or a sense of conscious collusion among all or some of the contributing authors.\textsuperscript{19} By the time of the executions the official story had crystallized into the coherent form of a traditional novel or drama with characters, a defined and polarized conflictual plot, a strong and unambiguous linear cause-and-effect development and narrative line, and a rising and falling action bounded by a necessary beginning and the most definitive ending available in history or fiction: death as retribution and redemption.

One might expect the Rosenberg story to end there. The FBI said at the time of the executions that the "story" most definitely would not end with the Rosenbergs' deaths, meaning that the transcendentally signifying story of The Atomic Spy

\textsuperscript{19} "The frameup is an unconscious (occasionally semiconscious) mechanism. An unconscious mechanism is a kink in the mind that makes people do something without knowing that they are doing it. It is the sub-rational act of a group, serving in this case, through a series of pointed unintentions, the ends of a governing class. . . . The frameup is a process that you can't help feeling, but like most unconscious processes it's very hard to trace step by step. Half the agents in such a process don't really know what they are doing. Hence the average moderately fairminded newspaper reader who never has had personal experience of a frameup in action is flabbergasted when you tell him that such and such a man who is being prosecuted for wifebeating is really being prosecuted because he knew the origin of certain bonds in a District Attorney's safe" (John Dos Passos, \textit{Boston Herald}, 27 April 1927. Quoted in G. Louis Joughin and Edmund M. Morgan, \textit{The Legacy of Sacco & Vanzetti} [New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948], 244).
Ring responsible for the theft of the atomic bomb was still to be revealed. Yet, in one of history's great ironies, it was the promised elaboration of the spy ring story that ended--no one has ever been indicted or convicted for any act of atomic espionage--and the Rosenberg story that took on an unfolding life of its own, an elaborative and ongoing transformation that is still in process, an apparently endless chain of signifiers, an open-ended supplementarity, ungoverned by the signified that the state had in mind.

It is indisputable that an atom spy story served various individual, institutional, and governmental purposes, as well as a fairly large collective need in 1950. But given that story's strange history, it seems highly improbable that the official version of the Rosenberg story could have been produced in answer to those needs without audience development, including symbolic preparation and saturation of the public and institutional mind in terms of genre expectations and constructed linkages. It was these expectations and linkages, I argue, that allowed a particular version of the story to be received and a political show trial and execution to ensue. Yet, in a strong historical contradiction--especially in a period of aggressive worldwide propagation of the American "way of life"--the particular enactment of that drama of necessary punishment for extreme treason, I also argue, breached the Constitutional covenant between the state and its people.
This larger betrayal, made possible only by a high-level public acceptance as "true" of a story strongly marked by traces of motivated construction and imaged fictionality, continues, as we shall see, to work as a stimulating, provoking antagonism in the political and cultural imagination of the United States. My purpose in this study is to analyze and trace the politically motivated production of the heterogeneous Rosenberg narrative and the historical and cultural effects of its symbolic uses.
THE ROSENBERG STORY: HISTORY

The sacrificial principle . . . is intrinsic to the idea of Order. [Consider] the compulsions of Empire, as two mighty world orders, each homicidally armed to the point of suicide, confront each other. As with dominion always, each is much beset with anxiety. And in keeping with the 'curative' role of victimage, each is apparently in acute need of blaming all its many troubles on the other, wanting to feel certain that, if the other and its tendencies were but eliminated, all governmental discord (all the Disorder that goes with Order) would be eliminated.

Kenneth Burke¹

II

FRAME NARRATIVE

Postwar Liminality

The last years of the war and the immediate postwar period (1944-1949) allowed a rare period of liminality for the United States—a time for re-thinking and re-articulating its own purposes, and those purposes in relationship to the larger world. I call this period liminality, rather than transition, for the exigencies of the depression followed by those of the war had disrupted the traditional socioeconomic relationships of a masculist-capitalist order. In the political drive toward a postwar order, multiple and centrifugal energies of the period inevitably evoked and brought into play strong centripetal counterforces. The struggle in the immediate postwar period was for the determination of the national agenda, and this required not only an orchestrated coalition of certain desires and the systemic silencing of others, but also the production of a story of national purpose that could enlist popular acquiescence. The rhetorical translation of some of these interests, including the harshest kinds of national self-
interest and realpolitik, into an abstract narrative of moral leadership for the world—a narrative which has persisted in its function as justification of United States policies and actions long past its origin in a specific set of material circumstances—is one of the major accomplishments of this period. The elements of the story were effectively in place by 1950.

The highly complex documentation of cold war social and international politics is an ongoing project of contemporary historiography. Historians tend to accept a certain cluster of historical phenomena as founding components of the cold war mentality, symbolic and material phenomena that operate

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At a level of non-human logic, although each is the experience and result of the practice of "an ensemble of human agents." 3 I want here to consider the symbolic production of what Kenneth Burke calls the justifying, or "perfecting myth" for cold war policies and actions, to note "the role of symbolism as the motivating genius of secular enterprise." 4 This cover story was produced through a struggle of competing voices, in the context of and as actants in the founding historical phenomena, competing for control of ideas and the means of meaning-making.

I want to show the ways in which the production of this cover story set the stage for and to some degree required the

4 Logology, words about words—philologological and rhetorical analysis—is the method Burke uses to critique coherent systems of (political) meaning. He notes a double movement in history, from sociopolitical raw data to the "perfecting myth," which then becomes the originator ("motivating genius") of a certain order ("secular enterprise"), and its rationale (Kenneth Burke, The Rhetoric of Religion, 240-1, 170). Roland Barthes, concerned with the ideological function of narrative, and following Lacan, understood narrative as the "principal instrumentality by which society fashions the narcissistic, infantile consciousness into a 'subjectivity' capable of bearing the 'responsibilities' of an 'object' of the law in all its forms." This would also describe the function of Burke's "perfecting myth." (Quoted in Hayden White, The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987], 36). White relies on Louis Althusser's definition of ideology to discuss narrative as a system of meaning production by which individuals can be taught to live a distinctively imaginary relation to their real conditions of existence (White, 193. Louis Althusser "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays, trans. Ben Brewster [New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971], 127-86).
official Rosenberg Story. The story of the "frame-up" of the Rosenberg are an embedded narrative. Its frame narrative is also the story of a frame-up: the cold war, the most effective, enduring dispersal and silencing of the left in a (legally) totally enfranchised and constitutional democracy in history. This larger frame was the articulation of a justifying myth compelling enough to bring most United States citizens under its sway, either through fear or rapture, and often both. It was written under the sign of the right, producing subjects willing to support, enact, and reproduce desires of the right, and requiring the exclusion of the oppositional energies and voices of the left.

Throughout this elaboration of the production of the frame narrative, I will be concerned with revealing the symbolic strategies for framing the left. I intend the ambiguity here with framing in the visual arts as the construction of a containing border. A crucial word—and form—for the FBI, HUAC, Department of Justice, and the media during this period was "list," whose roots mean border and boundary. The drawing of a frame around all voices to the left of center and labeling them Left spelled with a capital C was a formalist symbolic enterprise.

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5 Frame-up in the sense of a collectively and incrementally narrated enclosure delimiting meaning and determining specific events. See John Dos Passos's working definition chap. 1, n. 20.)
Circumstances

Postwar first-power global status in an atomic era. The United States had been a world, as opposed to hemispheric, power for some time. This was, after all, the "The American Century." The concept of world power was first articulated in reference to the United States in 1898, after the imperialist Spanish-American War; books began to appear about the United States as world power in the early 1900s. But it was only after World War II that the general public began to conceive of the United States according to the dimensions of world power, construed for a brief period as absolute because of United States use and "ownership" of the atomic bomb. About this there was public consensus, and it was founded in real, material phenomena. There was congruence, for a moment, between rhetoric and historical phenomena. And this reality brought with it unequalled opportunities for the expression of ambitions and wills to power; it also entailed

6 Henry Luce in a *Life* editorial in 1941 entitled "The American Century," said it was time "to accept wholeheartedly our duty and our opportunity as the most powerful and vital nation in the world and in consequence to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence, for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit" (Zinn, 22).
7 Theodore Draper, "American Hubris: From Truman to the Persian Gulf," *New York Review of Books*, 16 July 1987, 40. This article, analyzing the earliest cold war policies and the endurance of their rationale for global national policy, is an elaboration of the ways in which local practical decisions become doctrines, which then become totalizing myths, substituting for critical thought while shaping political decisions and masking actual motivations.
a burden of enormous responsibility, as well as understandable uncertainties, anxieties, and terrors. Some, not blinded by ambition or terror, saw the responsibilities with more clarity than others. Hanson Baldwin, New York Times military expert, wrote on September 12, 1945:

What was needed to accompany the atomic bomb . . . was some action in the political and moral and psychological fields as dramatic and tremendous as the achievement of atomic fission. That no such action has been taken is the world's loss--and America's loss. For the truth is that the U.S. has sacrificed its moral leadership of the world. . . . We have maybe three to five years before the secret of the manufacture of the atomic bomb becomes more or less world wide. They should be years wisely used, for the opportunity will not knock again." 8

Pervasive national anxieties. The anxieties of the nation's citizenry were multiform and specific in origin. They were not just a product of the national emergence into global dominance; they were specific to the Depression, the loss of traditional socioeconomic relationships, the articulated threats of Stalin's Comintern, and the atomic bomb. The New Deal had been a cluster of reformist Keynesian

8 Quoted in Reuben, 7.
strategies for redistributing and increasing individual cash flow and had not transformed the basic relations of production which had produced the Depression. Although the war had boosted the economy from depression into a boom state of prosperity, those economically deprived during the 1930s still lived in a confused and powerless terror that is proving in the 1990s to have realistic content.\(^9\) The economically empowered believed that the crucial drive for economic expansion into a global market, and thus their economic position, was threatened by external (Soviet) and internal (domestic labor) interferences.\(^{10}\)

Less articulated or even acknowledged on the left was the pervasive sense of loss and disorientation (present in all times of liminality) resulting from the wartime

\(^9\) Post-depression terror has modulated, despite the postwar "boom" into the sliding despair of the increasing number of United States citizens classified as poor since 1968, a category that incorporates each year more members of the middle class, women, and children, while upper middle and upper class incomes, as well as the GNP, continue to increase annually. See Michael Harrington, *The New American Poverty* (New York: Penguin, 1984). See also Harrington, *The Next Left: The History of a Future* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986).

\(^{10}\) Will Clayton said "No nation in modern times can long expect to enjoy a rising standard of living without increased foreign trade" (Chafe, 68). The self-defeating ethno-centrism and imperialism of this statement were then and are now virtually unrecognized by most United States business people. Realistic in its apprehension of the inevitability and (national) advantages of a global market (the subtext of which was a consumer economy based on third world cheap labor and expanding markets), it still assumes a nation-state economic centrism that ignores the necessary interdependencies of a global economy, as well as the realities of a global economy based on depletable natural resources.
transformation of traditional masculinist socioeconomic, familial, and institutional relationships. The Depression and New Deal programs had already threatened a disruption and deforming of these traditional relationships, but exigencies of war had produced entirely new patterns of employment and equalization of function across class, race, and gender lines—new patterns which had even disrupted the traditional American family as represented in nostalgic television programs of the 1950s like "Ozzie and Harriet" and "Father Knows Best." 11

In any enumeration of the anxieties fueling the cold war, it is crucial to acknowledge the real historical presence at this conjuncture of a threatening great-power antagonist. When the Third International, the Comintern, was established in Moscow in March, 1919, its manifesto, directed primarily at "state" Socialist parties of Europe that had abandoned international communism, also established the textual grounds of American anti-communism:

11 It was easy for liberals and all those on the left to underestimate the pervasive sense of loss over the disruption and transformation of traditional relationships: "[L]iberals were dismissing the traditionalists' sense of emotional loss, which stemmed from the decline of home, church, and school; their resentment at the collapse of traditional values; their feeling of being displaced by irreverent and incomprehensible intruders who undermined decent and familiar standards" (Powers, 309). The entire infra-structure of the country was altered by the military mobilization of 12 million Americans and the ensuing shift of women and blacks into the workplace. Mass suburbanization also began following the war, initiating a radically debilitating transformation of the inner city and of the lives of its people.
The Third International is the international of open mass action of revolutionary realization. Socialist criticism has sufficiently stigmatized the bourgeois world order. The aim of the International Communist Party is to overthrow it and raise in its place the structure of the socialist order.12

A February 1945 speech by Stalin insisted on the permanent rivalry between communism and capitalism, an assertion which he supported and reinforced with his subsequent postwar moves in Eastern Europe. His policies and actions established a definition of communism and the Soviet Union that would become the demonic force against which all the moral authority of the United States had to be Marshalled, despite similar motivations and interventions being practiced by the United States, even under the auspices of a Marshall Plan and a Truman Doctrine.

Indeed the ideologically and geographically threatening program of the Comintern had its own proponents among members of the United States Communist Party. But it is important to distinguish between the real threat of the Soviet Union as cause of cold war policies, and the imaged demonology of the Soviet Union as effect of cold war policies. The public--and

most politicians and policy makers--had little opportunity to know realistic dimensions of the threat of Russian/Communist aggression.\textsuperscript{13}

An anxiety not escaped by anyone except a few militarists capable of massive denial was the complex of feelings aroused by the United States' use of the atomic bomb--developed in secrecy--in a questionably necessary strategy to end the war.\textsuperscript{14} These feelings included guilt (conscious and unconscious) mitigated by justifications revealed as spurious by historical consideration or by outright denial; confusion, uncertainties, and paralysis

\textsuperscript{13} Chafe writes that none of the rationales for the cold war hold up, since "at no time did Russia constitute a military threat to the United States. . . . "Economically," U.S. Naval Intelligence reported in 1946, "the Soviet Union is exhausted. . . . The USSR is not expected to take any action in the next five years which might develop into hostility with Anglo-Americans." Following the war Russia reduced its army from 11.5 to 3 million men and cut its budget to half of the United States budget (Chafe, 73). This information, even had it been available to the public, would not have effectively countered the fears of an atomic strike by the Soviet Union following its first test explosion in 1949. But an extended cold war was not a logically necessary outcome of the possession of the atomic bomb by the two superpowers. That cause-effect relationship was a rhetorical construction that functioned ideologically to support a specific political and economic agenda.

\textsuperscript{14} Review of the documents suggests that the atomic bomb was used primarily to pre-empt Russia in Japan and the far East. A Strategic Bombing Survey after Nagasaki reported that "Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated" (Lader, 24). If this was an accurate assessment, it refutes the rationale that the saving of American soldiers' lives, by ending the war without United States invasion of Japan, justified the use of the atomic bomb. This is not only the wisdom of retrospect; United States military intelligence was aware of Japanese surrender plans before the bombs were used in August of 1945. Zinn, 12-15.
about the meaning of atomic weapons; and fears of retribution or first-strike aggression; and blind ambitions for a United States pre-emptive first strike against the Soviet Union. A full understanding of the implications of the possession and use of atomic weapons was available to only a relatively few scientists and policy makers; the majority of the people remained uninformed, while long-lasting political decisions continued to be made with insufficient, compartmentalized information and dispersed responsibility.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{National postwar prosperity.} Business and industry during the war began operating at the highest levels ever of productivity and profitability. Full employment, threatened by the return of members of the armed forces, and the momentum of productivity generated by the war required rapid displacement into peacetime (defense) military productivity, as well as increased production of consumer goods, a reconversion process strategized before the end of the war. The dependence of capitalist stability on growth at a time of full productivity made a postwar "initiative" for the aggressive development of foreign markets also crucial at this juncture. Some way had to be found to justify, maintain, and expand wartime productivity in a period at least temporarily without a fueling war.

\textsuperscript{15} See Zinn, 9-13 on dispersed responsibility and compartmentalized information in decision-making in modern bureaucratic states.
The inauguration of mass-culture society. Given the postwar economic momentum, chain papers fed by network news and driven by profitability, the development of technology for more rapid and thorough newspaper distribution, and the commercial development of television, the elements were in place for the production of mass culture: people reading and consuming the same things, approaching something like a national think-alike. This low denominator communications saturation ultimately would elevate "low brow" to the status of "popular" and a co-opted "radical chic"; but for cold war purposes it also proved to be an efficient machinery for the popular diffusion of a polarized and consensus mentality.

Ideas

At the disposal of the construction of the national agenda were several concepts specific to the dominant historical phenomena. Whether these ideas are considered from a psychoanalytic or a linguistic perspective, it is clear in reading documents of this period that each idea actively contained its opposite and at the same time evoked clusters of mediating ideas and terms.16 The dominant and dramatically urgent ideas following the war were: global

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16 Here again I note the influence of the work of Kenneth Burke on the methodology for this study.
power, atomic warfare, national security, and prosperity. Since the United States had emerged from the war with first-power status, the idea of global power was both seductive and terrifying: it contained notions of total responsibility, megalomania, and grandiosity; the threat of loss of position and control, or of anarchy or destruction by the other(s); as well as the intermediate possibilities for the negotiation of multi-jurisdictional pragmatic relationships among differing autonomies.

Atomic warfare was not just one idea among others, as the scientists and most eloquently Niels Bohr recognized: after Alamogordo the idea of atomic war, while always a historical possibility, was no longer a possibility that, if realized, would remain within history. Nor apparently has its opposite, peace, ever been a real historical possibility. The bomb thus had no practical use as an instrument of diplomacy--a fact diplomats and policy makers have been remarkably slow to understand. The United States had financed and directed the development of the atomic bomb as a military weapon, and its use contributed to the sense of absolute power that prevailed for a brief period after September 1945. But by the end of that year a quite specific and contradictory cluster of ideas and fears was forming in the institutional and collective minds of the nation: Hiroshima and Nagasaki evoked notions of ultimate power or total powerlessness; political necessity or guilt, anxiety,
fears of retribution and generalized paranoia; as well as the
mediating visions of international negotiation, scientific
and technological cooperation, and global arms control. Most
crucial in the cluster of ideas around that of atomic warfare
was the way in which fears and anxieties were manipulated and
imaginatively displaced into ideas of ownership, secrecy, and
defensive aggression.

The idea of national security was certainly not new in
history, but with the development and use of electronic
technology and atomic weapons, it became a qualitatively
different idea in United States history. It became the
modern national security state, a concept that
institutionalized a practice of governmental secrecy so
extensive as to justify a deprivation of the democratic
rights which national security was in part intended to
protect. More than the other ideas, that of national
security was actively driven by its opposite: breach,
espionage, betrayal, treason, aggression, take-over,
overthrow, revolution. Clearly these ideas contained both an
internal (domestic) and external (foreign) dimension--another
aspect crucial to the symbolic fashioning of the ensuing cold
war rationale.

And finally, but certainly not least in consideration,
was national prosperity. Its opposite, economic depression,
was a terrifying historical reality for the United States in
the Great Depression. And herein lay a real contradiction:
business and industry interests which were attempting to promote growth in an international market, with foreigners as consumers for an expanding United States economy, feared an intensification of New Deal policies as much as they feared depression. That is, they wanted a continuation, in the name of economic growth, of basically the same relationships of production that had led to the depression, while preserving New Deal and wartime tax policies and government spending.

The linguistic opposition prosperity/depression also elided crucial distinctions in favor of gross national indices. Prosperity as formulated failed to acknowledge the actual disparities that existed within the macro-dimension of national economic well-being. The opposition, because it continued to be thought and preached in national terms, also masked another opposition more threatening to the dominant interests: capitalist accumulation (partially through federal government socializing subsidies for capital through tax expenditures) and its rhetorical opposite socialist distribution. The assimilation of all non-capitalist ideas of the postwar political economy to the idea of communism,

17 "Even had all of Truman's Fair Deal been enacted, such liberal reform would have left many millions beyond the benefits of government. The Fair Deal appears, despite its rhetoric, to have been designed to prevent extensions of benefits to the poor, while granting enough concessions to organized male workers to ensure their allegiance. "The very poor, the marginal men [sic], those neglected but acknowledged by the New Deal, went ultimately unnoticed by the Fair deal" (Barton J. Bernstein, "America in War and Peace: The Test of Liberalism," Twentieth-Century America, 364)."
and specifically Stalinism, was a product of the successful use of the first three ideas—global power, atomic warfare, and the national security state—to contain, manipulate, and manage the social anxieties and fears of the period.

Voices

A gross anatomy of the dominant and emergent voices engaged in the postwar struggle to write the explanatory narrative foregrounds a number of actively interested groups. Jameson attributes to these ideological subject positions the possibilities of acting to "make their own history in circumstances not of their choosing."18 I would identify these circumstances, for the purposes of this argument, as the material phenomena and the clusters of predominant ideas emanating from them which I outlined in the preceding two sections. The subject positions are not mutually exclusive categories, nor does the disposition of the prevalent ideas among them strictly follow any previously determined divisions of political ideology, although certain affiliations and alignments suggest themselves immediately.

There was a promising confusion of boundaries, positions, theories, and possibilities in the moment of liminality during which the struggle took place. More

alternatives to what we now know as the history of the cold war were envisioned, voiced, and briefly enacted than is commonly recognized by the largely naturalized cold war mentality operative in United States policies and affairs during the latter half of the twentieth century. Some of these voices were eloquent and informed; some were simply powerful, with neither eloquence nor full information; some were relatively powerless and inarticulate but for a moment of potential political presence enhanced by emergent postwar socioeconomic relationships. Some merged into coalitions as mutually reinforcing interests were articulated, and some were exploited as their usefulness became apparent. This is formally nothing more than the political process of a representative democracy, misleadingly and ideologically represented as political pluralism.\textsuperscript{19} So how did it produce the virtual extinction of the expression of any interests to the left of center? How did it institute an ideology of moral purpose protected by secrecy and fear that maintained not only a certain economic and political order but also a self-induced moratorium on oppositional critical thinking and dissent?

\textsuperscript{19} Pluralism as it operates in the United States pretends to a political dynamic of general consensus while it operates to exclude and disempower majority interests of class, race, and gender, to discredit its opposite, democratic socialism, and to mask—under the rhetoric of pluralism—its own socioeconomic and political program. See Ellen Rooney, \textit{Seductive Reasoning: Pluralism as the Problematic of Contemporary Literary Theory} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).
1) *Business and Industry*, fearing a slow-down of the full-steam momentum generated by war-time productivity and lamenting the loss of access to Axis resources and industries destroyed during the war, were determined to maintain and expand their position as government's managing partner—a position held with only minor interruptions since the time of Alexander Hamilton.\(^{20}\) For the representatives of business interests, the cold war possibilities read like an "investment prospectus" in an infinitely expanding world economy.\(^{21}\)

2) The *Military* exited the war in a position of high mobilization and political strength, a position that was threatened by wide-spread expectations of and calls for de-

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\(^{20}\) Zinn, 31. The Chamber of Commerce in its assessment of the postwar status of business and industry noted that "We have lost virtually all oil wells and refineries in the Balkans, as well as giant industrial plants in Germany and Hungary" (Caute, 349). This loss was somewhat balanced by the fact that in 1945 corporate profits were at an all time high. \$26 billion from 1936 to 1939, they rose to \$117 billion from 1940-1945, and rose 30\% just in 1946 (Lader, 4).

\(^{21}\) Truman himself contemptuously described State Department documents prepared to secure Congressional funding for Greece and Turkey as sounding like an "investment prospectus" (Draper, 41). Parenti and Aronson document this mentality in the media: headlines in *Business Week* in 1947 read "New Democracy, New Business. U.S. Drive to Stop Communism Abroad Means Heavy Outlays for Bases, Relief and Reconstruction. But in Return American Business is Bound to Get New Markets Abroad." In 1950 *U.S. News and World Report* said "Government planners figure they have found the magic formula for almost endless [economic] good times. . . . Cold War is the catalyst. Cold War is an automatic pump-primer. Turn the spigot and the public clamors for more arms spending. Turn another, the clamor ceases. . . . Cold War demands, if fully exploited, are almost limitless" (Parenti, 118-19; and Aronson, 35).
mobilization and disarmament. It was, however, in the historically unique position of having directed the development and use of the atomic bomb. For many members of the military the atomic bomb continued--despite scientists' entreaties to the contrary--to be construed as a nationally owned, secret offensive weapon and a deployable means of guaranteeing United States security and first power position.

3) Conservatives, represented--but not exclusively--by the Republican Party, were determined to regain control of national foreign and domestic policy from liberal New Dealers; they held power locally but were weak nationally. In analyzing Republican postwar strategies it is important to distinguish the extent to which the right found itself increasingly solidified and polarized by the threat from the left represented by Stalin's territorial and ideological aggression, from the degree to which the right used this threat domestically to unify conservatives and eliminate all other voices.

4) The FBI had as its head since 1924 a genius of bureaucratic administration, a master of the legal and illegal manipulation of government officials as well as of the uses and dissemination of secrets, public information, and misinformation. J. Edgar Hoover's personal ambition was to be the agent of national purification from the "enemy within," and he was gratified to find his own prejudices
increasingly supported by the power elites and eventually millions of Americans.\textsuperscript{22} 

5) The House Un-American Activities Committee was organized in 1938 to investigate foreign "isms," in a context of pre-war anxieties about Nazi, Communist, and other foreign subversion. The FBI, by interpreting a Presidential directive from Roosevelt broadly--and unconstitutionally--had by 1945 already compiled several thousand files on people allegedly engaged, or likely to engage, in various forms of foreign espionage. When HUAC was formed, it began a competitive and collaborative venture with the FBI, with Hoover secretly providing information which emerged from the Committee as lists, subpoenas, and extra-judicial interrogations. In all of these activities the media were willing partners.

6) The Print Media, whose interests since the turn of the century had become increasingly identified with those of business, operating more and more under monopoly ownership, were supported by advertising and motivated by

\textsuperscript{22} Hoover invoked "the enemy within" in his public, official, and private appeals for FBI authority to take all [if extralegal] necessary steps to protect the United States from the threat of internal subversion and treason by communists and members of other left organizations. See Theoharis and Cox, 169, and Powers. See also William W. Keller, The Liberals and J. Edgar Hoover: The Rise and Fall of a Domestic Intelligence State (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
profitability. By 1945, utilizing national network news sources and chain journalism reproduction and distribution processes, the media worked primarily to represent and reproduce national unity in terms of dominant interests; in effect there had been a predominant and continuous cold-war consensus journalism since the 1920s in the major chains and urban dailies. With the media willing to accept and report FBI and HUAC news releases from "informed sources" as factual, the apparatus for the construction of anti-communism as a national political activity was in place.

7) The Democratic Administration, made up of New Dealers, other liberals, and conservative Democrats, demonstrated the greatest degree of honest confusion and openness, an openness which was exploited as the potential vulnerability it can be in high-stake political battles. As chief executive, Truman continued to take what he regarded as simple decisive actions in the most complex of policy matters while dispersing and compartmentalizing his information sources, thus making his government even more vulnerable. Truman as national and democratic party leader was popularly successful in his use of liberal rhetoric to mask his

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23 From 1945-1960 advertising increased 400%, three times the nation's annual investment in higher education. Chafe, 119.
24 Aronson, 25.
25 See Zinn, 9-13; see also Bernstein, "America in War and Peace," in Twentieth-Century America, 362.
basically pro-business and white male allegiances and practices.

8) Politicians and Policy Advisers addressed the potentials and responsibilities of the United States postwar global status from positions articulated variously by idealism and humanitarianism, pragmatism, or realpolitik. Realpolitik is the aspect of coldwar policy that was occluded in public policy statements. It operated at a level of secrecy justified by national security requirements. The formulator of the umbrella policy of global containment of communism, George Kennan, elaborated the realistic self-interested agenda in a Top Secret State Department memorandum in 1948:

We have about 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6.3% of its population. In this situation we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security. To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and daydreaming and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national objectives. We need not deceive ourselves that we can afford today the
luxury of altruism and world-benefaction. We should cease to talk about vague and unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of living standards and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans the better.26

But by 1950 policies based on "straight power concepts," as well as the more mediatory and pragmatic approaches were all subsumed under a justifying myth of an idealistic humanitarianism, which then became the rationale for almost any mode of action that served dominant United States interests.

9) High Energy Scientists, some of whom had opposed use of the atomic bomb, as soon as the secrecy constraint was removed in 1945, began active information campaigns in an urgent effort to accomplish the grounding of postwar policy in an understanding of a world changed utterly by the realities and possibilities of atomic energy.27 The

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26 George Kennan, Top Secret State Department internal document in 1948, quoted in Harold Pinter, "Language and Lies," Index on Censorship 17,6 (June-July 1988): 2. For Kennan's article outlining what became--beyond his intentions--a global cold war foreign policy under the rubric of Containment of Soviet Aggression, see Mr. X, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," Foreign Affairs 25, no. 4 (July 1947): 566-82.

27 Nobel prize-winning physicist James Franck in a memorandum to the Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace, 21 April, 1945: "How is it possible that the statesmen are not informed that the aspect of the world and its
discounting and containment of their energies and efforts was a crucial step in the elaboration of the official Rosenberg story.

10) Liberals in the fifties were too diverse in their outlooks to be defined effectively by that label. Nor did future is entirely changed by the knowledge that atomic energy can be tapped, and how is it possible that the men who know these facts are prevented from informing the statesmen about the situation?" Quoted in Schneir/Schneir, 30.

28 Liberalism, a word which originated in a class distinction, setting off free from non-free men [sic], suffers from and practices, in the twentieth-century United States especially, semantic and material contradictions and political co-optation. For a history of the word, see Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, Rev. Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 179-181. Conventionally and rhetorically opposed to "conservatism" in the United States it serves the strategic political function of defining a largely class-based, disempowered other in a liberal capitalist society. Liberalism's historical rather than strategic opposite—and its opposite in European usage—is "socialism," since in the United States both liberalism and conservatism are belief systems based on an individualist theory of the relationship of the individual to society. George Bush, an almost perfect embodiment of American liberalism, was able, because of the tradition of cold war rhetorical abuse of "liberal" and of liberals, to use the label against his presidential opponent to signify its opposite, socialism. Lacan imagines disposing of by using up a word that no longer serves a useful purpose, or that is only too useful in constructing a certain symbolic order. Referring to his use of "essence," Lacan claims "One must make use, but really use them up, really wear out these old words, wear them threadbare, use them until they're thoroughly hackneyed!" (Jacques Lacan, Le Séminaire livre XX: Encore [Editions du Seuil, 1975], 56. Jane Gallop suggests that perhaps Lacan is attempting just that with "phallus" and "castration," but maintains the view that a word upon which a given order depends can't be voluntarily and completely used up from within that order (The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 55. "Liberal," less totalizing in its effects, nevertheless works conceptually in complex and multiple ways to maintain a certain order. If "liberal" can even be imagined as used up and disposed of, its United States opposite, "conservative," would lose much
most liberals want to be identified by what was essentially a
derisive term used by people who considered themselves to be
the only loyal Americans. Not only were New Deal proponents
and many democrats part of the liberal mix, but also many who
considered themselves as radical left were more accurately
liberal in outlook. But ex-communist intellectuals also
called the remaining members of the communist left "liberal."
Excluding those communists who remained loyal to Stalinism,
liberals signified a diverse group of people who saw
themselves as representing the Lockean ethic of liberal
democratic capitalism, but who generally stopped short of
doing so in a way that involved any kind of systemic critique
of the confounding of that ethic by the oligarchic, masculist
form of capitalism which prevailed in the United States
political economy. Crucial to the elaboration of the
national agenda was a strategic shifting of liberal
allegiances to the right.

11) Labor, reaching across the entire political
spectrum, had been shaped by the Depression, the New Deal,
and strong left leadership, including members of the
Communist Party, into the beginning of a horizontal
organization with primary concern for social and workplace

of its rhetorical function and effectivity, perhaps opening the way
toward a more complex and realistic politics. Perhaps that disposal
process is under way in the late twentieth century, with the
proliferation and vocalization of multiple interest formations that
confound the use of such a mystifying and reductive dichotomy.
issues. As an organized group with articulated concerns it emerged from the war as a strong and active political presence, eager to consolidate its gains during the war as a full partner in planning and productivity while working voluntarily under no-strike agreements and wage controls. In the postwar inflation, without a revision of the artificial wage structure, labor faced a decline in the real value of wages as profitability was rapidly rising. Jobs at all levels were threatened by reconversion and the millions of returning soldiers. Seeking compensation commensurate with its contribution to wartime and postwar profitability, a stabilizing of its position in the form of participatory management or bargaining agreements, and improved workplace conditions, labor began its period of greatest activism in United States history.

12) The Left was in disarray after the end of the wartime Popular Front coalition and depleted by disillusionment with Stalinist communism, as well as with socialism on the part of those who confused socialism with Stalinism. The United States Communist Party was the largest left organization, followed by the Socialists, who had been steadily losing their political base since the time of Roosevelt. There were the Socialist Workers Party, the Workers Party, the New-York based American Labor Party (probably the most comprehensive and effective left
organization in the country); 29 multiple youth groups; several hundred groups labeled as communist front organizations by the attorney general, like the National Farmers Union, the National Lawyers Guild, and the Peace Information Center; and innumerable smaller left sectarian groups.

Although the United States left was described--by the right--as a simmering mass movement threatening to domestic stability, its numbers in 1945 were smaller than imagined or represented. 30 But even more surprising to the average newspaper reader in 1945 would have been the actual nature of left political activity, fragmented and deprived of a national economic or political base except for that which existed through labor organizations and civil rights groups like The Urban League, NAACP, CORE, and voter-registration teams. That these groups were (and still are) naturalized as left and subversive in a constitutional democracy is one of

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29 The American Labor Party, under the leadership of Congressman Vito Marcantonio, was a primarily New York city coalition of political, ethnic, social, and economic interests (workers and union members, ethnic minorities, communists, New Dealers, teachers, professionals, intellectuals, frustrated socialists, and liberals.), working pragmatically through neighborhood organizations and on specific local issues. It was one of the most effective left organizations in the country.

30 Michael Rogin notes that any group that is labelled as radical (and most often this means anti-industrial according to Rogin), is per se defined as a mass movement, allegedly characterized by irrationality, and tendencies to totalitarianism or anarchy. Rogin, 27.
the deeper contradictions of United States society and
history.

With the exception of Communist Party leader William Z.
Foster's insistence on the Stalinist hard line, left groups
had almost all abandoned notions of revolutionary apocalyptic
change and come to embrace a gradualist politics, which they
advocated through speeches, education, and publications—a
rhetorical activity which Daniel Bell mocked for its moralism
and idealism as "mimetic combat in the plains of destiny."\footnote{1}
The left was represented by one congressman in 1945: Vito
Marcantonio of New York, head of the American Labor Party.

13) The United States Communist Party by the end of the
war had reached the acme of its power as a Popular Front
political force working actively in labor unions (especially
the CIO) and organizations on the left, as well as in the
Democratic Party. After the end of its open participation in
left and liberal political and cultural activities, it
returned to a more rigorous and covert internationalist
Stalinist politics through local organizations, generating
political energy and ideas through membership in non-
communist and communist-front organizations. However, by
1945 many members were re-defining their affiliations and
ideologies.\footnote{2} This was in large part due to the control

\footnote{1}{Isserman, \textit{If I Had a Hammer}, 48.}
\footnote{2}{There were never more than 100,000 American Communists at any one
time, yet labor unions, youth groups, peace organizations, civil rights
groups, and a host of miscellaneous clubs, gatherings, and assemblies}
exercised by Foster, for whom the maintenance of ideological integrity was more important than democratic political participation in the formation of a domestic agenda.

In its refusal of open political participation and failure to challenge postwar anti-communist political strategies on constitutional grounds, the Party played into the hands of the irrational but dominant conservative interests. Historian Allen Matusow notes that the profound—and costly—irony of anti-communism was that "it developed in the absence of any real internal Communist menace; for by 1950 Communism in America had lost whatever influence it once possessed." But while communism (as an ideology of and program for revolutionary practice) had lost whatever influence it once possessed in the United States, its opposite, anti-communism, was in 1950 approaching a high point in its staged public and private policy career as protector of the conservative national agenda. In the interest of warding off the apocalyptic threat of communism, anti-communism was shaping United States domestic and international affairs; intersecting and dividing public and

private realms; thwarting the work of groups attempting to secure fundamental economic and civil rights; and shutting down dissenting forms of critical thinking and acting.

14) Artists, Writers, Film Makers, and Intellectuals emerged from the wartime period of national-unity quietism and from the preceding era of thirties and forties social criticism and activism into a post-atomic, post-holocaust, rapidly polarizing world. Many of these men and women had been committed socialists or Marxists; many had at one time, especially during the Popular Front, been members of the Communist Party. But the familiar liberal and objective or realistic forms of artistic and intellectual apprehension and critique seemed suddenly pitifully inadequate, as did the utopian theories of Marxism and socialism. In an extended moment of postwar re-thinking and hesitation on the part of critical artists and intellectuals, an emergent cultural right, which had been reductively and powerfully defining itself and contemporary culture in terms of modernism and formalism, was positioned for dominance.34

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34 Postwar literary modernism and formalism emerged from the more complex and socially implicated critical practices of I.A. Richards and William Empson in England in the twenties. T.S. Eliot used some of the assumptions of their work to shape an influential formalist aesthetics. The southern Fugitives and Agrarians, led by John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate, developed in the thirties a theory and practice based on such an aesthetics, laying the foundations for a formalist New Critical orthodoxy for literary criticism and pedagogy that prevailed from the forties to the eighties. New York intellectuals Hilton Kramer, Clement Greenberg, and Harold Rosenberg provided the same theoretical and
15) Women and Ethnic and Racial Minorities had been tolerated as working equals during the war because of industrial and military manpower [sic] needs. They found themselves at the end of the war not only without real political and economic gains, but also experiencing an actual loss of wartime position.

16) Farmers by 1900, still a significant proportion of the population (35.7%), in terms of economic position and power had been relegated to the status of a special interest group. Labor had rejected the opportunity for a farm-labor alliance in 1890, and farmer participation in political power and reform or left politics had come to an end with the New Deal and the rise of the CIO, which had articulated itself against rural interests. World War II brought a new level of agricultural prosperity, followed by the protections of parity and the cold war economy. This prosperity for a while masked the increasing corporate industrialization of agriculture after 1945.

17) The People of the United States, with their varying and multiform allegiances to the above groups, were almost all giving voice to relief, elation, pride, and diffuse fears and anxieties, as well as--most crucially--a virtually

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35 By 1950 this number would be reduced to less than 15% of the total United States population. Rogin, 189-90.
36 Ibid., 191.
untested and abstract faith in the rectitude and justice of their way of life and the deserved authority of their federal government and its institutions.

Meaning-Making

The use of language is a meaning-seeking and -making endeavor involving certain fundamental operations which have their analogues in our understanding of both individual psychic and collective political processes. In the rubric of linguistics, the basic operation is one of the utilization of differences and similarities to establish one meaning at the exclusion of its opposite and many other meanings; in psychological rubric it is one of splitting and projection, a primary process which is both the means of knowing and a defensive way of not knowing;\(^{37}\)\(^{38}\) at the political level, the

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\(^{37}\) Hayden White notes that "the perception of the 'Same in the Different' and the 'Different in the Same' is the origin of all hierarchy in social practice, as it is the origin of syntax in grammar and logic in thought" (White, 117). This interlocking splitting and projective mechanism, following the principles of displacement (distinctions, difference) and condensation (generalization, similarity), allows good/bad discriminations and suspension of emotion in order to form judgments; it allows analysis of an event in the service of thinking and maturity. As a common denominator also in all psychological defense mechanisms, it tends in extreme situations toward a disavowal of past and future, and supports organismic (totalizing) anxiety at the expense of signal (specific, local) anxiety (James S. Grotstein, *Splitting and Projective Identification* [New York: Jason Aronson, 1981], 5). It is a defense which wishes to "postpone
operation is one of national ideological and institutional enclosures and exclusions based on motivated understandings of self and other, or "us" and "them."

As the level of syntactic and perceptual/cognitive complexity increases, other operations and phenomena come into play, operations that as constitutive mechanisms are more performative than constative or descriptive: a naturalizing of arbitrary relationships through repetition and saturation; establishment of cause-effect relationships and semantic--and political--similarities and differences through constructed rhetorical linkages; transformation of meaning through incremental or discontinuous but repetitive shifts among categories and codes; drives toward a narrative or mythic coherence that masks irrationalities and contradictions; and the establishment of widespread and subconscious generic expectations with their specific teleologies or closures.

contfrontation with some experience that cannot be tolerated; but it also can . . . negate, destroy, and literally obliterate the sense of reality."(131) It involves alienation of one's own experience into a mystified, mythified re-personification (9), thus resulting in a transformation of both self and object, assigning the split off percept to a container for postponement or for eradication (131). Melanie Klein saw it as a fundamental defense against persecutory anxiety, often accompanied by idealization, denial, and omnipotent control of internal and external objects"(129); Freud saw it as a costly response to conflicts between instincts and reality, or between idealizations and reality (25-29).
Just as the struggle among postwar political interests for dominance was in one sense the way things happen in a constitutional and representative democracy, these linguistic and semantic operations are no more than the ways in which meaning happens. What happens, though, when the inevitable inclusions and exclusions and drives to coherence in meaning-making coincide with popular insecurities and anxieties and a nation-state's will to global power? What happens when both the individual citizens and their institutional leaders have high intolerance for ambiguity and require, for the alleviation of anxieties and the exercise of power, an intensification of management techniques of inclusion and exclusion, coherent and unambiguous definitions and explanatory narratives? 39

What happens is a tyranny of meaning that approaches the dimensions of myth. What begins as explanatory narrative for specific and local phenomena becomes through official repetition over time what Burke calls a "perfecting myth," able to function as an idealistic, abstract, and totalizing rationale for similar policies and actions in differing

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39 The atomic age produced a new level of universal terror in the face of history. "Even for Hegel the sublimity of the spectacle of history had to be transcended if it was to serve as an object of knowledge and deprived of the terror it induced as a 'panorama of sin and suffering.'" Ideology and perfecting myths are attempts to deal with unbearable social and historical realities, beliefs and myths which must be critiqued for the political exclusions and repressions they enact. White, 70, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of History, trans, J. Sibree (New York: Willey Book Co., 1944), 20-22.
circumstances.\textsuperscript{40} An explanatory narrative that achieves the status of perfecting myth serves to reconcile discrepancies and irrationalities while appearing to obviate public—or official—scrutiny of actual circumstances. Such a narrative becomes effectively monolithic and saturating, demonizing its opposite, and cancelling or absorbing all mediatory and intermediate terms and kinds of activity. I am here concerned with the symbolic operations necessary to produce the perfecting myth and manichean rationale for the events occurring under the sign of Cold War, a rationale that made possible and even necessary the unfolding of the Rosenberg story. In its own way, each one of these operations played a part in creating the conditions for the unfolding of that story.

Positions

There were four groups whose voices, had they not been still pre-emergent and atomized, or neutralized, had the potentiality for mitigating, complicating, or transforming the national cold war narrative. These were the voices of women, minorities, scientists, and farmers. Women workers and union members; women's civic, business, and professional

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{40} Burke, Rhetoric of Religion, 240-1; see also Draper, op. cit.}
organizations; women's reading and reform groups; and women as members of the Women's Advisory Committee to the War Manpower Commission in the Department of Labor were active during the war. But as a self-conscious political force women had not yet assimilated the ways in which the achievement of suffrage in the twenties was still only a formal victory, nor the ways in which their massive entry into the job market during the war was only the beginning step in a long struggle for equality. Also, the linkage between Communist conspiracy and women's reform groups had been established in the public mind during the twenties, by representations of women committed to social reform as part of a "spider web" conspiracy directed by Moscow to subvert the family and traditional American values.41

There were isolated feminist voices, but as collective critical speaking mass, women were not protagonists in the argument in the postwar period. The Women's Advisory Committee in 1942 had not raised questions of wages and hours for women workers in order that it might "quietly go about its business, without offending propriety or tradition . . . [and that] it embraced larger objectives than special privilege."42 For the most part, women in the postwar period

41 Chafe, 97
42 Women's Bureau Report in 1952 on the work of the Advisory Committee during the war. The Committee did advocate family assistance programs and child-care facilities to support women workers, but the Bureau report said the Advisory Committee's work "should set at rest the alarm of those who wince at the memory of objectives ascribed to the early
continued to be willing to forego solidifying the real new position they held in the socioeconomic order, so as not to risk affronting a war-produced national unity. This is affirmative culture at its best.\textsuperscript{43}

Minorities were in the position of having achieved higher socioeconomic value through wartime needs, and a new degree of collective self-awareness as reflected in increasingly active civil rights organizations. But their white male (and female) audience was determinedly resistant to the political implications of their necessary emergence to a more equal and visible military and socioeconomic presence. Returning black soldiers and blacks dis-employed by white replacements found themselves back in the patterns and practices of segregation. They faced a sharp upsurge in local, systematic efforts—including blatant illegalities, sanctioned threats, terrorism, and violence—to deprive them of the political and social rights and advantages of their use as equals during the war.\textsuperscript{44}

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\textsuperscript{44} The national and local civil rights organizations did ground-breaking work in establishing larger collective self-awareness and effective patterns of protest and resistance. A. Philip Randolph, who as leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters had conceived and established the March on Washington Movement in 1941, mobilized college students all over the country in 1947 for a black anti-draft movement that forced Truman to desegregate the armed forces. The Urban League and NAACP fought restrictive housing covenants and urban renewal; CORE organized
Truman created a Committee on Civil Rights which recommended a permanent Commission on Civil Rights and legislation against lynching and voting discrimination, but the program expired without legislative action. The crucial equation articulated by the Committee between inequality and segregation, without legislative or juridical backing, failed to challenge existing structures or racism. So much for white masculist, liberal reform: minorities had still ahead of them the task of their own constitutional self-empowerment and the achievement of an active role in establishing political and social agendas.45

The scientists' commodification and cancellation as challenging and mediatory voices I discuss more fully in chapter III in an analysis of the production of secrecy, a key motivating term for the official Rosenberg story. The scientists had been effectively eliminated as oppositional voices in policy deliberations by 1949. The eloquence and informed intelligence of their appeals for international cooperation and negotiations were overridden by the combination of political and military institutional ambitions and biases and the officially perceived requirements of an expanding economy.

sit-ins and boycotts; and local communities attempted voter registration drives despite threats and violence. See Bernstein, "America in War and Peace," 369; Lipsitz, 17, 239-40.

Farmers, lacking the means for organized political power concomitant with their socioeconomic function, and despite increasing marginalization and elimination by banking and industrial operations, were beginning in 1945 increasingly to turn to conservatives for the protection of their interests. This has its own contradictions, as well as potentials for long-term diminishing returns, but this alliance in the postwar period meant the absence of any postwar program for food production and distribution in opposition to the dominant ideas of national maximum output and expanding markets. The theoretically rational operations of a national and protectionist production system for a global market—even with the attempted corrections of a regulated capitalism—have proven to be an especially irrational formula for food production and distribution, domestically as well as internationally.

An official blindness to the presence and deafness to the voices of these groups, even within left organizations, left the way clear for traditional white masculist methods of decision- and consensus-making without the complications and ethical (or constitutional) imperatives of feminist perspectives, minority internationalist class and ethnic sympathies, scientific global and collaborative perspectives, or the anti-capitalist (but not nostalgic) logic required for the protection of perishable or depletable resources. That left a configuration of business and industry, the military,
Republicans, the FBI, and the HUAC facing the organized left, labor, and communists as ideological adversaries. The print media and the radio had for some time thrown their lots with their owners, abandoning a twenties and thirties practice of investigative and critical journalism. But policy advisers, Democrats, liberals, artists and intellectuals, and all of the people without direct or articulated affiliations to any of these groups, were in a still mediatory position in the brief struggle for the United States postwar agenda. Women and minorities were not taken seriously in the postwar period, even within their "own" organizations, especially the unions. But they were resistant to unfair practices, and their resistance was increasingly collective, building a base for a more effective politics in the sixties and seventies.

An argument for the limited postwar effectivity of unorganized people with limited self-awareness does not suggest that such people play unvalenced political roles without effect. On the contrary, they play a crucial role in any consensus formation, but they play it by-and-large unwittingly; that is, they "work by themselves," producing and reproducing specific relationships without realizing it.46 Experiencing the confusions and uncertainties of the postwar period, and having formulated no clearly articulated

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46 Again, Althusser's (and Barthe's and Lacan's) formulation of the function of ideology in producing compliant subjectivities capable of inserting themselves into a given field of social relationships. See chap. II, n. 4.
positions on the issues, these groups with mediatory and coalition potential also stood in a positions of great volatility, like unbonded chemicals. They were vulnerable in their openness, and perceived as threatening to right and left in their free-agent potential.

Conservatives experiencing the economic empowerment of wartime productivity were primed for a restoration to political power and needed the active allegiance, passive acquiescence, or cultural silencing of these groups. Even though the democratic congress followed the conservative agenda by enacting the Taft-Hartley law over a presidential veto and by successfully blocking liberal social reform efforts, the Republicans wanted political control of the government and national policy, which they had not had since Roosevelt's first election in 1932. While the right clearly had the economic power, political power was still potentially available across the political spectrum in this period of liminality, in a pattern that promised instability to and invasion of conservative positions.

The consolidation of the right and the assimilation and/or effective silencing of all neutral, mediating, oppositional, or destabilizing groups is an operation that has been told from many vantage points, each attributing differing distributions of primary forces. Undoubtedly economic interests were the dominant force, but the actual formation of the supporting national consensus for or
acquiescence to these interests generally excludes their direct expression. Since I am here concerned with the rhetorical elaboration of the national postwar agenda, I will consider only the ways in which a coherent public narrative began to take shape, indicating the predominant voices, and suggesting the subtexts.

This story was an altogether political production, with the power elites—conservatives, business, industry and military interests—as its underwriters; political leaders, business leaders, J. Edgar Hoover and theHUAC as its primary actors; and the media as its promoters. As far as most people knew, the developing programs and policies as well as their rationale were the product of a (necessary) political process of consensual pluralism, resulting in a transition in power from New Deal Democratic liberalism to Republican conservatism. Most United States citizens then—and now, evidence to the contrary notwithstanding—think of their primary relation to their government and the state as a political one, or as governed by and through the formal politics of a pluralist democracy. With public politics as

47 This is an example of the persistence of older forms of thought within new social relationships, but as Murray Levin's book shows, the increasing nonparticipation in United States elections is a result of hopelessness and cynicism among the disaffected and the empowered. The concept of universal suffrage has actually served a useful function of control of social energies in the modern state-capitalist or socialist. The twentieth century has witnessed an increasing disfunction of traditional representative electoral politics and an increasing disparity between their public rhetoric and actual socioeconomic
the stage upon which the argument and its resolution in cold war ideology took place, it is possible to see how quickly and artfully the dominant groups seized, rhetorically organized, and dramatized the historical circumstances with their clusters of ideas in order to secure their own agenda under the cover of an idealistic, humanitarian global program.

Foreign Policy

The primary strategy of political challengers is to blame the incumbents for the ills of society. This the Republicans could not do: United States society had never been in better shape, nor had it before been in a position of such global power. The general perception was that Roosevelt's New Deal and the Democratic administration had managed these benchmark achievements. But conservatives had to take over quickly, or the same Democrats and liberals, without the exigencies of war, would begin to erode and disperse the concentrations of profit and power.

circumstances and relationships. If it is no longer possible for non-dominant but politically major interests to have effect on or through traditional political systems, then the persistence of a belief in those systems has an ideological function. See Zinn, 109-119; see also Murray Levin, The Alienated Voter (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1960) and C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).
In situations of extreme urgency and fear, language use tends toward the extremes of meaning-making, in absolute, abstract dichotomies and polarizations. In this case, since the dangers couldn't immediately be proven to be within--democrats, labor, and the left had all been contributing participants and partners in wartime management and productivity\textsuperscript{48}--all the dichotomizing and polarizing energies of the political process were first projected externally and focused on the dangers--as defined by Stalin himself--of Soviet aggression.

The twenties red scare, with the inflated rhetoric of the media and the repressive actions of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer directed toward communists, radicals, aliens, immigrants, and labor, had prepared the audience well for the reception of an expanded version of the same drama after the wartime alliance with Russia was over. But the twenties scare did not yet entail the production of a totalizing polarization of Foreign Policy that would begin to be articulated after 1945 under the rubric of a cold war.\textsuperscript{49}

Since 1944 the domestic rhetorical elaboration of the Soviet threat had begun to take on a life of its own, deriving from real Soviet actions and words but disproportionate to these realities, even serving to

\textsuperscript{48} Barton J. Bernstein, "America in War and Peace," Twentieth-Century America, 354-55.

\textsuperscript{49} At the beginning of World War II, Secretary of State Cordell Hull's staff numbered twenty-one. Draper, "American Hubris," 40.
interpret them, and operating prematurely as a monolithic analysis not justified by the inconsistent complexities of daily international political operations. Aggressive communism was conveniently the negative and opposite term to the crucial conservative concepts of the period: United States global power, atomic weapons ownership and control, national security, and prosperity. As threatening opposite, it was utilized to occlude all the middle terms: negotiated, shared, and inter-related political and economic autonomies, arms control negotiation, active initiatives for regular communications among powers on all issues, and domestic socioeconomic reforms and empowerments. This initial splitting and projection of all difference onto an aggressive world-hungry other, received by an audience only too willing to have its anxieties efficiently contained, established the long-term and primary postwar importance of foreign over domestic policy and activity.

Such a priority of foreign over domestic interests established a hierarchy for political analysis, with the result that domestic concerns could be defined in terms of their relationship to foreign policies, producing a short-sighted and self-defeating neglect of internal divisions and contradictions that would come into play with increasing dissonance in the following years. As Michael Rogen notes, "in foreign policy, the nation as a whole and its interests are at stake; hence foreign policy may be included in the
'nongroup' sphere of politics," lending itself to moralistic formulations and supporting the silencing of conflicting views and alternative policies. Foreign policy can achieve a moralistic elaboration that remains relatively unquestioned by oppositional voices because decisions made secretly in a national security state have their effects over there, not here. Only in a misadventure or action of questionable legality does foreign policy come under any kind of public scrutiny and reality check, and the effects of this kind of challenge are prolonged and dispersed into tedium by hearings and juridical procedures that last years.

It is not that domestic policies in liberal democracies lack moralized explanations; it is just that domestic policies are at least in theory more subject to popular, dissenting, and oppositional participation in their formulation. If domestic policies could be made dependent upon and secondary to foreign policy, then even popular challenges or demands could be managed and contained by a rhetoric of national interest and national security.

Anti-Communism

The tendency of United States policy makers to project all difference onto an aggressive world-hungry other provided

50 Rogin, 21, 223, 266.
another even more effective means of silencing domestic dissent and opposition: anti-communism. It established a manichean structure of difference and exclusion that could be manipulated linguistically to absorb all internal political opposition--legally, illegally, and through the production of self-censorship through fear. The major task for conservatives in their drive to achieve control of national policy was the identification of all opposing or threatening groups with the demonized other. Since these groups represented those middle-term ideas which conservatives were increasingly valencing in the anti-communist lexicon as appeasement, the task in retrospect was relatively simple.

The Republicans formulated anti-communism as the primary political strategy in their successful drive for the recovery of national power in the elections of 1946, 1948, and 1952. The theme for the 1946 Congressional elections was Republicanism versus Communism, a moralizing and polarizing slogan the value of which conservative groups were quick to realize and utilize. The successes of the 1946 election established anti-communism, in various permutations, as a permanent conservative strategy for acquiring and securing political power for the rest of the century. It is important to bear in mind, in any consideration of the constitution of the domestic cold war mentality, the supporting, reinforcing, hyperbolizing and saturating role of the media, fed by anonymous "informed source" news releases from the FBI and
its Crime Records Division and from the House Un-American Activities Committee, as well as by the publications of J. Edgar Hoover himself. 51

The history of the formulation of anti-communism is primarily that of a rhetorical operation, with quite real effects, an operation that focused on the political order and could not have flourished in the absence of a dichotomizing foreign policy. The linguistic operation necessary to the unification of all groups sympathetic to or willing to forego criticism of the conservative agenda, and to the silencing of all others, was that of linking. The construction of a potentially infinite series of linked terms was dependent upon an initial linkage of communism with treason. Once this link was firmly established by a repetitive rhetorical sleight of words, dissent from liberals and the left could be linked to the (communist) treason of "intent to harm or overthrow." Long before this primary link was questionably but juridically established by Louis Budenz in the trial of eleven Communist Party leaders in 1949, Republicans, Hoover,

51 Even in 1952, after the extent of anti-communist irrationality was widely apparent, Peter Kihss justified media reporting of news releases as factual by saying: "For the newspapers Fort Monmouth has been a lesson that will not be quickly forgotten, but the reading public should understand that it is difficult if not impossible to ignore charges by Senator McCarthy just because they are usually proved exaggerated or false. The remedy lies with the reader." Quoted in Regin, 255. See also Caute, Aronson, Parenti, Powers, and Theoharis, The Boss.
the HUAC, and the media were making it real in daily language use, at least for political purposes at the national level.\textsuperscript{52} Richard Nixon's 1948 dramatically staged and televised representations of the pumpkin papers evidence he had secured in the Chambers-Hiss case prepared a popular audience for the widespread official use of the communist-espionage connection to silence political, intellectual, artistic, bureaucratic and pedagogical inquiry and dissent.\textsuperscript{53} Hiss's conviction in

\textsuperscript{52}Louis Budenz, an ex-communist government witness was given unusual latitude by the trial judge Harold Medina in the 1949 sedition trial of eleven Communist Party Leaders to establish the connection between domestic communism and revolutionary intent, including espionage. Budenz accomplished this identification not by testifying about illegal activities of individuals, but by interpreting the words of theoretical Marxist and Leninist texts, Stalin, and contemporary American communists. He was supported in this interpretation by two other ex-communists, Elizabeth Bentley, the "Red Spy Queen," and Whittaker Chambers. The eleven Communist Party leaders were convicted under the Smith Act for conspiracy and sent to prison for five years. The Supreme Court upheld this abrogation of the constitutional distinctions of the First Amendment and its own precedent of "clear and present danger" because of the "inflammatory nature of world conditions." It was not until 1957, when California Communist leaders on trial hired a constitutional lawyer to represent them, that the Supreme Court re-empowered the First Amendment distinctions between statements of belief and advocacy of illegal action. A year's investigation of the several hundred other people named by the ex-communist government witnesses produced no indictments, but by the mid-fifties some 150 other members of the Communist Party had been arrested, and another 150 non-native born Communists deported under the Smith Act because of the communist-treason equation. The CP leader William Foster's decision at the end of the 1949 trial for the Party leaders to go underground was the effective end of the Communist Party in the United States. Lader, 71-76, 86; see also Reuben, 120-199; and Powers, 294-6.

\textsuperscript{53}As the Congressional Doorkeeper William "Fishbait" Miller recounted in his memoirs concerning the discovery of the "pumpkin papers," "[Nixon] was so delighted with something that he had to share it. He said, 'I'm going to get on a steamship and you will be reading about it.
1950, though only for perjury in having denied knowing Whittaker Chambers, served to reinforce the notion of widespread and governmental domestic espionage. However, even then, less than one per cent of a national sample of the population in the early 1950s named communism as a concern, although 34% of the people interviewed said communism was a subject they had recently discussed. The first test-explosion by the Soviet Union of an atomic bomb had taken place in September of 1949. If by 1950 the people at large weren't yet worried about communists, there were enormous political pressures among those at the top levels of government to produce an explanation for United States loss of its main weapon and guarantor of world supremacy.

The extension of the primary link between communism and treason to form a circular triad or false syllogism based on the terms communism/treason/left was accomplished by an

I am going out to sea and they are going to send for me. You will understand when I get back, Fishbait!' He looked very elated and keyed up, as if he were dancing on wires. Even his eyes were dancing." Quoted in Theoharis, "Unanswered Questions: Chambers, Nixon, the FBI, and the Hiss Case," Beyond the Hiss Case, 277.

54 Regin, 224-25.

55 I don't think it is carrying a psychological analogy too far to say that the United States suffered a narcissistic wound, especially at official levels, from the Soviet test explosion of the atomic bomb. The wound was re-opened by the successful launching of Sputnik in 1957 and by the Soviet and Eastern European victories at the 1958 Olympics. These events were a serious challenge to United States concepts of superiority to a presumably or allegedly backward Soviet Union (I am grateful to Robert Gilliland for a conversation linking these three events as successive narcissistic blows to United States national image).
incremental and mutual interplay of rhetoric and events. Aided and abetted by the mainstream media, conservative anti-communists began a practice of serialization, the construction of repeated incremental translations and shifts from one order of terms to another, changing discontinuities into perceived tautologies, creating natural associations out of arbitrary ones, and thereby constructing identity linkages between communism and any groups dissenting from or likely to dissent from the conservative agenda: labor; the organized left; radicals; liberals; democrats; Jews; non-native-born citizens; aliens; proponents of and organizations devoted to civil rights and women's rights; social reformers and activists of any kind; and artists, intellectuals, and educators.

These identifications then worked to fragment organized and unorganized groups from within. Defensive behaviors of self-imposed censorship and leadership and membership purges rendered such organizations even more vulnerable to manipulation and control. Each one of the silenced groups has its own history in the face of mounting anti-communism,

56 The links were accomplished by changing non sequiturs into tautological articulations, disjunctive shifts that subsume differing meanings and support the drives to meaning, order and dominion. Kenneth Burke maintains that all forms of expression are either tautologies or non sequiturs. If this is true, then astute reading of the political world would require vigilance for identifying both forms of meaning, which generally appear as logical articulations, and for attempting to uncover the differences they elide or occlude. See Burke, Rhetoric of Religion, 128.
but it is revealing to analyze these political histories (which are usually written in terms of personalities and events) with a play of forces in mind: words making value divisions among people who then work without legal coercion to disassociate themselves from those words (and those "other" people).

The first to succumb were those oppositional voices with the greatest organized power and also the greatest political vulnerability: the democratic administration and labor. The Truman administration came out of the war facing the enormous responsibility of articulating domestic and foreign policy. The Republicans re-articulated this charge almost immediately into the problem of seizing and holding domestic political power, a task requiring a different expenditure of energies from those of policy-making. In this case the democratic position quickly and unnecessarily became defensive. Despite Truman's liberal rhetoric, by February of 1946 he had replaced Roosevelt's cabinet with conservatives, except for Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace, for whose resignation he asked in September of that year when Wallace remained critical of developing policy.

The conservative and Republican strategy increasingly subjected the administration to a squeeze play between the left and the right, thus keeping it off balance and pushing it into contradictory positions and actions that were ultimately self-destructive. Business organizations like the
Chamber of Commerce played a major anti-communist role in the successful 1946 Republican congressional campaign. In September of 1946, just before the midterm elections, the Chamber distributed 683,000 copies of its *Communist Infiltration in the United States*, written with the assistance of the FBI, and in January 1947 a revised report called *Communists Within the Government* appeared, followed by *Communists Within Labor*. In December of 1946 the National Association of Manufacturers allocated six million dollars for anti-communist advertisements, and continued to spend several million dollars a year to reinforce the idea that labor's program was Moscow-produced.

The Republican victory of 1946 included the elections of Nixon and McCarthy to the House and the Senate, and the campaign worked to establish the syllogism of liberals as red. By 1947 liberal anti-communists, New Dealers, and labor anti-communists had reformed themselves into the Americans for Democratic Action, in support of Truman's foreign policy. Rogin suggests that democrats and liberals had a weakened will to resist the onslaught of anti-communism. They were

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58 Lader, 24; Caute, 349.
having to adjust to the loss of the Popular Front, the New Deal, and the wartime Soviet alliance by developing new attitudes and policies. But the old Popular Front forms of thought made them feel vaguely guilty of accusations by anti-communists, and thus both vulnerable to and eager to avoid attack.59

Truman's response to Republican charges of softness toward communism was rapid in preparation for the 1948 Presidential campaign. He set up in November of 1946 a Commission on Employee Loyalty to suggest bipartisan ways of dealing with the alleged communists in government. This resulted in the March 1947 Executive Order 9835, instituting the Federal Employee Loyalty Program and creating a board with unchecked powers to investigate employees for Loyalty. Loyalty was the first of several crucial secondary and supporting key terms in the elaboration of anti-communism. It was a concept, like patriotism, without content and impossible to define, discoverable only through a negation dependent upon an arbitrarily constructed breach of the concept. Under Executive Order 9835 Loyalty could only be enacted through written denial of affiliation with organizations suspected of being on the left and thus vulnerable to communist infiltration.

The concept of Loyalty then generated the production of the "blacklist." The Loyalty Order empowered Attorney

59 Rogin, 256.
General Tom Clark to use the list as a rhetorical and practical method for linking left organizations to communism and treason and thus for containing dissent through prosecution. These powers were extended by the McCarran Internal Security Act in 1950, a successful repetition of the unsuccessful 1948 Mundt-Nixon Bill requiring registration of all Communist Party members as well as members of all listed organizations. With the introduction of this extra-judicial list backed by the McCarran Act, Hoover's long-term accumulation of secret files on people and organizations likely to commit espionage came into play ("likely" being a linking word itself, rhetorically and subjectively establishing identity between two non-identical entities).

Lists were also in 1950 McCarthy's method of publicly linking and implicating individual names in shifting and unreliable quantities with little respect for facts or human beings. Over four million federal employees were eventually checked for Loyalty, resulting in the loss of jobs by 378 people, with no evidence in any instance of any form of espionage. The accomplishment of the Loyalty Order was not to be found in these numbers; it lay in the production of an empty discriminatory concept Loyalty. By 1950 there were loyalty oath ordinances in thirty-three states as well as in innumerable local communities.60

60 Lader, 76-7,79. See also Caute.
By 1946 Truman had irrevocably cast his lot with conservative anti-communists in an attempt to maintain his position. In the 1948 presidential campaign he effectively displaced any remaining taint of liberalism/communism onto Henry Wallace and his third-party Progressives, while moving rhetorically to the left himself in terms of labor, civil rights, and a Vinson peace mission to Moscow. This move proved to be solely a rhetorical strategy. Following the election Truman's administration became instead increasingly pro-business, hostile with regard to labor and civil rights, and militant in cold war foreign policy. And by 1952 the conservatives under Eisenhower were firmly in control of the national agenda.

Within labor organizations the pressures were great to consolidate their wartime gains, and to transform expanded formal and instrumental relationships into positions of real authority and political power commensurate to their function in the postwar economy. They required leadership and programs that focused on domestic workplace and social issues, and they needed to negotiate new contracts with management providing for worker participation in the postwar national prosperity.

Two factors undermined the political strength derived from their actual role in national productivity. One was the predominantly vertical and corporatist mentality of labor. Corporate policies of liberal paternalism undercut
organizational efforts toward a more horizontal trans-corporate collective awareness and activism. Labor was also caught in the same squeeze play as the democratic administration, between conservative business and industrial interests and what was being elaborated as the left-communist threat to domestic security. The conservative purpose was to win labor's uncritical partnership with business and government for the cold war, meaning for military production, expansion into foreign markets, and the Marshall Plan—all of which meant a focus away from labor's real issues in favor of a continuing "sacrifice-for-unity" rhetoric of the war years.

1946 was the year of confrontation. After bargaining failed, the railroad, mine, maritime, automobile, electrical and steel workers scheduled and began strikes in what was to become the greatest period ever for labor's assertion of demands based on its actual and crucial socioeconomic position in the United States. Truman responded with a "draft labor" bill in May of 1946, authorizing government seizure of vital industries, and the imprisonment of striking union leaders, and he established fact-finding committees to take over bargaining when deemed necessary by the administration. The media had established the link between labor's requirements, strikes, and communism in hyperbolic headlines during the red scare of the twenties. Now that rhetorical connection was again pervasive in mainstream publications.
The Communist Party under William Foster's hard line leadership was in effect complicit with the conservative program, for in maintaining allegiance to Moscow, it offered neither practical, political support to workers--the people it was designed to serve--nor a realistic alternative to a conservative business/labor partnership. The rhetorical collapsing of the left into communism mitigated the effects of remaining left voices encouraging labor to hold to its own purposes. Labor thus began, with the help of its own major leaders, and despite important and local exceptions, to reorganize itself for a business partnership. It jettisoned workplace and management-sharing issues in favor of wage packages, removed communists from boards and positions of leadership, voted anti-communist and anti-socialist resolutions, and gave discretion over local funds and bargaining positions to central authorities.

Truman's actions and the 1947 passage of the Taft-Hartley Act, to which labor failed to mount effective opposition, promoted a relatively rapid collapse of the labor left despite its quantifiable position of bargaining strength with management. Taft-Hartley eliminated closed shops, allowed Presidential use of injunctions, and banned sympathy strikes, mass picketing, and secondary boycotts, undercutting and fracturing labor solidarity entirely. It also made unions responsible for damages by wildcat strikers, forcing unions to police their own workers. Section 9-H required
that all union officers sign annual affidavits disavowing Communist Party membership or beliefs. With the confusion of communist and left beliefs operative by 1946, 9-H produced a degree of self-censorship that deprived the remaining left voices and issues of an effective political base.

Labor leadership cooperated with Taft-Hartley requirements and restrictions, using the cold war as the rationale for its actions. Business had found a way to have the economic benefits and controls of a war without a war, by rhetorical construction. Walter Reuther had erased the communist-associated left from the UAW board by 1947, and Philip Murray had George Marshall as the keynote speaker for a CIO convention that same year. By the 1948 convention the CIO was actively silencing and eliminating effective left membership; Reuther demanded of delegates attending that convention, "Are you going to be loyal to the CIO or loyal to the Communist Party?"61

By 1950 eleven major unions had significantly reduced active left membership, and all workers had been successfully deprived, by legislation, executive actions, and by the defection of their own leaders, of an opportunity for the construction of a partnership with management, of a relationship that reflected labor's actual contributions to productivity rather than hegemonic power relationships based

61 Lader, 56.
on paternalistic exploitation of workers by management. By 1953 overall union membership was below five million, and when the CIO merged with the AFL in 1955 membership was still declining.\(^{62}\)

The demise of the Communist Party is closely linked with the eradication of the left from the unions. The unions were the party's power base, and its only chance for effective participation in the United States political process. But under Foster's leadership the party had maintained a rigid stance since the spring of 1945: opposition to the cold war and the Marshall Plan, and no deviation from the Stalinist internationalist line. Foster's intransigence isolated it from all forms of practical domestic politics and made the party a relatively easy victim of domestic anti-communist silencing tactics. Foster began his own internal purges for "white chauvinism" in 1948, and took the leadership underground after the conviction of eleven party leaders in 1949, thus eliminating the CPUSA from the domestic scene.

The HUAC began its Hollywood hearings in 1947, the first move of an extended national assault against intellectuals and artists. This group wasn't so easily silenced--as a group--as Democrats, liberals, and labor; many faced psychological and economic hardships for themselves and

their families in order to maintain the principle and substance of their intellectual freedom. But the extent to which many converted to patriotic ex- and anti-communism, not through fear, evasion, or even threatened loss of a job--but through a high-principled conviction based on bitter disillusionment with Stalinism, requires a complex historical imagination to comprehend.

As a political forum for their intellectual and cultural work after 1950 many of these patriots chose the American Committee for Cultural Freedom and its parent organization the Congress for Cultural Freedom—a non-grass roots organization of artists and intellectuals which later was found to have been initiated and funded by the CIA. The shift by ex-communists, predominantly New York Jewish intellectuals, from radical left critical work to pro-American affirmations of extreme cold war rhetoric and policies was a product of the conjunction of the Holocaust and Stalinism with United States government and media terrorism against the left, especially the non-native-born left.

These ex-communists chose to align themselves actively and eloquently with "our country and our culture" as a defensive move not unlike that of many democrats, liberals, and union members.63 They engaged in anti-communist

rhetorical attacks against former colleagues, while retaining the appearance if not the reality of doing critical work. Their attempts to continue their work as artists and intellectuals in the service of their country were compromised by a defensive allegiance that blinded them to the official oppressions and abuses that were occurring in "our country." By defining totalitarianism and communism as dialectical elaborations of liberalism, they made a putatively logical connection reinforcing the same rhetorical connections being established by conservative anti-communists, thus playing into the hands of the larger betrayal by our country of its people.64

Some, like Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, managed eventually to maintain a more critical distance from compromising alignments, thus keeping open a space for careful dissent.65 There were other men and women called before HUAC or Loyalty Boards who spoke truthfully and went

64 Christopher Lasch, "The Cultural Cold War: A Short History of the Congress for Cultural Freedom," in Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History, ed. Barton J. Bernstein (New York: Random House, 1968), 322-359. At the first meeting of the Congress in 1950 the "end to ideology" was announced in the interests of opposing communism, socialism, and domestic liberal intellectualism as "ideology," while claiming a pure rationality untainted by ideology for themselves. Their rationality was expressed in the polarized and reductive diction of ex-communism, anti-communism, and demonized cold war politics. Lasch notes the "amazing tenacity of the Bolshevik habit of mind" among those who now rejected Bolshevism, as well as the elitist entrenchment of anti-bourgeois polemic (327).

to jail for refusing to implicate their associates; many lost their jobs over loyalty issues; many stayed safe by talking, naming names, and even actively becoming part of the propaganda machine. Others, wittingly or unwittingly, embraced de-politicized belief systems and practices, such as formalism, abstract expressionism in the visual arts, new criticism in literature, phenomenology and existentialism in philosophy, and a claim to rigorous "objectivity" in the social and natural sciences, thus enabling the increasing academic and business/industrial/military commodification of higher education, critical work, and theoretical science.66

This conservative anti-communist or de-politicized constellation of interests and voices was in place by the time McCarthy inaugurated his career on March 9, 1950, in a talk given to the Republican Women's Club in Wheeling, West Virginia: "I hold here in my hand a list" of 205, or 57, or 81--the exact number varied in reports--names of State Department employees "who have been named as members of the Communist Party and members of a spy ring" [italics mine].67 The fundamental political work of organizing the right, excluding or silencing the left, and quashing dissent under the sign of anti-communism had been accomplished by 1950,

when ninety-nine per cent of the American people did not worry about communists.68

Was the production of anti-communism so complete that the people stopped worrying? More probably, common-sense understanding of the populist nature of anti-communism notwithstanding, a pervasive fear of communists among the people was not necessary for a manipulated anti-communism to succeed, at the political leadership level, in securing conservative control of the construction of a cold war agenda.

For forty years this agenda has remained the dominant program for United States policy under cover of its humanitarian perfecting myth, regardless of its inadequacy and costs to domestic needs, regardless of the actual historical conditions of multiple autonomies and local nationalist and often democratic revolutionary movements, and regardless of the disparity between the explanatory rhetoric and the motivations and effects of United States actions and interventions in the world.69 As Freud said

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68 Regin, 224-25.
69 Draper attributes to the Truman Doctrine the virtues of having been a specific, local, pragmatic program only later extended into a global foreign policy. His language of pragmatism, however, ignores some of the other textually discovered motivations and contradictions for the Truman Doctrine: 1) the kind of regime Truman wanted to protect the Greeks against described the right-wing government for which he was asking support; 2) the armed rebellion Truman attributed to communists was internal and Greek, with support from Yugoslavian communists; 3) Clark Clifford and Dean Acheson thought Truman should refer (in his Truman Doctrine speech to Congress) to the threat to United States vital
about splitting and projection, the cold war has indeed been an extremely costly means of avoiding conflict, one that has often seemed oblivious to past realities as well as blind to present and future possibilities.70

III

EMBEDDED STORY

Ownership, Secrecy, and Spies

One of the keystones of cold war policy, especially from 1945 to 1949, was the premise of United States ownership of the atomic bomb and of the secret of its production. This belief made possible a certain absoluteness that prevailed in the diction and decisions of policy makers during those years. Whether it was an absoluteness of political power, or absoluteness of military force, it supported reckless talk about possible courses of action for the United States in protecting and pursuing its interests. It was also the basis for the death sentences given the Rosenbergs by the trial judge in 1951, as well as for Eisenhower's denial of clemency in 1953.

Ownership is a concept not limited to capitalist countries when it concerns military and industrial technology and production. Ownership of the atomic bomb, however, which involved complicated questions of ownership of collaboratively and internationally generated epistemology and technology, was a concept difficult to maintain in theory
as well as in practice. It was maintained, however, in terms of secrecy and monopoly before the Soviet test explosion in 1949, and thereafter in terms of quantitative and qualitative superiority.

The concept was a natural if illogical one—especially in the months immediately following Hiroshima and Nagasaki—to the country which had financed and directed the development of the atomic bomb. But in the next few years, despite all knowledgeable arguments to the contrary, monopoly ownership and secrecy were somehow reformulated, represented, and used as the political and military key to the success of the United States in the cold war struggle for world dominance in the name of freedom. The United States would own and manage this particular piece of epistemology and technology, this time responsibly, in the name of world peace, while preventing the aggressive and demonized other, intent on the conquest of the world, from acquiring it. This public rhetoric of peace masked the diary entries, memoranda, and policy papers that dealt with expected war in terms of pre-emptive atomic strikes against the Soviet Union.¹

¹ The nature of the atomic bomb remained incomprehensible to most people, even or especially at the highest levels of government. The Schneir/Schneir history of the Rosenberg case reports two diary entries made by David E. Lilienthal, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, in 1949. Following a meeting with the Joint Chiefs of Staff he reported: "The view of some of the military is that war is inevitable. The top, however, do not go so far; they believe it's 'likely' in a relatively short time, four to five years. After it comes we must use the atomic bomb, as we can't hold Europe without it. . . ." [They] regard
Ownership, Secrecy, and Spies

Ownership and Secrecy

The production of the concepts of ownership and secrecy has a specific history. After Pearl Harbor, when Roosevelt and his advisers decided to provide the resources for the secret development in the United States under military control of a useable atomic bomb, he did so at the urging of refugee scientists and engineers from Germany and Eastern Europe. These scientists feared a German first use of such a weapon, the basic physics of which had been discovered and published in 1939 by Neils Bohr and Enrico Fermi, as part of open, collaborative, international work in atomic physics. Russian scientists had participated in this collaborative

the next four to five years the most critical in the entire history of the country." A diary entry a few days later following a discouraging conversation with Senator Brien McMahon, chairman of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy, reads "What he is talking is the inevitability of war with the Russians, and what he says adds up to one thing: blow them off the face of the earth, quick, before they do the same to us--and we haven't much time" (432). Chief arms reduction negotiator Paul Nitze writes in his 1989 memoir that during the fifties he was an early advocate of "limited" nuclear wars, and that in the instance of the Berlin blockade he argued for considering a pre-emptive strategic strike. "This, I believed, could assure us victory in at least a military sense in a series of nuclear exchanges." Paul H. Nitze, with Ann M. Smith and Steven L. Rearden, From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision, A Memoir (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), p.204.
effort. In significant numbers the Manhattan Project scientists gradually and radically changed their thinking about the military use of atomic energy as they came closer to the realization of their concerted work. During the war and in the immediate postwar period some of these scientists were among the most urgent and eloquent voices in the argument over postwar policies.

But placing them under military control and the constraints of absolute secrecy had unforeseen results which militated against their ability to engage persuasively in policy matters. They were effectively commodified by this action, as producers with little say about the conditions or uses of their production. Not only was free and open discussion among the scientists themselves curtailed, but the military and security lines of command cut them off from any kind of exchange with politicians, informed people, the media, and policy makers. This also meant that the politicians and policy makers were cut off from the benefits of open inquiry and critique from informed people outside their fields of action as crucial decisions were being made.

Most of the scientists recognized the threats to scientific enterprise and the dangers to world affairs accomplished by this compartmentalization of their work, but the damage had been done at their behest, and in the interests of national security, against which there was no effective argument. So their ability to intervene concerning
the uses of their own work--of which only they recognized the full potential--was badly constrained just at the time there were the most urgent reasons for them to be heard. By the end of the war, when some of the secrecy constraints were lifted and many scientists began to lobby actively for arms control negotiations and international scientific and technological cooperation, their commodification had already succeeded in converting them--in the minds of politicians--into political innocents with limited and strictly instrumental use values.

They were heard, though, some of them even before the bomb had been developed and tested. Neils Bohr was the foremost among scientists at that time to perceive the institution and practice of science as a "profoundly political force in the world," and among the first to see the full political implications of atomic weapons. Without invitation he lobbied actively with Roosevelt and Churchill and other statesmen to persuade them of the radical transformation atomic energy would make in world politics. As Robert Oppenheimer explained it,

[Bohr] was clear that one could not have an effective control of . . . atomic energy . . . without a very open world. . . . The very fact that knowledge is itself the basis for civilization
points directly to openness as the way to overcome the present crisis.²

Bohr argued at every opportunity that the atomic bomb was the ultimate occasion for the development of an open world, a recommendation which translated specifically into informing the Russians of the work in progress and involving them in negotiations on postwar arms control. In retrospect he wrote, in 1950,

It appeared to me that the very necessity of a concerted effort to forestall such ominous threats to civilization would offer quite unique opportunities to bridge international divergencies.³

Bohr began his urgent diplomatic missions before the bomb had been developed, and he was joined by seven scientists working on the atomic project at the University of Chicago who served on the Metallurgical Laboratory's Committee on Social and Political Implications of Atomic Energy. They issued on June 11, 1945, what became known as the Franck Report in which they emphasized that atomic

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³ Rhodes, 534.
weapons could not possibly remain a monopoly for more than a few years and urged action toward a postwar international agreement on the control of such weapons. They anticipated that Russia and other nations would have the bomb within a few years, "even if we should make every attempt to conceal [our steps]." After they and other policy makers of like mind had failed to deter Truman from using the bomb on Japan, urging instead a demonstration explosion, they took their appeal to the public. As Selig Hecht of Columbia University said, "If there was one great secret we gave it away in July 1945." The chief assistant to Major Leslie Groves, head of the Manhattan Project, had spoken for all of them when he said after observing the Alamogordo test explosion,

All seemed to feel that they had been present at the birth of a new age--The Age of Atomic Energy--and felt their profound responsibility to help in guiding into right channels the tremendous forces which had been unlocked for the first time in history.  

As can be seen from Bohr's, the Committee's, and other scientists' concerns, their imperative was one of

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4 Schneir/Schneir, 33.
5 Ibid., 37.
6 Ibid., 33.
responsibility—both to the real issues of atomic energy development and to the global human economy. The critical issue upon which their argument turned was that of secrecy, the key term for the production of the Rosenberg story, as well as for the development of the national security state with all its economies and apparatuses of information production. The thing the scientists agreed did not exist became the justifying term for the inauguration of a newly systematized federal government deprivation of individual rights in the interests of national security. It is particularly revealing to read the documents, letters, and speeches prepared and delivered by the scientists in every available forum following the war; they show the complex realities that had to be masked, obfuscated, and denied symbolically in order to produce an irrational, tyrannical, and far-reaching concept of secrecy.

The scientists were not alone in their assessment of the inadequacy of secrecy as an explanatory concept for policy. In a September 1945 memorandum to the President, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, probably the most knowledgeable non-scientist in the administration, noted that without a cooperative agreement with the Russians a secret arms race "of a rather desperate character" would develop; that the Soviet Union would be able to produce bombs on its own, and that our refusal to negotiate would lead to relations between the two countries becoming perhaps "irretrievably
embittered." He advised that we agree to pool our knowledge, stop the production of atomic weapons, and "encourage the development of atomic power for peaceful and humanitarian purposes." 7

On 2 October, 1945, in the New York Herald Tribune, Walter Lippmann, agreeing with Hanson Baldwin of the New York Times, wrote:

[I]f the secret cannot be kept, it is unnecessary to argue whether it ought to be kept. Moreover, it would be in the highest degree dangerous to suppose we were keeping the secret if in fact we were not. For that could only give us, as it has already given many, a false sense of security and a false sense of our own power . . . How then can we best protect mankind against the terrible possibility of this new scientific knowledge? In the last analysis, only by making the knowledge so universal that it would be impossible for any government to perfect in secret some new devilish application of it. . . . The object of our policy cannot be to keep the secret. That cannot be done. To those who contend that we should guard this secret, we must, I believe, reply that on the contrary the

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7 Reuben, 104-5. See also Godfrey Hodgson, Biography of Henry Stimson (New York: Viking, 1988).
safest course is to guard against its being a secret anywhere. 8

In December 1945 the Oak Ridge scientists delivered this statement:

Let no one mistake us; we do not want to give the bomb away. Rather we want to take it out of the control of any one nation--including our own. 9

As late as 1949, even after the 1948 Republican Congressional victory and after the first Soviet test explosion, the Congressional Joint Committee on Atomic Energy acknowledged the fallacy of the secrecy/ownership illusion:

Actually, the basic knowledge underlying the explosive release of atomic energy--and it would fill a library--never has been the property of one nation. On the contrary, nuclear physicists throughout the world (including those who live behind the iron curtain) were thoroughly familiar with the theoretical advances which paved the way for practical development of an atomic bomb. . . . The Soviet Union, for its part, possesses some of

8 Ibid., 7-8.
9 Ibid., 14.
the world's most gifted scientists . . . men whose abilities and whose understanding of the fundamental physics behind the bomb only the unrealistic were prone to underestimate.\(^{10}\)

An International News Service Washington dateline in December of 1949 reported that

The Atomic Energy Commission Friday bared secret documentary proof that Russia has known the scientific secrets of the Atom-bomb manufacture since 1940, the year the United States began attempts to develop the missile.\(^{11}\)

Truman in his first public statement about the bomb had said that the United States, Great Britain and Canada "do not intend to reveal the secret."\(^{12}\) There is documentation that the Truman administration had established the secrecy/ownership policy as a primary operating principle for national security and foreign affairs as early as September 1945.\(^{13}\) But for the next five years there was the appearance

\(^{10}\) Reuben, 1. United States policy makers successfully maintained the illusion--until Sputnik in 1957--that the Soviet Union was a peasant economy without the theoretical, technological, or industrial resources to produce a bomb.

\(^{11}\) Wexley, 16.

\(^{12}\) Reuben, 108.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 104-7.
of a real discussion: scientists and journalists published articles, sat on advisory commissions, visited Congressmen and other policy makers, and spoke before civic groups and at colleges and universities. Joined by some policy advisers and government officials, they were successful in the bitter and crucial struggle to secure civilian control of atomic energy development. They continued to speak on behalf of negotiations and open inquiry until the Soviet test explosion in 1949 delivered such a wound to national self-esteem that "responsibility" in the political mind took on an opposite valence from that advocated by the scientists.

The immediate response--chauvinistic, proprietary, and outraged--was a demand to find the spies who had stolen the bomb. The public and policy-making mind had been well prepared for the narrative of a domestic Atomic Spy Ring by the monopoly ownership concept. As the scientist Edward U. Condon, the director of the Bureau of Standards, had predicted in 1946:

It is sinister indeed how one evil step leads to another. Having created an air of suspicion and mistrust, there will be persons among us who think other nations can know nothing except what is learned by espionage. So, when other countries make atom bombs, these persons will cry 'treason' at our scientists, for they will find it
inconceivable that another country could make a bomb in any other way except by aid from Americans.\textsuperscript{14}

The Atomic Spy Ring

The other major component in the construction of ideal readers for the Rosenberg story was the production of the concept of The Soviet Atomic Spy Ring. In February 1946 Canadian newspapers reported a sensational story of a Canadian spy ring involved in trading atomic energy secrets. Eventually twenty-six people were named and arrested, six of whom were finally convicted for self-confessed and undocumented acts of minor espionage not having to do with atomic energy.\textsuperscript{15} The Canadian Prime Minister told Parliament five weeks after the story broke, "This espionage business has not arisen out of the atomic bomb in any way or secrecy in connection with it."\textsuperscript{16}

In March of that same year the British physicist Allan Nunn May, a former member of the Canadian Research Council,

\textsuperscript{15} One of these six people was convicted on her admission of having discussed the Spanish Civil War and the second front in Europe with a member of the Canadian Communist Party in 1939. Reuben, 45-49.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 25.
confessed when questioned by British Intelligence to having given atomic energy--not atomic bomb--information to a foreign individual on principle, believing that "it was necessary to convey general information on atomic energy and make sure it was taken seriously."\textsuperscript{17} It was assumed that May was part of the so-called Canadian Atomic Spy Ring, but no evidence for that has appeared. May had not worked on the atomic bomb, and no officials--American, British, or Canadian--considered it possible that he knew enough to reveal any information about its development. He was sentenced to ten years and served six.

True to its practice of reporting charges and allegations as fact, the United States media picked up the Canadian story when it first broke at its most sensational "informed source" stage of narrative, and continued to base articles on those claims, ignoring the subsequent failure in Canada to produce evidence or convictions. It was reported throughout the United States that this Canadian spy ring, despite no supporting testimony or indictments, was evidence of a huge Soviet atomic espionage network operating in Canada, the United States, and Britain, thus linking communism to espionage. The day after the story appeared in Canadian papers, the United Press dispatch across the country read:

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, 98.
Rep. John Rankin, Democrat of Mississippi, said tonight that a "Communist spy ring had been uncovered in Canada that extends throughout the U.S. and is working through various Communist front organizations." Mr. Rankin, a member of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, said the Committee was "on the trail" of the Communist spies.\textsuperscript{18}

In the same month, Time magazine ran an editorial stating that

It took no imagination to visualize what kind of a Soviet network was operating in much larger nations, like the U.S. and Britain. One source, in Washington, said that the FBI could crack down at any moment on 1,500 irresponsible secret-peddlers in the U.S. Such a crack-down was probably not far away.\textsuperscript{19}

Such a crack-down was quite far away. It has yet to occur. But The Soviet Atomic Spy Ring became a transcendent signified requiring its historical narrative fulfillment,
especially for those whose various interests it served, those dominant interests whose well-being depended on the promulgation of the cold war. It served the Republicans and the HUAC in their battle against Truman,20 it served Hoover's personal ambitions and paranoias,21 it served the members of the military who were actively lobbying for war preparations, and it served business and industrial interests whose investments were also based on arms escalation. Since the media served these interests, it was in their interest to keep reporting the story as it was released by these people's representative informed sources, sometimes even with a modicum of critical awareness. As Cyrus Sulzberger reported in the New York Times in March, 1946,

[T]he momentum of pro-Soviet feeling worked up during the war to support the Grand Alliance had continued too heavily after the armistice. This made it difficult for the Administration to carry out the stiffer diplomatic policy required now.

20 Press release from J. Parnell Thomas in September 1948: "The silence [of the executive branch] up to now as to the existence of that conspiracy [to give away the "secret" of the atomic bomb] and what it sought to accomplish has been tantamount to a representation to the American people that espionage against the development of the atom bomb just did not exist. A representation such as this in a free country, where such representation is palpably at variance with the facts, is un-American." Quoted in Reuben, 144.

21 One major ramification of the concept of The Spy Ring was the emergence of the FBI as a policy-making branch of the US government. See Reuben, 114.
For this reason . . . a campaign was worked up to obtain a better psychological balance of public opinion to permit the Government to adopt a harder line.22

There was of course active Soviet espionage—before, during, and after the war, as there is Soviet espionage today. It had in 1944 a sharp focus on military secrets, most certainly the atomic bomb. The Communist Party USA was organized and directed from Moscow as part of an international movement. According to some former members it functioned as a recruiting body for Soviet espionage agents, among other legal social and political activities. Because of Hoover's unalterable and blanket association of communist party membership with espionage and sabotage, the FBI maintained files on thousands of people discovered to be members of the Party and of affiliated organizations.

But some FBI files were the product of United States intelligence (espionage) and of specific allegations of espionage by former party members. The HUAC testimony of Whittaker Chambers in 1939, and then that of Louis Budenz and Elizabeth Bentley in 1945 greatly supplemented and augmented the information developed by Canadian, British, and domestic intelligence work. But a federal grand jury especially

impaneled in 1947 to investigate the hundreds of spies named by Budenz and Bentley disbanded a year later with no indictments. The Bentley/Budenz/Chambers information may have led Hoover to believe that a gigantic espionage network was operative in the United States following the war, but no network has been discovered, and no documents supporting the claim have never been released, for national security reasons.\textsuperscript{23}

In 1956 Attorney General Brownell at the FBI's suggestion had his department look into bringing all "members" of the spy ring before a grand jury where they might be forced to testify under immunity. After investigation of FBI documents, the department concluded that "additional information sufficient to warrant further prosecutive proceedings has not been developed. Investigation of all logical leads has, so far, failed to produce any appreciable results."\textsuperscript{24} In 1957 the entire project was abandoned, but the story continues even today to operate as the ur-narrative for Soviet atomic espionage in the United States.

By the time of the test explosion of Russia's first atomic bomb in August 1949, the stage was set for the Rosenberg story to play itself out in the way that it did.

\textsuperscript{23} See Reuben, ch. 11 and 12, 16-110, for a thorough and detailed history of each of the abortive spy cases following the war.

\textsuperscript{24} Quoted in Schneir/Schneir, 478.
The imaginative narrative of United States ownership of the secret of the atomic bomb had been rudely interrupted on August 29, 1949, not by the realities of international epistemological and technological development, but by secrecy's counter-narrative, Red Atomic Spies. A thoroughly contextualized reading of the ensuing Rosenberg story, with special attention to its managing images, themes, and tones as well as to the metanarrative commentary of FBI documents and relevant historiographies, suggests that the controlling narrative shift for their story was not from raw data to coherent story, but the other way around: an organizing principle generated its supporting narrative. This principle was the complex cold war anti-communist national security state, with all its political, social, and economic determinations.

By 1949 industries (the military industrial complex, exporting manufacturers, and the media, among others), government agencies and political groups (the internal and external surveillance apparatuses, special congressional committees, Republicans and other conservative and liberal politicians), and institutions (the legal system to some extent, public education, the Atomic Energy Commission) began literally to make their livings from the narrative, economic,
and political enactments of this overdetermined and dichotomized concept of the national security state.\textsuperscript{25}

In order to dramatize the arbitrary uses to which ownership and secrecy were put for the official Rosenberg story, it is worth repeating a number of high-level and contradictory responses to the first Soviet atomic bomb test which were compiled by Walter and Miriam Schneir for their Rosenberg history, \textit{Invitation to an Inquest}.\textsuperscript{26} Truman's announcement on September 23 of the Soviet test explosion contained this realistic assessment contradicting his own administration's chosen policy of bomb ownership and secrecy:

\begin{quote}
Ever since atomic energy was first released by man, the eventual development of this new force by other nations was to be expected. This probability has always been taken into account by us. Nearly four years ago I pointed out that "scientific opinion appears to be practically unanimous that the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{25} Daniel Isaacson, Doctorow's narrator in \textit{Book of Daniel}, notices this same phenomenon: "No matter what is laid down there will be people to put their lives on it. Soldiers will instantly appear, fall into rank, and be ready to die for it. And scientists who are happy to direct their research toward it. And keen-witted academics who in all rationality develop the truth of it. And poets who find their voice in proclaiming the personal feeling of it. And in every house in the land the muscles of the face will arrange in smug knowledge of it. And people will go on and make their living from it. And the religious will pray for a just end to it, in terms satisfactory to it (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), 311-12.

\textsuperscript{26} Schneir/Schneir, 52-54.
essential theoretical knowledge upon which the
discovery is based is already widely known. There
is also substantial agreement that foreign research
can come abreast of our present theoretical
knowledge in time."27

General Eisenhower agreed with Truman:

[T]he news we have been given by the President
merely confirms scientific predictions. I see no
reason why a development that was anticipated years
ago should cause any revolutionary change in our
thinking or in our actions.28

The New York Times argued

[T]here is no valid reason for surprise at this
development. . . . Only those Americans who failed
to pay attention to what was said of the atomic
bomb by the men who knew most about it--namely, the
men who made it--could ever have believed that we
possessed a permanent and exclusive monopoly of
this destructive weapon.29

28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
But Senator Karl Mundt's press release stated

It now appears that earlier and prevailing laxity in safeguarding this country against Communist espionage has permitted what were once the secrets of our atomic bomb to fall into the hands of America's only potential enemy.\(^{30}\)

And Representative Richard Nixon of the HUAC stated for the media that Russia's atomic know-how was "hastened" by the Truman Administration's failure to act against Red spies in the United States.

If the President says the American people are entitled to know all the facts--I feel the American people are also entitled to know the facts about the espionage ring which was responsible for turning over information on the atom bomb to agents of the Russian government.\(^{31}\)

Hoover's response was to set into operation the FBI machinery to "find the thieves."\(^{32}\)

\(^{30}\) Ibid.


The Official Story

Hoover's program for the identification of unknown spies began in Manhattan and reached to Los Alamos and California. The Search for the "Unknown Subject," the person responsible for stealing the secret of the atomic bomb, began with the atomic scientists. Among those investigated were Hans Bethe, Richard Feynman, Edward Teller, Victor Weisskopf, Philip Morrison, and George Kistiakowski, some of whom were Nobel Prize recipients for physics and scientific policy advisers to Truman and later Eisenhower. Several hundred suspects were identified from the wartime Los Alamos project. No espionage activities were found. A concurrent and overlapping investigation began when British Manhattan Project physicist Klaus Fuchs confessed in February of 1950 to having given the Soviet Union information on the atomic bomb project through an American courier. When the FBI identified a suspect for this role who confessed to being Fuchs's courier, Fuchs altered his testimony to fit the suspect Harry Gold's description and the FBI had the beginning of what would eventually become the official Rosenberg story, the one which ended with their deaths.34

33 "Unknown Subject" was the name given to the FBI Los Alamos investigation. Schneir/Schneir, 436.
34 For a discussion of Harry Gold's extraordinary imaginative life and narrative capabilities, see pages 133-37 below.
Early Drafts

The case is a necessary by-product of the atomic age. Let us hope that it will serve to supply the democracies of the world with some significant lessons. Irving Saypol\(^{35}\)

Choosing an historical or chronological starting point for the story is already a positioned interpretive act, but in keeping with my chosen genre of literary history, I will begin with the first "writing" of the Rosenberg story unfolded in time to a public audience: a list of events in chronological order. This is the most neutral and apparently transparent form of the story, deriving from the print media whose sources were at first news releases from the FBI and the Department of Justice, and then observable events. It occludes the ways in which Hoover's press release of the Rosenbergs' arrests rearranged Julius's words in order to make them appear to be his confession of aiding the Soviet Union, as it occludes all other official and media

distortions of the story as it developed. An analysis of the media's role is not my purpose here, although I trust I have made a persuasive argument for the uncritical acceptance by the media of "informed source" news releases as facts, to the despair and real detriment of thousands of people.

The media's "neutral" account then necessarily occludes the arbitrary linkages, gaps, contradictions, and denials, as well as the naturalized assumptions underpinning the chronology. These phenomena have been gradually revealed through detailed and solid historical research, and especially as a result of the release of 200,000 FBI documents following legal proceedings by the Rosenberg sons and historian Allen Weinstein against the government under the 1974 Freedom of Information Act. The contradictions and constructed linkages and purposeful occlusions did not go wholly unnoticed in the period surrounding the trial, appeals, and executions; but the coherence of the government story in the larger context of the developing cold war, as well as the interactions of the main actors in the trial (a factor impossible to account for by reading the trial record), worked successfully to convince a twelve-person jury of the Rosenbergs' guilt for conspiracy to commit espionage. The rest, as far as evidence can be found, is a story of the limitations of legal formalism further constrained by the

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36 See pages 159-64 below for an account of these distortions.
sway of politics and ideologies over studied approaches to juridical and moral concepts of justice.

The chronology below already inscribes within it what Hayden White considers to be the fundamental narrative conflict; it "presupposes the existence of a legal system against which or on behalf of which the agents of the narrative account militate."\(^{37}\) It raises questions of agency, authority, and legality, as well as of origins, motivations, selections, articulations, endings, and interpretations.

Chronology

**August 6 and 9, 1945** The United States dropped first a fission and then a fusion bomb, Thin Man and Fat Boy, on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with an immediate death toll of 152,034.

**February 15 and 16, 1946** A Canadian spy ring and the existence of an atomic spy ring in the United States were announced; Alan Nunn May confessed to having delivered atomic energy information to the Soviet Union.

**August, 1949** Communist People's Republic declared in China

**September 23, 1949** Truman announced that the Soviet Union had tested its first atomic bomb. J. E. Hoover

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\(^{37}\) White, 13.
announced to his staff, "The bomb has been stolen. Find the thieves."³⁸

February 3, 1950 Dr. Klaus Fuchs, German-born British nuclear physicist who had worked on the atomic bomb project at Los Alamos as part of the British participation, voluntarily confessed to having given atomic bomb information to the Soviet Union.

March 1, 1950 Fuchs was tried and sentenced to fourteen years in prison.

May 23, 1950 The FBI arrested Harry Gold, a chemist in Philadelphia, on the basis of his voluntary confession that he had been a courier between Fuchs and a Russian Vice Consul.

June 15, 1950 The FBI arrested David Greenglass, formerly a machinist at Los Alamos, for having been an accomplice of Gold in 1945.

July 17, 1950 Julius Rosenberg, David Greenglass's brother-in-law, was arrested for conspiracy to commit espionage with Greenglass and Gold in 1944-45.

June 25, 1950 The Korean War began with North Korea's invasion of South Korea.

August 11, 1950 Julius's wife Ethel was arrested on the same charges as her husband.

³⁸ Whitehead, 305.
December 9, 1950  Gold was sentenced to thirty years in prison.

March 6-29, 1951  The trial of the Rosenbergs and another named accomplice, Morton Sobell, was held in Foley Square Courthouse in New York City. The main prosecution witnesses, called by chief prosecutor Irving Saypol and his assistant Roy Cohn, were David and Ruth Greenglass and Harry Gold. Verdict: guilty

April 5, 1951  Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were sentenced to death by electrocution by Judge Irving R. Kaufman.

April 6, 1951  David Greenglass was sentenced to fifteen years.

February 25, 1952  Rosenberg-Sobell conviction affirmed by U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

February 25, 1952-June 19, 1953  Twenty-three motions and appeals for new trial, reduction of sentence, stay of execution, and Presidential clemency were made on the basis of perjury; unfair trial; cruel, excessive, inapplicable, and unprecedented sentencing; newly discovered evidence; subornation of perjury by the prosecution; application of incorrect law; justice and/or mercy. All appeals were denied.

June 19, 1953  Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were electrocuted.

June 20, 1953  Justice Black's majority opinion was made public, noting that the Supreme Court "had never
reviewed the record of this trial and therefore never affirmed the fairness of this trial.\^{39}

A less neutral beginning version of the story is a summary of the government charge, which institutes an unfolding narration of the chronological events. It posits a provisional causality and agency for events past and to come. Formally it is still not a story; it is narrated, but it has no closure, explains nothing, and leaves crucial relationships—legal, narrative, and motivational—unresolved. The charge is a step in the process of elaborating the coherent narrative which it ultimately will become. It assumes a legally structured and bounded nation-state and claims a severe threat to and breach of the state's integrity by individual agency, but its incompleteness militates against its narrative authority to constitute and enforce an ending.

Government Charge Summary

In 1944 Julius Rosenberg and his wife, Ethel, persuaded her brother, David Greenglass, and his wife, Ruth, to enter a conspiracy to commit espionage by transmitting atomic secrets to the Soviet Union. The Greenglasses

\^{39} Wexley's summaries are the basis for the chronology and charge given here, x-xiv.
delivered such secrets to the Rosenbergs in 1945. During 1946-49 Julius Rosenberg told his brother-in-law of other espionage he and his spy ring had committed.

Included in the spy ring were two former college classmates of Julius Rosenberg, Max Elitcher and Morton Sobell. Since their part in the conspiracy was not connected to atomic espionage, neither was known as a co-conspirator to the Greenglasses.

In 1945 Julius Rosenberg arranged by unknown means with the New York Soviet Vice Consul, Anatoli Yakovlev, to send a courier to the Greenglasses in Albuquerque, New Mexico, to pick up atomic information. Yakovlev sent Harry Gold for this purpose, the latter a self-styled "American partner" of Dr. Klaus Fuchs.

In 1950 after Fuchs, the German-born British atomic scientist, was arrested in England, and after the FBI had subsequently arrested Gold in Philadelphia, the latter implicated David Greenglass. Upon Greenglass's arrest he confessed and implicated his sister and brother-in-law, as well as his own wife, Ruth.

The Rosenbergs were subsequently arrested, but in the meantime the FBI had obtained from Max Elitcher a
confession implicating both Julius Rosenberg and Morton Sobell. The latter, known to be on a trip to Mexico with his family, was arrested in Texas after the Mexican authorities had deported him. The Soviet official, Yakovlev, could not be apprehended since he and his family had returned to the Soviet Union in 1946.

These two versions, a chronology and a synthesis of the government charge, leave us with the knowledge of a sequence of events, documented or asserted, as well as with an awareness of all that is not being said. With extended interrogations of the principals (Harry Gold, Ruth and David Greenglass), as well as with people charged with potential perjury (about communist party membership), the FBI was able to develop a fuller and more coherent narrative, an activity that from the beginning was a coordinated and collaborative effort based on the founding assumption of a huge domestic atomic spy ring.

For example, Klaus Fuchs described his American courier and the approximate dates of their meetings to the FBI agents the British government allowed to interview him, but when certain clues led to the arrest of a Philadelphia chemist, Harry Gold, and he confessed to being Fuchs's courier, Fuchs altered his statement to fit with Gold's.40 When Gold and

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40 All subsequent assertions will be considered in the sections that follow. See pp. 136-37 below for the Fuchs-Gold statement
David Greenglass, who confessed to having given Gold information about the atomic bomb, told stories that didn’t match, the FBI interviewed them together in order to coordinate their stories. When the government needed a conviction for Ethel, for whom there was not any incriminating evidence, David and his wife Ruth were able to recall Ethel’s participation in the conspiracy, which they had both repeatedly denied. Ten days before the trial they remembered that she had typed all the papers passed to the Soviet agents.41

It is important to acknowledge that, for better or for worse, this is exactly how the United States justice system works to prepare adversarial litigation: professional questioning of witnesses and informers in order to construct a story that will prevail. What needs to be considered in this case is not so much the systematic procedures of the adversarial process—the legal profession itself produces persuasive critiques of this system—but the various interests served by the production of this particular story, a narrative which had a coherence and authority which the Rosenbergs’ own story could not mitigate, and against which they were unable to prevail.

reconciliation. For a summary of pre-trial irregularities or anomalies, see Schneir/Schneir, 434-463, and Radosh/Milton, 20-169.

41 Schneir/Schneir, 463.
The causes for this failure are of course multiple and complex and reach into the unknowable, in terms of the Rosenbergs' own story as well as an evidentiary basis for the government story, documents allegedly supporting Hoover's and the Justice Department's belief in an extensive spy ring, headed by Julius Rosenberg. Any such "evidence" was unavailable to the Rosenberg defense and remains not "available under any circumstances" forty years later and a full fifteen years after the passage of the Freedom of Information Act in 1974.42 Hoover's belief was the immediate and primary motivation for the production of the official story, a motive for narrative which I will discuss at length below.

Whatever the internal coherence of the government story, however, the causes for its persuasiveness with the jury and the judges who ruled on it can also be located outside the explicit arguments and constructed data of the trial.43 The diction and imagery of the prosecution and trial judge, as well as of the appellate judges, link their bases for argument and rationales for judgment to the historical context and frame narrative of the cold war, not only to

42 Ibid., 478.
43 There were twenty-three appellate considerations of the case, involving 112 judges (sometimes the same judge hearing the case several times). Louis Nizer, The Implosion Conspiracy (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1973), 493-495.
testimony, statutory law, or precedent. As a scholar and critic of legal theory and practice concludes,

The persuasiveness of a story is not the product merely of the arguments it explicitly presents, but of the relationship between those arguments, and other, more tacit, arguments--tantamount to already in place beliefs--that are not so much being urged as they are being traded on. It is this second, recessed, tier of arguments--of beliefs so much a part of the background that they are partly determinative of what will be heard as an argument--that does much of the work of fashioning a persuasive story.\(^{44}\)

That is, the persuasive story is always an embedded narrative. The purpose of the preceding chapter was an attempt to articulate a frame narrative sufficient to the purposes of this analysis of the official story.\(^{45}\)

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\(^{44}\) Stanley Fish, "The Law Wishes to Have a Formal Existence" (Paper delivered at a conference at Cardozo School of Law, Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice, New York, October 2-3, 1989), 25.

\(^{45}\) Louis Nizer's 1973 book, *The Implosion Conspiracy*, which reached the best seller lists, is one of two volumes most Americans have read to learn about the Rosenberg case (the other being Doctorow's *Book of Daniel*). His naiveté is remarkable given the legal reputation he has built for himself. He assumes the Rosenbergs' guilt as charged, considers Harry Gold to have been a "disinterested witness," and charges himself with the moral task of revealing an unproblematic truth concerning the case: "The Rosenberg trial and subsequent events . . .
Before a discussion of the narrative motivations, strategies, and anomalies of the official story, it should be noted that the causes for the failure of the Rosenbergs' own story also lay to some extent in their more immediate surround, in economic, legal, and political conditions. The Rosenbergs had none of the financial, professional, institutional, juridical, political, or media resources available to the prosecution. They were limited financially, politically, and ethnically in their choice of an attorney, as well as in the size of their defense staff; the media was not interested in their story or their attorney's story; their attorney had limited or effectively no ability to call witnesses, while the prosecution had the power to call any official or scientist conceivably helpful to its case; the prosecution had the full institutional authority and expertise of the FBI and the Justice Department, in consultation with the Atomic Energy Commission, at their disposal; and finally the judge, in highly irregular ex parte communications with representatives of these institutions, involve a succession of unexpected climaxes of which only the truth could be the author. . . . I ventured forth to subdue the facts in writing." Consider this passage on evidence and jury findings: "Jurors must decide on what is put before them. They cannot respond to stimuli which are not there" (4,110.) The only stimuli to which they can respond which are not there are pervasive cultural ideologies, or background beliefs. See n. 44 above. These background and shaping assumptions announce themselves in textual gaps, occlusions, and ambiguities which Pierre Macherey would have us read for their positive content. See A Theory of Literary Production, trans. Geoffrey Wall (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).
was manipulated into a position of ideological certainty that made him a partisan and an active agent in constructing the official story.\footnote{See "The Kaufman Papers" (New York: National Committee to Reopen the Rosenberg Case, 1976).}

In a cruel irony, the Rosenbergs were hampered by their trust and that of their attorney in the forms and practices of American constitutional law and jurisprudence. They had been members of the Communist Party and insisted on testing their belief that the Fifth Amendment would work to protect their Constitutional rights against self-incrimination concerning a membership that was legal. But in a maneuver later declared unconstitutional, the prosecution managed rhetorically to convert this Fifth Amendment pleading into a sign of guilt, especially where Ethel was concerned.\footnote{See pages 164-71 below. For opinion rendering this procedure unconstitutional, see \textit{Grunewald v. United States}, 77 S. Ct. 963 (1957).}

So the Rosenbergs' own story, for reasons that are unknowable, never became fully articulated. The story they told had serious gaps and silences; and too rarely did they or their attorneys challenge profoundly questionable assertions and equally dubious dramatic strategies of the prosecution or the trial judge. In several of these instances, the upper courts ruled that the action of the prosecution was reversible error, but without a motion by the Rosenbergs' attorney during the trial, the appeals court construed itself as powerless to act.
Before analyzing specific rhetorical operations in the construction of the official story, I will conclude this introduction to that story with the trial judge's sentencing speech. His statement is in many ways a handbook of cold war mentality, manifesting in diction, tone, and hyperbolic, manichean, and apocalyptic imagery the background assumptions supporting the particular closure he narrated for the official Rosenberg story. It points to the ownership theory of the bomb supporting United States competitive superiority; it assumes a totalizing projection of aggressive energies onto another demonized nation-state; and it reveals the massive displacement of international concern with atomic warfare onto concern with the alleged actions of the Rosenbergs, actions which become through semantic level-shifting tantamount to the actual use of the bomb for the destruction of lives, an effect which to date only the United States government has achieved.

Sentence

The issue of punishment in this case is presented in a unique framework of history. It is so difficult to make people realize that this country is engaged in a life and death struggle with a completely different system. This struggle is not only manifested externally between these two forces but this case indicates quite
clearly that it also involves the employment by the
enemy of secret as well as overt outspoken forces among
our own people. All of our democratic institutions are,
therefore, directly involved in this great conflict. I
believe that never at any time in our history were we
ever confronted to the same degree that we are today
with such a challenge to our very existence. The atom
bomb was unknown when the espionage statute was drafted.
I emphasize this because we must realize that we are
dealing with a missile of destruction which can wipe out
millions of Americans.

The competitive advantage held by the United States
in super-weapons has put a premium on the services of a
new school of spies--the homegrown variety that places
allegiance to a foreign power before loyalty to the
United States. The punishment to be meted out in this
case must therefore serve the maximum interest for the
preservation of our society against these traitors in
our midst.

[While the defendants prefer our justice system],
they made a choice of devoting themselves to the Russian
ideology of denial of God, denial of the sanctity of the
individual and aggression against free men everywhere
instead of serving the cause of liberty and freedom.

I consider your crime worse than murder. . . . I
believe your conduct in putting into the hands of the
Russians the A-bomb years before our best scientists predicted Russia would perfect the bomb has already caused, in my opinion, the Communist aggression in Korea, with the resultant casualties exceeding 50,000 and who knows but that millions more of innocent people may pay the price of your treason. Indeed, by your betrayal you undoubtedly have altered the course of history to the disadvantage of our country. . . . We have evidence of your treachery all around us every day. . . . [You] passed what [you] knew was this nation's most deadly and closely guarded secret weapon to Soviet agents.

The evidence indicated quite clearly that Julius Rosenberg was the prime mover in this conspiracy. However, let no mistake be made about the role which his wife, Ethel Rosenberg, played. . . . Instead of deterring him from pursuing his ignoble cause, she encouraged and assisted the cause. She was a mature woman--almost three years older than her husband and almost seven years older than her younger brother. She was a full-fledged partner in this crime.

Indeed the defendants Julius and Ethel Rosenberg placed their devotion to their cause above their own personal safety and were conscious that they were sacrificing their own children. . . . Love for their
cause dominated their lives—it was even greater than love for their children.

It is not in my power, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, to forgive you. Only the Lord can find mercy for what you have done. ... You are hereby sentenced to the punishment of death, and it is ordered ... you shall be executed according to law.\textsuperscript{48}

Plotting

The official Rosenberg story had the potential for serving two primary functions in addition to providing generalized support for the cold war dichotomy favored by the vested interests. It could aid the military in its efforts to secure congressional approval of Truman's 1950 mandate for the development of the hydrogen bomb, and provide dramatic support for military-industrial attempts to institute a permanent arms race based on a superiority, first-strike, and retaliatory model.\textsuperscript{49} But more significantly for the course

\textsuperscript{48} Trial Record, 1612-1616.
\textsuperscript{49} There is correspondence from members of the Atomic Energy Commission and from members of Congress discussing the value of the Fuchs confession in mobilizing domestic support for the development of the hydrogen bomb, and in silencing advocacy for negotiations and arms control. Since the Rosenberg case was at first construed as the Fuchs case, the Rosenberg case by extension served the same propaganda purposes. See Schneir/Schneir, 433.
the story eventually took, the government believed that a conviction and harsh sentence would potentially force the elaboration of another frame story—the story Hoover, the FBI, and the HUAC had been working on overtly since 1946, and indirectly since 1944: the narrative of The Atomic Spy Ring. As the prosecution argued in its summation at the end of the trial,

The identity of some of the other traitors who sold their country down the river along with Rosenberg and Sobell remains undisclosed. We know that such people exist because of Rosenberg's boasting to Greenglass of the extent of his espionage activities. . . . We know of these other henchmen of Rosenberg. . . . We don't know all the details, because the only living people who can supply the details are the defendants.50

And later in a hearing for reduction of sentence before the trial judge, the prosecution reasserted

I submit that on the evidence which has been introduced to the Court, and on other material which I personally know of, that the Rosenbergs are

50 Schneir/Schneir, 288.
the centers or were the centers of a real widespread network of spies, and if I am correct, the Rosenbergs have ample information which, if they wanted to cooperate, could lead to the detection of any number of people who, in my opinion, are today doing everything that they can to obtain additional information for the Soviet Union.\footnote{Ibid.}

The cold war frame narrative set up and required its own embedded narrative explanation of Soviet possession of the atomic bomb. The Rosenberg story, while appearing to satisfy that need, only pointed to its own status as an embedded narrative within a frame not yet elaborated. So before the official Rosenberg story had been cast and constructed, its frame story existed in concept, as signified without signifiers, a widespread network of Soviet spies without specific names or identifiable acts of espionage. For reasons of political strategies, personal ambitions, and obsessions which can be tracked in political histories and biographies as well as in media reports of the time, this larger narrative of the extended spy ring also had to be produced. The means for producing that story would be a
"stiff sentence"--ultimately a death sentence--for the Rosenbergs, in order to make them talk.

Ruth Greenglass said the FBI agents told her in her first interview, on June 16, 1950, just after her husband's arrest, that "this thing is bigger than you understand, perhaps the biggest thing the F.B.I. has done in this country... It meant [the agents'] reputations, their jobs."\textsuperscript{52} The Greenglass attorney John Rogge ten days later visited Irving Saypol, the chief prosecutor in the case, to plea bargain for the Greenglasses, saying "that perhaps the information he could furnish might be used to prosecute those more responsible for espionage activities than his clients."\textsuperscript{53} This occurred at the same time that the Justice Department communicated to the FBI that there was not sufficient evidence to arrest Julius Rosenberg: "we have only Greenglass's statement, which he probably will repudiate."\textsuperscript{54}

When FBI agents arrested Julius Rosenberg on July 17, still without sufficient evidence, they also described the arrest in terms of its potential for generating the spy story:

The indications are definite that he possesses the identity of a number of other individuals who have been engaged in Soviet espionage... New York

\textsuperscript{52} From FBI and Justice Department memoranda, quoted in Schneir/Schneir, 455-59.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 456-7.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 456.
should consider every possible means to bring pressure on Rosenberg to make him talk, including a careful study of the involvement of Ethel Rosenberg in order that charges can be placed against her, if possible.\textsuperscript{55}

Hoover, reading this report, wrote in a marginal comment, "Yes, by all means," and then wrote to Attorney General J. Howard McGrath that "proceedings against [Julius Rosenberg's wife] might serve as a lever" to make Julius name his espionage partners.\textsuperscript{56} But the arrest of Ethel a month after her husband, without evidence of illegal activities on her part and without grand jury action, and the threat to prosecute her as a co-conspirator failed to produce the desired revelations from Julius.

On February 8, 1950, eight months after David Greenglass's arrest, six weeks before the Rosenberg trial began, before Ethel had been implicated by the Greenglasses as a co-conspirator, and before Harry Gold had remembered that his code greeting to David had been "I come from Julius," a most unusual meeting took place. At this meeting with members of the Justice Department, the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy and the Atomic Energy Commission, Myles Lane from the Justice Department and

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 459.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
The assistant prosecutor in the Rosenberg case solicited approval for prosecution plans to prove that Greenglass had access to vital atomic secrets, plans that might require courtroom use of classified information. As Lane explained it,

[T]he only thing that will break this man Rosenberg is the prospect of a death penalty or getting the chair, plus if we can convict his wife, too, and give her a stiff sentence of 25 or 30 years, that combination may serve to make this fellow disgorge and give us the information on those other individuals. I can't guarantee that. . . . [But] it is about the only thing you can use as a lever on these people. . . . [T]he case is not too strong against Mrs. Rosenberg. But for the purpose of acting as a deterrent, I think it is very important that she be convicted too, and given a strong sentence. 57

The agreement to seek a death penalty for Julius in order to force him to provide the frame for his own alleged espionage activities established the plotting requirements for the government case: the information David Greenglass

57 Quoted from "Proceedings from the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy," 8 February 1950, in Radosh/Milton, 146-47.
allegedly gave to Gold and Rosenberg had to be shown to be "vital secrets"; Julius had to be linked to Gold and to Gold's Russian agent; and Ethel had to be implicated as a knowing participant in the espionage activities. In short, the government would make a case for treason in the legal framework of a charge for conspiracy--a charge for which the death penalty was unprecedented in United States history.

Casting

Judge Jerome Frank of the Second Circuit Court of Appeals noted in his opinion denying the defense motion for a retrial that in a trial by jury the higher court was not allowed to consider the credibility of witnesses or the reliability of their testimony. Since this present study concerns itself with the motives and effects of narrative in the Rosenberg case, the imaginative capacities of the key witnesses implicating the Rosenbergs--Harry Gold, David Greenglass, and Elizabeth Bentley--are worth noting.

Harry Gold had developed a complicated game for one person using playing cards to simulate baseball games, seasons, play-offs, and series, which cumulatively produced a complete history with full statistics.\textsuperscript{58} His representation

\textsuperscript{58} Robert Coover's book \textit{The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.}, employs this kind of self-generating dice-based game
of himself was an extension of this kind of make-believe populating and furnishing of the world. Apparently all of his adult life he had lived an elaborate fantasy life, an imaginative concoction which he conflated with real aspects of his relationship with his mother--about whom he felt guilty, even blaming himself for her death. He modeled much of this life on the lives and environments of people he actually knew. Gold had an especially dramatic invitation to continue such fictionality in being asked to testify by the prosecution in a conspiracy trial. The government was soliciting the uncorroborated and detailed accounts of any conversations he might have had with anyone at any time concerning the passing of information on the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union.

For sixteen years Gold had led his employer and associates to believe that he was married to a woman named Sarah O'Ken whom he had met while courting another girl with one blue eye and one brown eye who had spurned Gold for a rival named Frank whose uncle manufactured peanut-chew candy. Sarah's previous boyfriend had been Nigger Nate, an underworld pimp. Gold and Sarah had two children, twins named David and Essie, one of whom had had polio. During this time he and Sarah separated. He then traveled on weekends secretly to watch his children playing in the park,
since he could not bear the pain of visiting them. His brother Joe (who was actually alive and living at home with Gold and his father) had been killed during the war.\textsuperscript{59}

In the industrial espionage trial of Abraham Brothman in 1950, before the Rosenberg trial, Gold on cross-examination explained the extent of his lying and said "it is a wonder steam didn't come out of my ears at times."\textsuperscript{60} On cross-examination in the 1955 perjury trial of Benjamin Smilg, Gold testified "first I created this wife whom I did not have. Then there had to be children to go along with the wife, and they had to grow old, so I had to keep building one on top of the other."\textsuperscript{61} In an autobiographical statement prepared for his defense attorney in the Rosenberg trial he wrote "I definitely did spend a great deal of time in the very enjoyable pastime of imagining Harry Gold . . . always of course in a stern and self-sacrificing role."\textsuperscript{62} His attorney in the Brothman trial said in defense of Gold, but in words that can only be read as radically and ironically true in light of what is now known about Gold, "I say to your Honor, after forty years of association with men . . . that Harry Gold is the most extraordianrily selfless person I have ever met in my life."\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{59} Schneir/Schneir, 102.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 363.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 412-13.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 112-13.
Gold claimed that he had for many years given his Soviet agents fictitious names of recruits and accounts of information he was receiving; after his arrest, during interrogation before the Rosenberg trial, he also gave the FBI names of espionage suspects who were revealed upon investigation to be non-existent. He was willing to make significant fictitious assertions under oath. In the 1955 Smilg trial he admitted under cross-examination that the elaborate conversations with the Soviet agent Jacob Golos to which he testified before a grand jury in 1947 were entirely false; he did not even know Jacob Golos. It is obvious that in the murky area of conspiracy and espionage--especially where there is no documented crime or activity--the valencing of a statement as true or false by Gold has no orienting frame of reference. Such claims were eventually revealed as meaningless and without value.

I have noted that he took details for his fantasy life from the conversations of his associates. His explanation of his ability to lead a double life likewise mimics the diction, phrases, and rationale of Klaus Fuchs's explanation for his own acts of espionage. Fuchs had said in a statement made public that his mind operated by a sort of "controlled schizophrenia" by which he kept his life in "two separate compartments"; Gold said he used a one-track mind for Soviet

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64 Ibid., 443.
65 Ibid., 364.
work and then just turned the switch to another track for his own work.\cite{66} There is no publicly known evidence which connects him with Fuchs, but he told his attorney after his confession and arrest, "I am absolutely fascinated by a person with ability. . . . And therefore I was fascinated by--or rather, attracted to--Klaus. . . . [We] were somewhat kindred souls. . . . we were as good friends as it is possible for two men to be."\cite{67}

But Fuchs's description of his American courier did not fit Gold; Fuchs was unable to name his courier or identify Gold's photographs. It was only after Gold's confession, incorporating new details from Fuchs's statement cabled from London to the agents questioning Gold, that Fuchs amended his statement to fit more closely with Gold's.\cite{68} As might be imagined, however, Gold received deep satisfaction from his alleged association with Fuchs, as well as from the crucial roles he played in the Brothman and Rosenberg trials, evidenced by the perverse pride recorded in the statement he delivered at his sentencing hearing, at which he was given thirty years in prison:

Your Honor, I feel that an explanation is due to the people of the United States . . . all of whom I

\cite{66} Ibid., 103.
\cite{67} Ibid., 413.
\cite{68} Ibid., 440-41. See pages 141-148 below for a discussion of the process of making narrative testimony congruent.
have besmirched by my crime. . . . And a horrible and heinous one it is. . . . For in the end, a far more terrible weapon than any Atomic Bomb was created, namely, Harry Gold, Soviet courier, a name . . . now an anathema to all decent people.69

Nevertheless, Gold's career and fame as ex-Soviet courier and valuable government witness was short-lived. When he was called from prison in 1956 to testify before a Congressional committee about Soviet espionage, his obvious blurring of boundaries between fiction and fact rendered his testimony useless. An Associated Press report called it "fiction rivaling."70

David Greenglass, while not nearly so imaginative as Gold, had his own proclivities to fantasy and "selflessness." His wife told his attorney that her husband had a "tendency to hysteria," that he had one time run through the house nude yelling of "elephants" and "lead pants," and that since he was ten years old "he would say things were so even if they were not."71 Greenglass himself said to his attorneys the

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69 Ibid., 420.
70 Ibid., 365.
71 The Greenglass's attorney John Rogge had records of confidential conversations with the Greenglasses. These files were stolen from his office and published in an April 1953 issue of the French newspaper Le Combat, revealing some discrepancies between the Greenglass trial testimony and their conversations with their attorneys. See Radosh/Milton, 366.
morning after his arrest that he had allowed the FBI investigators to shape and supplement his confession.\textsuperscript{72}

His attorney John Rogge said in an interview after Greenglass's release from prison in 1960 that Ruth was "the more stable" of the two, and that David could be "easily led." A Justice Department attorney who spoke with Greenglass in prison during the Department's last and abortive attempts in 1957 to identify and bring to justice The Spy Ring said that Greenglass had begun their conversation by saying he was the smartest man the attorney would ever meet, and that his work at Los Alamos was crucial to the development of the atomic bomb. This attorney left the interview feeling that David was a man with "no conscience at all," and that if he were a judge, he wouldn't take his testimony too seriously.\textsuperscript{73}

Elizabeth Bentley, the third key witness for the government case, had never met Julius and knew nothing of the alleged conspiracy. She was an ex-communist and self-confessed Soviet spy who was frequently used as a government witness to establish, by assertion, the link between the Communist Party and espionage. Her naming of eighty people

\textsuperscript{72} Radosh/Milton, 366-68. See pages 144-48 below for a discussion of the development of Greenglass's testimony.

\textsuperscript{73} Quoted from interviews by Radosh and Milton with John Rogge and Benjamin Pollack, 349. David Greenglass was an army machinist with a high school education who had failed the several college courses he had attempted. After his assignment doing tooling work on implosion lens molds at Los Alamos during the Manhattan Project, he had come to the FBI's attention for possible black market trading in parts stolen from the Los Alamos Project.
as Soviet spies had failed to produce any indictments after a year-long grand jury investigation in 1947. Despite this failure, her testimony had inaugurated her career as a professional witness; she received a book contract, as well as commissions for articles, to write about her life as a Soviet spy.

But Bentley was also unable to substantiate the reality of the dramatic life she described for herself as a high-level agent for Soviet espionage, called upon frequently, she said, to "g[ive orders to Earl Browder . . . [the head of the American Communist Party until 1945] from Moscow to him, and he had to accept them."74 Her story to FBI agents in November of 1945 was largely responsible for reinforcing Hoover's belief in a widespread espionage network operating in the United States and within the government. A New York World-Telegram story headlined "Red Ring Bared By Blond Queen" reported the widespread espionage she had revealed, after the grand jury had been unable to indict anyone she named. By then even the HUAC was acknowledging internally that there was no material evidence for any of her allegations, nor substantive corroborating testimony.75

Because of the failure of the Rosenbergs' attorneys to cross-examine Gold and Bentley, the jury was not privy to the fantasy elements of these key witnesses' lives and

74 Schneir/Schneir, 311.
75 Ibid., 312-13.
experiences, much of which was discoverable at the time of the trial. Those who have no doubts about the Rosenbergs' guilt and the correctness of the trial and punishment attribute this failure to the defense's fear of the additionally damaging testimony that might result from such questioning. But it is difficult to imagine that had the defense had the resources to research Bentley's and Gold's records, including their previous and contradictory trial testimony, they would not have wanted to give the jury access to the incriminating gaps, inconsistencies, contradictions and fabrications in their previous testimony. Whatever the reasons, the absence of interference and interruptions allowed the government witnesses to recount a single narrative which was persuasive and credible for its internal coherence, lock-step sequence, and mutually reinforcing repetitions.

Rehearsals for Coherence

The apparent chain-reaction linking of Fuchs to Gold to Greenglass to Julius to Ethel Rosenberg was the most persuasive element of the government story, the one that Eisenhower cited in his memoirs The White House Years to
explain his denial of clemency to the Rosenbergs: "Klaus Fuchs . . . implicated Gold, who in turn named Greenglass." 76

This impressive lock-step agreement of the various stories was, however, not evident in the original versions of the protagonists. As I have noted above, Fuchs was not able to identify Gold as his American courier until after Gold had confessed. During the three days in May, 1950, following Gold's arrest, cables crossed between London and Philadelphia as FBI agents used Gold's and Fuchs's statements to refresh each other's memory. After Gold had given a confession, he was induced to incorporate into his story some details from Fuchs's May 22 statement which had not appeared in his original statement, details such as Fuchs's having told him in June of 1945 of the test explosion scheduled at Alamogordo for the first atomic bomb. On May 23, portions of Gold's statement were cabled to London for incorporation into Fuchs's statement. The cable, signed "Hoover," urged the agents in London to "reconcile discrepancies in statements of Fuchs and Gold." 77

Of the three principal prosecution witnesses' testimony, Gold's shows the greatest discrepancies between his original statement and the courtroom narrative. This narrative was the cumulative product of some 400 hours of FBI

77 Ibid., 439-41.
interrogation, as well as of the time he spent with government attorneys preparing for the trial and in joint sessions with David Greenglass.\textsuperscript{78} Ten days after his first confession, Gold remembered that he had met with a soldier in Albuquerque after meeting with Fuchs in June, 1945.

Gold was not able to remember at that time any of the links to Julius he would testify to in the courtroom, even though by then he was a willing government witness. Crucial to the government story in the trial some ten months later were the ideas—not documents—of a torn jello box used to establish identity, as well as the greeting from Gold to Greenglass, "I come from Julius." But Gold did not mention a torn jello box, did not remember the soldier's name or that he, Gold, had registered at the Hilton hotel. He said that he had used the greeting "Benny from New York sent me."\textsuperscript{79}

This testimony from Gold took place about three weeks before David Greenglass was arrested as the "unknown subject," the person responsible for giving away the secret of the atomic bomb, the person Gold would refer to later as

\textsuperscript{78} Schneir/Schneir, 423. Weldon Bruce Dayton, with a personality significantly more stable than that of Gold, was questioned by the FBI and before the grand jury a number of times, beginning a few weeks after the Rosenberg trial, in an attempt to identify the "second echelon of the Rosenberg spy ring." Dayton recalled "I had the helpless feeling that I really might be indicted for telling the truth." And "I have been told . . . so many things by so many FBI agents . . . and they have all gotten kind of melded together and congealed [so] that it is awfully hard for me to know now what I knew in the first instance." Quoted in Schneir/Schneir, 306.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 443.
his "extra added attraction." The FBI presented Gold with a list of names, including Hank Greenberg the baseball star, and Manny Wolf, a restaurant where Gold had dined. The first ten of the names were alphabetized by first and last names: Arnold Blume, Charles Drusher, Ezra Finkelstein, and so on. None of the names except for Greenglass is known from the FBI files to have been a suspect in any investigation. Gold preferred Max Schwartz, but thought Greenglass might be a possibility. He first agreed that the address 209 High Street "was not at all impossible," and later, after viewing "dozens of reels of motion pictures" of Albuquerque streets and houses, "finally succeeded in picking out the correct house."\(^81\)

To establish that indeed Gold was in Albuquerque on the day he said, a Hilton hotel registration card was produced--before Gold had been able to recall anything about a Hilton hotel. The Schneir account of the Hilton hotel registration card, a card they firmly believe to have been a forgery because of certain irregularities in form, procedures, and handwriting, casts serious doubt on FBI practices. Gold was unable to recall the Hilton registration until his testimony at the trial, testimony which also allowed the introduction of the hotel registration card at the trial. This crucial piece of evidence was returned to the hotel and destroyed

\(^80\) Quoted in Schneir/Schneir, 444.
\(^81\) Ibid., 444-5.
four months after the trial, even though appeals were pending in the case.

After Gold had finally identified Greenglass as the man who gave him information in Albuquerque, Greenglass was questioned in an all-night session in which he confessed and implicated his wife as the instigator of his activities. He mentioned a torn card given him by Ruth that he had used for identification of the courier, and summarized the information he had given that courier in 1945. He at first insisted that he did not know who was directing his wife's recruitment of him, but for his typed statement asserted that it was his brother-in-law Julius.\textsuperscript{82} He later reported in confidential conversations with his attorneys that the FBI had given him the framework of the story he narrated, and documents indicate that it was dictated by FBI agents and signed by David. All the agents' logs of this first interview have been destroyed, but Greenglass also told his attorney that the technical information he had given Gold "may not be at all" what he had described to the FBI, and that while he didn't recall two visits in one day from Gold, he had "allowed" the second visit to be included in his statement. In this same conversation with his attorney he indicated that he had tried, unsuccessfully, to keep Julius out of the picture and wanted to contact him as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{82} Schneir/Schneir, 451-52.
\textsuperscript{83} Radosh/Milton, 366, 368.
After Greenglass's arrest and confession, and just before Julius's arrest on July 17, David's wife Ruth decided to cooperate with the government by giving evidence against Julius. The Greenglass attorney and the prosecution agreed that Ruth would testify in return for immunity from prosecution, since her husband's testimony could not be used against her, and that David would also cooperate, with the expectation that he would receive a light sentence. The FBI agents then began the careful process of "reconciling discrepancies" between Gold's and Greenglass's statements, and of developing Ruth's and David's stories so as to establish coherence, especially in their implication of Julius and Ethel.

Gold was finally able to recall the torn card, and that he had been given it by his Soviet agent, thus establishing a link between Julius and the Soviet agent, since the Greenglasses attributed the torn card to Julius. Gold was also able to remember that Ruth had said in Albuquerque in 1945 that she had talked with a "Julius" by phone about a subsequent meeting between Gold and Greenglass. David's and Ruth's signed statements on July 17, prior to Julius's arrest, had not agreed; on July 19 David met with agents to make the narratives congruent, which was accomplished by David's adopting Ruth's version. He was also able at later

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84 Schneir/Schneir, 456-7; Wexley, 138.
85 Ibid., 453.
meetings to remember the dates and purposes of other espionage contacts he had made that coincided with the requirements of the FBI's "unknown subject" profile. In December of 1950 FBI agents met with Gold and Greenglass together at the Tombs Prison where they were being held in order to have their "concerted effort in recalling" their June 1945 meeting. The agent's report reads:

Concerning the reported salutation "Greetings from Ben," Greenglass says that he has no recollection of such a statement made by Gold. . . . Greenglass proposed that possibly Gold had said "greetings from Julius"; which would of course make sense to Greenglass. Gold's spontaneous comment to this was that possibly Greenglass was right . . . [but Gold] is not at all clear on this point.87

In a report in February of 1951, a month before the trial and nine months after Gold's questioning began, the agent stated that

subsequent to these interviews with Greenglass and Gold, the latter averred that after considerable reflection he is quite certain that on the occasion

86 Schneir/Schneir, 459-60.
87 Ibid., 462.
of the first meeting he had with Greenglass he brought greetings from Julius, and that such was done under the direction of Yakovlev [the Soviet agent].\textsuperscript{88}

Greenglass subsequently agreed. In a report by Myles Lane on February 12, Greenglass was said to be "under the impression that when Harry Gold came to Albuquerque to see him in June 1945, Harry Gold said that Julius sent him."\textsuperscript{89}

This final reconciliation, as the prosecutor would note in his summation, "forged the necessary link in the chain" of evidence to connect the Rosenbergs to the Soviet Union and to espionage.\textsuperscript{90} The documents and the personalities of the leading characters allow the inference that this vital link may have been nothing more than a narrative construction. As Gold wrote in a pretrial statement,

\begin{quote}
The manner in which all of the pieces of the giant jig-saw puzzle, of which I was a part, are falling ever so gloriously into place--to reveal the whole
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{88} Quoted in Schneir/Schneir, 462.
\textsuperscript{89} Quoted in John Anthony Scott, "Greetings from Julius," (New York: Fund for Open Information and Accountability, Inc., 1978), 5.
\textsuperscript{90} Trial Record, 1521.
picture--has added a tremendous zest and sense of achievement to my life.\textsuperscript{91}

Dramatic Strategies

In terms of courtroom strategy the prosecution had another significant advantage over the defense counsel in addition to its superior resources: its sense of the dramatic. Julius and Ethel's defense team consisted of Emanuel Bloch, a left lawyer whose experience was in personal injury and civil liberties cases and who thought Julius was just another routine Fifth amendment case; his father Alexander Bloch, whose primary legal experience had been as an attorney for the furrier's union; and their assistant, Gloria Agrin, a recent law school graduate. None of these three had any scientific background, knowledge, or information, especially concerning the development of the atomic bomb, an undertaking which remained to a large extent still under the category of classified information. The prosecution consisted of Irving Saypol, heralded as "the nation's number one legal hunter of top Communists," because of his successful prosecution of Alger Hiss and the eleven

Smith Act defendants, and assistant prosecutors Roy Cohn and James Kilshheimer.92

Cohn's place is now secure in the annals of unscrupulous legal manipulators, and at least one of the Rosenberg historians holds him as one of those most responsible for the production of the Rosenberg case.93 Not only was Cohn's self-representation dramatically suited to public interrogation and prosecution, but apparently his skills in the manipulation and rehearsal of narratives for courtroom use exceeded the broadest constructions of legally sanctioned methods for the development of testimony. According to Harvey Matusow, who was an ex-communist professional government witness like Elizabeth Bentley, he and Cohn "developed" testimony frequently, both knowing that it was false. At times testimony was formulated by Cohn and memorized by Matusow for the trial.94 Cohn was in charge of preparing Greenglass and Gold for the trial and in charge of Greenglass's examination. And Manny Bloch had Ruth demonstrate for the jury on cross-examination her remarkable ability to repeat lengthy complicated paragraphs of testimony verbatim.

The prosecution team was in dramatic control of the trial from the beginning, with its version of the Rosenberg

92 Time Magazine, 23 July 1951, quoted in Radosh/Milton, 171.
93 Wexley, 487.
story amply heralded by pre-trial publicity. During the trial several strategies worked powerfully to reinforce their representation of the Rosenbergs as responsible for the theft of the atomic bomb, as well as the hubs of a domestic espionage ring. These strategies were all rhetorical, they bordered on deceit or deliberate misleading of the defense and of the jury, and in two instances were held by higher courts to have been reversible error and unconstitutional. They involved the anti-communist ploy of "the list" as well as a crucial exploitation of an indefinite pronoun antecedent; the manipulative use of media headlines to further implicate the defendants; a double-bind misrepresentation of the Fifth Amendment; and the use of imagery and non-sequitur translations of terms to build the concept of treason and the picture of an atomic spy ring masterminded by Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

The Bomb Itself. As I have noted before, it was only on the basis of a successful representation of David Greenglass's allegedly delivered sketches as conveying the secret of the atomic bomb that the Rosenbergs were tried in effect for treason and sentenced to death. In the pre-trial meeting Myles Lane held with members of the AEC and the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy, Lane secured approval to represent the information Greenglass said he had conveyed to Gold (no documents existed) as "vital secrets."
Lane felt that this claim would produce stiff sentences for Julius and Ethel as a strategy to force Julius to "disgorge" the real spy ring. Saypol's opening argument set this strategy up:

We will prove that the Rosenbergs devised and put into operation, with the aid of Soviet . . . agents in this country, an elaborate scheme which enabled them to steal through David Greenglass this one weapon, that might well hold the key to the survival of this nation and means the peace of the world, the atomic bomb.\textsuperscript{95}

The cold war assumptions of secrecy and ownership and a contradictory manichean moral dichotomy are implicit background beliefs apparent in the diction and tone of this one sentence of Saypol's statement: an elaborate atomic spy ring has stolen the secret weapon which, as the sole possession of the United States, could have been the key to world peace, but is now, in the hands of the Soviet Union, a potential for world destruction. Opening statements always beg questions; but the questions Saypol begs all fit neatly into the prepared mental ground of cold war ideology which members of the jury and the press as well as the judge all

\textsuperscript{95} Trial Record, 183.
shared to some degree. This contextual preparation had the effect of decreasing the prosecution's burden of proof. And, in a spiral movement, the Rosenberg convictions then had the effect of solidifying and reifying the context which made their conviction possible.

The prosecution's pre-trial strategy had been to present the defense and the jury with a list of the one hundred and twenty witnesses it intended to call, including the military and scientific directors of the Manhattan Project, General Leslie Groves and J. Robert Oppenheimer, as well as Harold Urey and George B. Kistiakowski. It also received permission from the judge for representatives of the Atomic Energy Commission, including Dr. James Beckerley, Director of the AEC Classification Office, to sit at the prosecution table in the courtroom during the trial.

Neither General Groves nor any of the scientists was called to testify; there are indications that none of them was ever contacted about the possibility of a court appearance or to request their evaluation of the information Greenglass allegedly had given to Gold and Rosenberg. Only twenty-three witnesses were called by the prosecution, and only four of these gave testimony implicating the Rosenbergs.

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Only two people were called to testify to the significance of the information in the sketches Greenglass had drawn for the jury to illustrate what he claimed to have given Gold and Rosenberg in 1945: Walter S. Koski, a chemical engineer at Los Alamos for whom David did machine work on implosion lens models, and John Derry, an electrical engineer, who testified that one of Greenglass's sketches referred to the type of bomb dropped at Nagasaki.

The AEC representatives were in the courtroom theoretically to protect against exposure of classified information in testimony; the effect of their presence was to lend powerful credence to the notion that the Greenglass sketches were in fact what was repeatedly referred to by the prosecution and Greenglass himself as "the atomic bomb." There were aspects of Greenglass's information that the AEC preferred not be brought out in the trial, but most of it was declassified for the trial and then reclassified to discourage open conversation among working nuclear scientists. For the jury's benefit, the chief prosecutor entered into the record a statement to the effect that "The Atomic Energy Committee has declassified this information under the Atomic Energy Act and has made the ruling as authorized by Congress that subsequent to the trial it is to be reclassified."97

97 Trial Record, 479.
But "the atomic bomb" it was not. Nor, according to some of the senior scientists who worked on the development of the bomb, was John Derry in a position to evaluate the importance of Greenglass's sketch. The naming of well-known senior scientists on the prosecution's witness list, however, had the effect on the defense and the judge of establishing the seriousness and authenticity of the Greenglass information. The list was so overpowering that it may have worked successfully to deter the defense from calling its own rebuttal witnesses. The scientists who responded to Emanuel Bloch's post-trial request for evaluation of the sketches--sketches which Greenglass prepared for the trial, and which Bloch of course did not see until the trial--said it was possible that the sketches, while containing no real technical information, might have served the function of supporting in a general way the Fuchs technical report delivered to the Soviet Union.

All of these elements conspired to convince the defense attorneys that in fact Greenglass had given away the secret of the bomb. Greenglass testified repeatedly that his sketch was the result of knowledge accumulated over months of work at Los Alamos and was "the atom bomb itself," and the prosecution repeated his assertion multiple times with the effect of a litany: "the bomb itself," "the sketch of the bomb itself." The defense neither objected to any of the
repetitions nor called expert witnesses to interrogate the assertions.

The strongest such assertion, that of John Derry, actually depended on a pronoun antecedent ambiguity. He also was referring to the sketch that Greenglass had characterized as "the bomb itself," when he said that it "related to the atomic weapon being developed in 1945." Then he was asked

Q. Does the information that has been read to you, together with the sketch concern a type of atomic bomb which was actually used by the United States of America?"

A. It does. It is the bomb we dropped at Nagasaki, similar to it [italics mine].

It does and it is: there is an enormous slippage between these two "its," and their antecedent is not necessarily identical. Unless Derry himself was seriously deluded about the significance of the sketch, the antecedent of the second "it" is "the bomb which the sketch concerns": so his statement extended by antecedents reads, "yes, the sketch concerns a bomb that we used; the bomb which the sketch concerns is the bomb we dropped at Nagasaki, similar to it."

But in the rhetorical context established for the jury by

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98 Trial Record, 912.
Greenglass and the prosecution, it is likely that the jury heard the syntactic echo in Derry's second clause as also a semantic echo. That is, both clauses were heard as having the same antecedent, Greenglass's sketch. Then the semantic inference is that "it," the sketch, "is," just as Greenglass had said, "the bomb itself."

It is impossible to say what any of the senior scientists would have testified, had they been called by the prosecution or the defense. Given the red taint with which many scientists were regarded in 1950 because of their arguments denying secrecy and ownership, in favor of negotiation with the Soviet Union on arms control, and against the development of the hydrogen bomb, it is understandable that they were not called. The only scientists to speak out actively in defense of the Rosenbergs were Albert Einstein and Harold Urey, the latter being one of the named but not called witnesses for the prosecution. They both wrote letters--Einstein to the President, and Urey to many people--some of which were published in the New York Times, arguing the injustice of the trial and the dishonesty of the media in reporting it.

But subsequently there has been much reviewing of the Greenglass sketches and information, and scientists have been forthcoming with their opinions. They called Greenglass's sketches a "caricature," "confused and imprecise," lacking any crucial data and details; one points out that "the atomic
bomb itself" "is an industry, not a recipe."\textsuperscript{99} "It is not possible in any technologically useful way to condense the results of a two-billion-dollar development effort into a diagram, drawn by a high-school graduate machinist on a single piece of paper."\textsuperscript{100} Dr. James Beckerley, the AEC Director of Classification who sat at the prosecution table during the trial, said in a speech before a group of industrialists in New York in 1954 that the atom bomb and the hydrogen bomb were not stolen from us by spies, and that such bombs are "not matters that can be stolen and transmitted in the form of information."\textsuperscript{101}

In April of 1954 General Leslie Groves, head of the Manhattan Project, testified at the Atomic Energy Commission's special Personnel Security Board's hearing "In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer," who opposed the government's plans for the development of the hydrogen bomb. Some testimony that Groves gave at that hearing was deleted from the transcript because it was felt that his statement "was irrelevant and was unfortunate in that it could be used by the Communists for propaganda if the testimony was ever


\textsuperscript{100} These comments were in affidavits critiquing Greenglass's sketch by atomic scientists Philip Morrison and Henry Linschitz. Both men were involved at the highest level in the development of the implosion bomb at Los Alamos. Quoted in Schneir/Schneir, 464.

released to the press," a rationale similar to that of several Supreme Court Justices in the final days of appeals before the executions. Groves had conceded

I think the data that went out in the case of the Rosenbergs was of minor value. I would never say that publicly. Again, that is something, while it is not secret, I think should be kept very quiet because irrespective of the value of that in the over-all picture, the Rosenbergs deserved to hang and I would not like to say anything that would make people say General Groves thinks that they didn't do much damage after all.¹⁰²

Trial by Newspaper. The day after Julius Rosenberg's arrest, the newspaper headlines represented him as a self-confessed member of the Klaus Fuchs spy ring; details of his alleged espionage were reported as facts rather than as the vague government charges they were at that time. Many papers, including The New York Times, included what were apparently direct quotations from Julius: "The FBI investigation revealed, Mr. Hoover said, that Rosenberg made himself available to Soviet espionage agents 'so he could do the work he was fated for' and 'so he might do something to

¹⁰² Revealed in a memorandum from Hoover to Attorney General Brownell in 1954. Quoted in Schneir/Schneir, 466.
help Russia." The "facts" and "quotations" are all from Hoover's press release following Julius's arrest. These reports represented publicly, as facts attested to by Julius himself, all of the allegations which would be at issue in the Rosenberg trial, and which the Rosenbergs consistently denied; the reports also appeared to be explaining Julius's motivation for espionage in his own words. If the reports were to be believed, the only role left to Julius was that of government witness; he had already been tried and convicted in the newspaper.

Since Ethel's arrest was construed by the government as necessary both in order to make Julius talk, and to disallow her testifying in behalf of her husband, there had to be a crime; with a conspiracy charge this was easy. Ethel Rosenberg was arrested and charged on August 11, 1950, with assisting her husband in recruiting her brother to obtain information concerning the atomic bomb for the Soviet Union. The grand jury until then had had no interest in Ethel; they intended to bring charges against Ruth Greenglass as the self-confessed person most implicated in atomic espionage for the Soviet Union. Myles Lane convinced them that charges against Ruth would keep the government from being able to make its case—that is, charges against the person who confessed to the espionage would prevent them from being able

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to prosecute those who did not. Ruth's pre-trial testimony became the only evidence they could develop against Julius in several crucial connections, and as it turned out, the only evidence at all against Ethel.

But Myles Lane also used the press to convict Ethel in advance. Following her arraignment he held a news conference at which he made this hyperbolic charge: "If the crime with which she is charged had not occurred, perhaps we would not have the present situation in Korea." The next day the New York Times included that statement in its story on Ethel under the headline "Atomic Spy Plot Is Laid to Woman." Two years after this, it was held in a Circuit Court of Appeals in Delaney v. United States that behavior similar to this deprived defendants of their Sixth Amendment rights. Where such material is "fed to the press by prosecuting officials of the Department of Justice" it is not only in violation of "due process of law," but fails to insure "civilized standards of procedure and evidence."

On March 15, 1951, the day of Ruth Greenglass's cross-examination during the trial, a front-page New York Times headline read "Columbia Teacher Arrested, Linked to 2 on Trial as Spies." The article reported that the scientist

104 Wexley, 132.


William Perl would be a government witness in the Rosenberg espionage trial, and quoted the prosecutor as saying that Perl's role was to corroborate statements of key government witnesses. This was a scare tactic, threatening the defense with testimony against the Rosenbergs—by perhaps another former member of the communist party testifying in order to avoid prosecution for perjury. Hoover had urged the arrest prematurely because he thought it would aid both the prosecution and the FBI in its attempts to force the story of the spy ring; the prosecutor thus obtained a grand jury indictment while the trial was in session.

Arrested, Perl said nothing and did not appear as a witness. He was later convicted for perjury for denying that he had known Rosenberg and Sobell at CCNY. But the Rosenberg jury had not been sequestered, and the publicity of this manipulated corroboration of "the spy ring," as well as of the Rosenbergs as members of that spy ring, could not have been effectively kept from the jury members. This was the reversible error that was noted by the Second Circuit Court with the comment that defense failure to file a motion for retrial rendered the higher court powerless to act. Later Judge Learned Hand rejected the prosecution's arguments against a stay of execution to give the defense time to lodge an appeal to the Supreme Court by saying "People don't
dispose of lives, just because an attorney didn't make a point."\textsuperscript{107}

Harold Urey, one of the senior scientists on the prosecution witness list, was present in the courtroom in May 1953 when the defense made a motion for a hearing based on the discovery of substantive new evidence. The judge refused to look at the evidence, and denied the motion in a decision written before he had heard the oral arguments. Urey was shocked enough to say to a \textit{New York Times} reporter who asked his opinion,

\begin{quote}
Now I see what goes on in Judge Kaufman's courtroom, I believe the Rosenbergs are innocent. When I look in that courtroom I see no Kaufman but McCarthy . . . What appalls me most is the role the press is playing. The judge's bias is so obvious. I keep looking over at you newspapermen and there's not a flicker of indignation or concern. When are you going to stop acting like a bunch of sheep?
\end{quote}

The next day the \textit{New York Times} reported the denial of the defense motion, without mentioning Urey's comments.\textsuperscript{108}

These are isolated but crucial instances of the manipulation of language and of the media by the FBI and the

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\textsuperscript{107} Wexley, 494.  \\
\textsuperscript{108} Meeropol/Meeropol, 193.
\end{flushright}
Department of Justice. The manipulations furthered the official story at the expense of due process; they cumulatively produced an extra-judicial conviction of the accused prior to any legal discovery of evidence. But these are also in each case instances of media complicity in the uncritical production of words and silences that served the interests of one motivated narrative over still equally valid alternative versions of that same narrative, and, in this case, complicity in an extra-judicial trial.

Sign of Guilt. The Fifth Amendment grants a paradoxical power which rarely works so purely in practice as it was designed to do in protecting the individual right to avoid self-incrimination and in maintaining an official assumption of innocence. Refusals to declare innocence are inevitably tainted by the excluded opposite, guilt; and a refusal based on a binary opposition cannot adequately accommodate a guilt/innocence valence that varies according to its context. Compare the ways in which the use of the Fifth Amendment labelled people as communist during the HUAC and McCarthy era, with the self-sacrificing and patriotic heroism figured by its use by Oliver North in the Iran/Contra hearings and trial. Use of the Fifth in 1950, however, meant only one thing: communist sympathies or affiliations. Since it was assumed by almost everyone that the Rosenbergs were
communists, it was not surprising to anyone that Julius and Ethel pled the Fifth so frequently as they did.

Ethel in particular used the Fifth throughout both of her subpoenaed appearances before the grand jury after Julius's arrest. Emanuel Bloch had advised her of her rights to avoid self-incrimination, she was especially vulnerable because of Communist Party affiliations, and she had no way of knowing of what she might be accused as a result of the Greenglass testimony. Without counsel present to guide her, she sought refuge in the Fifth Amendment which she pled for almost every question asked her, including questions of neutral and verifiable facts, as well as of Communist Party membership and alleged espionage activities. She refused to answer hundreds of questions "on the grounds that it might incriminate me," even if neither a positive nor a negative answer implied guilt of any kind. In the early stages of the Rosenberg story during which she found herself before the grand jury, it was impossible to differentiate between neutral and incriminating facts.

That the use of the Fifth allowed an assumption of guilt among the members of the grand jury and the trial jury is understandable and unavoidable; the judge's charge to the jury is intended to neutralize such assumptions. But the judge gave the appropriate charge and then allowed and participated in the explicit turning of Ethel's use of the
Fifth before the grand jury into a sign of guilt before the jury at the trial.

The judge had previously charged the jury regarding the use of the Fifth Amendment, "You can't draw any inferences from the refusal to answer by the witness. . . . You can't infer that the witness has admitted anything from the refusal to answer." When Ethel took the stand, the prosecution secured her acknowledgment that everything she had told the grand jury was the truth. After questioning her, the prosecutor then went through the grand jury testimony and the trial testimony question by question, comparing her refusal to answer before the grand jury with her answers at the trial as a voluntary witness. He did this in order to ask her, with increasingly serious implications, if her response of possible self-incrimination were the truth, making the same point over and over until the judge finally stopped him, through some thirty-two pages of the trial record.109 Ethel at first was completely thrown by this tactic, but her answers became an unwitting but increasingly astute critique of abstract categories, as well as of legal formalism.

Q. And everything you told the grand jury was the truth?
A. Right.

109 Trial record, 1372-1402.
(Quoting from grand jury testimony)

"Q. When did you consult with your attorney for the first time in connection with this matter?
"A. I refuse to answer on the ground that this may tend to incriminate me."

Q. Do you remember having been asked that and having given that answer?
A. That's right.
Q. Was that the truth?

Bloch objected, since he saw what was happening, and the judge responded that if the witness was willing to answer questions then which she refused to answer previously on the ground that it might tend to incriminate her, "might not that be something which the jury would consider on the question of credibility?" His ruling effectively cancelled his charge to the jury and translated the assumption of innocence protected by the use of the Fifth into a question of witness reliability for jury consideration. The prosecutor continued, and I quote only the most damaging questions, and the most astute answers:

Q. Was this question asked of you and did you give this answer:
"Q. Do you recall ever having discussed the work of your brother, David Greenglass, the work that he was doing at Los Alamos, New Mexico?

"A. I decline to answer on the ground that this might tend to incriminate me.

A. Yes.

Q. Would you care to state how that would incriminate you?

Mr. Bloch: Just a second. I object to this question upon the grounds that if this witness would ever answer that question, it would vitiate and nullify all the rights that every citizen is entitled under the Fifth Amendment.

The judge sustained that objection, but allowed Saypol to continue so long as he only asked if it were true that to answer those questions before the grand jury would have incriminated her:

Q. Do you remember this question and this answer:

"Q. Did you invite your brother David and his wife to your home for dinner? I mean during the period while he was on furlough in January 1945?

"A. I decline to answer on the ground that this might incriminate me."

Q. Do you remember giving that testimony?
A. Yes, I remember.
Q. Was it true at the time you gave it? Yes or no.
A. It is not a question of it being true.

With this answer Ethel Rosenberg touched on the crucial issue of a right that exists to protect individual citizens from dichotomized and abstract categories, guilt by association, and judgments not subject to due process. The protection is from anything that might "tend" to incriminate the witness, and Ethel astutely recognized that a truth claim is not at issue in the use of the Fifth Amendment, even though that is the import of the prosecution's line of questioning.

Bloch kept objecting, claiming that the prosecution's method was destroying the privilege, but the judge insisted that her use of the Fifth Amendment before the grand jury for questions which she had answered at the trial created a question of reliability for the jury to decide. He began participating in the prosecution strategy, by pushing Ethel to explain the discrepancy in her responses, and dismissed Bloch with "Oh no, no, I know you have no quarrel with the Court; it wouldn't do you any good if you did."110 After another set of questions, Ethel responded,

110 Trial record, 1385.
My husband had been arrested on July 17 and I had been subpoenaed to come before the grand jury. It was not for me to state what I thought or didn't think the Government might or might not have in the way of accusation against me. I didn't have to state my reason, but I did feel that in answering certain questions I might be incriminating myself unless I exercised my privilege.

And after the next set, followed by "Was that the truth?" she gave a simple but sophisticated defense of the Fifth Amendment:

When one uses the right [against] self-incrimination one does not mean that the answer is yes and one does not mean that the answer is no. I made no denial. I made no assertion that I did not know him [Harry Gold]. I simply refused to answer on the ground that that answer might incriminate me.

A little later, after another set and "Was it true [that your answer would have incriminated you]? she said "It can't be answered yes or no." And then, "It is not necessary to explain the use of self-incrimination. . . . Whatever reasons
I may have had, I had them, and therefore I felt I had to take refuge."

This prosecution strategy was devastating to Ethel, and by supporting it the judge in effect allowed the very inference that he had originally charged the jury to disallow: that every use of the Fifth Amendment was, by comparison with later testimony, an admission of Ethel's guilt on that question. Six years later, in Grunewald v. United States, the Supreme Court ruled that grand-jury testimony is not allowable at the trial to show inconsistency, since there can be many reasons for taking the Fifth Amendment before a grand jury that are not necessarily inconsistent with later testimony in response to the same questions. In 1957 Thurgood Marshall asked the United States Attorney during arguments before the Circuit Court of Appeals on a motion by Morton Sobell, the Rosenbergs' co-defendant, "If Ethel Rosenberg were tried, say last spring, and we had her conviction before this court today, wouldn't we have to reverse on the authority of Grunewald?" The answer was "This court would probably have to rule in favor of the defendant."
Ethel as Lever

She was not "just a housewife": she was stubborn, intransigent, perhaps even the driving force behind her mild-mannered husband. With her stoic manner, her refusal to admit her "guilt" (even if such an admission would save her life, and spare her two young children from orphanage), and her final defiance of death, Ethel Rosenberg signified a denial of men's authority over women. Her alleged communist affiliations seemed allied with that denial in mutually reinforcing abnormality. In short, Rosenberg threatened the patriarchy that supported the social order of American capitalism.\textsuperscript{113}

Julius's death without talking was a great disappointment to Hoover and Attorney General Brownell, but not a serious problem of conscience. Julius's file apparently contained a copy of a Communist Party membership card and suggestions that he was involved with a number of people believed to have been conducting industrial and military espionage--possibly involving top secret but not

\textsuperscript{113} Maurice Berger, "Of Cold Wars and Curators," \textit{Artforum}, February 1989, 86-7.
atomic information--for the Soviet Union. The problem was Ethel, for whom no evidence of espionage existed, and who had been arrested and charged, convicted and sentenced as a way of making Julius talk. The last question on an interrogatory prepared for Julius should he have decided to pick up the phone placed on his way to the electric chair indicates the degree to which high-level cynicism was operative toward her to the end: "Was your wife cognizant of your activities?" A certain conception of woman was inherent in postwar ideology; Ethel Rosenberg was alien to any such conception. Think of the fund of Madison Avenue and media images available in the United States to women in the fifties, in an era of virtually unchallenged masculine representational authority--blond mothers with children, dressed in aprons or church clothes, or according to the fashion plates of a burgeoning new postwar industry; the television mothers of "Ozzie and Harriet" and "Father Knows Best," or the Hollywood versions portrayed by June Allyson, and Doris Day. Ethel was Jewish, the daughter of immigrants, lower Eastside poor, a labor activist in her shipping clerk union before her marriage, and a suspected communist. This was not the woman upon whom the western order depended.

From the time of Julius's arrest, Ethel chose to assume the role of an apolitical housewife and to go through her

114 Radosh/Milton, 450.
115 Ibid., 451.
three-year imprisonment, including two years in isolation at Sing Sing, with "courage, confidence, and perspective."\textsuperscript{116} Her decision meant not giving anything away through facial expression, gesture, or words, which made of her a perfect projective screen for those representing her for their own purposes. It also meant not showing any signs of victimization which might have enlisted the sympathy and mercy of a masculist society and its institutional representatives. The media were discomfited by Ethel's emotionless presence and demeanor. At first they experimented with representing this lower Eastside Jewish housewife and mother accused of atomic espionage in the style of women's page social and fashion reporting. We know for example that for her first grand jury appearance she wore a powder-blue and white polka-dot dress and a modest straw hat. Each day of court appearance her size and dress were described: the day she wore the scarlet bodice, it was the only spot of color in the courtroom. But as the trial progressed, attention shifted to Ethel's refusal to demonstrate feeling, a refusal which was interpreted as a sign of arrogance, disdain, contempt, and absence of remorse, increasingly read as evidence of guilt in a cold and unnatural woman.

\textsuperscript{116} In a letter from Ethel to Julius in prison, dated 17 April 17 1951, quoted in Meeropol/Meeropol, 40.
Ethel's earlier letters to Julius, not written for publication, reveal her as a courageous, conflicted, angry, and often despairing woman; suffering from migraine headaches, back spasms, and uncontrollable bouts of crying; loyal to her husband and concerned for their children. After their first appeal was denied, Julius and Ethel decided to gain support from the people by writing letters for publication, to be edited by the Rosenberg Defense Committee, the National Guardian, and the Daily Worker. In these letters Ethel wrote in a self-consciously elevated and allusive literary style to portray herself as an ordinary middle class fifties housewife and mother of a happy family, committed to liberal democratic ideals, and secure in her ability to face persecution with dignity.\textsuperscript{117}

This unwitting use of the master's tools--sterile cultural images of the ideal fifties wife and mother, liberal ideology stripped of conflict and feelings, an acceptance of martyrdom, and all expressed in a high literary form of expression--elicited ridicule from the high culture intellectual left and offered no counter-engagement at all with the state's development of Ethel as master spy. These

\textsuperscript{117} The collected letters (selected and edited) were published in 1953 as Death House Letters (New York: Jero), and The Rosenberg Letters (London: Dennis Dobson); in 1954 as The Testament of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg (New York: Cameron and Kahn). Meeropol/Meeropol reproduces many previously unpublished letters. Various letters appeared in the National Guardian and the Daily Worker from 1951 to the time of the Rosenberg executions in June 1953.
letters most clearly reveal the Rosenbergs' problem of effective self-representation. It is difficult to conceive of any position available to the Rosenbergs that could not have been used by the state for the representations it required.\footnote{A few years later, however, after McCarthy's censure by the Senate, and with more sophistication on the part of the defense, members of the communist party charged with conspiracy were successfully able to use the First Amendment instead of the Fifth, admitting party membership and challenging the state to prove illegal actions or clear and present danger. This would probably have been a more powerful stance for the Rosenbergs, but still might not have prevailed against a relatively easy-to-prove conspiracy charge requiring only one uncorroborated witness.}

The government's story, which began with what certain officials considered to be Ethel's out-of-control behavior, got out of control itself in ways that had not been intended. What was designed as a tactically political exploitation of the alien woman as spy turned or returned to require the murder of the woman and the mother, evoking the most primitive kinds of anxieties among its implementers. Ethel's part in the story began the day of Julius's arrest, July 17, 1950, when FBI agents reported to Hoover on her disruptive female and communist behavior:

Ethel, his wife, made a typical Communist remonstrance, demanding a warrant and the right to
call an attorney. She was told to keep quiet and get in the other room with the children.\textsuperscript{119}

After receiving this report, Hoover, who had a peculiar sensitivity to disruptive and subversive elements out of their place, endorsed the Justice Department's plan to develop a case against Ethel in order to use her as a "lever" to make Julius talk.\textsuperscript{120} One month later, after Ruth Greenglass remembered that Ethel had been present at one of their espionage discussions, Ethel was arrested, and in FBI press releases printed verbatim by the media she was arbitrarily translated from an out-of-place Communist Jewish woman and mother to a Soviet spy of global importance.

Myles Lane of the Justice Department held a press conference the day of her arrest in which he blamed Ethel for the Korean war, which had begun in June of 1950, noting also that "her crime jeopardizes the lives of every man, woman and child in this country."\textsuperscript{121} The \textit{New York Times} headline on her arrest ran, "Atomic Spy Plot Is Laid to Woman."\textsuperscript{122} Notice how the most mundane newspaper practice is implicated in a process of woman mythologizing or even demonizing. That this atomic spy plot was attributed to a woman is already

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} Schneir/Schneir, 458.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 459.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Reuben, 423.
\item \textsuperscript{122} \textit{New York Times}, 12 August 1950.
\end{itemize}
hyperbolic, but by headline reduction, it becomes a plot laid to mythic Woman. That is an unusual use of the verb "laid" for attributed; as a participial adjective it describes a fabric or paper woven with only warp threads, lacking the woof and bonded together by a binding material. The language of this seven-word headline confesses a plotting process it doesn't even know.

Hoover had at first hoped to produce an open-ended story with the Rosenbergs--from Los Alamos physicist Klaus Fuchs's arrest and conviction in England, to the arrest of Fuchs's self-confessed courier Harry Gold in Philadelphia, to Gold's implication of Greenglass, to Greenglass's implication of Julius, to Julius's implication of the entire spy ring. Ethel is absent from this series; it was just her body in prison that was intended to move Julius to do the chivalrous thing to save his woman. By the time of the trial, however, Julius had said nothing the Justice Department wanted to hear. So on February 8, 1951, Myles Lane held a joint meeting of members of the Justice Department, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy to rehearse his plan for the prosecution of the couple, admitting to the group that there was not a strong case against Ethel. There was a consensus in this meeting held before any evidentiary proceedings had taken place, that because Julius "was the keystone to a lot of other potential espionage agents," he was to be given a death penalty and
Ethel was to be convicted and given a "stiff sentence of 25 or 30 years" in order once again to use her to force Julius to "disgorge and give us the information on those other individuals." Lane added, "[Death's] about the only thing you can use as a lever on these people." Now two levers were operative: woman and death.123

It was typing that led to this. Until this February meeting a month before the trial began, and during the eight previous months of FBI interrogation, the only evidence implicating Ethel had been Ruth and David Greenglass's testimony that Ethel had been present when David's development of information about the Los Alamos project was sought. The Justice Department felt that this was not sufficient for her prosecution. After the February 1950 meeting, however, Ruth and David remembered a number of occasions on which Ethel had typed or talked about typing David's notes for Julius. Ruth especially reiterated in her trial testimony typing talk between her and Ethel—about how tired Ethel was from staying up so late to do all the typing for Julius. And about how Julius reassured her about David's bad handwriting, saying that Ethel would type his notes. In his summary argument at the end of the trial prosecutor Irving Saypol portrayed Julius as the hub of a spy ring: "Imagine a wheel. In the center of the wheel, Rosenberg,

123 Radosh/Milton, 146.
reaching out like the tentacles of an octopus." Then he included Ethel, not at the center with Julius, but off to the side, at the typing table:

Rosenberg got from [David] the cross-section sketch of the atom bomb itself and a 12-page description of this vital weapon. This description of the atom bomb, destined for delivery to the Soviet Union, was typed up by the defendant Ethel Rosenberg that afternoon at her apartment at 10 Monroe Street. Just so had she on countless other occasions sat at that typewriter and struck the keys, blow by blow, against her own country in the interests of the Soviets."\textsuperscript{124}

Irving Saypol was also the chief prosecutor in the Alger Hiss case, as well as in the Brothman trial. In the government story he developed, it was Priscilla Hiss who typed the infamous pumpkin papers--an allegation never proven, and Elizabeth Bentley who typed Brothman's notes before handing them over to her Russian agent.\textsuperscript{125} That is, Irving Saypol had a remarkably consistent plotting device culturally available to him: the woman as the male spy's typist.

\textsuperscript{124} Trial Record, 1523
\textsuperscript{125} Wexley, 418-19.
Lane's plan for stiff sentences for both Rosenbergs was effectively carried out by the prosecution, who convinced even the judge that they were guilty of apocalyptic treachery. Judge Kaufman declaimed in his sentencing speech

Who knows but that millions more of innocent people may pay the price of your treason. Indeed you have altered the course of history . . . [in passing] this nation's most deadly and closely guarded secret weapon to Soviet Agents.\textsuperscript{126}

Kaufman singled Ethel out as a full-fledged partner, who, three years older than Julius, was a moral failure as a woman and wife in not having deterred her husband from his ignoble cause. He further castigated them both for sacrificing their children. In the two years before their executions, the brunt of this accusation came to bear primarily on Ethel as unnatural mother. She was to become the moral and emotional focus of this story for both the right and the left. It was Ethel who fascinated the media, and it is Ethel who has inspired literary and biographical treatment in the years since the trial. She has become almost synecdochic for the Rosenbergs: a fifteen-year-old-boy, for example, when he heard of my interest in the Rosenberg story, asked "The

\textsuperscript{126} Trial Record, 1615.
Rosenbergs—is that the lady spy who gave the Russians the atomic bomb, and they had to give her two extra jolts to kill her?"

The FBI and Justice Department succeeded in convicting Ethel as spy, but they had not anticipated that the lever plan for her would fail, that the Rosenbergs would maintain innocence and remain silent. Of course Hoover and certain members of the Justice Department knew that the representation of Ethel as atomic spy was instrumental and unsubstantiated. Hoover had actually signaled to the trial judge that he was not in favor of the death sentence in this case, especially for a woman and a mother, Hoover's relationship to his own mother, I would suggest, as a flip side of his obsession with the enemy within. His development of an extensive FBI apparatus for surveillance and apprehension of alien and subversive enemies within the state was in part a displacement of his need to construct his own psychic security state. This public displacement, as well as a lifelong protective attachment to his mother with whom he lived, worked to contain his phobias, including his apparent fear of the feminine. The possibility of the state murder of a mother was too unsettling to the elaborate defense system he had constructed for himself.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{127} Hoover's development of domestic intelligence, under the terms of an informal and secret agreement with Roosevelt in the thirties, laid the groundwork for the national security state formally inaugurated in the postwar period, as it did for the anti-communism of that period. The
But two reports in the spring before the June executions made it possible for him to perceive Ethel as an unnatural mother, daughter, and wife. Ethel had refused to discuss her children with her own mother or to see her again after her mother's first two visits to Ethel in prison, two years after the trial. Mrs. Greenglass had from the beginning sided with David, the brother who had implicated Ethel with his trial testimony. During the second visit she had urged Ethel to support her brother by talking, even if it meant lying. In a letter, Ethel gave this visit and request as her reason for refusing to see her mother again. "I would still give anything for one kind word from her, though," she added. But for Hoover her refusal to see her mother was clear evidence of a betrayal of her role as a good daughter.\textsuperscript{128}

Even more helpful in allaying Hoover's anxiety about killing a mother—the Mother—was an unsolicited and so-called psychological report on the Rosenbergs prepared by ACLU co-counsel Morris Ernst—without his ever having met or talked with either Rosenberg. At the time of their arrests, Ernst had suggested to Hoover that he represent them in order

\footnotesize{major biographies of Hoover invariably turn to psychoanalytic explanations for the obsessional nature of his institution and administration of the FBI as an extra-legal guardian of domestic ideological purity. His private secret files gave him great political leverage, and his access to a national network of information endowed his public pronouncements with great authority. See Theoharis and Cox, and Powers. \\
128 Radosh/Milton, 376.}
to feed useful information to the FBI, but surprisingly he had been turned down. After receiving Ernst's psychological study just three months before the executions, FBI agent Louis Nichols wrote to Hoover that Ernst "has concluded that Julius is the slave and his wife, Ethel, the master."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 358.} Phrases and paraphrases of this report would continue to appear in official reports, in statements by the attorney general, in Eisenhower's correspondence, and even today as misprisings in informal conversations about the Rosenbergs. This alleged inversion of the hierarchy between male and female, between natural authority and unnatural but ever-threatening counter-force, caused any anxieties on Hoover's part concerning Ethel's execution to be replaced by a moralistic advocacy of her death. It simply would not do to act in any way that might be interpreted as a sign of weakness toward this woman or toward the enemy within.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 379.}

The morning of the scheduled executions the Supreme Court vacated by a vote of 6-3 a stay issued the day before by Justice Douglas, leaving presidential clemency as the only relief for the Rosenbergs. Ethel's manipulation and use by the government was unknown until the 1974 release of FBI documents concerning the Rosenbergs. At all levels of the appellate procedure the Rosenbergs had been considered as a unit; Ethel's role was at no time a matter for judicial
review. The day the Court vacated the stay, Attorney General Brownell encouraged Eisenhower to deny clemency, assuring him that the FBI had top secret documents proving both Rosenbergs guilty of treason. These documents had, however, not been made available to the Rosenberg defense and are still unavailable today--some forty years after the executions, and a full fifteen years after the passage of the 1974 Freedom of Information Act. These documents have been withheld because the identity of an "informant . . . of unimpeachable reliability [the person who allegedly convinced Hoover of the existence of a large atomic spy ring in which Julius played a key role] . . . is not available under any circumstances."  

Eisenhower's denial of clemency, issued immediately following the Supreme Court decision, and without his having read the Court's majority or dissenting opinions that indicated doubts and suggested clemency, reiterated in almost the exact words of the trial judge's sentencing speech the heinous treachery of the Rosenbergs, who were deemed yet again responsible for the future deaths of tens of millions of innocent people all over the world. Eisenhower, asserting the thoroughness of the judicial review of their case, missed entirely the signals sent from every level of the appeals

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131 The next section, 192-209, "Legal Formalism," considers the limits to judicial review and the excess of the issues to such limits.  
132 Schneir/Schneir, 478.
procedure that remedy for certain contingencies and errors lay only with the Supreme Court or Executive privilege.

Eisenhower may have held an unexamined belief in the absolute fairness of American jurisprudence. In order to deny clemency, however, he had to overcome his own dis-ease with the state execution of a woman. This he apparently accomplished, as did Hoover, by means of the Morris Ernst report, and by a decision to concern himself only with the statecraft, the effect of his action, as he said, recalling the expedient of military executions for disciplinary purposes. He gave his rationale in a letter to his son John:

To address myself to the Rosenberg case for a minute. I must say that it goes against the grain to avoid interfering in the case where a woman is to receive capital punishment. Over against this, however, must be placed one or two facts which have greater significance. The first of these is that in this instance it is the woman who is the strong and recalcitrant character, the man is the weak one. She has obviously been the leader in everything they did in the spy ring. The second thing is that if there would be any commuting of the woman's sentence without the man's then from
here on the Soviets would simply recruit their spies from among women.\textsuperscript{133}

Eisenhower gives voice here to a dubious and often illusory tradition of gallantry that would render femininity exempt from the law. Moreover by defining the woman again as the stronger of the two, and by translating her into the leader in their work, he gestures to a more contemporaneous social and economic situation: the wartime and postwar entry of women into the workplace, that is, the men's place. And to add to that disruption, Ethel had introduced the possibility of women taking over the jobs of male spies.

Thus in the thinking and writing of all those involved in constructing Ethel's narrative she ends as more than a woman who was accused of stealing the state's main weapon. She's become a master of men, a threat to the espionage industry, a female lever manipulating the very men who instrumentalized her as lever, someone who must finally have the lever pulled on her. Nowhere is this more clearly inscribed than in the report of one of the three media witnesses to her execution, Hearst reporter Bob Considine:

\textsuperscript{133} Eisenhower, 225. Eisenhower wrote to a friend concerning the Rosenberg case, "That their crime is a very real one and that its potential results are as definitive as I have just stated, are facts that seem to me to be above contention" (225.)
Ethel wore a Mona Lisa smile. Her little minnow of a mouth was curled at the edges in the faintest possible way. She was dressed in a dark green print of cheap material, a prison dress that revealed her plump legs below the knee. Her dark brown hair . . . was set in an almost boyish manner . . . As the hood was lowered over her eyes and the black strap placed across her mouth, she was looking straight ahead almost triumphantly. As the torrent of electricity swept through her body, . . . from every pore there seemed to emanate a strange, unearthly sound made up almost exclusively of the letter Z. Now she seemed about to stand. Her hands contracted into fists. Thus she sat, lifted off her seat as far as the straps would permit, and I had the startled feeling that she would break those bonds and come charging across the floor, wielding those tight little fists.

[After he comments on the two extra jolts needed to kill her, he continues] She could relax now. Her face possessed the same quizzical half smile that had been painted upon it minutes before. [As she was pushed out of sight on a wheel table her] right leg was flexed in an easy and almost nonchalant posture. It was a trying experience when, a few minutes later, briefing thirty eight reporters from
half a dozen countries, the first question asked was a shrill one from a lady reporter: "What did Mrs. Rosenberg wear tonight?" she called up to me. It just seemed so damned callous.  

A close reading is not necessary to hear in this report a figurative inscription of the maternal, as well as overt signs of a regressive and misogynist terror. Considine first takes Ethel's body apart to read in its fragments a seduction that is inscrutable, ambiguous, revolting, and marked by artifice. She wears a Mona Lisa smile that is painted on even in death; her mouth is a slippery little fish, her legs are plump below the knees, her hair frowzy and boyish, her fists closed tight and threatening, and her eyes stare triumphantly. Considine has constructed his own viewing position as that of the boy/man disgusted at the sight of the mother's body. As she is wheeled away her leg falls loosely and suggestively to the side, and now he is seeing a prostitute, or perhaps the aftermath of the primal scene, or of a rape.

134 Bob Considine, It's All News to Me: A Reporter's Deposition (New York: Meredith Press, 1967), 170-172. Considine had portrayed the Rosenbergs guilty as charged in his syndicate reporting of their case. He was the only one of the three witnesses able to describe the executions to the world media; his highly interpretive and projective comments thus appeared in newspapers and on radio both nation-wide and globally as the definitive story of the Rosenberg deaths.
But it is in describing her dying that his figured fantasies pitch themselves into a vision of a witch-like phallic mother. Her body emits an unearthly "Z" sound as she tries to stand erect with the current running through her. Considine fears that she will break her bonds and charge him with her tight little fists. Now he has become the object of this woman's anger, which he depicts as the fury of a little child, the rage of a defiant and triumphant woman, and the threat of a charging animal. Considine tells us that it has been a trying experience. For Ethel certainly, for Considine in other ways trying, but that is not what he means. He is saying it was hard on him that in the briefing to the world press he gave after the executions a "shrill lady reporter" asked what Ethel was wearing. What this woman asked about was what he had just himself noted: Ethel's cheap little green death dress. With his contempt for the question and for the questioner, he manages a final flourish of displacement of his own hysterical misogyny onto a woman.

\[135\] For feminist discussions of the phallic mother (the mother who, according to Freud, is to the child still imaginatively "complete," endowed with a penis and omnipotent) see Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Nancy Chodorow, Reproducing Motherhood: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); and Julia Kristeva, The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). Derrida has said that "the mother must be rediscovered differently if we are to move beyond repetitive Oedipal dilemmas of Western culture."
It is clear that the level of discourse has changed from one of public and institutional rationalization to one of primitive fears and fantasies of the woman out of bounds. But more significantly it is the intimate and reciprocal relationship of these two discourses that Ethel Rosenberg's story so clearly reveals. The postwar period was a time of atomic cold war-gaming among men. For the strategic purposes of this game, it was believed tactically necessary to produce Ethel as spy, depending on her as desired woman to move the man to reveal his secret. But this use of her, by the logic of the men's own rules, led to matricide, and thus their textual woman evoked a desire/fear complex of intra-psychic conflicts which were only too easily managed by increasingly regressive and projective rationales.

The normal and ongoing splitting and projective mechanism of meaning-making became a regressive loop, closed to interventions and driven to primitive limits by the excesses of its own production.136 This regressive loop, fueled by desire/fear, is a quite different dynamic from the operations of the momentary textual effects of a desire uncontaminated by fear, effects which post-structuralist critics often gender as feminine and read as working to interrupt discursive wills to knowledge and power, as

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136 For a discussion of splitting and projection as the two fundamental cognitive mechanisms, see ch. III, n. 37, p. 51.
intervening in drives that would silence, exclude, kill or ignore.  

In the official Rosenberg story, it was the woman in the text—not a textual effect gendered as feminine—who provoked an exhibition of what we can today read as the usually unarticulated desire/fear component in political discourse. Her foregrounding of this component and its regressive process makes her story a paradigm or microcosm of the larger dynamics and operations of United States cold war ideology. But Ethel died of this text, our reading is belated, and the real ownership of the lever was never in doubt. Reading the textual effects of desire/fear in intertextual institutional discourses can only be a crucial first, if sometimes impossible and most often belated, step in political interventions.

Legal Formalism/Excessive Issues

As the judge's sentencing diction shows, and as does the prosecutor's throughout the trial, the Rosenbergs were rhetorically tried and sentenced for treason, on a charge of conspiracy to commit espionage. This was the only charge the

137 Alice Jardine analyzes historically and philosophically this kind of textual disruption gendered as feminine, which she calls "gynesis," in Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).
government could make since there was no documentary evidence of any crime committed by anyone—the Rosenbergs or any other witness. The conspiracy charge is the charge preferred by the government in trying to make an undocumented case, since the usual laws of evidence and due process do not hold. In a conspiracy charge it is necessary for the prosecution to show, by the uncorroborated testimony of one person and nothing more, that the accused discussed the commission of an illegal act with intent to carry it out.

Julius and Ethel were accused by her brother David Greenglass, an army machinist at Los Alamos during the war under investigation for black market trading in stolen parts. Greenglass was questioned after Harry Gold confessed to having been Klaus Fuchs's courier for information concerning the Los Alamos project and said he had also received information from a GI in Albuquerque in 1945. Under interrogation Greenglass accused Julius of having promoted and supported his conveyance of names of scientists and three sketches of atomic bomb design elements to Julius and to Harry Gold. Harry Gold said in the Rosenberg trial that he was told to say "I come from Julius" in greeting David Greenglass in Albuquerque; and Elizabeth Bentley, the ex-communist professional government witness said she had taken phone call messages from a "Julius" to convey to her Soviet contact Jacob Golos. One of Julius Rosenberg's CCNY friends Max Elitcher, under threat of perjury charges from having
falsified his loyalty oath, testified that Julius had tried on several occasions to recruit him for espionage purposes for the Soviet Union.

The testimony of Greenglass, Gold, Bentley, and Elitcher established the links, in terms of cause-effect, agency, and time span crucial to the government case. Without those links, the case would not have held up, legally. As Judge Jerome Frank said in his majority opinion for the Second Circuit Court of Appeals affirming the procedural legality of the trial court,

Doubtless, if that [accomplice] testimony were disregarded, the conviction could not stand. But where trial is by jury, this court is not allowed to consider the credibility of witnesses or the reliability of testimony.\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{138} Opinion by United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, 195 F. 2d 583, 592 (1952); see also in microform, \textit{U.S. v. Rosenberg}, prepared by M. Glazier for the Fund for the Republic (Wilmington, Delaware, 1978?), 1648. The higher court may not rule on witness credibility or testimony reliability in a federal jury trial because the appellate judges were not in a position to evaluate non-verbal elements that contributed to the judgment of such issues. But herein lies a logical inconsistency. Solely from reading the trial record the Second Circuit Court judges felt confident in holding, in response to the defendants' charge that the trial judge was biased in favor of the prosecution, that the judge had not acted prejudicially. The charge was that the judge showed bias in tone, diction, the valence of his questions, and in his rulings silencing the defense and encouraging the prosecution—-discriminations which do not readily manifest themselves from a reading of the words of the trial record, words and sentences
The Rosenbergs denied everything having to do with espionage or conspiracy, answered questions concerning their political views, and pled the Fifth Amendment concerning membership in the Communist Party.

According to the recollections of FBI investigator Robert Lamphere, a number of Soviet messages, found in 1944 after the break-in of the New York office of the Soviet Government Purchasing Commission, were decoded in 1948. These documents referred to an unnamed United States espionage recruiter and two named possible recruits, one of which was Max Elitcher. Also decoded in these messages was a report on the development of the atomic bomb by Klaus Fuchs. The discovery of this message led to Fuchs' induced and voluntary confession in England in February, 1950, resulting in his fourteen-year sentence for espionage.

Julius Rosenberg is not named in these documents, according to Lamphere, but there is reference to an "Ethel" in a file released after 1974, stating that she probably knew of her husband's espionage activities. Dates in the censored document suggest that this reference was to Ethel Rosenberg and her husband Julius. As I stated in the previous chapter, while no documentary evidence supporting the government

\[\text{which remain within the parameters of legally correct judicial decisions and actions.}\]

\[139\] Radosh/Milton 8-10
claims regarding Julius and Ethel was available to the
Rosenbergs or their defense counsel during the trial, the
prosecution, the trial judge, and President Eisenhower were
all assured at various times that there were in the
Department of Justice files unimpeachable documents proving
the existence of a spy ring headed by Julius Rosenberg.
Those documents had to remain secret--forever, apparently--
for national security reasons, and for the protection of an
informant, even though it meant the denial to the Rosenbergs
of their fundamental right to know the operative evidence
against them. When the prosecution and the judge share the
same privileged information and reassurances--denied the
defense--relating to the defendants' guilt, their claims,
rulings, agreements, rhetoric and tone acquire extra-legal
significance 140

Under federal civil law the jury, properly charged by
the judge to discount their own prejudices as well as any
discernible biases of the judge, is solely responsible for
deciding on the facts of a case. The federal judge, as "the
only disinterested lawyer," has wide latitude in "developing"
these facts in order that they might be "understood" by the
jury, as well as by himself. 141 A contradiction built into

140 Schneir/Schneir, 467-8.
141 Opinion by United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit,
195 F. 2d 583, 594 (1952), quoting in part Simon v. US, 123 F. 2d 80.
See also in microform U.S. v. Rosenberg (1951-2), prepared for The Fund
this description of the federal judge's function and thus inherent in United States jurisprudence lies in the semantic construction linking "disinterested" with "development of facts" and "understanding." What is occluded in such non sequiturs posited as rational and normative procedures is the complex texture of background and assumed beliefs which inevitably structure the hermeneutics of any developed understanding.

Once the jury had reached a guilty verdict based on its understanding of the facts as developed by the prosecution, defense, and trial judge, and after the judge had sentenced the defendants, the appellate courts were in their own words powerless to call into question the credibility of witnesses, the reliability of testimony, or the verdict or sentence, which fell within statutory boundaries. No Rosenberg historiographer has suggested that any appellate judge was privy to the information shared by Judge Kaufman and Irving Saypol concerning secret evidence of Rosenberg guilt. In the first appellate opinion, delivered by the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in February, 1952, there is a message to the effect that had the upper court had power of revision regarding convictions or sentences in this case, there were a number of circumstances that would bear careful consideration: that the convictions depended entirely on the testimony of "self-confessed spies," and that the death sentence was based on evidence which came "almost entirely
from accomplices." These statements, opening the door for reconsideration of both conviction and sentencing, reveal both the blindness in general of American jurisprudence to the effects of context--background beliefs--on the evaluation of "evidence" by judge or jury, and the specific and probable ignorance on the part of the appellate judges for the Rosenberg case of the Justice Department assurances to the prosecution and to the judge of unimpeachable evidence of Rosenberg guilt. Even despite this juridicated and systemic blindness and specific ignorance, the court still found reason to call into question the conviction and sentencing, but without the power to call for a new trial. Later appellate opinions also pointed out possible reversible errors upon which the upper court was still powerless to act due to the defense's failure to file a motion for retrial.142

All of the major appellate opinions, including those of the Supreme Court, contained a message to the next higher Court or to the President that it lay only within that next authority's power to modify what might be an unjustified

142 The Second Circuit Court of Appeals on 17 February 1953, stayed the executions for the Supreme Court to review the Circuit Court's decision finding that "possible prejudice" had been present during the trial and that the Supreme Court should hear the defense's argument. Judge Learned Hand, the Circuit Court's most cautious jurist, wrote "People don't dispose of lives, just because an attorney didn't make a point. . . You can't undo a death sentence. There are some Justices on the Supreme Court on whom the conduct of the prosecuting attorney might make an impression." On March 28, the Supreme Court nevertheless denied certiorari without reviewing the trial record. New York Times, 18 February, 1953. Quoted in Wexley, 494. (C.A.2 citation)
verdict or sentence. In all the appeals, the trial record was reviewed only once, by the Second Circuit Court, which signaled in its opinion to the Supreme Court and to the President that remedy lay with them, since the Circuit Court was powerless to intervene.

On June 19, 1953, the morning of the most recently-scheduled Rosenberg executions, the Supreme Court ruled on the last appeals on behalf of the Rosenbergs under pressure resulting from an inappropriate agreement between the Chief Justice and the Attorney General, who felt it important that the executions proceed without further delay. The private and public papers of the last month of court skirmishes reveal the Court's implication in cold war ideology and the paralysis of anti-communism.\textsuperscript{143} In three Supreme Court denials of Rosenberg defense motions, dissenting Justice Frankfurter and other justices had felt that the Court should review the trial record, which it in fact never did, before ruling. But Frankfurter had declined to write a dissenting opinion since he thought it would provide words for communist propaganda about the weaknesses of the American justice system. His concern for protecting the institution overrode the purpose for which that institution had been established.

\textsuperscript{143} See Michael E. Parrish, "The Supreme Court and the Rosenbergs," \textit{American Historical Review} 82,4 (Oct. 1977): 805-41; see also Shalit, \textit{Fatal Error}. 
But in joining the majority opinion for vacating the final stay of execution, Justice Jackson included his reservations about the sentence:

Vacating this stay is not to be construed as endorsing the wisdom or appropriateness to this case of a Death Sentence. That sentence, however, is permitted by law and, as was previously pointed out, is therefore not within this court's power of revision.\textsuperscript{144}

At this last court hearing Frankfurter responded more directly in his addendum to the Court's denial of the Rosenberg defense motion for time to prepare a clemency petition:

Were it established that counsel are correct in their assumption that the sentences of death are to be carried out at 11 p.m. tonight, I believe that it would be right and proper for this court formally to grant a stay with a proper time limit to give appropriate opportunity for the process of

\textsuperscript{144} Rosenberg v. United States, 346 U. S. 273, 292-3 (1953). Quoted in Schneir/Schneir 250. The Justice's individual opinions (except for Frankfurter's, which was published three days after the executions) were printed the day after the executions in the New York Times, 20 June 1953.
executive clemency to operate. I justifiably assume, however, that the time for the execution has not been fixed as of 11 o'clock tonight. Of course, I respectfully assume that appropriate consideration will be given to a clemency application by the authority constitutionally charged with the clemency function.\textsuperscript{145}

And Justice Black, the only member of the Supreme Court to have consistently voted for trial review wrote in his dissenting opinion:

I do not believe that Government counsel or this Court has had time or an adequate opportunity to investigate and decide the very serious question raised in asking this Court to vacate the stay... Judicial haste is peculiarly out of place where the death penalty has been imposed for conduct part of which took place at a time when the Congress appears to have barred the imposition of the death penalty by district judges acting without a jury's recommendation... It is not amiss to point out

\textsuperscript{145} \textit{Rosenberg v. United States}, 346 U. S. 273, 322-23 (1953), 322-23. The executions, instead of being delayed for clemency consideration by the president as Frankfurter had expected, were moved up by Attorney General Brownell to 8:00 p.m. that same evening, in order to avoid executing Jews on the sabbath.
that this Court has never reviewed this record and has never affirmed the fairness of the trial below. Without an affirmance of the fairness of the trial by the highest court of the land there may always be questions as to whether these executions were legally and rightfully carried out. I would still grant certiorari and let this Court approve or disapprove the fairness of the trials.\textsuperscript{146}

But President Eisenhower had already issued a statement thirty minutes after the Supreme Court's decision was announced, and before these opinions were available to him. This statement is remarkable for its ignorance of the tentative nature, qualifications, and messages of any of the appellate decisions, as well as for its close repetition of the trial judge's diction, hyperbole, and displacement in his sentencing speech. It also manifests, as did Judge Kaufman's sentencing statement, the "second, recessed tier of arguments," the "already in place beliefs," that determine what will be heard and "traded on":\textsuperscript{147}

\begin{quote}
I am convinced that the only conclusion to be drawn from the history of this case is that the Rosenbergs have received the benefit of every
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{146} Rosenberg v. United States, 346 U.S. 273, 296-301 (1953).
\textsuperscript{147} Fish, 25.
safeguard which American justice can provide. . . .
I am not unmindful of the fact that this case has
aroused grave concern both here and abroad in the
minds of serious people, aside from the
considerations of the law. In this connection, I
can only say that, by immeasurably increasing the
chances of atomic war, the Rosenbergs may have
condemned to death tens of millions of innocent
people all over the world. The execution of two
human beings is a grave matter. But even graver is
the thought of the millions of dead whose deaths
may be directly attributable to what these spies
have done. When democracy's enemies have been
judged guilty of a crime as horrible as that of
which the Rosenbergs were convicted; when the legal
processes of democracy have been marshalled to
their maximum strength to protect the lives of
convicted spies; when in their most solemn judgment
the tribunals of the United States have adjudged
them guilty and the sentence just, I will not
intervene in this matter. [italics mine] 148

Justice Frankfurter reveals in his diaries and memoranda
his own complicated response to the Rosenberg case. A

principal spokesman for judicial restraint, and a conservative on First Amendment issues, Frankfurter wrote in a Rosenberg memorandum on June 4, 1953, that the refusal of the court to review the convictions on at least seven occasions was "the most disturbing single experience I have had during my term of service on the Court." He had called three times for Supreme Court reviews of the record and of the Circuit Court's decisions. He recognized the anti-communist double bind in which political and judicial decision-making was caught: issues were being raised by the appellate judges which "arouse disquietude in minds that are fiercely hostile to Communist dangers as are Messrs. Jenner, McCarthy, and Velde, but who are also concerned for those American traditions which make them hostile to Communism."\(^{149}\)

He finally decided that to dissent from the last opinion denying certiorari would provide words to be used by propaganda of the Communist Party, or to lead "high-minded and patriotic laymen who do not understand these things to believe that I implied that the Rosenbergs were convicted though innocent."\(^{150}\) That is, even though he felt legally and morally required to do so, he decided ultimately not to dissent, for fear that radicals would use his words for their


\(^{150}\) *Ibid.*
own purposes. As Michael Parrish points out, the courts were trapped in the reality of the cold war and in its symbolism as well. Justice Frankfurter's memoranda indicate how a normally bold jurist, outraged by the prosecutor's tactics, could be intimidated by the prospect that words of dissent could be used against the nation in its global battle against communism.\textsuperscript{151}

Most of the Justices had noticed and explicitly commented in their opinions on the limits of legal formalism, which in this case worked to protect what were legal but still questionable decisions and procedures by the government, the judge, the prosecution, and the defense. There was also a substantive question concerning the applicability of a 1918 espionage law which had been surpassed by a 1948 law, a question which deserved the Court's deliberate consideration.

But certain Justices' uncertainties regarding the sufficiency of formalist reviews, as well as the confusion over the applicable law, were to a great extent resolved by the pervasive feeling among more than a majority of the Justices that cold war political concerns took priority over

\textsuperscript{151} Parrish, 827.
debatable issues of due process: issues of constitutionality, applicability of the 1918 law, inadequate defense, potentially reversible errors by the prosecution and the judge, the rhetorical translation of a conspiracy charge to one of treason and the ensuing abuse of crucial rules of evidence, and a perhaps unwarranted severity in sentencing.\footnote{Summarized in Second Circuit Court of Appeals opinion in Rosenberg \textit{v. United States}, 195 F. 2d 583 (1952). See also in microform, \textit{U.S. v. Rosenberg} (1951-2), prepared for The Fund for the Republic (Wilmington: M. Glazier, 1978?). Justice Jerome Frank of the Second Circuit Court of Appeals found, in this majority opinion on defense motions for the Rosenbergs, that although the Judiciary Act of 1879 grants a sentence-modifying authority to federal courts and the Supreme Court, sixty years of precedent denied the use of such authority. "It is clear that the Supreme Court alone is in a position to hold [that the Judiciary Act of 1789 confers that authority]. . . . As matters now stand, this court properly regards itself as powerless to exercise its own judgment concerning the alleged severity of the defendants' sentences." He mentions that this reluctance may also have to do with the existence of the executive's pardoning power. Then he adds this qualification to their dismissal of the Rosenbergs' and Martin Sobell's appeal: "It has been held that, [where upper court modification authority does exist], the upper court may consider, for such purposes, the quality of the evidence on which the verdict rests. . . . So here, had this court such power, it might take into consideration the fact that the evidence of the Rosenbergs' activities after Germany's defeat (as well as of their earlier espionage activities) came almost entirely from accomplices." 195 F. 2d 583, 606-7; in microform, 1675-77.}
Closure and Open-endedness

Soon after the executions of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, The New York Times ran this wrap-up of the story, contradicting its 1949 contention that the United States had no monopoly on the atomic bomb and demonstrating the rapid development of a national consensus around cold war ideology:¹⁵³

In the record of espionage against the United States there had been no case of its magnitude and its stern drama. The Rosenbergs were engaged in funneling the secrets of the most destructive weapon of all time to the most dangerous antagonist the United States ever confronted--at a time when a deadly atomic arms race was on. Their crime was staggering in its potential for destruction. It stirred the fears and the emotions of the American people. . . . The prevailing opinion in the United States . . . is that the Rosenbergs for two years had access to every court in the land and every organ of public opinion, that no court found grounds for doubting their guilt, and that they

¹⁵³ See ch. III, p. 104.
were the only atom spies who refused to confess and that they got what they deserved.\textsuperscript{154}

And J. Edgar Hoover, apparently forgetting that the United States was the only country to date to have "caused the shadow of annihilation to fall" on the world, asked

Who, in all good conscience, can say that Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, the spies who delivered the secret of the atomic bomb into the hands of the Soviets, should have been spared when their treachery caused the shadow of annihilation to fall upon all of the world's peoples?\textsuperscript{155}

The media, with a few exceptions, such as the \textit{National Guardian}, the \textit{Daily Worker}, the anti-communist \textit{Jewish Daily Forward}, and the \textit{Washington Star}, closed down the story through restatements of its official version as it had developed by the time of the executions, and attempted to deny that the Rosenberg deaths would be the end of The Atomic Spy Story. But it was the end of that story. All subsequent government attempts to achieve full revelation and plenitude of the larger spy story came to nothing. The project was

\textsuperscript{154} \textit{New York Times}, 21 June 1953, Section IV, p. 1
abandoned in 1957. Instead new stories began being written, dismantling the official story, substituting alternative legal, historical, biographical, and fictional versions, of which this rhetorical analysis has been one.

Since the immediate Rosenberg story coincides with and emerges from a radical period of silencing of the left on all relevant issues, some specific issues are thus available from that story for analyzing the subsequent literary uses of the Rosenberg story: the long-term effects of cold war politics; the cultural work of opinion-making; the functions of leaders, the media, and the individual in a late twentieth-century masculist capitalist democracy; the use and abuse of gender, race, and class in such a democracy; legal formalism and United States jurisprudence; attitudes toward nationalism, foreign policy, and arms control in a global society; mass culture and democracy; loyalty and betrayal, affirmation and dissent; the function, performance, and potential of traditional and emergent politics since 1950 and at the beginning of the twenty-first century; attitudes toward historical narrative past, present, and potential; and the individual as political and cultural agent in postmodern society.

This is a heavy agenda; literature has no responsibility to address these issues, but it is impossible not to read the two major Rosenberg novels as critical social fiction. By definition this would entail interrogating them for their
effective positions toward social issues, as well as toward the narrative performance of social criticism. It would also entail evaluating their use of specific social fields and literary forms and techniques for critical, dissenting, and oppositional cultural activity in what Gore Vidal refers to as the post-Rosenberg era—an era in which explanatory narratives for state and institutional policies and master narratives of historical development have lost their credibility. An analysis of the Rosenberg novels as critical social fiction will be the subject of Chapters IV through VII.

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THE ROSENBERG STORY: LITERATURE

The one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it.
Oscar Wilde

To become good literary historians, we must remember that what we usually call literary history has little or nothing to do with literature and that what we call literary interpretation--provided only that it is good interpretation--is in fact literary history.
Paul de Man

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IV

Literature and Society in the Post-Rosenberg Era

This study of the Rosenberg stories is an experiment in using the tools of literary analysis to study both the narrative construction of history and the historical, social implications of narrative. I began with a consideration of the narrative context and construction of the historical Rosenberg story, suggesting and foregrounding the possible motivations, manipulated rhetoricity, potential fictionality, and historical effects of any such narrative. Now I turn my attention more directly to fiction, extending this literary history of the Rosenberg story to include the two novels which use the Rosenbergs as the occasion of their writing, and to read them insofar as possible in relation to the cold war United States social world.³

The articulation of culture to history or society, which is the object of study for a broadly defined cultural criticism, is an always unresolved theoretical, practical, and critical problem. The difficulty lies in attempting to theorize the relationships that inhere among what Ernesto

³ I identify the United States cold war period as extending from 1945, when the Truman administration established the cold war as national policy, to 1990, when the United States began responding to the resignation of its superpower antagonist, the Soviet Union, from its partially real, partially projective cold war role.
Laclau calls, speaking specifically of society, "impossible objects." History, society, and culture are all overdetermined and infinitely complex chronologies of reinforcing and contradictory relationships. Invisible to direct observation, these relationships cannot be adequately theorized; they can only be thought and posited (represented) partially and hypothetically. The more variables there are, and the more complex the mutually interacting entities, the higher the order of thinking such relationships has to be—both in terms of complexity and abstraction.

It is impossible to make a claim for culture as a whole as any one thing in its relationship to its society—conceived for these purposes as interacting human and material relationships through time, which are cognitively available to us as a field of study only textually. Culture cannot adequately be explained as reflection or superstructure, ideological instrumentality, or critical opposition. While advertising, journalism, television

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5 Again I use Terry Eagleton's Althusserian definition of ideology, extending his class standpoint to allow a more complex interplay of gender, race, and class: ideology is "that complex structure of social perception which ensures that situation in which [power relationships] are either seen by most members of the society as 'natural,' or not seen at all." According to Eagleton, following Althusser, ideology has a relative power and life of its own. "Not always a direct expression of ruling class interests, it even may be in contradiction with them at moments. Ideology, then, is not a set of deliberate distortions imposed
programs, or political speeches and press conferences can be interpreted as more one than the other kind of activity—more ideological, for example—literature, the visual arts, and the performing arts tend toward a performance of all three functions, in various reciprocal proportions and intensities, functions often discoverable and displayable only through critical interpretation using multiple orders of thinking.

Without specifying or quantifying absolutely such orders of thinking, we can easily imagine a spectrum ranging from a first to an nth order, whether the model of apprehension is Cartesian objectivity; Kantian/Hegelian idealism; Marxian historical materialism or neo-Marxian and feminist cultural materialism, Nietzschean perspectivism; Husserlian/Heideggerian phenomenology and existentialism; scientific undecidability, probability and complementarity;

on us from above, but a complex and contradictory system of representations (discourses, images, myths) through which we experience ourselves in relation to each other and to the social structures in which we live. . . . The work of ideology is also to construct coherent subjects: the individual thus lives his [or her] subject-ion to social structures as a consistent subject-ivity, an imaginary wholeness."


6 Fredric Jameson has developed his own productive methodology of synthetic neo-marxist cultural criticism, using four expanding interpretive horizons of analysis, worlds within worlds, that involve increasingly complex and abstract kinds of assimilations and generalizations, resting ultimately in the outer horizon of History, the unceasing struggle between freedom and necessity. My critical use of a concept of expanding orders of thought is not unlike Jameson's scheme, but I prefer to leave the orders unquantified and unschematized. See Jameson, "On Interpretation," The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 17-102.
or contemporary poststructuralist constructivism and textuality.\textsuperscript{7} Whatever the model, and whatever the order of thinking, the positing of relationships is necessarily speculative and open to critique and revision, reversal, or cancellation from other orders or ways of thinking the same objects and relationships, as well as from the perception of entirely different objects and relationships as relevant to the argument being made. Ultimately the social use, assimilation, and power of any explanatory version of sociohistorical phenomena will depend upon its ability to produce the desired effects: material and/or cultural effects, desired by interested, positioned groups or institutions with the critical mass and power to deploy a particular version or hypothesis for its own purposes.

I intend to read the Rosenberg novels as the social fiction they are; to situate each one historically; to produce partial critical readings that reach beyond the books' manifest content and formal boundaries by purposefully

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{7} Constructivism: the argument that subject and object both are historical effects of our methods of apprehending, responding to, and interfering with "reality," and that "reality" is thus always already mediated, knowable to us only through the translations of our own anticipatory and explanatory representations, that is, through a language-bound textuality. Textuality: the argument that experience and history are only knowable and communicable through language, conceived in the broadest sense as the signifying process, and thus that the foundation of all knowledge and belief systems is necessarily rhetorical, textual, and intertextual, based on a linguistic system that operates by difference, exclusion, and opposition, and that never is identical with material reality.
\end{footnotesize}
considering them as representative of or as saying something about cold war United States society; and to analyze critically the implications of such representations.

This methodology differentiates my work from that of new historicists, as well as from that of poststructuralist critics. Although I am necessarily working within a field of textuality, I am unable and unwilling to confine my articulation and positing of relationships to that of making specific textual linkages. In some new historicist work there are a contextualized density of linkages and complexity of argument which manage to posit persuasive and historically specific relationships while refusing totalizing claims for the operations of textuality. The greatest obstacle to my doing this kind of work with the Rosenberg novels is their contemporaneity, and the prematurity and arbitrary reductiveness of positing even textual relationships in the midst of too much history. I prefer to rely on other methods

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of reading and critiquing these novels—the use of multiple orders or points of view, as well as conflations and juxtapositions of codes and disciplines for apprehending, conceiving and positing text-context relationships and effects, which claims will depend for their effect ultimately on the rhetorical qualities of my argument.

My earlier representations of the frame and embedded narratives of the official Rosenberg story would not have been possible at the time of the cold war/Rosenberg event, for many obvious reasons, not least of which are the differences between then and now in the range of allowable and believable critiques of cold war politics, the public unavailability of documents then that make a contemporary analysis possible, and a critical and institutional environment in the 90s that provides methodologies of analysis and audiences unavailable in the 50s. By the same token, my account of the 50s is undoubtedly infused with categories and concerns of the present and simplified by a forgetting or ignorance of context.

This rhetorical analysis of the Rosenberg story and the historical, social critiques offered by the two novels have in common their status as phenomena of the post-Rosenberg age. 9 They are post-Rosenberg not just chronologically, but also in terms of their elaboration in the postmodern present,

9 Vidal, 94.
an historical period in which the traditional liberal enlightenment narratives--liberal democracy, the free market, socialism, marxism--have lost their adequacy to function, as they did during World War II and in the immediate postwar years, as overreaching, metanarrative explanatory justifications for the decisions, events, and evasions of everyday life. Despite their rote repetition and ritualistic public use by many political officials, business leaders, military officers, church leaders, teachers, and schoolchildren, they are no longer adequate to what Fredric Jameson considers the actual but unrepresentable complexities of late twentieth-century global society on planet earth.\textsuperscript{10}

The Rosenbergs' form of adherence (still not known) to what they considered to be the preferable version of the enlightenment liberal metanarrative--marxism and international communism--resulted in their conviction and execution for an action defined as treasonous. Simultaneously, some of the most knowledgeable and far-sighted members of the nation allegedly betrayed by the Rosenbergs had been passionately arguing for the same action--international cooperation on atomic bomb technology--as official United States policy. They believed international cooperation best served the long-range interests of the United States in a world context, while promoting the liberal

\textsuperscript{10} Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," \textit{New Left Review} 146 (July-August 1984): 53-92.
enlightenment goals of peace and maximized individual social freedom. But the policy which prevailed, defining retroactively the alleged Rosenberg action as a threat to national security, was publicly established on the rhetorical grounds of the same enlightenment narrative as marxism or socialism: national bomb ownership and secrecy would best serve United States interests as the global guardian of peace and of the principle of maximized individual social freedom.

As I have noted in chapter II, there were already in 1945 great discrepancies between the United States explanatory narrative and actual socioeconomic and political conditions and ambitions, but the power of the narrative was still intact and operative for its national audience, as was the Marxist narrative in Stalin's Soviet Union and for communist parties everywhere. The Rosenberg story could not have taken place as it did without the support of the United States version of the Enlightenment narrative, and without national belief in the United States role in keeping the world safe for that narrative to realize itself in history.

The post-Rosenberg era is one of epistemological skepticism toward and interrogation of such official explanatory narratives for domestic and global material circumstances and relationships. It began--for the United States, at least--with the questionably necessary use of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and has intensified with each irrational official action performed in the name of
peace, freedom, and democracy: anti-labor illegalities and violence, the Rosenberg trial, McCarthyism, racist violence and deprivation of rights, anti-student violence, discriminatory domestic laws and economic policies, Vietnam, Watergate, arms escalation, Iran/Contra, and United States foreign policy in the Middle East.

A growing awareness of the inability of the traditional explanatory narrative to account adequately for these phenomena is pervasively evident in the language of television sitcoms, MTV segments, films, rap lyrics and other politicized song forms, comic routines--that is, in all the forms of popular culture. Skepticism toward traditional explanatory narrative characterizes also the more avant garde and often less accessible practices of an anti-narrative, interrogating, and denaturalizing postmodernity in films, television, literature, and the visual and performing arts. This anti-narrative attitude has produced in the eighties and nineties a bitter division in the academic humanities, between a subject-centered humanism based on Cartesian objectivity and Enlightenment rationality, and the more or less radical critique of such a humanism that poststructuralists, cultural and feminist critics, and new historicists articulate in their theory and practice. The effectiveness of these practices in disturbing the old but inadequate narrative is evident in the powerful counter-
offensives of official and institutional reaction and censorship they are provoking.

Left oppositional cultural criticism in this period consists to a large extent in reading various cultural phenomena analytically in order to distinguish between and foreground elements that reinforce the traditional narratives supporting irrational relationships of power, and elements that interrogate the relationships between such narrative and perceived social conditions. It is not that the liberal narrative of a just and democratic society has to be abandoned because it doesn't fit actual circumstances; it is that its use as masking justification for unjust and undemocratic practices must be interrupted and displayed as contradictory.

That project of interruption, of which the continuing Rosenberg story can be seen as paradigmatic, is also what postmodern fiction claims to be accomplishing. But the paradox of a delegitimating fiction that takes as its referent an irrational social order resides in the extent to which any fiction, even anti-realist fiction, re-presents society, even in order to interrogate its irrationalities. As Adorno noted, with his usual cultural pessimism, this problem of complicity in perpetuating an unjust social order cannot be avoided: "For discourse to refer, even protestingly, is for it to become instantly complicit with what it criticizes; in a familiar linguistic and
psychoanalytic paradox, negation negates itself because it cannot help but posit the object it desires to destroy."\textsuperscript{11} But this totalizing and pessimistic claim depends on a decontextualization and a de-historicization of linguistic reference and representation. It ignores the critical valencing of representation that occurs through manipulation of contexts, genres, forms, and modes of expression.

A purposeful critical standpoint for late twentieth-century cultural criticism that remains suspended between a non-totalizing optimism or pessimism yields a cultural field that, in working to resist and rebel against oppressive life forms, often indeed reproduces some of the very conditions which enable those forms to persist. The critical function for this post-Rosenberg era, then, is to define and foreground the differences between the two--reproduction and interrogation of history and social relationships--in critical work, pedagogical practice, and other practical forms of life and work, thus extending the work of the postmodern fictionist. It is in this sense that the postmodern artist, critic, and left political activist, for now, may share the same purpose.

The oversaturation of an age with history . . . leads an age into a dangerous mood of irony in regard to itself and subsequently into the even more dangerous mood of cynicism. . . . In this mood, however, it develops more and more a prudent practical egoism through which the forces of life are paralyzed and at last destroyed. . . . Modern man . . . has become a strolling spectator and has arrived at a condition in which even great wars and revolutions are able to influence him for hardly more than a moment. . . . Thus the individual grows fainthearted and unsure and dares no longer believe in himself: he sinks into his own subjective depths, which here means into the accumulated lumber of what he has learned but which has no outward effect, of instruction which does not become life. The man [overwhelmed by history] can no longer extricate himself from the delicate net of his
judiciousness and truth for a simple act of will and desire.¹

E. L. Doctorow's *Book of Daniel*, published in 1971, was immediately hailed as "the political novel of our age,"² and continues to be regarded critically as unique for its treatment of historical and political issues through the lives of individuals. Called "a threnody on the agony of the American left," it is, as reviewers and Doctorow himself have noted, not about the Rosenbergs but about the idea of the Rosenbergs, "how they came into being, why their trial was needed, what their legacy is and the mixture of that legacy with the social-political climate today."³ Doctorow's second novel, *Daniel* was the first to bring him critical attention.

*Daniel* was not a bestseller; it was, however, a Bowker's notable book for 1971, with Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Barthelme's *City Life*, Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, George Jackson's *Soledad Brother*, Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Millet's *Sexual Politics*, Silberman's *Crisis in the Classroom*, Greer's *Female Eunuch*, Illich's *Deschooling Society*, *The Pentagon Papers*, Percy's

³Ibid.
Love in the Ruins, Skinner's Beyond Freedom and Dignity, Piven's and Cloward's Regulating the Poor, and Clark's Crime in America. The Book of Daniel has been in continuous print since 1971 and is regularly taught in high schools, colleges, and universities. It has been published in England, and all the western European countries, in a number of foreign languages. With the democratization of eastern European countries in the late eighties and early nineties, requiring a rearticulation of the meaning and practice of the left in those countries, The Book of Daniel reached a new and expanding audience.

The Book of Daniel is an early juxtaposition of two literary modes--realism and postmodernism--as a method for bridging the two historical eras in which those modes prevailed: the pre-Rosenberg period of the old left, and the post-Rosenberg period of the sixties and the new left. As most of its reviews noted, it is a book about a past period in United States history that informs the issues of the present, particularly in regard to the historical and future role of the domestic left. The book maintains two primary and interpenetrating narrative tracks. It attempts to account for the effects on a family and its individual members of becoming the object of the antagonistic and projective forces of a society. Using the history of that family, and the son's efforts to connect his past with his present and experience the immediacy of his world, it also
attempts to account for the generational break of the sixties, the shift from old left to new, articulating the differences, losses, and gains of that apparently disjunctive withdrawal and emergence. And it suggests indirectly, through multiple literary techniques, the possibilities and potentials for dissent and radicalism in a post-McCarthy society whose dominant cultural image is Disneyland.

Formally it is a bridge between the realist and the postmodern novel, using the techniques of both in a complex and multi-voiced, multi-mode, first- second- and third- person, self-referential counterpoint of historical synthesis and narrative, interrogation and delegitimation, and imaginative reconstruction; political and personal uncertainty, skepticism, cynicism, and insights; social and political analysis and critique; biblical history and theological speculations, and contemporary cultural and literary criticism. It uses what is often referred to as the imaginative literary dominant in the United States--the individual's quest for identity, the bildungsroman--as its linear, realistic narrative thread, interrupted, knotted, cancelled, and contested by historical and personal memory, book knowledge, and lived experience--a process not altogether productive of unity or clarity of person or point of view. This open-endedness of subject(ivity) and argument is purposeful, refusing and critiquing simple ideologies and explanatory narratives, always from the critical imaginary of
a just world, an ideal which serves as the sole fixed point in a critical re-thinking of history and its subjects.4

Fifteen years after the Rosenberg trial, Doctorow began thinking about the Rosenbergs and the role of the United States left when he noticed similarities and differences between the Vietnam anti-war movement and the ineffective old left efforts to oppose the cold war. As he developed the idea of a novel about the subject, he decided that the Rosenberg children could embody the problematic of a generational and cultural rupture in a way that a confirmed

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4 John Dos Passos is Doctorow's most direct predecessor; both of them work in the tradition of Defoe (Journal of the Plague Year, or Moll Flanders) using fiction and fact interchangeably to write critical and provocative social fiction. Dos Passos is usually classified as a realist/naturalist writer, but he formally anticipates or initiates postmodern forms of historiographic metafiction (Linda Hutcheon's term), interspersing fictional segments with documentary texts, headlines, newsreels, impressionistic biographical fragments, and a stream-of-consciousness commentary called "Camera Eye." His work is more naturalistic than Doctorow's, in that the fictions are always subordinate to and finally foreclosed by the forces of a coherent and antagonistic history. Doctorow reverses this balance, using fictions to interrogate a motivated and often incoherent history, as well as to challenge readers' preconceived historical assumptions. He calls his writing "false documents," as opposed to true documents like the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, or the Watergate tapes. See Barbara Foley, "From USA to Ragtime: Notes on the Form of Historical Consciousness in Modern Fiction," E. L. Doctorow: Essays and Conversations, ed. Richard Trenner (Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1983). See also Linda Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction: The Pastime of Past Time," A Poetics of Postmodernism (New York and London: Routledge, Chapman and Hale, 1988).
member of neither the old nor the new left could do. As Irving Howe wrote in 1965:

The thirties intellectuals, bound together by common problems and understandings, seem in danger of losing their dominant position in American intellectual life. . . . A younger generation of intellectuals and semi-intellectuals, perhaps not as well equipped dialectically as the older leftists, semi-leftists and ex-leftists, and certainly not as wide ranging in interest or accomplished in style, yet endowed with a self assurance, a lust for power, a contempt for and readiness to swallow up their elders [is] at once amusing, admirable, and disturbing. Thinking of themselves as "new radicals," these young people see as one of their major tasks the dislodgement of the old ones. . . . A Kulturkampf seems in prospect, and one in which, I must confess, my own sympathies would be mixed.6

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And a typical response from the point of view of that self-assured, lustful, and contemptuous generation of "careless courage" (313):

The 1950s were the turning point in the history of America. Those who grew up before the 1950s live today in the mental world of Nazism, concentration camps, economic depression, and Communist dreams stalinized . . . Kids who grew up in the post-1950s live in a world of supermarkets, color TV commercials, guerrilla war, international media, psychedelics, rock 'n roll and moon walks. . . .

This generation gap is the widest in history. The pre-1950s generation has nothing to teach the post-1950s.7

From his vantage point of cynical detachment, Daniel is an effective--if immature--agent for an analysis and critique of a past and present in which he has been and is present. He grew up in an old left family which remained loyal to the narrative of marxism and the communist party after the disaffection by most of the left following disclosures of Stalin's statist and terrorist practice of communism. Along with the Isaacsons' unwavering loyalty to the marxist narrative of a historical progression toward a just society,

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they also possessed a liberal faith in the United States Constitution and institutions, as did most of the communist old left. But they worked ceaselessly to educate their children to the occlusions of mainstream historiography, as well as to the discrepancies between the historical vision of a just society, and the social and economic realities and contradictions masked by United States formal education, advertising, and the media. His parents were executed in 1953 for the treason of having given the Russians the secret of the atomic bomb, after having been convicted and tried under conspiracy charges.

Daniel is a graduate student trying to write his dissertation in history at Columbia in 1967, but he can't find a thesis: "How [do his abuse of his wife, the suicide attempt of his sister, and other family griefs] establish sympathy for me [as narrator]? Why not begin [instead] with Daniel searching, too late, for a thesis" (8). Although Daniel is a transitional figure without allegiances, he shares certain generational characteristics with the emerging new left. He is middle class, rebellious, and enraged, but without historical knowledge and without a father--that is, without a sense of generational continuity. He lacks a practical knowledge of the past and the practice of analysis necessary to develop a workable thesis or a political position; he is paralyzed, unable to write his dissertation
or to enter into the dialectical, conflictual process of politics.

But motivated by love, rage, and guilt for his parents and sister as sacrificial, willing to experience anything in the interest of more understanding, equipped with an historical imagination, and aided by an unannounced wiser older voice that speaks through him (narratively, not mystically), he is able to begin the laborious personal and political work of "making connections," not necessarily the same thing as making narrative. In this he achieves a kind of historical wisdom and understanding of radical effectivity and its limits that makes the exuberant and "careless courage" of the left impossible for him. Tom Hayden, a co-author of the 1962 Port Huron inaugurating manifesto of the new left, said that becoming a radical "was like giving birth to yourself." But Daniel's birth is not into the unified self, either of the United States' liberal humanism or of the new left's pluralist consensual and participatory democracy.

Daniel Isaacson is a postmodern, intertextual, and historicized David Copperfield. Like David, Daniel is writing an autobiography in order to come to terms with a criminal father (and mother) as well as with himself in an irrational society: "Let's see, what other David Copperfield kind of crap [can I tell you]," he asks (117). Since this is

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also a Holden Caulfield line, Daniel notes that "the Trustees of Ohio State were right in 1956 when they canned the English instructor for assigning Catcher in the Rye to his freshman class. They knew there is no qualitative difference between the kid who thinks it's funny to fart in chapel, and Che Guevara. They knew then Holden Caulfield would found SDS" (117-18). This is a typical Doctorow fusion of individual and history, both in its evocation in a quip by Daniel of the censorship and enforced conformities of the fifties, and also in its linking of small individual gestures with larger political scenarios.

But Daniel as a defensively cynical intellectual and non-participating observer is even more directly a descendant of Henry Adams, the distanced fence-sitting observer of himself and history. Daniel is also writing his dissertation/novel to acquire an "education" in understanding the individual in history. In The Education Adams thinks of himself, as Daniel intermittently does, in the third person, as a spider having to construct a web of understanding from his own perceptions of sequence in an anarchic world. Daniel is an equally distanced observer in search of understanding--a "criminal of perception"--forced into an unwilling remembering of his past and reconnection with his present by the influence of his angry, dying sister with whom he feels an incestuous relationship of the heart and mind: "they were like the compensating halves of a clock sculpture that would
exchange positions when the chimes struck (10). "My involvement with Susan has to do with rage, which is easily confused with unnatural passion" (253), a rage evoked by her moral judgment of him as an evasive and unprincipled betrayer of his family and his past.

Daniel and Henry Adams have affinities other than their roles as observers: Like Adams, Daniel has his own concerns with "monstrous sequence" -- the effects of the cause-effect constructions of history and of historiography -- as well as with the apparent historical transition from unity to multiplicity, from the unified Enlightenment narratives of both right and left to conflicting revisionist and emergent histories and to the partial points of view and contesting, conflicting narratives of the sixties. Like Adams, he sees electricity (Adams's dynamo) as the dominant metaphor for a society managed and motivated by electronic technology. He is also concerned with education, remembering the training his father had given him in being a "psychic alien," teaching him to see through the illusions of ideology to the discrepancies between promises and social reality, as well as the cultural cover-ups by advertising, the media, and politics. He critiques the efficient substitutes for education and historical knowledge provided for a mass culture by the diversions and evasions of Disneyland and television, which he considers uniquely suited to the
educational requirements of a totalitarian society. Here is Adams on the same subject:

All State education is a sort of dynamo machine for polarizing the popular mind; for turning and holding its lines of force in the direction supposed to be most effective for State purposes. The German machine was terribly efficient [in this]. (78)

In The Education Adams is working toward a coherent theory of contemporary (late nineteenth- and twentieth-century) history, which he finally understands in an altogether naturalistic way, as a field of multiple and contradictory forces drawing the individual along like a fish on a hook, entirely disjunctive with a more coherent past, and ultimately requiring a newly adaptive and reactive social mind. As he tells us over and over, his is a story of failure, personal and human, in what is becoming a post-humanist age; appropriate to such a totalizing view, Adams protects himself throughout by the consistent stance of ironized viewer. In this Daniel departs from Adams. Daniel begins in irony and cynicism and ends somewhere else. His story is not one of absolute or self-advertised failure, despite his insights into those very forces predicted by
Adams: an age of technology, manipulative social forces, and imminent catastrophe.

Doctorow himself to some extent shares Adams's reservations about the possibilities for individual agency in a post-nuclear society:

... The story of any given individual may not be able to sustain an implication for the collective fate. The assumption that makes fiction possible, even Modernist fiction—the moral immensity of the single soul—is under question because of the bomb. ... The over-riding condition of things [is] that we're in the countdown stages of a post-humanist society.

Unlike Adams, Doctorow also maintains his own contradictory and existential position as a radical humanist in that post-humanist society:

I'm a leftist. But of the pragmatic, social democratic left—the humanist left that's wary of ideological fervor. It's a very exhausting place to be. ... I've been called an idealist and naive

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and a pseudo-Marxist. But in this country the reference has to be the Constitution. . . . If I was not in [the radical Jewish humanist tradition], I would certainly want to apply for membership.\textsuperscript{10}

Here he gives voice to a division not uncommon to critical intellectuals and political activists: a pessimistic or tragic view of history, coupled with a willed and defiant "obligation to engage to construct a just world," through a "fusion of moral engagement with critical epistemology."\textsuperscript{11}

This is Romain Rolland's "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will,"\textsuperscript{12} but it is also a tentative move away from narrative resolutions toward an analytic and open-ended critical process.

Since he also claims that "a political [literary] work, by its very nature, would usually end up acknowledging the ambiguities of what it's talking about,"\textsuperscript{13} we could expect a certain ambiguity toward claims for the individual in history in a determinedly political novel like Daniel. This is most obviously expressed in Daniel's oscillation between first and

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, 52, 54.
\textsuperscript{12} Epigraph, Richard King, "Between Simultaneity and Sequence," E.L. Doctorow: A Democracy of Perception, 45.
\textsuperscript{13} Doctorow, "Politics and the Mode of Fiction," 50.
third person narrative, although I am unable to find in this
alternation anything other than a formal gesture toward the
ambivalent position and meaning of "subject." It should be
noted that the book has been criticized for what is
considered to be gratuitous uses of postmodern formal
techniques. While it may be difficult to show the congruence
of a formal with a thematic logic in specific instances, the
multiple interrupting modes and voices are certainly true to
the historical, political, social, and personal uncertainties
and arguments that make up the book. A schematic
correspondence between formal and semantic disruptions would
itself be problematic, offering an aestheticized narrative
coherence that it is the book's purpose to interrogate and
interrupt.

The epigraphs invoke a despairing view of history. The
first of the three epigraphs is a passage from the biblical
Book of Daniel 3:4, in which the oppressed people under
Nebuchadnezzar are exhorted to fall down and worship the
golden images. The biblical Daniel offered the possibility,
through his interpretations of the King's dreams, of sparing
the people from the worst excesses of authority, but his
visions were increasingly apocalyptic and hysterical. The
second epigraph is from Whitman, playing the same kind of
instruments that served in the biblical Book of Daniel as a
signal to Nebuchadnezzar's people to fall down in worship;
but in Whitman's verse they serve to commemorate the
"conquer'd and slain." The final epigraph takes us to the end of this downward spiral, with Allen Ginsberg's words to America, in the poem by the same name, "I can't stand my own mind/ . . . Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb."

Doctorow is telling us that history is apparently a repetitive and worsening story of the corruptions of power and greed and the barbarisms that underlie every act of civilization. But this time with a difference: the possibility of the end of history through the same human agency that practices corruptions and barbarisms in the name of civilization. The shift from local to global destructive capacities with the development of the atomic bomb was accompanied in the fifties and sixties by a cultural break almost as radical: the shift from the historical narrative constructions of Hitler and Stalin, or Truman, McCarthy and Eisenhower, with their assumptions of the potential for a conflation of narrative and material historical mastery, to history by Disney, politics by television, and society by consumption. "Rather than making the culture, we seem these days to be in it. American culture suggests an infinitely expanding universe that generously accommodates, or imprisons, us all."

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14 "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism." Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Illuminations, 256.
But the epigraphic progression through tyranny and oppression to atomic apocalypse and individual alienation and impotence is belied by the formal structure of the novel: a division--by time and/or by image--into four books, beginning with "Memorial day" 1967, commemorating all the "conquer'd and slain" evoked by Whitman's lines; passing through "Halloween," the night of carnival and the eruption of dark forces ("that archetype traitor, the master subversive Poe, who wore a hole into the parchment [of the Enlightenment and the Constitution] and let the darkness pour through" (218); then "Starfish," the forgotten thirteenth zodiac sign signifying the unity of language with truth, life with justice, and belief with intellect, but also a unity in death for Daniel's sister Susan who died from world withdrawal; and ending with "Christmas," a time of birth and hope--for Christians, but also, to some extent, for Daniel. The time when God becomes man, in order to practice an unrationlized and paradoxical form of communitarian and egalitarian justice which the political left in a post-theological age finds itself charged with defending and promulgating.

The reader of Daniel's story is not allowed to rest easily in a unified subject-position; she is rather invoked by different and conflicting voices, in a range of tones, and at different points of uncertainty or conflict in the argument Daniel is conducting with himself and his audience. The reader thus unwittingly and/or actively participates not
only in the ongoing, searching dialogue but also in the attempt to achieve partial and tentative comprehension of the problems and potentials of assuming political positionality in late twentieth century United States.

The manipulation of reader participation is pervasive and largely unintrusive, with occasional purposeful foregroundings of the narrative demands on her. Daniel speaks in a conversational tone to which we are all accustomed, repeatedly and colloquially using the impersonal and indefinite second person "you" instead of "one," and drawing us in at a largely unconscious level. "We understand St. Joan: You want to fuck her but if you do you miss the point"(254). Concerning the primitive rationale for the cold war's economic and military policies, he manages to show how the disavowed and projected other resides in our own hearts:

When you defeat an enemy you are required to eat his heart. . . . You consume the heart of your enemy so that it can no longer be said of him that he exists--except as he exists in you. (286)

He laments his loss of childhood hope and his disconnection with family and the past in a way that also acknowledges a sense of connection in which we all participate:
All my life I have been trying to escape from my relatives and I have been intricate in my run, but one way or another they are what you come upon around the corner, and the Lord God who is so frantic for recognition says you have to ask how they are and would they like something cool to drink, and what is it you can do for them this time. (37)

There are occasional intrusive and challenging invocations to you, the reader, or to other you's whose evocation is equally startling and forceful. These direct addresses are sometimes angry and hostile, sometimes empathetic, sometimes ironic, sometimes tragic. Whatever the tone, the result is a more intimate engagement between the reader and Daniel and his world. As he is commanding his wife to undress and kneel away from him like "an abject devotionalist" so he can burn her buttocks with a cigarette lighter, he interrupts the narrative to interrupt the reader's voyeuristic and prurient gaze: "Who are you anyway? Who told you you could read this?" (74) And then goes on to speculate about the differing effects of realism or symbolic imagination, citing the example of a razor slicing through an eyeball in a Buñuel film just when the audience has settled for the symbolic substitution of a thin cloud gliding across the moon.
This is a metafictional and seemingly gratuitous digression on literary matters, but as Daniel/Doctorow make clear to us throughout the novel, and as Kenneth Burke demonstrates in *Rhetoric of Religion*, what is always already characteristic of our interpretations of the world is a reduction of the complexities of history, and thus eventually of our historical memory itself, into motivated and symbolic evasions, exclusions, coherences, and closures that are no longer adequate to material circumstances. This narrative reduction is what Doctorow and Daniel perceived as having occurred in the belief system of the old left. Daniel comments that the old left "dwelt in a realm so mysteriously symbolic that it defied understanding" (27). Daniel's quest is partially to re-member his parents' story for himself, from his own memory and critical intelligence, rather than settling for the equally bankrupt right or left symbolic versions of the Isaacsons as traitor or martyr.

Daniel's "you" brings into the circle of address more than just the reader: he appeals to the oppressed and imprisoned around the world with an ironic consolation that is an indictment of United States political and economic hypocrisy:

A MESSAGE OF CONSOLATION TO GREEK BROTHERS [sic] IN THEIR PRISON CAMPS, AND TO MY HAITIAN BROTHERS AND NICARAGUAN BROTHERS AND DOMINICAN BROTHERS AND
SOUTH AFRICAN BROTHERS AND SPANISH BROTHERS AND TO MY BROTHERS IN SOUTH VIETNAM, ALL IN THEIR PRISON CAMPS: YOU ARE IN THE FREE WORLD! (288-9)

And he laments to his own country: "My country! Why aren't you what you claim to be?" (47), refusing with this gesture the blindly loyal turn which the intellectual old left made in the early fifties. His diction echoes and subverts the famous "Our Country and Our Culture" Partisan Review 1952 collective statement of re-allegiance to American cold war values and policies.

To a sympathetic reader, someone who already knows the history he is telling, someone perhaps from the old left or a contemporary left intellectual, he establishes his most intimate and personal relationship: "Note to the Reader: if [this historical analysis] seems after all this time elementary . . . then I am reading you. And together we may rend our clothes in mourning" (67). Referring to his parents' arrest as "one of the Great Moments of the American Left . . . artfully reduced to the shabby conspiracies of a couple named Paul and Rochelle Isaacson" (135), he challenges a now antagonistic and perhaps complicit reader with his angry determination to render a realistic--not symbolic--account of their deaths: "I suppose you think I can't do the electrocution. I know there is a you. There has always been
a you. YOU: I will show you that I can do the
electrocution" (359).

Daniel's personal quest is inseparable from social and
historical analysis, which he performs and dramatizes in
various modes, reaching in each segment of analysis earned
insights that serve as efficient summary critiques of many
aspects of the left and of contemporary United States
society: the crippling idealism of old left marxism and
utopian socialism; the terror of Stalin's reign; the American
Communist Party's role in the demise of a viable postwar
American left; education by Disney, TV, and images; political
power through money and bureaucracy instead of representative
democracy; the censorship of dissent; trial by media; the law
as protection of privilege; racism and anti-semitism;
American capitalism as capable of surviving only in
opposition to communism and socialism;\(^{16}\) the complicity of

\(^{16}\) This is an insight dramatized and materialized in the United States
in the years following perestroika, glasnost and the democratization of
formerly statist socialist states. The dependence of the particularly
corrupt form of capitalism practiced in the United States on the
function of the communist Soviet union and its satellites as worse
alternative has not been understood; nor do current government officials
realize or acknowledge the extent to which the nature of United States
capitalism will change now that its manichean and defining other is
radically changing. It may even be impossible to further postpone
examining the extents to which the United States is a socialist state,
but one which uses socialist fiscal and monetary strategies to support
the non-poor and to support capital (85% of domestic social outlays
support the non-poor, while tax expenditures in the form of credits,
deductions, and depreciation allowances effectively and significantly
subsidize capital). See Michael Harrington, The Next Left: The History
liberal moralism, for its failure of analysis, in working to reproduce undemocratic and unjust social relationships; the failure of Enlightenment rationality; the theatricality necessary to the working of institutions like banks, courtrooms, churches; corporal punishment as a system of class definition and management; the moral failure of United States fiction to engage socially (as in the work of Henry James); madness (of his grandmother and sister) as a social, not private and idiosyncratic, response to the end of hope.

The dramatization of these ideas in social and historical situations and the relevance of such recollections and analyses to Daniel's quest vitalize a potential didacticism. Also, as a writer and intellectual attempting to reconstruct his own history, Daniel is able to offer abstract and philosophical, sometimes metafictional, critiques of objectivity, historiography, and fiction-making. These epistemological analyses and critiques, also deriving from Daniel's reflections on or interactions with people and groups of political positionality, achieve a conflictual or dramatic materiality that dramatizes the ordinarily invisible relationships between an era's epistemology and its historical phenomena: the relationship between old left American communism and faith in a progressive history; or that between faith in a progressive history (the same Enlightenment narrative and the rationales for and development of the cold war; or that between Martin Luther
King's use of the same narrative to initiate the confrontations of the sixties, with the ensuing proliferation of points of view, and the construction of multiple narratives and multiple political positionalities—all in a liberal democratic society.

*The Book of Daniel,* and the greatly diluted film version, "Daniel," directed by Sidney Lumet and scripted by Doctorow, along with Louis Nizer's bestselling *Implosion Conspiracy,* are the only versions of the Rosenberg story known by the public at large. Nizer's book is blatantly biased, based on an absolute faith in American institutions and justice and written without benefit of now available FBI files. His attitude toward the Rosenbergs is condescendingly moralistic and arrogantly classist, racist, and sexist. The film, synonymous with the Rosenberg story for most of its viewers, is an almost entirely depoliticized, privatized, sentimental and familial take on the story, a conscious decision on Lumet's part.\(^{17}\) Doctorow's book is a provocative and faithful representation of the political complexities, uncertainties, and implications of the story, but its audience has been small relative to that of Nizer's book and

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\(^{17}\) In an interview with Arthur Bell, Lumet said "I set out to make a movie about parents and children." Bell responds: "We don't know as much about their politics as we do about their characters. When they're finally electrocuted we've become so fond of them we don't care—or really want to know what their politics are." "Dead on," Lumet replies. Arthur Bell, "Not the Rosenberg's Story, Village Voice, 6 September 1983, 42."
to that of the film, which has had the largest audience of all. I would offer the novel to anyone who expressed an interest in knowing the Rosenberg story, but with one serious qualification: Doctorow's use of gender.

One of the more complex relationships Daniel dramatizes in his book is gender relations and specifically the political function of women in regard to men. The historical narratives—of Stalin's purges and Bukharin's resistance, of the formulation of United States cold war policies, and of the development of mass culture—are exclusively men's stories in the novel, as indeed they were. But Daniel's personal history involves more women than men, although it is populated with a rich range of each gender, and in the novel's economy, the functions of men and women are split between the autonomous public life and the dependent private.

Doctorow made one significant change in the historical Rosenberg story, in addition to turning Ethel's accuser-brother David Greenglass into Dr. Mindish, the family dentist. This change, the substitution of Susan, the Isaacson daughter, for one of the two Rosenberg sons, seems gratuitous and harmless until it is examined as a pattern of the gender structuring of the novel itself. It is not the sex change itself that matters; it is how the story then departs from the Rosenberg story and the story of their sons, Michael and Robert Meeropol, that assumes significance for a critical reading.
Both Meeropol brothers and their wives are political activists, spending only part of their time representing their parents to interested groups around the country, while the largest part of their political work is with local communitarian projects or national or international issues specific to their interests. Michael finished his formal education with graduate work in economics at Cambridge and a doctorate from the University of Wisconsin and now teaches in a college in Massachusetts, where he and his wife and children live and work. Robert received a doctorate in anthropology from the University of Michigan, followed by a law degree. Now a practicing lawyer, he and his wife work alternate years so they can devote every other year to volunteer social and political work. They organized the local group supporting Central American autonomy and political refugees in the Massachusetts town where they live with their children. Robert is currently engaged in establishing a foundation to provide financial support for the education of the children of United States political prisoners, since he and Michael were beneficiaries of the financial and emotional support of the old left, including a trust fund for their education established by their parents' attorney, Emanuel Bloch.

It is important to insist that this biographical information has absolutely no claims on Doctorow or any other fiction writer. His decision to portray one Isaacson child
as dying of old left despair and a sense of betrayal by a hypocritical business-controlled government, and the other child as coming to terms with political positionality and participation in a new left world was a highly effective means of dramatizing and metaphorizing the history and differences of old and new left. As was his portrayal of a senile (old communist left) Dr. Mindish at Disneyland.

Daniel's quest is slow and painful, and he reaches a sense of himself as a figure of continuity, a person whose connection with his past keeps him both from a nostalgic return to outmoded forms of thought and from a total identification with the more reckless and naive or self-absorbed new left. The novel opens with Daniel visiting Susan after her puzzling suicide attempt, explained only by the note to him, "They're still fucking us. Goodby Daniel. You get the picture." Susan is Daniel's other half, the feminine counterpart who enrages him while inhabiting his mind and heart. And she is dying from a belated allegiance to old left values, an allegiance possible only through what Daniel calls a failure of [political] analysis:

Look at her lying there making a fool of herself;
Teach her to play her stupid games. Look at the actress! Look at how just lying there, not saying a fucking thing, not doing a thing but lying there and picking up bedsores she can still be morally
preemptive. . . . I can live with your death. . . .
I'll [still] want a hamburger with everything on it. . . . [Your voice] is so familiar to me that I cannot perceive the world except with your voice framing the edges of my vision. It is on the horizon and under my feet. . . . It is the feminine voice that passes solidly through ontological mirrors. It lies at the heart of the matter, the nub of the thing, the core of the problem, in the center on the bull's eye, smack in the middle. We understand St. Joan: You want to fuck her but if you do you miss the point. (253-4)

But how many readers also miss the point, made silently and unwittingly, that it is the woman in this pair who can't be analytical or effectively involved in the political world? That it is the woman who acts, even in death, as the moral voice inhabiting the man's head? That it is the woman who has to die of thwarted desires for an active life, while the man incorporates her program and begins its fulfillment in his own life? This use of feminine gender, motivated perhaps at least in part by formal needs, is an unambiguous example of the potential in representational fiction for complicity with oppressive role and relationship expectations. That Susan Isaacson's representation works to replicate and naturalize oppressive gender definitions and expectations in
a book whose larger purpose is to interrogate oppressive assumptions supports Myra Jehlen's contention that "[the novelistic process of generation, of the becoming of the self] may be so defined as to require a definition of female characters that effectively precludes their becoming autonomous, so that indeed they would do so at the risk of the novel's artistic life."\textsuperscript{18} Could we have had a \textit{Book of Daniel} without a Susan Isaacson?

Daniel gives us a powerful and tragic dramatic portrait of his enraged and deranged immigrant grandmother, driven mad by life-long hardship and repetitive loss of hope, in a process that descends, by declension, through the three generations of women, beginning with the grandmother's faith in god, then with his mother's faith in politics, then with Susan's loss of faith and suicidal despair. Daniel describes an imagined photograph of the three women in a medical textbook, in diction that recovers exactly the objectification of (mad and nude) women by a male gaze:

They all have triangles, but move your gaze upward.
This is a medical textbook. The meaning of the picture is in the thin, diagrammatic arrow line, colored red, that runs from Grandma's breast

through your mama's and into your sister's. The red line describes the progress of madness inherited through the heart. (88)

It is the women--the ones with triangles--who are the bearers and enactors of society's irrationalities. But in describing the feminine voice as passing through ontological mirrors Daniel grants Susan an ability to challenge the narrative coherence and abstract essentialism that mask a more complex situational reality. In this, he accords the feminine voice a critical function that feminist criticism explicitly assumes as a crucial part of its work: to challenge essentialist notions of United States twentieth-century masculist capitalist society, notions of what is natural to a hierarchical society in which one gendered and racial class lives by exploiting and excluding the others. Doctorow's use of Susan, however, is an extension and replication of "essential" and "natural" notions of women, and in this sense perpetuates an oppressive and maddening process of purposeful social definition of women.

Daniel's own attitude toward women is skewed toward sadistic sexual manipulation, and it serves a critical function in the novel. For Daniel every woman is first someone to fuck, usually in anger, or with a distanced sense of power and manipulation. His wife he conned into sex when they first met by telling her fucking was a philosophical
act. Phyllis, a descendant of "harem breeders" in Daniel's eyes, is a "sand dune" (5) to be kicked around, someone to terrorize and abuse physically and sexually, and someone who he thinks is turned on by forgiving him, someone whose appearance is improved by suffering. Because of his self-conscious desire to talk about his behavior, and his awareness of it as disgusting, we can read Daniel as the abused child passing on the abuse in his own family.

But Daniel was abused by the state, not by his family. How do the effects of losing loving parents to state "justice" translate into wife and child abuse? Perhaps that is only too obvious: by a familial replication of experienced abuses of a masculist state power, Doctorow's critical inversion of the Marxist-Leninist explanation of the state as a replication of a familial division of labor and power, that is, of the family as the model for a hierarchical masculist capitalist state. Daniel speculates that the radical revolutionary Artie Sternlicht would not act in the same ways as he does toward his wife:

I am thinking if Phyllis met him she would have gone with him, her rhythm liberated, and this revolutionary stud would fuck her and afterwards they would both laugh and feel good. And she would not be hung up. He is probably a champion fucker. He does not put a woman in bondage. (186)
But by using male-female abuse as a means of portraying the costs to the Isaacson family and especially its children, as well as to the United States polity, of cold war politics and a subordinate judicial system, Doctorow lost a powerful element of the old left story: the communitarian ethic that sustained it despite its eventual fracturing and dissolution by the CPUSA, anti-communism and McCarthyism. It was the faithful communist old left that supported and nurtured the Meeropol brothers into an adulthood of constructive familial and public ethics and politics, rather than a pathology of displacement inward to suicide or outward to family abuse.

Doctorow effectively figures the demise of the old left as a political force, carrying forward the oppression and abuse it suffered in the fifties in Daniel's sexual pathology, and its failed political history in Daniel's critical memory. But Daniel is equally critical of the new left, despite his efforts to join in the movement by talking with radicals and participating self-consciously in the 1967 march on the Pentagon (the march which is the subject of Mailer's 1968 *Armies in the Night*). His awareness of history as tragic, and his lifetime habit of self-conscious but to some extent earned cynicism interfere with any ability to participate innocently in what he experiences as the theatricality of the new left.
[The march on the pentagon] seems to be an academic gathering. . . . What a put-on. But I have come here to do whatever is being done. . . . I played Washington when I was a kid. (307-9)

Even in attempting to reassure Susan, who is unconscious in a fetal position in the hospital, that he is becoming politically responsible, Daniel cannot avoid a final distancing comment on his own theatrical cynicism toward political activism, as he tapes a poster of himself over her bed:

The poster is a black and white photograph of a grainy Daniel looking scruffy and militant. Looking bearded, looking clear-eyed. His hand is raised, his fingers make the sign of peace. It is a posed photo blown up at a cost of four ninety-five. (257)

After Daniel has found the Mindishes in California, hoping to learn from them attitudes and points of view missing from his own reconstruction of his family story, and after receiving an enigmatic blessing from the senile Dr. Mindish, he returns to the Columbia library (in 1968) and his novel/dissertation, hoping "to discuss some of the questions raised by this narrative" (367). Only to be interrupted by
Close the book, man, what's the matter with you, don't you know you're liberated? . . . We're doin' it, we're bringing the whole motherfucking university to its knees! (367)

And Daniel, still the tentative and observing outsider, "walk[s] out to the Sundial [to] see what's going down" (367).

But Daniel the narrator has provided us with a more critical and positive analysis of the possibility for left effectivity in the post-Rosenberg era. He has discussed the role of God in past theological eras as that of "lay[ing] on this monumental justice," "seek[ing] recognition and help of righteous people," and testing each generation anew to discover who can learn and practice his justice.

The drama in the Bible is always in the conflict of those who have learned with those who have not learned. Or in the testing of those who seem that they might be able to learn. (12)

The implication is that in a secular age, justice is the work of human beings, and it is political work. Not politics in the ersatz and farcical sense of United States electoral politics, but the politics of everyday life.
With the help of the radical Artie Sternlicht, Daniel analyzes the limitations of liberalism and of the new left as inhering in a failure to make connections, a failure not confined to those on the left. This is the paradox of narrative: that explanatory narratives establish cause-effect and sequential relationships that mask and occlude cause-effect and sequential relationships. Responsible political work begins by foregrounding those connections that the hegemonic narrative denies, negates, or hides, while scrupulously resisting the narrative seductions of an unprovisional coherence and closure.

Daniel's book is itself a lengthy process of changing his apolitical state of mind by forcing himself to make personal and political connections that neither the traditional Enlightenment narrative of United States history and purpose, nor the traditional narratives of utopian socialism, nor the liberal participatory democracy narrative of the new left can explain. Finally he arrives at a sophisticated understanding of the sacrificial role of an effective radical left in the contemporary United States. He decides that liberals habitually err in the direction of overestimating the power of the individual while the new left underestimated the power of the state and its institutions. But a radical left that continually informs itself by the hard intellectual work of a comprehensive political and
social analysis can and does have a specific function and effect in society:

The radical discovers connections between available data and the root responsibility. Finally he connects everything. At this point he begins to lose his following. It is not that he has incorrectly connected everything, it is that he has connected everything. Nothing is left outside the connections. At this point society becomes bored with the radical. Fully connected in his characterization it has achieved the counterinsurgent rationale that allows it to destroy him. The radical is given the occasion for one last discovery—the connection between society and his death. After the radical is dead his early music haunts his persecutors. And the liberals use this to achieve power. (173)

Daniel notes the frequency with which "radical" suggestions, like that of Eugene Debs for social security, or of Rosa Luxemburg for women's rights to their own bodies, become liberal and then conservative policies. This sacrificial but analytic and prophetic role is the intellectual function Michael Harrington, Barbara Ehrenreich, Cornell West and
others have assumed for the Democratic Socialists of America in the 1990s.\(^{19}\)

The failure Sternlicht and Daniel attribute to the left—that of failing to make connections not sanctioned by the master narrative—is the same failure that is operative in United States social fiction—a failure of second and third-degree orders of thinking. A failure to imagine fiction that can dramatize the unnarrated social contradictions of twentieth-century United States society. A failure to apprehend and conceptualize invisible political, historical, economic, social, and cultural relationships of power and constraint that intersect, construct, and empower or constrain the lives of individuals. A failure that results in a national literature the rest of the world considers apolitical and unworldly, focused on private lives living in pure social groups in suspended time and space.

At the 1986 PEN International meeting in New York, Günter Grass and Salman Rushdie, among others, were unreticent in calling United States writing "insular, naive, and provincial." Grass complained that he couldn't say anything critical of America without first claiming that he was not a communist, and the New York Times confirmed this by

\(^{19}\) Michael Dukakis served such a function in the 1988 presidential sound-bite campaign. Michael Aronson and Christopher J. Georges have shown, point for point, how quickly Bush adopted many of Dukakis's major policies: fiscal policy, housing reform, gun control legislation, health care program revisions, and environmental policies, among others. "Dukakis Triumphs," New York Times, Thursday, 7 June 1990.
reporting his comment and noting that Grass had not publicly criticized a Communist government in the past eighteen years. Salman Rushdie commented that "Americans seem unaware of the effect of the United States on the rest of the world." John Updike, in his defense of United States writers, cited George Washington's warning against foreign entanglements, and described his own experience of America as a pastoral (in 1986).

E.L. Doctorow, reporting that meeting in the 120th Anniversary issue of The Nation, comments on the "love it or leave it" attitude of many United States critics and readers, and claims that "the loss of a social dimension in much of the otherwise impressive fiction being written today has been widely noted. Horizons have diminished." He emphasizes the critical and cultural costs to the United States of the cold war linkage of dissent with communism and anti-Americanism: "That the argument [over social fiction] should surface now, with each insufficient side of it divided fairly neatly between America and the rest of the world, suggests the possibility that we are suffering some state of mind not apparent to ourselves."20

Working to change this United States state of mind in the direction of critical and responsible political self-awareness is the accomplishment of The Book of Daniel.

VI

THE PUBLIC BURNING


Having noted at the time of the Rosenberg executions the unusual aspect of the state execution of a female spy, Coover became interested in the story again in 1966 after reading Wexley's 1955 *Atom Spy Hoax*. He read for several years, following the multiple directions in which the story led: biographies, newspapers, histories, court records, letters, essays and articles, and finally the unsorted jumble of released FBI records obtained by the historian Allen Weinstein in 1974 under the Freedom of Information Act. Begun in 1966, *The Public Burning* was almost finished in 1973 when the Watergate scandal broke, resulting in front-page and editorial displays of Nixon biographical material that Coover
had spent seven years developing for his use of Nixon as narrator and prime actor of the book. This unexpected and unwelcome scoop served Coover ultimately as encouragement for a figural and thematic intensification of his Nixon material.

The book was promised for publication in the bicentennial year 1976 by Coover's Knopf editor, Robert Gottlieb. But Random House (Knopf publisher) and RCA (Random House owner) attorneys, worried about potentially libelous material, pressured Knopf to reject the book as immoral. As Gottlieb "explained" to Coover, "What if you had written a book like this about Eleanor Roosevelt?" The book then went from house to house, finally to be published by Richard Seaver at Viking in 1977. By then, editing decisions and legal opinions had become inextricably intertwined and Coover felt that the house lawyers were doing "everything they could to pressure me to emasculate the book." He began resisting requests for revisions and cuts "in fear that I was being asked for the wrong reasons to take it out. The book's probably still informed a bit by that anxious tenacity."  

Public Burning by the time of publication had received publicity about the publication delay over potentially libelous material, and it quickly became a bestseller. But the first week Public Burning reached the New York Times Bestseller List, Viking abruptly stopped all commercial

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publicity and promotion. Never published in paperback, the book quickly went out of print.

Frequently compared to Gargantua and Pantagruel, Moby Dick, Ulysses, Giles Goat-Boy, Catch-22, and Gravity's Rainbow, Public Burning was reviewed with the energy and passion it deserved. Donald Hall called it a "monstrous, obscene, impossible, valuable fantasy. . . . But what is one to do with it? I cannot tell if it will survive its setting. If it survives it will survive as a monster--but then American literature is a collection of monsters." Robert Tower wrote in the New York Review of Books that "excesses and miscalculations hobble Public Burning's course like a pair of dropped pants." Paul Gray in Time called it a "protracted sneer," and Norman Podhoretz called it, in so many words, an anti-American partisan revisionist fiction that, hiding behind "the immunities of artistic freedom," was a "cowardly lie." But Tom LeClair claimed that Public Burning "was too important a book--too total and significant a vision--to be denied by taste or ideology."

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Coover's fear that the RCA-Random House lawyers would succeed in emasculating his book were well-founded: *Public Burning* is in every way a man's book. It is constructed by male voices, and what are conventionally assumed to be masculine points of view, masculine tones, masculine humor, masculine characters, masculine work-places, and masculine behavior. The constant use of the generic "man" to generalize to society as a whole offers rhetorical support to the dramatization of this man's world. Coover wanted to replicate "all the sounds of the nation," to construct "a text that would seem to have been written by the whole nation through all its history." In this he falls considerably short, for the sounds of his whole nation throughout all its history are white, male, and masculist. A few women are present--more psychically than physically--but they are shadow figures of morality, reproach, and rejection, or fixated objects of (infantile or projective) male desires.

In this 534-page collection of the nation's voices, often referred to and critiqued as a novel of excess, the only women's voices we hear--through Nixon--are those of his wife Pat (Why don't you grow up, Dick?), his Quaker grandmother Milhous and his mother (who taught him to want emotional resolutions to unresolvable conflicts and to feel sorry when people have to die), and Ethel Rosenberg (who is

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6 LeClair and McCaffery, 75-76.
an object of erotic fantasy for Nixon, as well as someone with whom he identifies). Julie and Tricia Nixon and Eleanor Roosevelt are mentioned (Tricia's bottom, and the whack Teddy Roosevelt gave to Eleanor's, to be specific); as are Oveta Culp Hobby (who was laughing so hard at Nixon she was showing her khaki drawers [474]) and Claire Booth Luce, the mother of Time magazine; as are the generic "girls" of whom the young Nixon was ignorant and afraid; secretaries (one of whom is raped on the "Good Neighbor Special" train to the executions, inspiring Nixon to attempt to alter the course of history by visiting Ethel in Sing Sing); Marilyn Monroe, Christine Jorgenson, Bess Truman, Elsa Maxwell, Teresa Wright and the ladies in the Mormon Tabernacle choir who are all at the executions; and Betty Crocker--sprung Athena-like ("full-formed and all buttoned up" [453]) from the head of General Mills--who is invited by Uncle Sam to introduce the government officials, entertainment stars and VIPs present at the Times Square Rosenberg execution ceremony.

"Okay, get your sweet buns out there, dumplin' and prepare a table before me in the presents a mine inimies!" He whacks her lovingly on her corseted butt. (457)

By now it should be clear that the relative absence of female voices is purposeful. Public Burning is an outrageous
parody of the hegemonic American Destiny Man's World in the formative stages of the cold war: a racist, classist, sexist, hierarchical, exploitive, aggressive, violent, and obscene world. That is, Coover sets up this world in order to interrogate, cruelly mock, and radically undercut its values, while exposing its contradictions and costs.

If Coover has written a parody of a man's book, then one could expect that gender might be a primary category for interrogation, manipulating this manifestly sexist book into what functions effectively as a feminist critique of masculist society. I am not at all sure that the prevalent twentieth-century United States ideology of objectivity or positivism has not shifted the general reading audience so far to the literal side of reception that it is difficult for us as a culture to read parody as parody. Coover's book is a devastating critique of masculist hegemony, but many readers object to this work as pornographic and sexist, and as a dramatic replication of and complicity in that which Coover attempts to subvert. As Brecht asked about literature that fails in its critical function, is it the text or the audience which needs to be re-written? That is not a rhetorical question.⁷

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Postmodernism and Perfecting Myths

Empirically I sanction dialectic; time and development, never without a principle of transcendence, an upward way that, when reversed, interprets all incidental things in terms of over-all fulfillment toward which development is SAID to be striving. . . . But [human beings] will forget this and assume that words are positive and erect systems from them. . . . And empires will be built on what seems to be a positive: mine, which is implicitly a negative command, leading to guilt, yearning for a sacrifice to cancel the guilt and allow the same conditions to continue.9

Coover, like Kenneth Burke, reads the immediate postwar period as an extreme example of the theological, mythological, ritualistic, and violent scapegoating (projective) nature of political order-keeping in history. And Coover's critical project, like that of Burke's, is one of exposing the motivations, rhetoricity, and irrationalities

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8 Myth is to be understood here in its Levi-Straussian structural definition as a unified narrative that functions culturally to reconcile irreconciliable or antagonistic phenomena.

of historical order-justifying narratives, "perfecting myths" reduced from "sociopolitical raw data" to inaugurate and rationally maintain a certain order.\textsuperscript{10} Coover is a Burkean critical fiction writer, the writer who most consistently practices Burke's strategy of "perspectives by incongruity," or acategorical juxtapositions to unsettle the "natural," mythic (often the same thing), and rational categories that structure systems of knowledge, power, social relationships, and common sense--the categories, that is, that structure our everyday life.\textsuperscript{11} Such planned incongruities, constituting both a methodology and an epistemology, constructing new ways of seeing material and cultural relationships, will necessarily "violate 'good taste,' critical decorum, and what he calls the 'proprieties of words.'"\textsuperscript{12}

While it can be easily shown that all fiction--even anti-realist fiction--is to some extent realistic, postmodern fiction claims to operate in opposition to classical realism

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Ibid.}, 240-241.

\textsuperscript{11} Burke, \textit{Permanence and Change}, 89-90. As Paul Jay points out, Burke pre-figured post-structuralist practice, but always with political and ethical positionality. Both Burke and Derrida construe language as instrumentality, and both interrogate texts on the basis of the relationships that inhere between metaphor and knowledge; both use stylistic interventions to unsettle assumed categories and oppositions, and both "aim neither at recovery or death, but at sustaining the disease that constitutes the critical condition" (356). This is precisely Coover's project and achievement in \textit{Public Burning}. "Modernism, Postmodernism, and Critical Style: The Case of Burke and Derrida," \textit{Genre} 21,3 (Fall, 1988): 339-358.

\textsuperscript{12} Jay, 351, 353.
and its pretensions to transparency and neutral naming, in favor of language and juxtapositions which attempt to upset the supporting assumptions and constructed unities of such a positivist mimesis. The distinction between a positivist or Lukascian rational realism and a more irrational Brechtian critical realism is central to debates on the politics of literary realism and of postmodern fiction.\textsuperscript{13} Coover shares with Kenneth Burke a suspicion of what Burke calls the "liberal ideal" of supposedly neutral naming, in favor of a double method that interrogates what it invokes, subverts what it inevitably installs, and in so doing, makes perceivable and thinkable phenomenal relationships, disjunctions, or contradictions not susceptible to visual inspection, or not readily nameable within the discrete categories of rationalized experience.

Such a double method is also a scrupulously open process, unable to hide its operations behind assumptions of objectivity, transparency, neutrality, or omniscience; and it refuses its reader any subject-position of identity or coherence, at worst constructing a confused and disaffected

\textsuperscript{13} This argument is central to the \textit{Aesthetics and Politics} debates among Lukacs, Adorno, Benjamin, and Brecht in the 30s on the cultural/political effects of literary realism (London: New Left Books, 1978). Two radical postmodernist fiction writers, Christine Brooke-Rose and Raymond Federman, whose work is considered anti-realistic, both insist that "the novel cannot escape realism." Christine Brooke-Rose, "Eximplisions," and Raymond Federman, "What Are Experimental Novels and Why Are There So Many Left Unread?" \textit{Genre} 14,1 (Spring 1981): 9-22, 23-31.
reader, at best requiring a reader as active participant in the development of a point of view, and of a critical position. The classic realist text allows and even encourages passive consumption; the postmodern text requires a critical completion by the reader. This is a dangerous, discomfiting, and unpopular practice. As Burke says, "one must violate the tenor of one's own culture as the members of his [sic] culture know it" in order to undo conventional structures of perception and thought."14

This Coover does, purposefully, with great moral passion, bitterness, and grotesquerie. He only too successfully sustains "the dis-ease that constitutes the critical condition,"15 producing the kind of postmodern fiction which many critics call "sacrificial," a fiction that can be distinguished, in intention but not in the limitations on its effectivity, from a more aestheticized high culture or elitist fiction.16

14 Burke, Permanence and Change, 107; Jay, 353 ?
15 Jay, 356.
16 Sacrificial fiction refers to writing that accomplishes its critical and political objectives by unsettling generic expectations and assumptions, as well as cultural notions of literary "decorum," to the extent that it fails to satisfy or actively offends a general audience. Ulysses and Gravity's Rainbow are sacrificial in this sense, but they are also elitist, excluding a general audience in their erudition and highly allusive style. Much postmodern fiction is popular in its images, allusions, and humor, but frustrates its audience because of the anti-narrative anti-realist anti-individualist standpoint from which it is generated.
Although Coover construes the "fiction-maker's function [as furnishing] better fictions with which we can re-form our notions of things," Public Burning's work is ultimately a dark and bitter symbolic formalization and simultaneous deforming and de-naturalizing of what he calls the American civil religion and its operations by, on, and through individuals. It offers no positive vision, no "better fictions," no possibilities of redemption or recuperation, despite the salvific claims for male postmodern (and Coover's) fiction so often made by its conservative, usually male critical adherents. It is an historically specific

human comedy, Rabelaisian in its exuberance and freedom of expression, and Swiftian in its scatology and pessimism.

Coover's conviction that we have come to the end of an epistemological tradition in the ways we look at and adjust to the world is entirely consistent with poststructuralist philosophy's claims for the twentieth century as the beginning of a post-humanist era. Poststructuralist philosophers use linguistic categories and operations to call into question the rational and polar categories of Enlightenment epistemology, objectivity, identity, truth, and the unified subject. From the vantage point of a master fictionist Coover critiques those same categories of liberal ideology as inadequate mythic and fictional constructions which have outlived their usefulness and relevance to contemporary lived experience, fictions which nevertheless

reproduce themselves through conventional narrative practices and continue to serve ideological functions of order-keeping:

Our old faith--one might better say our old sense of constructs derived from myths, legends, philosophies, fairy stories, histories, and other fictions which help to explain what happens to us from day to day, why our governments are the way they are, why our institutions have the character they have, why the world turns as its does--has lost its efficacy.\(^\text{19}\)

This epistemological revolution--with inevitable ontological implications--theorized variously in the seventies and eighties as an encompassing global phenomenon called postmodernism, finds its motivations in the twentieth century experience of rationalized history as irrational, the existence of the mutually exclusive but individually coherent and logical explanatory accounts of wave and particle physics, and complex, interpenetrating global socioeconomic conditions that seem to defy rational conceptualization or manipulation. Despite the common-sensical Newtonian ways in which we continue to approach daily life, we find ourselves in a disorienting and alienating transition, without

\(^{19}\) Gado, 142-43.
confidence in the usual explanatory methods and practices, and before we as a political culture have found and assimilated new and more adequate general languages and methods of apprehension and communication.20

Postmodern fiction is a symptomatic but also constitutive component of this inter-period. Its practitioners and supporters describe its political function as that of performing politically useful disruptions of worn-out categories, rationales, fictions, and myths, the stories which continue to "throw their weight around" with shaping authority when their explanatory adequacy to actual social conditions is non-existent. Coover's sense of these worn-out fictions working as "dogma, invading the world and turning it to stone," is his non-Marxist or neo-Marxist version of Lukacs's elaboration of Marx's concept of reification, a contradictory yet systemic rational objectification of human relationships (inevitable in modern commodity capitalism) which conceals their concrete spatial-temporal-affective nature. For Coover and neo-Marxists, reification, or "turning [the world] to stone," is a collective product of the order-

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20 See Richard Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), for a philosophical, historical, and political exploration of the implications of the priority of language systems in shaping what is perceived as reality and truth in any given period. While acknowledging that no one person can "manage" or "develop" a more adequate language, he insists on individual agency in imagining and using new and "better" language as incrementally significant.
seeking mind working symbolically to achieve worldly "understanding" in ways that work contradictorily to alienate the thinker from her world. As a fictionist Coover finds it compelling and necessary to interrogate such dogmatic explanatory narratives on their own grounds, relying on narrative strategies to undo narrative fixities homeopathically.

Commitment to Design

Coover initiates his writing with "an arbitrary commitment to design," not from a belief in cosmic or Platonic underlying order--to the contrary--but from "a delight with the rich ironic possibilities that the use of structure affords." This use of design is also consistent with his understanding that every effort to make meaning of the world requires a narrative shaping of data and language in a "kind of fiction-making process." Games and numerology are important metaphors for this inevitable and necessary process:

22 Gado, 148.
When life has no ontological meaning, it becomes a kind of game itself. A metaphor for a perception of the way the world works, and also something that almost everybody's doing. If not on the playing field, in politics or education. If you're cynical about it, you learn the rules and strategies, shut up about them, and get what you can out of it. If you're not inclined to be a manipulator, you might want to expose the game plan for your own protection and ask how it can be a better game than it is at present.²³

The symmetrical and numerical design of Public Burning follows an historical sequence of the three days leading up to the Rosenberg executions. Each of the four parts contains seven sections. Seven plays a significant role in the biblical apocalypse found in the Book of Revelations, and it is also on "the seventh occasion [the seventh court appeal by the Rosenbergs] [that] the great hand of Uncle Sam shall finally subdue the Phantom [the Soviet Union]" (108). These twenty-eight sections are narrated alternately by Nixon and an anonymous, multi-voiced narrator. The four parts are divided by three dramatic intermezzo's: a radio broadcast by

²³ McCaffery, 72.
Eisenhower in which he conflates faith in God and freedom with the United States role of protecting foreign resources important to its own interests; a dramatic dialogue by Eisenhower and Ethel Rosenberg of selected passages from her clemency appeal and from his denial; and an operetta sung by Julius and Ethel refusing the Justice Department's last-minute offer of freedom in exchange for talk. There is a Prologue in which the official Rosenberg story and all other major personae and plot elements are announced, and an Epilogue providing an ending word on politics and fiction—in a context of painfully induced skepticism about form, closure, and endings that leaves the reader's critical disease fully intact.

The arbitrary and mathematical symmetrical design of the book (whose numerological implications can be unpacked for further intimations of apocalyptic and redemptive meaning) serves to contain the centrifugal energies produced by the book's raucous interrogation of American mythic meaning systems. This interrogation occurs formally, at levels of rhetoric and plot, as well as narratively and directly in the skeptical but ambitious, self-doubting investigative work of the book's histor\(^{24}\), Richard Nixon. The narrative line is at

\(^{24}\) I use histor from Robert Scholes' and Robert Kellog's The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966). The Greek word refers to "not a recorder or recounter but an [inquirer -r] investigator [who] examines the past with an eye toward separating out actuality from myth." The histor's authority comes from a critical spirit and methodology, not from the authority of his sources (58, 242-3).
least a double one: that of the Rosenbergs and that of Nixon, who has been put the test by Uncle Sam of researching the Rosenberg story, interpreting it "politically correctly" in order to pass the presidential test, and of successfully representing, to the American public gathered in Times Square, the Rosenberg executions as an occasion for national renewal and redefinition.

The alternate unknown narrator sections provide a social, historical, and ideological context for Nixon's quest, voiced at first by an Archie Bunker worst case American male using multiple vernaculars, dictions, and modes and frequently quoting Uncle Sam/Sam Slick the Yankee Peddler. This voice slips sometimes into a more intelligent and moderate critical voice supplying (verifiable documentary) background data for the story line as well as two set-pieces on the New York Times, the maker of a monolithic history of the commonplace, and Time magazine, the National Poet Laureate, a consummate stylist who celebrates what he understands, and belittles what he does not. By the ending sections, this narrator's voice has become that of an intelligent and well-informed literary parodist. This slippage is confusing, but the voice is consistent in its maintenance of a bawdy, sexist, racist, classist, and masculist point of view.

Public Burning's first title was The Public Burning of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg: an Historical Romance, but
Coover's editors rejected it as "historical romance." *Public Burning* is generically a (comic) historical romance in the medieval sense, with Richard Nixon as the knight setting forth to test himself in the political and affective world against his ideal self-image. It is also a mock epic, with Nixon as the questing hero, finally returning home wiser and three days older, to be embraced not by Pat, who spurns him, but by Uncle Sam proclaiming, "I Want You" (530). Coover has deliberately structured *Public Burning* as a comedy, rather than the tragedy it continually threatens to be, since he thinks of "tragedy as a kind of adolescent response to the universe--the higher truth is a comic response. . . . There is a kind of humor extremity which is even more mature than the tragic response." The "happy" ending, with the main couple joined in an embrace, provides a formally correct ending to this dark and bitter novel, but the degree of its "humor extremity" achieves an intimation of the collective human tragedy of polarized semantic and political orders.

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25 Similar in form to the fourteenth century comic/epic romance of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

26 There are also specific echoes of another grand epic, Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Nixon after his marriage, and after his return from the war, feels "the whole world before him" as did Adam and Eve when they were sent from the garden after the fall. But as expected in a parodic epic inversion, Nixon resolves his post-fall dilemma of freedom by a problematic choice of allegiance to Mammon, in the form of Uncle Sam, whose actions are not that different in effect from those attributed to the evil Phantom, the Soviet Union.

The ending serves both as a specific historical critique of the cold war period, and as a universal critique of rigidified belief systems that violate human, social integrity.

Any attempt to write about *Public Burning*’s design is limited by the sequentiality of language, as it is overwhelmed by the novel’s sheer surplus of form and content. There are four separate but inter-related narrative sequences: the three days leading up to the Rosenberg executions, the Rosenberg story, the Nixon story, and the formally correct story with its narrative closure and its arbitrary design of twenty-eight episodes with prologue and epilogue. But there are also the three metanarratives, commenting throughout on the motives and methods of rhetoric, narrative, and historiography. And all seven virtually inextricable stories (again the redemptive or apocalyptic number seven) coincide in a literary, historical, and ethical critique of all (the) stories.

**Planned Incongruity**

*Public Burning*’s language, consistent with its parodic mode and its orientation toward unsettling categories and assumptions, performs provocative incongruities on three linguistic and structural levels: rhetorical and stylistic,
logical and semantic, and dramatic and structural. The continuity through narrative levels—from rhetoric to drama—rehearses and foregrounds the largely unperceived continuum of rhetoricity that is operative in shaping, motivating, and interpreting actual historical events. Each of the levels of incongruity—incongruities that are intellectually stimulating and challenging in their own right in a purely formal sense—is increasingly subject, because of the cumulative effects of repetition, to another dimension of incongruity, an epistemological uncertainty along the axis of fact/fiction. This uncertainty is an aspect of postmodern fiction critiqued by cultural critics for its tendency toward repetitive and empty assertions of a radical epistemological undecidability. But Public Burning uses destabilizing literary techniques not for a totalizing critique of meaning, but for the production of a skepticism toward historical truth claims for meaning, specifically in this case as a challenge to the coldwar/Rosenberg history and its motivations, values, effects, and masking myths.

There is much talk of codes in Public Burning. Nixon understands that political and social life are coded, and that if "you knew the code, life was relatively easy" (406). Any member of an old boys' network, a street gang, or a humanities faculty understands this reality at a pragmatic level. In Public Burning Coover thwarts any pragmatic or facile reception or use of such codes—within the world of
the book, as well as between the book and its reader—by conflating and confusing words from different and antagonistic codes. Nixon's attempts to make sense of his historical world, and the reader's attempts to make sense of Public Burning's representation of that world are disrupted by juxtапositions revealing affinities and continuities of supposedly incongruous motives and effects, as well as contradictions and discontinuities of ideologically coherent motives and effects.

Public Burning's most pervasive conflation of codes is the one Burke analyzed in The Rhetoric of Religion, that between theology and dominion, between religion and politics. In a nation established on the separation of church and state, the American vernacular in Public Burning gives voice to an ethnocentric civil religion that is based on concepts of Calvinist election (irrational privilege), uncontingent freedom, and economic individualism as the surest means to the common good. Public Burning purposefully confuses political and religious terminology to foreground the religious (irrational, mythic, and primitive) aspects of this American ideology. The Statue of Liberty is our Regina Coeli; Times Square is the ritual center of the world and a place of national rebirth; Uncle Sam, like Athena, "popped virgin-born and fully constituted from the shattered seed-poll of the very Enlightenment" (6).
American history is "a hierology of free enterprise, football, revival meetings, five-card stud, motion pictures, war, and the sales pitch" (83). American history functions as a divine code, continually "bringing the Glad Tidings of America's election, and fulfilling the oracles of every tout from John the Seer and Nostradamus to Joseph and Adam Smith" (9). Imperialism is preordained like gravity; and America is the Hope of the World, but the electric sign at Times Square bearing this aphorism transmutes "Hope," letter by letter, from hope to rope, rape, rake, fake, fate, hate, nate, nite, bite, bile, pile, pule, puke, juke, JOKE (36-41). The Phantom (the Soviet Union) is darkness, evil, and Satan personified, and dissent from United States imperialist and cold war policies is heresy, apostasy, and an embracing of the anti-Christ. The accused/accursed Rosenbergs are to be electrocuted, for "it is written that 'any man who is dominated by demonic spirits to the extent that he gives voice to apostasy is to be subject to the judgment upon sorcerers and wizards'" (3).

These rhetorical juxtapositions of codes, modes of speech, and realms of practice fall into a seemingly random pattern of fact-fiction juxtaposition, to the extent that even the most historically well-informed reader is not able confidently to maintain a distinction between the two. Nixon's linear narrative chapters are composed almost entirely of his self-doubts and reflections, family memories,
fantasies, desires, and political and historical speculations. The anonymous narrator chapters give voice to more synchronic phenomena. Mixed in with their ideological rhetoric, code-mixing, and tall tales, they contain large amounts of historical data of the Rosenberg case and of cold war history during Eisenhower's presidency. Words, phrases, aphorisms, sentences, and paragraphs of these sections are as likely to be recontextualized matter from verifiable historical documents—speeches, memoranda, newspaper reports, letters, sacred texts, sermons, or information taken from histories and biographies of the period and its main actors—as they are imaginative constructions and reconstructions by the narrator, or the contradictory rhetoric of American ideology. Fact, fiction, speculation and ideology are formally indistinguishable in Public Burning, producing for the reader a disorientation of the common-sense relation of language to a supposedly objective reality. In such a context, the motivated and constructed nature of interpretive "facts" is foregrounded, as is the relative adequacy or inadequacy of figures and fictions to experienced reality.

Figures and fictions in this confusion of language codes, by escaping or exceeding the usual generic boundaries of fictiveness, acquire their own peculiar resonances with reality. The career of J. Edgar Hoover, America's Top Cop, is contemporaneous with that of Mickey Mouse, and he and Walt Disney are America's masters of the spin-off (15, 281); FBI
agents are soldiers in Christ; the free press cries out with one voice (66); the nine Supreme Court Justices file in "under a frieze of Truth, holding up a mirror to life" (69); and America is governed by "ilictions" (75). Figure and fictions, while undercutting myth and ideology, begin to claim their own authority to speak a different kind of "truth" that amuses, challenges, provokes, and offends.

This incremental break-down of code and fact/fiction boundaries, as well as of truth claims, occurs consistently through every level of linguistic operation. Incongruities begun at the level of rhetoric and style continue the process at the level of logic and semantics through paradox, logical self-cancellation, or illogical semantic shifts; semantically garbled language that achieves meaning contextually, or plain language that becomes contextually nonsensical; and effusive and irrepressible returns of the repressed. Such a carnivalesque linguistic performance problematizes altogether the fact/fiction distinction, not only abstractly, but also and simultaneously in regard to specified historical circumstances, producing a reading habit of doubled perception:

Treasury Secretary George Humphrey has let it be known that there is "no reason to fear peace, U.S. military spending is still necessary, armistice in Korea or no." (214)
The reader can take this as fictive, nonsensical or paradoxical wordplay (fear of peace?) completely in character with the outrageous linguistic performance of the book, while at the same time receiving it as what it also is, an actual quotation of the United States Secretary of the Treasury. The shock of this doubled reception lies in the unconscious awareness that it is reality, not fiction, that is nonsensical and paradoxical at the same time that it is real and rational: large sectors of the American public do fear and resist peace, for rational, economic reasons.

The reader, whose mental categories are increasingly disrupted to the extent that she reads with a mind open to the implications of alternative or mutually exclusive categories, is prepared to perceive ideologically undercutting "truth effects" from blatantly bombastic and fabulist passages, as well as from linguistic returns of the (politically) repressed. Bunyanesque tall tales, and Puritan, Enlightenment, and Yankee aphorisms suddenly have the double effect of giving voice to historical socioeconomic relationships masked by American liberal ideology:

I am Sam Slick the Yankee Peddler--I can ride on a flash of lightnin', catch a thunderbolt in my fist, swaller niggers whole, raw or cooked, slip without a scratch down a honey locust, whup my weight in wildcats and redcoats, squeeze blood out of a
turnip and cold cash out of a parson, and out-inscrutabullize the heathen Chinee. . . . We hold these truths to be self-evident: that God helps them what helps themselves, it's a mere matter of marchin'; that idleness is emptiness and he who lives on hope will die with his foot in his mouth; that no nation was ever ruint by trade; and that nothin' is sartin but death, taxes, God's blowin' Covenant, enlightened self-interest, certain unalienated rights, and woods, woods, woods, as far as the world extends! . . . A Freeman, contendin' for Liberty on his own ground, can out-run, out-dance, out-jump, chaw more tobacky and spit less, out-drink, out-holler, out-finagle and out-lick any yaller, brown, red, black, or white thing in the shape of human that's ever set his unfortunate knickers on Yankee soil! It is our manifest dust-in-yer-eye to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplyin' millions, so damn the torpedoes and full steam ahead, fellow ripstavers, we cannot escape history! (7-8)

Each level of incongruity incorporates the other; the third level--dramatic and plotted juxtapositions--utilizes all the resources of contradictory rhetoric and logic to
reinforce the unsettling value of its situational and shocking dark humor. As ideological commentary and critique, each dramatic episode has its own particular effectivity emerging directly from the specific incongruencies of the situation: Nixon's visit to and assault on Ethel at Sing Sing provides a clash between classes, genders, desires, powers, politics, ethics, and ambitions. The staging of the Rosenberg executions in Time Square enacts an aspect of the story that lies outside the realm of historiography: the official United States ritualistic and reintegrative scapegoating and justification accomplished by the Rosenberg trial and executions. Uncle Sam's unique selection and initiation of Nixon at the end dramatizes American national ideology as a masculist and invasive violation of its own people that seeks to reproduce itself, through men, from generation to generation.

Nixon: Representative Man

As Coover worked with his initial circus concept of the Rosenberg executions, narrated by "all the sounds of the nation," he felt "the need for a quieter voice." Of all the characters that auditioned for the part, "Nixon, when he
appeared, proved ideal."\textsuperscript{28} Nixon's prosecution of Alger Hiss, even though it achieved only the limited success of a conviction for perjury, not espionage, had provided him with a number of crucial photograph and television opportunities to dramatize the threats of domestic communism. He apparently staged an interrupted vacation to announce his discovery of the pumpkin papers implicating Hiss, exploiting the occasion to the fullest for its anti-communist political potentials.\textsuperscript{29} For many people ignorant of the actual course of the trial, Nixon's television appearances about Hiss had the effect of establishing the connection upon which Hoover had insisted since the thirties between the domestic left and espionage.

But Nixon's role in the Rosenberg story was more direct than that: Along with Hoover and the media, he helped set it up, establishing the genre, roles, and audience expectations before the story had been filled out. In a political attack on Truman in response to the Soviet atomic bomb test in August 1949, Representative Nixon of the HUAC had stated for the media "If the President says the American people are entitled to know all the facts--I feel the American people are also entitled to know the facts about the espionage ring which was responsible for turning over information on the

\textsuperscript{28} McCaffery, 74.
\textsuperscript{29} See ch. II, n. 50.
atom bomb to agents of the Russian government." This is a Coover-like semantic shift which conflates a fiction with an empty concept of "fact" in order to translate a fictional hypothesis into apparent material reality.

What a satisfying irony then for the author of a novel about the Rosenbergs to use Richard Nixon as his surrogate, as open-minded historic sorting through the enormous numbers of documents constructing and relating to the Rosenberg story, interrogating the official story in the process of trying to define the "correct" version that will show Uncle Sam that he is presidential material. The biographical Nixon was perfect for the part: his self-consciousness, his need to analyze everything, his suspicious view of the world, and his understanding of the strategies and powers of rhetoric were positive qualities for Coover's narrator. And Coover wanted someone who clearly resided and operated inside the American mythology, while feeling alienated and slightly off center: the self-aware critical observer.

Both detractors and admirers of Public Burning comment on the sympathetic character of the Nixon figure, a figure with whom most readers experience, to some degree, an unexpected and unsought identification. This, for many, is the supreme accomplishment of the book, the depiction of the humanity of Richard Nixon in such an unlikely historical and

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30 Schneir/Schneir, 52-3.
generic context. Coover anticipated this reaction, even before he had constructed his Nixon:

And, of course, I also had it on faith from the beginning that any exploration of Nixon, this man who has played such a large role in American society since World War II, would have to reveal something about us all. It was another quality, though, that first called him forth in my mind--this was in 1969, just after he'd been elected president--and that was his peculiar talent for making a fool of himself.31

The Coover-Nixon identity is a more immediate one than this quotation would suggest. Nixon, known as Iron Butt for, among other qualities, his thoroughness, was famous--and respected--for the scrupulous preparations he made for a trial or hearing, or to inform himself about an issue for a political appearance. He accumulated reams of notes based on massive amounts of materials read. This of course is what Coover found himself doing as he attempted to deal with the

31 McCaffery, 75. See also Burke, Rhetoric of Religion: "There is a sense in which the principle of personality does sum up or implicitly contain, the kind of social and political order in which it participates. We could even say, without straining a point, that every member of a given order in his way 'represents' that order," p.310.
complex and unknowable Rosenberg story. Here is Nixon struggling with all the information:

I was sitting on the floor of my inner office, surrounded by every scrap of information I could find on the Rosenberg case, feeling scruffy and tired, dejected, lost in a surfeit of detail and further from a final position on the issue than ever. (79)

And Uncle Sam, who has dropped in for a visit, catching Nixon masturbating in a fantasy about Ethel:

I ain't seen so much shit piled around in one place since we cleaned out Harry Gold's basement! ... I know how much your famous Iron Butt means to you, and I reckonize it gets you more votes than your face does, but you don't wanta get musclebound in one joint while the rest just withers away! (333)

And here is Robert Coover writing Public Burning:

I like to completely exhaust an image--the white whale syndrome, as you might call it. As a consequence, each book is supported by tons of debris. ... I could have saved myself two or
three years had I had [a computer when I wrote *Public Burning*]. That book is a good page-by-page example of a tremendous amount of preparatory material adding up to a few lines of text. Well, not so few, as it turned out—but that was the perfect kind of project to have done with the help of a computer. Instead I had thousands of little slivers of scissored paper spread out all over the floor and furniture—and watch out if the cat got in!\textsuperscript{32}

Both attempts to organize, shape and manage all the information—Coover's story and Nixon's story within the story—are inadequate to the raw materials. In both accounts there is an excess of data to meaning, a reality of human existence and history which *Public Burning*'s text manages to keep open, unreduced, and unresolved, despite the formal and seven-fold commitment to design of the book, and despite its definitive narrative closure. No positive statement is made that isn't contested, qualified, undercut, contradicted, mitigated, or parodied. The result, paradoxically, is not cancelled meaning, or radical skepticism toward meaning, or affirmation of meaninglessness in what Adorno calls a

"positivism of meaninglessness." It is rather an elaboration of multiple motivations and perspectives for a set of historical feelings, perceptions, interpretations, and actions—a multiplicity that overflows formal explanatory boundaries, making all the more evident the exclusionary nature and costs of purified cold war codes and systems of meaning, including the "professional" code ultimately chosen by Nixon.

More elusive than the Coover-Nixon identity are the points of contact for the reader identification with Nixon, who is an absurd and finally humiliated character. I would argue that this identification occurs to some extent whether or not it is a conscious one, as it often does with a first-person narrator. To the degree that we are all culturally prejudiced subjects, Nixon's blatant, outrageous, and comic expressions of classism, racism, and sexism have the potential always to evoke laughter and more or less unconscious responses of recognition on the part of the reader. Undoubtedly these representations have the double potential of providing reinforcement for the socially destructive attitudes they also foreground for their irrationality and cruelty. But a reader who experiences complicity in these attitudes is also set up for the discomforting experience of identification and complicity in

the painful and degrading resolution of Nixon's search for meaning and sociopolitical identity.

An equally complicated kind of Nixon-reader identification occurs at the level of Nixon's self-expressed conflicts and vulnerabilities: confusion in the face of conflicting data and desires, needs that appear effeminate in a masculist world, and a pervasive sense of individual helplessness before the demands and affronts of history. Nixon lets us in on his most private fears and fantasies, and at some level of intimacy he truly becomes representative of the contemporary human situation, despite the absurd and parodic intensification and exaggerations of his personality. His sexual fears, his family history, his ambitions, his need for approval and his desire for love, his sense of himself as an outsider, his (realistic) political skepticism, his dividedness and vulnerabilities, and above all his desire to make sense of it all, of himself and of his place in the world—all of these self-confessed elements work both as a critique of masculism and as points of identity with a general reader. Coover has managed to construct a parodic version of the biographical Nixon, whose self-awareness and conscious, performative self-construction also operate a humanizing critique of the Nixon persona in the process of becoming Nixon.
Since there is much more information than Nixon is able to shape into a story that satisfies his motivations and ambitions, the reader's less restricted point of view gives her a larger critical horizon in which to view Nixon's and the Rosenberg story. But at the same time, the reader's felt identifications with Nixon and through Nixon with the Rosenbergs also allow a concomitant sense of participation in the complicities, contradictions, and implications of American ideology. That is, a reader positioned by the limited nature of the narrators is in a superior position for critical judgment, able to assess more impartially the surfeit of data, is, through identification with the narrator, made also to feel a discomfiting sense of the potentials for complicity in a passive reception and even unwitting or active reproduction of a classist, racist, sexist and violent society.

Despite his gestures toward open-mindedness and critical self-awareness, Nixon is an ambitious, power-hungry American male politician, with serious limitations as a self-aware narrator. His fears of being the scripted actor instead of the director of his life keep him from being able or willing to comprehend or commit himself to the complicated and ambiguous, even paradoxical, middleness of responsible historical engagement. His limitations come from an
announced inability to tolerate anything but the certainty of opposites:

I'm no believer in dialectics, material or otherwise, let me be absolutely clear about that, I wouldn't be Vice President of the United States of America if I was, it's either/or as far as I'm concerned and let the best man win so long as it's me. But I want these emotional resolutions... [I]t feels good to indulge in emotions when it no longer matters. (48)

What were the Phantom's dialectical machinations if not the dissolution of the natural limits of language, the conscious invention of a space, a spooky artificial no-man's land, between logical alternatives? I loved to debate both sides of any issue, but thinking about that strange space in between made me sweat. Paradox was the one thing I hated more than psychiatrists and lady journalists. (136)

He vacillates instead between extreme and contradictory abstractions of the free and unified liberal individual, or the captured man of history who thinks he serves his country
by serving his own desires—in Nixon's case, a desire to be at the center of power.

His purchase on Uncle Sam's manichean division of global reality allows him an illusory mythic reconciliation of these two contradictory ideals and self-serving illusions of the American Dream: individual freedom and the pursuit of individual interests coincide to produce the common good. He can thus interpret American social reality under a rubric of sacred purpose, light and reason; and that of the Phantom under a rubric of satanic ignorance and evil. But he experiences certain contradictions in this American Dream when he attempts to accommodate the perceived differences between his fate and that of the Rosenbergs to the American civil religion. It appears to him that he and the Rosenbergs had similar family (class) histories and shared many of the same ambitions. How then did the poverty, beatings, and other hardships of his childhood allow him a Ragged Dick (Horatio Alger's protagonist) kind of access to the American Dream, leading him into the light of success, power, truth, and freedom, while Julius and Ethel, also wanting success in a better world, wandered into the darkness of communism, criminality, imprisonment, and death. He understands the positional nature of his limitations: "the one thing you could never understand was the thing you were intimately a part of" (427). But he is unwilling to risk his position as next-in-line for the Presidency and his ambitions to manage
the world long enough for the critical evaluation and understanding his information, experience, and perceptions might allow.

Instead, in his continual attempts to explain and justify the fates of the Rosenbergs as well as his own "success," he unwittingly gives voice to the dark underside of the American practice of Enlightenment liberalism: failure and guilt were finally matters of class and race. The only explanation for the Rosenbergs' having stayed in the ghetto and remained poor in the land of opportunity was a "failure of imagination on their parts." Or perhaps they were simply "faking it" as a cover for their communist beliefs and illegal activities. But "you only had to look at them [to know they were guilty]"; for "dowdiness was guilt" (127, 122). Of course their guilt was also revealed by their inability to play the absurdly phony middle-class roles they had chosen for the trial: "deep in their voices like an indelible stain ran irrepressible un-American accents, the sour babble of steerage passengers and backpack peddlers. The electorate, needless to say, were not fooled" (128). But, as Uncle Sam explains, the main guilt is derived metonymically:

No, bein' a Jew ain't it, though it probably didn't help them none either. Their kind of depravity is something deeper even than that, something worse.
You don't see it so much in the shape of their noses as in the way they twitch and blow them. You see it in how they shuffle and squat, how they bend, snort, and grimace. You see it in their crummy business, their greasy flat, their friends—even their crockery betrays them, their lawyers, their pajamas, their diseases. It's no accident, son, that they've been nailed with such things as Jell-O boxes, console tables, and brown wrappers—and it coulda just as easily been the studio couch they slept on, their record player, medicine chest, or underwear—they stink with it, boy, it's on everything they touch! (88)

Then Uncle Sam makes the common disjunctive translation of this kind of metonymic guilt (by class and race) into an implied political (and thus moral and religious) guilt: such people were "violators of the Covenant, defilers of the sanctuary . . . Sons of Darkness!" (88). "Phantom-seed brought from the Old World like lice in an old hat brim" (129).

Class and race are constant subjects throughout Public Burning: as blatant bigotry or return of the repressed in the anonymous narrator sections, and as the subject of a mixture of serious reflection and unconscious but motivated racism/classism on the part of Nixon. These two narrators,
prejudiced and blinded by their own empowered positions, nevertheless speak directly to the reader the split ideology of ethnocentric liberalism: a belief in an abstracted common humanity of equals whose different histories can only be explained by tautologies of inherent and self-fulfilling predictors such as class, race, and failures of imagination.

Gender

Nixon's two cherished political notions--pure individual freedom in an open-ended (American) history, and the common good as the product of (his) individual interests and ambitions--are contradictory ideals and self-serving illusions unified and reconciled by the American-Dream myth to which he subscribes. He perceives their antagonistic nature, however, in the way he imagines them as gendered alternatives embodied by the loving mother and the stern, punitive, angry, and violent father. Despite his graphically described gynophobia, he fantasizes his mother and all women as a potential haven for uncontingent love, unity, and freedom from time. He experiences his father and the old powerful men he encounters in his political world as the male authority whom he must please and obey in order to survive and succeed in the world:
Jesus! he could really set your ass on fire, he scared the hell out of me early on and I learned how to avoid the beatings, even if I had to lie or throw off on others, but he pounded Don's butt to leather and I used to worry he'd broken poor Harold's health and crushed little Arthur's spirit, I still have nightmares about it. . . . I suppose I've got something of both of them in me--"The Fighting Quaker." (49-50)

With gender as with class and race, Nixon's problem is one of attempting to preserve his identity and position in the complex of interwoven and conflicting social-sexual-political phenomena he experiences in his daily life. As is his habit, he attempts management through polar separations and compartmentalization of his experiences, a non-resolution that is unstable, unsatisfying, and costly. He alternates between the poles of maternal/paternal, feminine/masculine, passive/aggressive, fear/desire, private/public, failure/success, means/ends, and moral/practical. He wants to be a healer, a bridger of rifts, a unifier as he "keeps moving to find out who [I am] and what the world is" (366). He understands that "you create character as you go along" (295), and his desire is for some kind of mediation of the psychic oppositions he experiences in himself and in the cold war world. This is thwarted by his preference for the clear
either/or. But his experiences in the three days leading up to the executions have been a serious challenge to such a binary view of the world.

His dilemma is embodied in the figure of the 3-D film viewer who has left a showing of House of Wax with his polaroid glasses still on, who can't get his two disparate views of the real world to coincide as they did in the theater. Nixon has left the ideologically focused and rhetorically secure world of Congress and the political elites to investigate the Rosenberg story and to experience life in the streets. And he has found that he can't coherently and consistently assemble all the raw data and all his experiences under the unifying myth of the American way. Nor can he seem to achieve a fit between his ambitions to be the President of the American Dream and a sense of himself as a scripted product of that dream who wishes to escape its manipulations and irrationalities to find a more humane and open-ended kind of existence.

When for public purposes he needs to appear to manage ambiguities for a coherent argument, Nixon resorts to rhetoric and formalism:

[Debate taught me] how to manipulate ambiguities when you don't have the facts and aren't even sure what the subject matter is. I learned in debate
that the topic didn't count for shit, the important thing was strategy. (295)

But in his personal meditations he swerves back and forth between a complex and disorganized private self and a carefully controlled public Richard Nixon, a manipulated two-dimensional reduction, obsessed always with achieving the right gesture, tone, and camera angle: "maybe the caricature came first and the face followed" (187). The private Nixon wants love, unity, and freedom (available, he thinks, from a woman), while the public Nixon wants to be at the center of power in a masculist world "for the future of my country and the cause of peace and freedom for the entire world," he tells himself (308).

The private Nixon continually conflates Pat and Ethel with his mother, especially when he is feeling a need for warmth, comfort, and soothing: "If only I were home and [mama] and Ethel could take care of me" (68); "[Pat] looked at me like my mother used to when I came in from playing touch football in a muddy field. . . . Why was it, whenever I was at home, I felt guilty?" (203). But Pat and Ethel are also parodies of the fair and dark women Leslie Fiedler finds so often in American literature, women who embody the opposites of asexual moral purity and dangerous, forbidden
erotic sexuality. Pat, whom he married as the "win" he needed to complete himself for politics, and with whom he never quite understood "the mating part," although a stretch in the Navy helped, had simplified my life, brought it all together for me. Not by doing anything. Just by being Pat and being mine. Without having to say a thing, she became my arbiter, my audience, guide, model, and goal. Sometimes she felt she did have to say something, but it was usually better when she kept quiet. She looked good in photographs. I understood myself better when I looked at those photographs. She was the undiscovered heroine whom I could make rich and famous and who would be my constant companion. (55)

34 See Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1962). Fiedler notes a general failure of American fictionists to deal with adult heterosexual love and an obsession with death, incest, and innocent homosexuality. He insists, correctly, on the cultural influence of such representations, that these "are not merely matters of historical interest or literary relevance. They affect the lives we lead from day to day." And he notes the possibility that American fictionists are operating under the cultural constraints of a "pattern imposed by the conditions of life in the United States that no writer can escape no matter what philosophy he consciously adopts or what theme he thinks he pursues" (Fiedler, xi). This is consistent with feminist materialist analyses of the reciprocal effects of culture and social conditions in a twentieth century masculist capitalist society. citation?.
Pat is completely and cruelly objectified by Nixon, serving her instrumental gendered function for him even better in photographs than in person. He fantasizes her death and wonders "was I ready for that? Tough, of course. It would hurt. I'd be lost without Pat. It'd win a lot of votes, though" (204).

Ethel is a more complex and projective figure for Nixon, since he knows her not at all. She is able to embody the fantasized dark lady, the exotic, erotic Jewish alien other who is sexually uninhibited: "The Rosenbergs had no doubt tried everything. Since they were little kids maybe in the ghetto, being Jews and all" (143). And, as Nixon admits, "My weakness, I knew, was an extreme susceptibility to love, to passion. This is not obvious, but it is true" (298). This susceptibility is rather severely hampered by his ignorance about and abhorrence of genital sexuality. But his initial assault on Ethel when he visits her at Sing Sing gives him an unexpected sense of erotic empowerment:

I pushed my tongue between her lips as she jerked and twisted helplessly in my arms--I was glad I hadn't shaved, I was glad it was rough for her! I felt mean and bulky like a bear . . . but erotically powerful at the same time. I'll be goddamned! I thought. This was what I'd been planning to do all along!" (437)
Until his meeting with Ethel, Nixon had uncomfortably resided within his own clearly drawn opposition of male to female, with its concomitant and troubling aspects of homophobia, gynophobia, and, in Nixon's case, a fascination with buttocks. He was a "normal" man, who always assumed he would keep a wife beside him and have children. Marriage and children would tell the world something about him and be good for his career. But in his moment of erotic abandon and aggression with Ethel, and despite his fears of being "swallowed up, lost, and disoriented," unexpected linguistic slippages, identities, confusions, and reversals of gender begin to occur in his elated responses to himself as a "new man."

For the first time he no longer feels "inadequate" or "incomplete," and he "opened" himself to her as he had never to any other person. While she is still his narcissistic object, his "perfectly reflected image," through a sudden rush of images as he is grasping her bottom he also somehow begins to understand the individual injustices and cruelties of history. As he gazes at the cleft between her buttocks, he feels the peace and warmth of "brotherhood." Feeling great affinity with Ethel and with their similarly deprived pasts, he "let [his] hair down" with her as with no one before, and "jerked her hard into [his] body." He's always wanted to be this free, to say what he feels, to be a bum.
(437-442). He finds himself experiencing feelings of wholeness, power, freedom, and empathy:

I thought: all strength lies in giving, not taking. I wanted to serve. . . . In this long chaste embrace, I felt an incredible new power, a new freedom. . . . I had escaped [both Uncle Sam and the Phantom]. I was outside guarded time! I was my own man at last! I felt like shouting for joy. . . . We patted each other's bottoms. We rubbed noses. It was a bit prominent her nose. (442)

Consistent with the loosening of thought produced by his disorienting experiences of the past three days, in Nixon's openness and abandon with Ethel he feels a gender confusion manifest in a linguistic collapse of conventional gender categories. He gives voice, through pronouns and images, to a bisexual combination of conventional-wisdom aspects of both femininity and masculinity. This is Nixon's moment of carnival, confusing and breaking down the masculist boundaries upon which he rigidly relies as a defense against such eruptions and returns of the repressed feminine and homosocial. This linguistic and emotional liminality for Nixon could have resolved in a number of ways, given the range of sexual feelings and experiences now available to
him. Not surprisingly, however, given the book's and Nixon's obsession with anality, Ethel's and Nixon's encounter ends in a realm of a pre-oedipal anal logic.

An unwilled and recurring image of Ethel has appeared to Nixon as he has been trying to understand the Rosenbergs and their story: that of little Ethel as a child bending over by the kitchen stove to pull up her underpants. Nixon obsessively prefers bottoms, butts, buttocks to female genitalia.\textsuperscript{35} He has responded to the sight of Pat's bare bottom in bed, slack and inviting, with a free-associative meditation on his revulsion for female genitals. His passionate assault on Ethel slows into a "chaste embrace" while they rub each other's bottoms. Ethel's urgings to him to take off his pants in order to take her sexually evoke nothing but regressive fear and reluctance on his part: "I cried, Damn it, I was doing my best! I seemed to hear my mother getting me ready for school. You're going to be late!" (445). But Ethel's ploy to get his pants off is to make possible her final gesture of autonomy and resistance on her part; just before she is led off for the execution, in the pretense of cleaning his "filthy bottom," she lipsticks "I AM A SCAMP" across his buttocks.

\textsuperscript{35} My colleague Kit Wallingford points out the similarity of Nixon's image of Ethel as a little girl pulling up her underpants to Benjy's remembered image of Cady's muddy underpants in Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury. This seems related to Fiedler's thesis, saying something about the limitations and dichotomies of United States fiction's representation of men's perceptions of female sexuality.
Nixon next finds himself "front and center" on the execution stage at Times Square, pants down around his ankles and Ethel's message prominently displayed as he tries to summon his debate skills to salvage his career. He is confused by what he has just experienced, but can only fall back on the code of his life-long ambitions:

Christ! I thought. . . . I can't even remember my name! I fought to recover that name, that self, even as I grappled with my trousers, hobbling about in a tight miserable circle, fought to drag myself back to myself, my old safe self, which was—who knows?—maybe not even a self at all, my frazzled mind reaching out for the old catchwords, the functional code words of the profession, but drawing a blank. I ought to quit, I knew, but I couldn't. I didn't know how. I only knew how to plunge forward. (471)

He triumphs, co-opting Ethel's rebellious gesture for his own ambitions by asking everyone in the audience to "drop his pants for America." Compliance is enthusiastic, and the ritual orgy of American renewal ensues.

Nixon instinctively knows, despite his erotic and political confusion when he decides to visit Ethel, that faced with what he construes as a choice between feminine
freedom and masculine power his allegiance lies with the paternal or patriarchal:

[Mom] was the one I'd turned away from back there in Penn Station, and if I was walking with either one of them now, it was the rebellious and hot-blooded old man, not her. (359)

His choice of allegiance to the violent, racist, sexist old man of American history following his visit to Ethel is finally a definitive splitting of his complex personality in favor of the hegemonic masculine, producing a closure to his quest for identity as well as to Public Burning, an ending that radically calls into question the exemption of men from the violence of a society governed by masculist extremes.

The book-long fascination with buttocks--by all narrators, including Uncle Sam and especially Nixon--more than adequately prepares for the book's resolution of the sexual and gendered ambiguities and oppositions. But the resolution also takes place in political terms and on political grounds, emphasizing once more the inextricable implications of sex, gender, and politics, as well as the metaphorical usefulness of sexual imagery and relationships to explore relationships of power and abuse.36 Nixon

36 Eve Sedgewick, noting that the relation of sexual desire to political power and of sexual alienation to political repression is an actual but
believes, with some regret, that he is choosing the masculine and political at the expense of the feminine ethical and sexual. But he underestimates the costs of his choice. Following Nixon's persuasive performance at the executions, Uncle Sam shows up at his house to let him know he is the chosen one in an economy of masculist sexual politics:

"Come here, boy," he said, smiling frostily and jabbing his recruitment finger at me with one hand, unbuttoning his striped pantaloons with the other:

"I want YOU! ... Speech me no speeches, my friend, I had a bellyfulla baloney--what I got a burnin' yearnin' for now is a little humble toil, heavenward duty, and onmittygated cornholin' whoopee! So jes' drap your drawers and bend over, boy—you been ee-LECK-ted! ... You heerd me!" he roared. "E pluribus the ole anum, buster, and on the double!" ... "No!" I shrieked, giving way. And in he came, filling me with a ripping allrupting force so fierce I thought I'd die! This ... this is not happening to me alone, I thought

unstable relationship hard to articulate, values literature for its access to "oblique paths of meaning" in "panic-inducing images of real violence, especially the violence of, around, and to sexuality." Sexuality can act as signifier for various and more or less specific practices of power and subjugation among races, classes, and genders. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 10-11.
desperately, or tried to think . . . but to the
nation as well! . . . I felt like a woman in hard
labor. (530, 532-3)

Uncle Sam leaves Nixon "rolling about helplessly on the
spare-room floor, scrunched up around my throbbing pain and
bawling like a baby" (534).

So ends this comedy of the American masculist state, in
a sexual embrace between the two principal males--Nixon and
Uncle Sam, the representative figures of the American
individual and its masculist ideology. The embrace is
homoerotic, anal, and violent, reducing the individual to the
position of a helpless and humiliated abject, despite and
because of his choice of allegiance to the American civil
religion. His ambitions to be at an unambiguous and
masculine center of power have implicated him in a costly web
of divisions and requirements that strip him of agency except
as it coincides with the national ideology and interests.
Without occluding the greater costs of white male dominance
to women, minorities and underclasses, Public Burning
demonstrates the reproduction of ideology and power as a
violent penetration and impregnation of the psyche and body,
even of men.
CLOSURE

Anal Logic and Masculist Society

The emasculation figured and dramatized in Public Burning is not men's castration by women, even though gynophobia and misogyny pervasively characterize its masculist world; it is rather the degrading anal aggression of a violent penetration and occupation by the hegemonic masculine, getting fucked by masculist history and the masculist capitalist state. The threat and practices of this kind of political violence produce a non-gendered emasculation that manifests itself as a kind of individual impotence before such invasive power; men, women, and children are all equally vulnerable, albeit within a hierarchy structured by class, race, and gender. As Uncle Sam says, "There ain't nothin' to fear but fear itself and a dry hole."

Misogyny, gynophobic homosocial bonding, and narcissistic anal aggression are predominant in Public Burning as figures for American cold war states of mind. The Book of Daniel also uses misogyny, homosocial bonding, and
anal aggression as evidence of the costs to Daniel and society of state abuse. One manifestation of Daniel's displacement of the effects of family abuse by the state is his misogyny toward his wife and sister. While his aggression often takes the form of fantasies of erotic genital violence, in the cruelest moment in the book he makes his wife kneel away from him while he prepares to burn her buttocks with a cigarette lighter. There is at least a formal homology to Public Burning's ending in the blessing, in the form of a kiss, which the senile Mindish gives Daniel, ending Daniel's family history quest. Doctorow has carefully developed Mindish as an ambiguous and unknowable figure. Possibly a tool of the state and a traitor to Daniel's parents, he might also be a tragic member of the old left, called upon to betray his close friends in order to protect the communist party. In either case, he is a representative of a masculist power that claims ownership and mastery of history, and Daniel's search for identity, as does Nixon's, achieves a tentative resolution in an embrace with that power. Gore Vidal's novel Myra Breckinridge (1968), about the post-Rosenberg generation, uses anality and anal aggression as its structuring theme for a parody of the masculist mass culture society of the United States in the second half of the twentieth century.

Such figurative analogies between postwar United States history and aspects of anality have their own kinds of
metaphoric and cognitive descriptive power, even if the relationships are not easily demonstrable in the rubric of the social sciences. Fredric Jameson's comment is relevant: a cultural phenomenon like postmodernism—and in this case a predominant literary theme of anality—must be articulating something about what is going on in the world.¹ This is especially true when we consider the other postwar and postmodern United States novels that rely on anal logic and anal aggression for narrative development and resolution.²

According to psychoanalytic theory, the child's anal stage, occurring generally from one to three years of age, follows without cancelling the oral stage, and prepares for the Oedipal, genital stage. If negotiated relatively successfully, it results in the development of first a body ego and then a psychic ego, with a sense of body and psychic boundaries, and a capacity for both defenses and openness at the will of and in the best interests of the individual. The anal stage is critical to the development of a degree of autonomy that can tolerate and deal with the ambiguities, aggressions, and excesses of the internal and external world; it is crucial to the cognitive development of ways of knowing and ways of not knowing.³

¹ Jameson, "Regarding Postmodernism," 54.
² Gravity's Rainbow, American Dream.
³ Much of the language—if not the practice—of psychoanalytic theory, especially in the United States, tenaciously holds to ahistorical and essentialist categories. But "development of ways of knowing" here
At this stage, the individual's attempts to manage his/her own newly discovered aggressive and libidinal feelings and capabilities—a need to learn how to control destructiveness—are marked at first by an unpredictable alternation between extreme opposites: yes/no; passivity/aggression; withholding/attacking; closure/openness; submission/resistance. "The world that is dominated by anal psychology is full of opposites, reversals, and contradictions. . . . In the second and third year of life, an easy reversibility . . . can approach a cancelling out of meaning."4 This phenomenon is one that Derrida critiques as inherent in an epistemology founded on binary logic: "When the middle of an opposition is not the passageway of a mediation, there is every chance that the opposition is not

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pertinent. The consequences are boundless."\(^5\) The tendency to resort to a binary logic allows the development of "various ways of disregarding, disowning, or negating external and psychic reality."\(^6\) I want to suggest that the coordinates of an incomplete anal stage, or of an anal fixation that falls into opposite extremes of owning/disowning (both materially and psychically) and containing/attacking have at least metaphorically a homological correspondence both to the extremes of rhetoric and to the material practices of the anti-communist, consumer-driven national security state that developed during the coldwar period.

The rhetorical excesses of the articulation of the cold war I have discussed in Part II as the ordinary operations of language being put to exclusionary extremes of dichotomization and closure to provide the dominant group with a sense of certainty and positional security in a time of aggressive threats (internal and external) and socioeconomic disruption or liminality. But the socially retarding and destructive costs of the reassuring coldwar narrative with its long-term unnegotiable plot strictly governed by an either-or closure were enormous, cumulative, and enduring. Again there is at least an analogy between the social costs of this situation and the psychic costs of anal

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\(^6\) Shengold, 20.
fixation: "a concomitant of the need to achieve an illusion of closure, fixity, and stability (without which there might be no feeling of identity) is the danger of fixation. . . . Unless in the course of maturation the illusion of closure becomes subject to doubt, full humanity will not be achieved."\(^7\)

Discounting the notion of what even the author of these words would probably admit as an illusion of an achievable plenitude of humanity, the anal-stage necessity of learning and then practicing skepticism toward closure is most definitively a requirement for a reality-based democratic politics presumed to be oriented toward the goal of a just society. As it is a requirement for critical intellectual practice. But the cold war period was a lengthy practice of a politics of acquisition, containment, holding and withholding, based on a fixed and dichotomized theory of closure. It solidified and realized itself and its ideology in global political and economic relationships, producing a domestic society devoted to mindless consumption and waste and a national security state devoted to power through arms and secrecy.

And finally, the coldwar national security consumer state was the product of male networks of power in which women, minorities, and the working class served functions of

\(^7\) *Ibid.*, 37.
exchange value for white male interests. Coover's book is a critique, using anality as its predominant metaphor, of this masculist system and of its social costs to everyone, not just to the visibly exploited and oppressed. Nixon, preferring a clear either/or, chose the definitive closure of an extreme masculist American ideology, and closure is what he got. Not unlike Orwell's 1984 protagonist who feels "love" for Big Brother, Nixon's attitude ultimately becomes one of submission to and identification with an idealized oppressor/aggressor:

Maybe the worst thing that can happen to you in this world is to get what you think you want. And how did we know what we wanted? It was a scary question and I let it leak away, unanswered. Of course, he was an incorrigible huckster, a sweet-talking con-artist, you couldn't trust him, I knew that—but what did it matter? Whatever else he was, he was beautiful (how had I ever thought him ugly?), the most beautiful thing in all the world. I was ready at last to do what I had never done before. "I . . . I love you, Uncle Sam!" I confessed. (534)

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8 An oblique critique of the ideological construction of desire.
9 "There is a certain pederasty implicit in pedagogy. A greater man penetrates a lesser man with his knowledge. The homosexuality means that both are measurable by the same standards, by which measure one is
Open-Endedness

The oxymoronic and/or apocalyptic concept of historical closure has always been a theme of history and historiography, predating of course the atomic bomb and the twentieth-century awareness of global limits. But despite the atomic bomb, the reality of global limitations, and apocalyptic poststructuralist totalizations of a post-individual collective culture, there has been a concomitant and not inconsistent development of the notion of the individual as cultural and historical narrator and participant in the construction of social reality.

Certainly we have seen individual narrators making contributions to a collectively written history in the construction of the Rosenberg story. As we have seen authors like Doctorow and Coover add their own critical narrative revisions of the coldwar stories we told, heard, and

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greater than the other. Irigaray uncovers a sublimated male homosexuality structuring all our institutions: pedagogy, marriage, commerce, even Freud's theory of so-called heterosexuality. These structures necessarily exclude women, but are unquestioned because sublimated—raised from suspect homosexuality to secure homology, to the sexually indifferent logos, science, logic. ... Once [heterosexuality] is exposed as an exchange of women between men, [it] reveals itself as a mediated form of homosexuality. All penetration, considered to be sadistic penetration of the body's defensive envelope, is thought according to the model of anal penetration. ... The penetrated is a humiliated man." Once this penetration is conceived as also psychic and rhetorical, then the analogy between anal aggression and the reproduction of ideology in a masculist society is complete. See Jane Gallop, Daughter's Seduction, 63-4, 84.
performed as a nation. Until the end of history, we are all apparently to some degree engaged in producing an ending to history, the revelation of which remains deferred.

I mentioned that all seven of the stories operative in *Public Burning* come to a close together. Doctorow's book appears to end in greater uncertainty, with Daniel recounting three possible endings, capped by an admonition from the biblical Book of Daniel to "Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end" (368). We need to consider the endings of these two books which are manifestly critical social fiction dealing with contemporary United States history and with the modes and potentials of oppositional politics. Both dramatize the social and personal costs of adherence to dogmatic narratives of history; both formally insist upon that complicated middle ground of life and experience in which the closures of meaning necessary to thought and action are always also necessarily thought as part of the flux and points of departure for more useful versions.

Daniel's three proposed endings for his novel/dissertation do not, as some critics have maintained, affirm a postmodern uncertainty and undecidability. They follow instead a certain progressive logic in the context of the book and its subject of left politics, having to do with saying goodbye to outmoded forms of life and stepping down into the world from the security of a purely mental and
reflective environment in order to "see what's going down" (367). Daniel's future is unknown; while his skepticism and
cynicism may hold him to the role of observer, his tentative
reflections on left analysis and politics always seem to be a
source of energy and optimism to him. Through his
reflections, as well as through the book's formal design, we
begin to put together a modest and sacrificial but always
potentially historically significant program for left
politics. It is for the left to perform the hard work of
analysis, of making connections not visible through
naturalized or masculist versions of society. It is also for
the left to assume and articulate positions based on such
analysis and believed to be productive of social justice.
This is an always provisional practice, requiring resistance
toward one's own tendency to totalizing narratives and simple
binary explanations. It also requires a willingness to
persist, despite being ignored, rejected, mis-stated, mis-
used, or co-opted. Not unlike the work of an artist or a
prophet unhonored in his or her own time, the relevance and
value of articulated left positionality can only be judged in
retrospect, almost always as subsumed and enacted under a
liberal/conservative agenda.

Public Burning is criticized for offering no positive
vision, but in its pervasive engagement with the issue of
closure, it presents an ethical challenge for critical
participation in history. Coover elaborates this
thematically and figuratively at key moments in the text, and formally by the ending of both the Rosenbergs' story and Nixon's. The argument is figured, in typical Coover fashion, in terms of open-endedness and rape. An innocent or absolute open-endedness is a crippling vulnerability to assault, abuse, and co-optation:

They's a political axiom that wheresomever a vacuum exists, it will be filled by the nearest or strongest power! Well, you're lookin' at it, mister: an example and fit instrument, big as they come in this world and gittin' bigger by the minute! ... So clutch aholt on somethin' and say your prayers, cuz I propose to move immejily upon your works! (532)

Dogmatic closure, figured by rape, is by definition aggressive, abusive, and exploitive, working a deliberate violence on vulnerable victims. Nixon's Ethel learns this lesson when she is a high school member of the Clark Street Players. To an older cast member walking home with her, arguing that life means adopting a role and sticking with it,

She said, no, life is more open-ended than that. Then he jammed her up against a wall in a dark
doorway, dragged up her skirts, and pushed his knee
into her crotch. Some argument. (104)

Uncle Sam admonishes his audience to "Go forth to meet
the shadowy future, without fear, and with a manly heart on,"
his masculist dogma operating to organize data and human
behavior into what's best for him: "It ain't easy holdin' a
community together, order ain't what comes natural, you know
that, boy, and a lotta people gotta get killt tryin' to
pretend that it is, that's how the game is played" (531).
Nixon is confused, though, until he finally gets it at the
end. He has it in his mind that American freedom means the
absence of script and plot, and that the real struggle
against the Phantom is against the "lie of purpose" (363),
while Uncle Sam remains "The Superchief in the Age of Flux"
(341). He extends the analogy--illogically, and in accord
with the American dream--to equate freedom, flux, and open-
endednesss with American capitalism (called free individual
enterprise); and plot, social engineering, and historical
closure with socialist oppression. "Maybe in Russia History
had a plot because one was being laid on, but not here--that
was what freedom was all about!" (362).

By the time of these speculations, the motivated and
constructed nature of the Rosenberg story has become apparent
to him; as he noted from a lawyer's point of view, a story
that cohered perfectly in lock-step cause-effect sequence
when you walked forward through it began to unravel when you worked your way backward from end to beginning:

Hoover was in many ways a complete loony, arbitrary in his power and pampered like a Caesar, and if he dreamed up a spy network one day, then by God it existed. . . . It was an agent’s job [to carry the Rosenberg case] to successful conclusions (371).

This doesn't fit his concept of American free flow: "how do such things happen?" He speculates that the Rosenberg truth lay somewhere in the middle, that territory of dialectics, ambiguities, and uncertainties in which he cannot exist. It is ultimately Nixon's intolerance for this ground and the naïveté of his insistence on the reality of the opposites American openness/Communist closure that leaves him "open" to impregnation by the American "lie of purpose."

The ethical challenge to dogmatic closures is posed by the paradox inherent in the seven endings. The micro history of the 72 hours leading up to the execution has come to a temporal end, as has the 28-part mathematical series, an arbitrary and fashioned "design" with pre-determined closure. Hoover and the state have ended the Rosenberg story, but this book is also demonstrating by its very existence that the story is, despite their deaths in June 1953, still open-ended, still being narrated. Uncle Sam has violently
satisfied Nixon's quest, but only because Nixon has made himself entirely vulnerable to ideological co-optation by believing, against the evidence of a more complex and motivated political world, in a pure form of openness as the moral property of the United States.

But three of the stories, although they each stop arbitrarily in the last word of the book, "good-bye!" (534), cannot end until history ends: the play of words (language), narrativity, and history itself. Public Burning has told metastories--words about words, narrative about narrative, and history about history--that all demonstrate the ongoing and oscillating constructive/destructive activity of symbol-making, organizing, and enacting, an activity which is always potentially a liminal moment of political agency. To resist the dangers and costs of rigid formalized closure, Public Burning demonstrates the critical potential of an alternating postmodern literary discourse that can move within and work the middle of an historical epoch, interrogating opposites, exploring ambiguities, uncertainties, and contradictions, figuratively evoking skepticism toward final words, and providing a point of departure for more useful narratives. But more useful for whom?
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