

One
The Way to Hiroshima

Humanus sum, nihil humanum me alienum puto.
—Terence

No, this is not a disentanglement from, but a progressive *knotting into*.

—Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

Half of history is revenge, the other half is its provocation.
—William Gass, *The Tunnel*

I. Only Connect: Trauma in/and History

In August 1945 Elias Canetti writes the following in his journal: “A tormenting thought; as of a certain point, history was no longer *real*. Without noticing it, all mankind suddenly left reality; everything happening since then was supposedly not true; but we supposedly didn’t notice. Our task would now be to find that point, and as long as we didn’t have it, we would be forced to abide in our present destruction.”¹ What Canetti can’t see is that the point he refers to is the one he inhabits. He can’t see it because it is too close and blinds him (as it would soon the inhabitants of two cities) with a light not of this world.

The proliferation of new theories of history in recent decades is itself a response to a historical situation—that defined by the Bomb. That connection is also what these theories cannot know about themselves and ceaselessly displace in teaching us all the new ways we can know and write about the past. What they *do* know is that the assumptions and guarantees on which historians have traditionally relied in constituting their subject and the needs that histories fulfill in offering us an account of events structured by these guarantees are no longer adequate to a contemporary awareness of history and historicity.²

To cite the major developments (though in no necessary order of importance):³

1. Foucault’s concept of genealogical history and the archeology of knowledge and its creative extension in the new historicist methodologies developed by Stephen Greenblatt and his circle.

2. The hermeneutic theories of history and historical explanation developed by Gadamer, Habermas, and Ricoeur, with special note given to Ricoeur's development of a complex theory of time and narrative.
3. Derrida's recent work on Marx and Benjamin and his continuing effort to expose the Hegelian assumptions about history, progress, and the logos which structure the way history is narrated by historians who know little or nothing of Hegel.
4. Althusser, Sartre, Gramsci, and the many often sharply opposed approaches to history developed in recent years by Marxists as different as Frederic Jameson, G. A. Cohen, Perry Anderson, and Stuart Hall.
5. The recovery of Kant's speculations on history and its recent extension in Lyotard's theory of the differend.
6. The attempts by Slavoj Žižek, Joan Copjec, and Teresa Brennan to articulate the theory of history implicit in Lacan.
7. The massive significance of Walter Benjamin's speculations, the continued vitality of Adorno and the Frankfurt school, and the renewed interest in the thought of Kenneth Burke.
8. The work of Louis O. Mink, Hayden White, Dominick LaCapra, Roy Schafer, and others on the narrative and tropological principles that shape the writing of history.

To this list one can add Collingwood and McKeon's earlier theorizing about history, the work of Braudel, Baudrillard, deCerteau, Calinescu, and Bourdieu and the new modes of historical writing and historical investigation developed by anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz, James Clifford, and Natalie Zemon Davis. The list is by no means complete because one must add to it two developments that may be of greater significance and that complicate the issue of the historical.

I refer, first, to the number of alternative histories that have emerged in recent years thanks to feminist, multicultural, postcolonial, subaltern, and queer studies. Such works have contributed more than new knowledge to our understanding of the past. They have broken with the logic, the procedures, and the ruling assumptions of traditional historical methodologies by showing how that logic has as its primary function the exclusion (or marginalization) of "voices" that challenge its hegemony and the motives that inform its explanations. Such studies are not merely of local interest. They entail a theoretical *crisis*: the recognition that the principles of historical explanation that we regard as true, rational, objective, and universal are cultural, conventional, ideological, and deeply implicated in power and the repressions required for its maintenance. Ways of thinking derived from other cultures or voices silenced by the dominant culture may

provide precisely the critical handle required to understand what is really at work in the privileging of certain canons of reasoning and explanation as scientific and “objective” and the rejection of other experiences and ways of thinking as illegitimate and unfounded. The true bite of the multicultural—seldom honored because it cuts in every direction—is the idea that none of us are locked into privileging our own culture and “subject position(s).” We can gain distance from our frameworks by immersing ourselves in other ways of thinking. We can then use that experience to become aware of things that our culture and its dominant interest groups do not want to know about themselves. The implication of such an orientation for history is considerable, since historical explanation is perhaps the primary way in which a community establishes the structures of belief, mind, and feeling on which it depends in giving an “identity” to its members.⁴ Thanks to the explosion of the multicultural, we now have a way to internally distance ourselves from such beliefs and practices, even perhaps, following Nietzsche, to touch all that “goes without saying” with the hammer as with a tuning fork.

The second development goes even further in revealing history to us in new ways. I refer to the work of those thinkers I term the true empiricists—writers such as Faulkner and Morrison, Gaddis and Pynchon, Garcia-Marquez and David Grossman—whose explorations of new narrative strategies for the understanding of history deepen and redefine the crisis implicit in recent work in historiography. For what such writers explore is the *cognitive* power of new *narrative* methods for the very apprehension of history. In evolving new ways to write and represent history such writers thereby constitute the past as precisely what has eluded dominant modes of conceptualization and explanation. Their works thus become the primary texts we must grapple with in order to grasp the “complexity” of history as well as the ways we must learn to write in order to sustain that comprehension. It may turn out, in fact, that the concepts of history developed by the theorists listed above are but dim reflections of the concrete models of knowing offered by such writers—the implication being that we shouldn’t use Derrida (say) to read Pynchon or Ricoeur to understand Faulkner, but must take up the proper dialectical relationship and grant the literary work the power to challenge and even overturn the theoretical frameworks we impose on it.⁵ My purpose in this book is to develop that possibility: (1) to show that Literature is an independent way of knowing, prior to logic and the order of the concept, and (2) to demonstrate that its cognitive power comes to fruition in the apprehension of the historical.

Here is one way to think about this possibility. If conceptualization, especially as practiced within the ratio, alters and falsifies what artists such as Faulkner and Pynchon enable us to grasp, the problem is not to resolve this difference, but to sustain it as a way of thinking about history. After spending

a week in El Salvador, Joan Didion said “I now regard Garcia-Marquez as a social realist.” The implication of Didion’s remark is that “magical realism” is not fiction but revelation—that way of writing which first cognizes and represents the truth of Latin American history. My purpose is to sustain the disruptive implications of this idea and nurture it into theory for a discipline that still by and large wants to set strict limits to the ways in which it will understand itself as narrative, to say nothing of using the modes of writing contemporary novelists place at its disposal.

The idea that history, like literature and philosophy, is a way of writing, and that this circumstance is not incidental but constitutive in determining the “facts,” has been in the air for quite some time now. It derives from what we can list as a fourth major development behind the current rethinking of history. I refer to the explosion of theories of narrative and to what Clifford Geertz calls the “blurred genres” and new ways of writing history that have emerged in the work of historical scholars in a number of disciplines in recent years.⁶

What are we to make of these developments? Is it possible that Aristotle was wrong when he said that “poetry is more philosophic than history” since, qua narrative, it is impossible to fix the difference? The kinds of stories we are able to tell determine what counts as fact and inference. A narrative paradigm functions from the beginning of any historical inquiry. For example: assume agents with rational intentions that they formulated through careful deliberation before taking action and that is what one finds in “evidence” when one interprets the documents they left behind; documents that one then uses to construct a narrative that will offer a structured, orderly, reasoned account of why those agents were justified in raining nuclear fire on two cities.⁷

Narrative assumptions about human nature and the motives determining the intentions and actions of the agents who make history inform the act of historical interpretation. The very constitution of data is inextricably tied to the narrative framework in which one will “later” cast and represent the data. Such is the hermeneutic circle in which every historian moves. If here too “there are no facts, only interpretations” (Nietzsche), narrative is the reason because it provides the a priori framework that shapes the materials of historical inquiry from the beginning. What Flaubert teaches us about Emma Bovary, and Joyce about virtually every language our culture employs to make sense of experience, is true also for the historian. The limits of a person’s narrative framework—of the kinds of stories one can tell—establish the limits of what that person can know and experience. That is why narrative has become the neo-Kantian preoccupation of the day.⁸ As Frederic Jameson argues, the need to tell stories is the superordinate a priori, the deepest desire and structuring principle whereby “the human mind” makes sense of personal and cultural experience.⁹

Approach and avoidance, however, has characterized the response of those historiographers who have worked hardest to bring this condition to our attention. While historiographers such as White, LaCapra, and Ricoeur foreground the ways in which narrative genres, tropes, and conventions shape historical writing, their fascination with narrative halts at precisely the point where I will argue one should begin—with writers such as Joyce, Pynchon, Faulkner, Woolf, Gaddis, and Morrison as opposed to the models of omniscient and reliable narration provided by the nineteenth century novel. For when one begins with “modern” and “post-modern” writers, fascinating complications arise concerning the cognitive inseparability of historical knowledge and narrative “method”; complications which exceed the framework a metahistorian such as Hayden White uses to contain the Kantian turn in historical inquiry by establishing, through the use of Northrop Frye, an essentialistic and curiously ahistorical theory of the four literary forms or modes (romance, comedy, tragedy, irony) that for White inform and exhaust the possibilities of historical narration.¹⁰

In his recent work, White has opened himself to new possibilities, but the way he frames them involves assumptions that in effect cancel everything radical in those possibilities. Consider the following statement: “Such a conception of historical inquiry . . . would permit historians to conceive of the possibility of using impressionistic, expressionistic, surrealist, and (perhaps) even actionist modes of representation for dramatizing the significance of data which they have uncovered but which, all too frequently, they are prohibited from seriously contemplating as evidence.”¹¹ Implicit here is the assumption that there is still some way to separate the “data” and its comprehension from what is finally “rhetoric”—a way of presenting, even dramatizing things but not a mode of cognition whereby the data is had and known in the first place. What White holds back from is this: *representation is cognition*. For once take that step and there is no way to limit the narrative experiments historians may have to undertake in order to know their subject.

Re-enter Faulkner and Pynchon, Morrison and Gaddis with the recognition that the extant modes of narration—Frye’s essentialistic cycle, whether suitably ironized by White and Roy Schafer or grounded in Wayne Booth’s humanistic rhetoric of reliable narration—are not adequate to the “facts” of contemporary history or to the relationship authors must form to readers if those facts are to be comprehended.¹² The task of the historian is not to recycle the old forms, as if they constitute and exhaust all narrative possibilities a priori, but to evolve new and unprecedented ways of narrating experiences that cannot be cognized until modes of representation adequate to them have been invented. Narrative, so understood, is not tied to an a priori structure of explanatory paradigms (comedy, tragedy, romance, irony), nor is it tied to the need for a reliable authorial voice of reason

wedded to the essential beliefs of the humanistic tradition. It is a project made new and dangerous by the historical contingencies that are the historian's subject or become so whenever the paradise of the a priori is rent by the force of traumatic events.¹³

The leads offered by great writers of fiction will be of little use to us, however, as long as the discipline of history remains tied to epistemologies that rest on concepts of perception and explanation that render such narratological experiments irrelevant and finally intrusive to the pursuit of an objective, scientific knowledge that one restores to history once experimental writing has been cast aside for factual "narratives" that dare not know themselves as such, lest in doing so they "deconstruct" the line that somehow separates them from "fiction." This non-existent line, however, is only sustained by keeping the narrative dimension of historical writing to a minimum or by establishing, through the consensus of all "responsible" historians,¹⁴ a set of conventions regarding those ways of telling that are inherently proper to history and that save the historian from having to attempt the kind of narrative "inventions" and strategies one finds in Faulkner or Pynchon.

The appeal of such arguments derives, of course, from a recognition of what would happen if historians actually tried to constitute the radical possibility. What, for example, would result if an "academic" historian attempted to represent the Middle Passage in a voice similar to the one Toni Morrison finds necessary to its evocation in *Beloved*? Or if Shelby Foote attempted to rewrite a history of the South after internalizing *Absalom, Absalom!*? Or, imagine a consciousness of the Bomb as deep and tortured as that possessed by the narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow* made the basis for an actual historical narrative about Hiroshima that would of necessity become as expressive, as fantastic, and as appalling as anything one finds in Pynchon's fiction. Imagine: Oppenheimer in the dessert chewing on the *Gita*; Tibbets naming the plane Enola Gay, after his mother; a rapt and cheering crowd of 100,000 gathered in the L.A. Coliseum two months after the war to celebrate a simulated re-enactment of Hiroshima complete with "mushroom cloud"—and, in juxtaposition, the experience of the *hibakusha*, agents who never existed before in history.

As these examples indicate, the force of narrative is both epistemological and ontological. For the richest implication of this line of thought is that the way artists know is not only different; it liberates a knowledge of the Real that official historical methods are designed to conceal. One way to think of the artist is as a consciousness that internalizes and then sustains the traumatic impact of events by refusing to sacrifice the revelatory power of image and affect to the order of the concept and the rule of the ratio. The artist's task, as Rilke put it, "is to wait for that which has become concept to become again image." Such is the process from which the search for new artistic forms, new narrative ways to grasp and articulate experience begins; in the

image, say, of Morrison's Sethe dashing her child's brains out to prevent that child's return to slavery. For the artist, the image in its traumatic impact is the first historical fact and the last one: that primary datum that gives us the world in its power to enter us with the severity of a judgment that eradicates defenses and conceptual shields. A historian who takes up this possibility knows two things in their dialectical connection: (1) that conceptualization and the structures of explanation it offers prove inadequate to the affective reality of experience and (2) that it is possible, by refusing their pull, to recover what official accounts consign to silence.

Such a route, however, leads inevitably to a *crisis* for the discipline: one in which virtually everything on which historians have traditionally depended is subjected to a skeptical interrogation; a crisis that can't be resolved by reasserting pragmatic or academic consensual limits since the ground and motives from which such solutions derive are part and parcel of the very circle of understanding that has become problematic. History as a discipline is not an archive of monumental empirical labors. **It is a practice grounded in a system of guarantees.** That system and the reassurances it gives us are the primary things we read—and internalize—when we read histories. And, as we will see, that system has as its deepest motive and appeal the assurance that certain things will not be known.

II. The Concept of Crisis and a Hermeneutics of Engagement

Early in *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes one of his major and insufficiently appreciated contributions to methodology: "a discipline is mature only insofar as it is capable of 'undergoing' a crisis in all of its basic concepts and procedures."¹⁵ Rather than something to be avoided, this condition for Heidegger is something to be sought, something reflection must endeavor to produce. Moreover, when it happens, the first sign is this: the relationship between the objects under investigation and the frameworks of knowing "begins to totter." We start to see the ways in which our frameworks set up positive barriers to knowledge. The objects of inquiry then announce themselves in a new way: in terms of how they exceed, resist, challenge, and even mock the frameworks. The normal post-Kantian epistemological operation—concepts superimposed upon data—becomes problematic. A discipline in crisis is one where the very nature of knowledge—of what it is we want to know and why—is at issue. Because that is so, crisis in any discipline is valuable because it renews our contact with something else that Heidegger formulates in an equally memorable way when he defines a "metaphysical" question as one that "puts the very being of the questioner into question."¹⁶ Such a situation, like crisis, is of course for most people unintelligible, impossible, and intolerable. For some, however, it is the only time one feels truly alive in the act of thinking.

A *hermeneutics of engagement* is the term I have coined for the method of interpretation that develops and sustains the experience that gives birth to “metaphysical” questioning. I first coined this term in a memorable conversation I had with Paul Ricoeur in 1971. My effort was to distinguish my idea of interpretation from Ricoeur’s “hermeneutics of recovery.”¹⁷ A hermeneutics of recovery strives to find those “meanings” and values that are constant and repeatable across time, and that can be found in diverse cultural products once we develop the correct method of humanist, essentialistic interpretation. Engagement begins when all such assurances are in doubt. Contingency, existence, and anxiety then bite deep into the human subject, constituting a situation we can sustain only by resisting the ways in which we are predisposed to flee or resolve it. Crisis thereby generates its true complement: the questioner as a being in crisis, existentially at issue in the act of thinking and forced by it to descend to the most hidden places of the psyche.¹⁸

For one who sustains this condition as a methodological principle, the goal of thinking becomes to constitute a criticism that is radical and radically self-critical in principle, one where reflection strives to sustain the disruptiveness of experience, not resolve it.¹⁹ Most thinkers of course reject this possibility—or find it pragmatically unnecessary and undesirable—since it breaks with the Cartesian and rationalist assumptions that have traditionally informed the concept and the practice of reflection. Engaged reflection, in contrast, is a process that is itself existentialized from within through a principled sustenance and deepening of anxiety. Thereby, what others see as infinite regress, or the inability to “begin,” becomes an authentic constitution of a third major insight we can derive from Heidegger.

He terms it the hermeneutic circle and derives striking implications from a recognition of its inescapability.²⁰ Briefly, Heidegger argues that (1) circularity cannot be avoided because thinking is always situated; (2) the authentic response being not to bewail this situation or try to escape it but to enter it fully in the recognition that it contains a positive possibility. *Engagement* is the act that preserves this situation as the agon through which thinking existentializes the thinker.²¹ One result is an existentializing of epistemology. Discovering a framework’s limitations is no longer the basis of its “affirmation” through the Kantian acquiescence in necessary a priori limits. It has become, rather, the beginning of a search for underlying motives and the need for their critique. The rationality of pure mind now reveals the psyche beneath. The sufferance of painful insights into oneself becomes the circumstance that defines the possibility of self-knowledge.

Nietzsche’s ideal of “self-contempt” thereby becomes the basis for a thought in which reflection on one’s motives transforms the way in which one subsequently knows the world.²² With psychological self-consciousness comes an awareness of how deeply our thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and

feelings have been chosen for us, implanted in us by others; and of how altering this condition requires taking issue with oneself at a register of inwardness to which few subjects ever “descend” given the intense anxiety that attends it. Suffering is here not only the result of reflection, it is the way to it. And it begets as the basis for “self-overcoming” the need to cast the cold eye of a withering contempt not simply on the values we hold, but on the deeper ties that bind us to them. Tearing out of one’s heart certain desires and the complex internal relations that bind us to them has become the prime agent of human perception. Self-contempt of this order is neither a pathological state nor a psychological impossibility. It is a discipline of courage in suffering and self-mediation through suffering; the act whereby the quest for knowledge takes on the status of an ethical and psychological imperative. Knowledge (and the “self”) can no longer be consigned to the purely intellectual space of a world we construct solely in the head to assure the presence of the human mind to itself in endless pure tautology, a ratio secure in its transcendence of anything that doesn’t make “sense.” Engaged reflection lives, in contrast, the readiness to make uncompromising self-examination one’s innermost imperative. This is the engagement one carries as hermeneutic into every situation, every inquiry, which is why *deracination* is the best word for this method since the process is one in which taking action within oneself depends upon a repeated reversal that uproots the motives upon which the “self” depends for its identity. This process, by way of transition, is what this book attempts for both the author—and the audience.

III. Only Connect: Why Hiroshima?

A prospectus outlining this inquiry called forth the following comments from two National Endowment for the Humanities reviewers. I quote both reviews in their entirety.

1. The first, scrawled across the page: “Pure nonsense. What is his discipline? There are perfectly good justifications for Hiroshima. Not ‘Humanities’ at all but vapid, subjective philosophizing.”
2. The second, typed, serenely transcendent: “Why the insistence that Hiroshima is ‘concealed and forgotten’? Why the emphasis on a city’s *instantaneous* obliteration as a Sign more *horrific* than the cumulative engineered deaths of millions in World War II, millions in the holocaust, tens of millions in the Gulag, Cambodia, Rwanda, back to tens of thousands killed and blinded by Basil II Bulgarok-tonos, and back into time immemorial?”

Clearly, it’s not a good idea to get downwind of the post-Cheney NEH. That noted, we can profitably derive from these comments a preliminary

understanding of five issues that inevitably arise in any discussion of historical method.

A. Fact-Document

Joe Friday is always with us, but in doing history the unmediated vision is no more than a self-deluding myth. Consider the following headline in an American Newspaper, August 7, 1945:

“ATOM” CITY IN ASHES
HOLOCAUST IN HIROSHIMA
JAP PITTSBURGH HIT

Just the facts, or a first textualization. Understandable, as a sign of war weariness and thus easily purged through a more disinterested, “objective” account? Or would that account, by its very “objectivity,” elide what is set forth with uncommon clarity in the headline—the inseparability of an Event from its contextualization. The sentiments laid forth baldly in the newspaper headline may have been, in fact, the primary “cause” or motive in the decisions that led to the act; and to the subsequent effort of historians (and apologists) to conceal those motives and justify the bombing of Hiroshima on the basis of the “objective” evidence that can be obtained by consulting the official records left behind by the architects of that decision. But that does not free one from the circle. For to establish their veracity one must read and interpret those texts: some of which are similar to the newspaper headline, others quite different; some fashioned on the spot and apparently free of motives; others darkly ambiguous and intended primarily for public consumption; some created co-temporal with the event, or shortly thereafter, as a record of official *intentions*; others long after, late in the winter of one’s reflections.²³ In all cases, one thing is common—text. In consulting the historical “record” one never comes at long last on pure factual data, but always on yet another text open to interpretation. Moreover, in interpreting such documents, the search for “reasons” and the privileging of certain statements and explanations (albeit from the mouths of politicians) because they take that form is a perfect instance of the kind of circularity that many thinkers find so appealing: that is, the privileging of reason and intention as a way to limit what can happen in history so that we will achieve explanations that make “sense” and are reassuring to reason.

History, as event and as discipline, is inherently textual. with no way out of the circle.²⁴ The correct response is not to persist in the effort to remove such impurities in order to attain that mythical beast dear to the positivist’s heart—the brute, unmediated fact that puts an end to debate—but, following Heidegger, to enter the circle fully by recognizing that history

is a hermeneutic discipline and not an empirical one. The primary data of history are the documents that historians can only read through the frameworks of interpretation they employ to wrestle with that “data” in all its elusive, ambiguous complexity and frequent duplicity. When Truman, Byrnes, and Stimson speak and write the concealing of their intention may in fact be their primary intention.²⁵ Evidence for this hypothesis was inadvertently provided by the cry against “rewriting history,” sounded most recently by the VFW in its successful campaign against the Smithsonian.²⁶ For the cry belies the basic fact. History is always being rewritten because it is only through that process that historians ever come to know it.

B. Explanation

Out of that process, in some cases, a general consensus about “reasons” eventually emerges. Such is the case with the Bomb where, fifty years after, the “perfectly good justifications for Hiroshima” have finally been established. Since this book is *not* about that issue, but about a deeper history underlying it, I take this opportunity to list those justifications here. Thus: on August 6, 1945 and then again on August 9, 1945, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Japan for four reasons: (1) to avenge Pearl Harbor; (2) to justify to the American people the amount of money invested in the development of the Bomb; (3) to create a laboratory wherein scientists and military personnel could study its effects; and (4) to “impress” the Russians with this opening salvo of the Cold War. Furthermore: (5) the action was taken in full knowledge that the Japanese, at Hirohito’s direction, were pursuing terms of surrender through several diplomatic channels. (6) It was also taken in the knowledge that the planned “invasion of Japan”—which would cost a “million [sic] American lives”—had become, thanks to the success of Curtis LeMay’s fire-bombing campaign²⁷ unnecessary; except, that is, as a ruse perpetrated on our own servicemen and as a rhetorical prop in postwar propaganda. The first act of revisionism, of rewriting history was the myth fabricated after the war by Stimson and others to hide what America had done: namely, the myth that we dropped the Bomb “to end the war and save lives.”²⁸

Two observations follow the above that are crucial to the definition and understanding of my purpose. The production of the “case closed” account of any historical debate predictably generates the next new account, which depends, for its possibility, on the production or unearthing of the next new “fact.”²⁹ This is not simply the way dissertations get written or bar-room battles sustained. It is, with far more troubling results, the process whereby certain issues come to regulate the discussion of a historical event to the exclusion or repression of other concerns. If we can keep in place the assumption that there are two sides to every question, with the two camps

fixated forever on debating whether dropping the Bomb was “justified,” we can avoid dealing with the reality that is thereby displaced—the brute fact of August 6, 1945 and the historical meaning of that event as a human action. That is the subject of this book. And to the consternation of my NEH reviewers it necessarily entails matters that are all too conveniently labelled “subjective.”

C. Subjectivity and History

As Hegel shows in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, objectivity and the stance of observational reason is neither the primary nor the proper stance toward the real; it is, rather, one of the most abstract and self-contradictory attitudes we can adopt toward both the object of knowledge (especially in the “human sciences”) and the relationship of the knower to that object. Subjectivity, moreover, is not a lawless flight into self-indulgent projections breeding nothing but emotional and cognitive confusion, but a principle of self-reference and of knowing that is rigorous and supremely lawful because it develops through its own immanent critique. As such, subjectivity is precisely that self-mediation that enables us to get beyond the dualism of objectivity and subjectivity and the reified concepts of both terms required to sustain that dualism. For the right subject that is: one for whom subjectivity is the most rigorous and determinate relationship one can take up toward the objects of one’s inquiry; with knowledge a dialectic in which reference is always secured because the imperatives imposed by events in their traumatic impact on subjects generate the self-transformations one must undertake in order to become adequate to the task of knowing. To know the Bomb is to live a relationship to it that is subjective in the most exacting determination of that term. Those who seek the pure facticity of the fact, who regard “objectivity” in positivistic terms and “subjectivity” a woeful lapse from that stance, fail to see two conditions that blind them to the very subject matter of history: (1) objectivity is an attempt by a subject to limit the terms and conditions of its engagement; (2) it produces, as its necessary corollary, a drastic limitation of what can be known. The ideology of objectivity is not a purgation of subjective considerations but an attempt to reduce them to their most dogmatic and self-reifying form, to impose rigid controls on history so that its knowing will not “trouble us / With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls.”

D. Disciplinarity

Deracination is an interdisciplinary work, based on a self-conscious awareness of the methodology that makes interdisciplinary knowledge possible. That method is *dialectic* as that way of thinking that establishes necessary connec-

tions that cut across the separations that isolate questions and disciplines. To get a quick idea of what is distinctive about this way of thinking—and why the current practice of attaining the interdisciplinary by simply piling the results of distinct disciplines atop one another is its inadvertent parody—imagine Aristotle’s exasperation when he looked on the Platonic corpus and saw issues that must be separated into distinct disciplines jumbled together under hypostatized categories with no locus in “experience” save pure speculation. “What’s his discipline?” was the question Aristotle asked of Plato before correcting the situation by creating an organon for inquiry based on what Aristotle made his primary methodological task: the separation of distinct questions into distinct disciplines so that particular “sciences” could be constructed, each with their own univocal definitions and distinct, fixed procedures.³⁰ We who live habituated to that way of doing things forget what Aristotle knew (as did Kant and Dewey): separating questions and disciplines is just as difficult as joining them. Both operations are philosophic acts and depend on distinct philosophic principles.³¹

For some thinkers the task of thought is to find and establish necessary connections. The question “what’s his discipline?” is inappropriate to such a discourse. The proper question concerns architectonic principles: what is the nature of the categories that cut across and bind “disciplines” and in what ontological principle are they grounded?³² That ground principle may derive from a single discipline—logic in Plato and Hegel, history in Marx, psychology in Nietzsche and Freud. But that only happens if the grounding discipline is comprehensive and provides the dialectical thinker with a way to join together, in an inseparable unity, questions and phenomena that disciplinary thought is intent on keeping separate. To cite a simple example, this is the logic that allows Plato in *The Republic* to bring together education, poetry, justice, and the soul in an inquiry into the nature of Knowledge that is capped by an understanding that, qua Being, the good, the true, and the beautiful are and must be one. For the dialectical thinker, disciplinary thought rends the unity of experience, resulting in splits and bifurcations that destroy those connections that are lived before they are cognized and that require for their articulation modes of engagement and reflection that make preserving “the unity of lived-experience” more than just a pleasant phrase.³³

The effort to evolve such categories is here taken up in a new way because the architectonic principles I use are derived from art, and specifically from literature, and not from a conceptual or logical framework of comprehensive mediation such as characterizes the dialectical tradition from Plato through Hegel. The basic argument I will mount is that the image gives us an awareness of history that transcends the order of the concept and of what can be known within the conceptual medium. In so doing image brings to perception concrete connections that are sundered,

even in the best interdisciplinary work, insofar as that work remains based on the conceptual because the connections made by the image are radically different from the logical connections made possible by rational, conceptual mediation. Sustaining the ontological status of such connections, however, requires establishing art—and specifically literature—as an original, primary way of thinking and knowing that is capable of preserving its uniquely revelatory power over and against the effort of other ways of thinking to reduce that awareness to rational canons of discourse and intelligibility. Brought before the bar of historical investigation and forced to speak, Itzhak Zuckerman, soldier in the Warsaw ghetto and survivor of Auschwitz, responded to the insistent demand of Claude Lanzmann to contribute to the historical record with a deathless poem: “If you could lick my heart it would poison you.”³⁴ After such knowledge, the historian’s task is to sustain what Heidegger calls “the poetizing of discourse.” For when history is one’s concern, artistic knowing is perhaps the only mode of cognition and representation that proves adequate to the subject. Which brings us to a final observation.

E. Inhumanity Has No/A History: Basil II Bulgaroktonos Vivant

Boundless compassion is a wonderful thing. But Hiroshima has something to recommend it to our souls that other historical atrocities lack. It’s ours. As such it gives us a chance to learn something about history that is easy to miss. I refer to the resistance we put up against knowing certain things; the ways in which the writing of history often serves to confirm what we want to believe, not what we ought to know. As we will see, a system of *guarantees* structures the activity of most historians, providing the *glue* that holds together the assumptions about fact, inference, and explanation that unify historical inquiry. One of the primary motives behind the writing of history is to show the power of these guarantees to subsume historical contingency in ways that enable us to live in a world that has been given the shape of that intelligibility. The inestimable value of Hiroshima, in contrast, is its ability to foreground these guarantees as principles of resistance to knowing, and not as the one true a priori logic of explanation. The power of Hiroshima is that of a vast alienation or *Entfremdungseffekt*: that is, the opportunity to detect and thereby make a fresh decision about categories of mind and feeling that have become habitual.

It may even entail the knowledge that there is something new under the sun; that August 6, 1945 was unprecedented and remains so as an object for understanding. It is comforting to proclaim that inhumanity is one and the same from time immemorial, rather than a historical process where great and irreversible changes can occur. One is thereby delivered from the specter that haunts history—that “human nature” is historical to the core,

with no guarantee present to deliver us from the power of an event to complete processes of change that are irreversible and that produce results in which, as Virginia Woolf said, “human nature” itself changes utterly. Such a process, ripened through the use of poison gas and the erosion during the Great War of the protection accorded non-combatants matured to monstrous proportions in the years between 1937 and 1945. A new inhumanity was then ratified when an entire city—of no military significance, its population an undifferentiated mass—became the proper object of military strategy and military action.³⁵ A rough beast, its hour come round at last, was then born, ushering in a “new world order.” That order contained as its innermost, nuclear secret the recognition that the psyche—individual and collective—is historical and continues to evolve forms appropriate to itself long after the traumatic events that bring its disorders to apotheosis have been explained, justified, and thereby rendered Unconscious.³⁶

IV. On Psychoanalytic Method: No “Return to Freud”

This book attempts a psychoanalytic reading of Hiroshima—and of the American psyche. That reading is not based, however, on Freud, Lacan, Kohut, or any other current psychoanalytic orthodoxy. Such practices abridge the primary canon of engagement, depriving us of the most valuable lesson we can learn from Freud. The vitality of “psychoanalysis” resides in the effort to sustain a radically new way of thinking, not in a set of dogmas that are imposed a priori on phenomena without allowing the latter any power to challenge, extend, or revise the framework of interpretation. Genuine psychoanalytic thinking necessarily outstrips that practice because the logic that animates it is the effort to strip away defenses and resistances, to advance knowledge by seeking out what we do not want to know—about ourselves. That hermeneutic implies a complex epistemological relationship both to Freud’s texts and to their use as conceptual tools in studying phenomena that exceed their explanatory powers and thus contain the power to produce new theoretical developments within psychoanalysis itself. Sustaining that possibility is why no “return to Freud” is attempted here. Such returns invariably take one of two forms, both inherently limiting. The first involves the repeated attempt—most recently by Grunbaum and Dennett³⁷ to see if psychoanalysis is a “science,” and the recurrent discovery that its central concepts fail that test. To perform this operation one selects certain supposedly canonical statements in Freud’s texts—statements that are established as such through a literal and distinctly unproblematic reading of those “texts”—then tests those statements by seeing if they stand up to what we now know scientifically, given the latest developments in cognitive psychology and the neurosciences. Not surprisingly, some of Freud’s most provocative ideas—about the image, the nature of

depth memory, psyche as agon—are cast aside a priori since there is no way they can even be constituted as hypotheses within the empiricizing methods demanded by the “hard sciences.”

The second return follows an opposite route, to a radically different end. Through an exceedingly complicated, and somewhat hermetic, reading of Freud’s canonical texts, the original and undiluted “truth” of the master is recaptured, purged of revisionary errors. Lacan is, of course, the most eloquent, elusive, and at times profound example of this hermeneutic and its power to preserve the deep, and often previously undisclosed, meaning of Freud’s discoveries against the simplifications to which subsequent “developments,” such as ego psychology, have reduced them in adapting psychoanalysis to the social designs of the American “health-industry.”

Neither approach will be used here, for good psychoanalytic and hermeneutic reasons. Freud is a giant but also only a beginning. Return, even when purest, begets reification. And, of greater importance, a twofold resistance to history. First, to the genuine discoveries and advances that have been made since Freud by psychoanalysts as diverse as Melanie Klein and William Faulkner, Bion, Pynchon, Winnicott, Gaddis, Fairbairn, and Morrison. Second, to the ways in which these developments address the situation Freud only dimly foresaw when World War I convinced him that he had underestimated the force of Thanatos in the psyche. My effort is to develop the theory of psyche required to constitute Freud’s most radical insights and to extend them by tracing their development in those subsequent historical events that confirm everything Freud feared. In thus situating psychoanalysis before that Event which has the power to put all its confidences and concepts into crisis, my goal is to wrest from concealment and constitute a theory of the psyche that other psychoanalytic theories have worked overtime to contain.

V. Engaging the Audience: Agonistic Intersubjectivity

Such a project entails an exacting rhetorical contract that I hope to form with the reader. One of the interesting things about rhetoric is that when we “agree” with an author we scarcely notice it. Or we find an author’s rhetoric “sensible, restrained, and rational” when it confirms our assumptions and beliefs, when we are a member of the intellectual community whose needs and interests it serves. It’s when language breaks with any of this that we object to tone and emotional tenor, to the author’s voice and persona, the questionable nature of the examples used, and so on. All this invariably happens when a discourse tries to get to places in the psyche that we do not care to visit. Reassuring one’s audience while taking care not to give “offense” is the magna carta of successful rhetoric, which turns on the implicit

assurance that anything traumatic that comes up will be resolved in a way that contributes to the maintenance of the “identity” and the guarantees upon which one’s audience depends to sustain its beliefs in the basic order of experience. But that is also the inherent limitation of the circle in which such rhetoric moves. When we proceed *from* and *to* a coherent identity or fixed framework of interpretation, the topic under discussion becomes the medium through which we confirm—via repetition—what we already know, the fruit of inquiry being the reinforcement through that process of what has thereby proven its ability to master yet another experience.

An agonistic relationship to the reader is something quite different. It necessarily risks dismissal, especially when an author’s purpose is to unearth and then challenge some of our culture’s deeply cherished assumptions and guarantees. There is, however, an irony in the situation. For perhaps an agonistic relationship is the only one that truly respects the reader and shows the proper regard for the reader’s possibilities. It does so by asking readers to open themselves to the possibility that we are strongly opposed to self-knowledge; that we have constructed elaborate systems of defense to protect us from things we do not want to know; and that we are quick to react with hostility to anyone who presumes to speak in ways that suggest that in “doing history” we must place our lives, as well as our concepts, into question. Such an agon is possible only if author and audience bind one another to a drama in which painful, strongly resisted discoveries drive a discourse that is thus about the psyche confronting itself at that register where true change first becomes possible: change in depth through a reversal in which the subject is existentialized from within through a process in which the anxiety that was previously displaced through the construction of defenses and conceptual guarantees has become that “wakeful anguish of the soul,” which purges defenses in order to take up the burdens of one’s historical and psychological being.

As the previous sentence shows, such a process employs terms that are currently dismissed as signs of the worst kind of nostalgia, terms that invoke what has been thoroughly, utterly deconstructed: the subject. What I hope to show is that the only commonality between the principle I’m talking about and those theories of subject now happily refuted is the term. Rhetorically, however, the problem remains, since one of the primary barriers to communication in professional discourse is that the popular meaning that readers attach to one’s terms predetermines whether one’s discourse is warranted by current commonplaces and thus worthy of attention. Four cardinal terms I use are especially noteworthy in this regard. To forestall misunderstanding, and to give a further sense of what the agon I’m after involves, I here offer brief comments on each.

First and foremost is the *subject*, a term that enters any discourse today

trailing clouds of reflected pre- and mis-conceptions. For the “postmodern” audience, administering the *quietus* to the subject—that is, the Cartesian, humanistic, substantialist subject, begetter of the Kantian mind and the Hegelian logos—has been the primary achievement of recent thought. Any use today of terms or concepts tied to it (human nature, essences, universals) condemns one to ahistorical phallogocentrism, or, to appropriation, since the only legitimate meaning left to the term is that given it by Foucault (discursive subject-positions), Althusser (the effects of interpellation) or Lacan (schema L).³⁸ For the traditional humanistic audience, the equally easy assumption is that any use of the term subject implies agreement with a host of humanistic assumptions about “identity,” ethical development, and the social process that tie one to ego psychology, a rationalistic theory of the ideal communicative speech act, and a reassertion of the timeless, universal values of the *Aufklärung*.³⁹ My effort is to chart a course that cuts between these views in order to recover a specifically *existential* meaning for the term subject, one that fully situates subject in the world as that possibility which arises through a *self-reference* that is radically different from the essentialistic assumptions in which the concepts of subject mentioned above are grounded.

My use of the term *humanism* entails a different problem. One of my primary efforts is to show the ways in which humanism’s various representatives are attached to the “system of guarantees” that I strive to deracinate. In doing so, however, I argue for a way of being that is itself clearly and deeply “humanistic.” In fact, my project could be described as an attempt to reclaim humanism from essentialistic, ahistorical misprisonings by bringing it to the crisis that its current representatives continue to resist and deny by refusing to undertake an immanent critique that rethinks and revalues the “human” in terms of the *tragic*.

This brings us to the third term in need of clarification, since tragedy is one of the most essentialized and ahistorical concepts in our cultural lexicon, as thinkers from Aristotle through Frye show. Tragedy is readily essentialized, whereas the tragic is something different: what our inquiry will strive to produce, as what we proceed toward, not from. It is the comprehensive concept (*Begriff*) the entire discourse moves toward, but only insofar as the process constitutes an effort to sustain and concretize what Nietzsche was after when he defined *geist* thus: “Spirit is the life that cuts back into life; with its suffering it increases its knowledge.” Such a process is dedicated to the effort to purge thought of all efforts to transcend experience so that we may know and inhabit the world in its contingency, cleansed of guarantees. When this happens, it then becomes possible to see tragic drama (unlike comedy, romance, and irony, and in opposition to previous theories of tragedy) as that literary form which is historical in its being, and has the

ontological status of an *existential a priori*: that is, a way of thinking that is *at issue with itself* and that submits its ways of structuring experience to immanent critique and transformation by referring them to those historical realities that exceed the power of comprehension implicit in its previous forms. To the Kantian tradition, most a priori principles are categorical and subsume experience under concepts that remain fixed and universal.⁴⁰ Tragic mediation is a radically different process. As a *form*, the tragic is engaged in the immanent critique of itself, with history the force that generates this necessity. The resulting epistemological relationship is unique and decidedly non-Kantian. The *self-reference* of tragedy is the effort to detect and purge the *form* of its inadequacies, especially those connected to emotions (such as pity and fear) that are tied to the desire for transcendence and guarantees.⁴¹ The tragic sensibility readies itself to know what history calls on us to know by deracinating the internal limitations that save us from that knowledge. While other literary forms remain enduringly popular precisely because they offer us ways of fleeing history, the goal of the tragic is to evolve artistic forms that will enable us to know our situation in a way that is existential—and that radically existentializes us.

Which brings us to the last term and perhaps my most difficult task—the effort to reclaim and reconstitute existentialism as a meaningful position in contemporary thought. If existentialism functions here as what Kenneth Burke would call my “god-term,” it also conjurs up for most readers an intellectual movement that one scarcely hears mentioned anymore except as *passé* and with disdain. Reclaiming it involves not only rescuing the existential from what R. D. Cumming called its “vagabondage,” that is, the set of absurdist commonplaces and adolescent postures it assumed during its fifteen minutes of fame in American pop culture and the academy.⁴² The real task is to think one’s way through to it again. To begin again from within the experiences that gave it birth so that one might bring it to life again from the ground up and in the integrity of passion appropriate to it. That, rather than a return to certain texts of Sartre or Kierkegaard or Heidegger, is the starting point I will try to reclaim. It is, of course, what I’ve been practicing throughout these pages in an effort to engage the reader in a preliminary experience of what happens when questioning and anxiety come together in a thinking that strives to maximize the ways in which a subject’s being can become at issue to it in and through the study of history. When that happens, thought and the thinker are existentialized utterly and from within because inquiry turns on a probing of the deepest hiding places of the psyche. The term existential thus refers to an engagement in which dialectic is drama: thought develops out of an agon in which every structure on which the psyche depends is put at issue because the subject has once again become a being at issue to itself.

VI. *Only Connect: Immanence—The Existentializing Process*

The arguments of Hegel and Derrida against “Prefaces” are at base arguments for the radical immanence of thought, for the process of thinking as the emergence of concepts and of connections that can only be grasped through radical immersion in a drama where self-criticism is the moving and radically destabilizing principle that structures thought.⁴³ For most thinkers such a situation is intolerable and betrays a prior confusion: a lack of first principles, clear and distinct ideas, valid methodological procedures based on fixed canons of evidence and explanation, sound hypotheses capable of development and leading to conclusions and a body of doctrines that will be communicable to a coherent intellectual community.⁴⁴ This difference is worth noting here to indicate that what Hegel and Derrida say is true only of those philosophic systems that are *dialectical* and that make radical self-interrogation their through-line and moving dynamic. There are different modes of immanence, however, depending upon the nature of the *principle* in which a dialectical system is grounded and the relationship of that principle to experience. The immanence of the *Forms* in Plato, of *logos* in Hegel, of linguistic *différance* in Derrida and of *existential engagement* as practiced here are quite different things.⁴⁵ All affirm the primacy of the adverbial, of thinking and writing as agon. Here, however, the immanent “origin” and “end” resides in what I call the existentializing process, which is something quite different in its “results” from what happens in the other dialectical philosophies mentioned above. For those who engage their existence existentially, the process of thinking generates a content—what I term the deracination of guarantees—that is one with the sequence of irreversible acts whereby a subject, in internalizing that content, is changed utterly—and in depth—by it. That is why existential anxiety is not an abstract and self-reifying mood (as most popular accounts would have it) but a principle of action that, in Hegelian terms, is “its own notion immediately” or immanently because anxiety when authentic is a Keatsian “wakeful anguish of the soul.” It does not flee or bewail its state but seeks to sustain and maximize its power to reveal to the subject the concrete ways in which its being is at issue in a situation for which it can become responsible only by existentializing its being: that is, by purging oneself, at the deepest register of the psyche, of the protections and guarantees that would resolve the situation by denying everything that makes it vital—and one’s own. For the subject who sustains it, anxiety thus generates a complete transformation of anxiety itself; a complete change in how anxiety is lived and the attitude one must take up, in a spirit of gladness, whenever one finds oneself delivered over to the gift of its revelatory power to expose our inauthenticities. The circle of existential engagement ends only with a complete transformation of the condition

with which it began. As subjects, we are that process—or the self-reifications whereby we refuse it.

As existentializing process, engagement evolves as a way of thinking that necessarily gives discourse the structure of an *Aufhebung*⁴⁶ in which each stage “cancels, preserves, and uplifts” what went before by discovering connections and complications requiring a new inquiry, which often involves the shift to a field or topic that could not have been anticipated but that now emerges as necessary. Such a necessity is not a product of abstract Hegelian mediation. It arises instead as an outgrowth of the concrete circumstance in which the inquiry is grounded: as a process of internalization in which the deepening of the subject’s relationship to itself produces an *Aufhebung* that has the following structure. Each stage of the inquiry *cancels* an entire way of living: an “identity,” a psychological economy, a relationship that the subject can adopt toward its being. The inquiry then preserves the product of that labor as an anguish that becomes determinate through its projection into the larger complex of problems that have emerged as the true fruit of the prior inquiry. To use “uplift” or words of similar connotation for the third movement of the process would be doubly inappropriate since a movement which existentializes reverses the very direction of Hegelian thought. For us, *fur uns*, progress always points downward, to a deeper descent into the buried disorders and discontents of the psyche and the deracination that must be affected there if we are to overcome the guarantees that blind us to history and a knowledge of the actual forces that shape it.⁴⁷ (As we’ll see, this paragraph describes the logic behind the sequence of chapters that follow.)

The best way to introduce the result of that labor comes from a question that a friend asked recently after reading the entire manuscript:

“If the psyche—in its crypt—is as you say it is, why would anyone want to know it? That is, know themselves in these ways—and with these results? In eradicating all defenses, deracinating all guarantees, you seem to ask the reader to suffer to no purpose, with no resolution, and no direction other than endless tunneling into “the heart of darkness.”⁴⁸

Though I’d quarrel with this description, the reaction is genuine and deserves an honest reply. For some human beings suffering is an innermost imperative because resentment begins precisely when we set limits to what we can let ourselves know and suffer about the world. Sustaining sufferance thus provides the beginnings of an ethic based on an existential and not a categorical imperative, an ethic that is concretely historical and opposed, in principle, to the system of guarantees that the ratio superimposes upon history in order to deliver us from it. The value of suffering is its power to historicize us in our pores. As such, it is not a passive state or a masochistic disorder but, as Nietzsche knew, an active principle of willing determining

the “degree” to which we have attained “spirit” in the existentializing meaning of that term.

Because our time is a tragic one we refuse to see it as such. One of the ways we do so is by defining tragedy in essentialistic terms and then classifying it as one of the modes writers have devised to give a narrative order to experience. Suitably aestheticized, it is then troped by deconstructive *irony*; for when we classify modes and forms of writing in this way the ironic sensibility always carries the day since it provides both the principle of knowing and the rhetorical trope that generates and comprehends the entire system of classification. For the “postmodern sensibility” irony is the rhetoric of rhetoric: through its application the tragic becomes just another mystification, consigned to the nostalgic fringes of the modern, which the postmodern “subject” looks down on from that serene and superior position that irony confers on those who have internalized it and are now blind to the danger Rilke foresaw as its lure.⁴⁹

As long as the tragic is contained in such ways there is no way to retrieve it as a vital voice in the postmodern world; even perhaps as the *dialectical category* that comprehends our time in a way irony cannot and that breaks the hold irony has over us by revealing it as a *moment* within the reconstitution of a thinking that sees fragmentation, dissolution, and cultural breakdown not as an occasion for *aporia*, free play, and the double-binding of the ironized psyche to the abstract circle in which a self-dissolving thought moves, but as one of the many “signs” that suffering this condition is the act that restores the true dialectical relationship, which Hegel described as the movement from stoicism (structuralism) to skepticism (deconstruction) to “unhappy consciousness.” Most theories of the postmodern condition reverse the relationship of the last two terms: irony thereby cancels and delivers us from existence. The correct way to regain what is “living” in Hegel is to “negate the negation” and restore the tragic as the category that concretizes and existentializes the “unhappy consciousness,” as that engagement which underlies and measures all the attitudes and philosophies we adopt toward the world.

Developing such a dialectic informs the “suspensive” structure of the inquiry that follows and underlies the necessary connections it establishes among issues and disciplines that are usually held at considerable distance from one another. It may be helpful here to list that sequence as a further instance of the kind of dialectical thinking that will be attempted here. (1) The development of a theory of internalization that exposes the ruling assumptions of American ego psychology. (2) An interpretation of the Kantian sublime as the historical category required to understand the desire that finds fulfillment in the Bomb. (3) An examination of the inner world of “the psyche that dropped the bomb” and the evolution thereby of a new

theory of Thanatos as a force in history. (4) The possibility for a reversal of that condition through a reflection on Hamlet and the concept of existential reflection that Shakespeare develops in that character. (5) A new theory of the tragic is thereby advanced, leading to (6) a theory of the dialectical image and of artistic cognition as a way of knowing that has the reality of history as its referent. As we will see, this sequence, strange as it may initially appear, is the structure of thought required to connect two issues that are themselves necessarily connected: the bombing of Hiroshima and the need, after that event, to take up Einstein's challenge and internalize the Bomb by changing the way we think about and write history.

When Plato defined dialectic as that way of thinking that discovers the necessary connections that bind together separate phenomena and disciplines, the sequence outlined above is *not* the kind of structure he had in mind. Nor could he have imagined a historical situation in which the greatest dialectical thinker of our time would redefine that task thus: "paranoia is the ability to make connections."⁵⁰ Only connect: If, with Plato or Hegel, rational mediation is the route to one's dialectical totality one will build vast structures of mind, clouds of contemplation, winged with dusk: a world in the head, better far than that which one has sacrificed to the need for transcendental guarantees—and the need to be free at last from the burdens of existence. If, following the way of the artist, connections flare up as lighting products of that imaginative perception which comes when the world assaults the astonished heart with images that cannot be subsumed by the ratio, one will build structures of a radically different order, ones that deliver us from nothing.

The bombing of Hiroshima is the traumatic through-line that binds together the various inquiries undertaken here as the Event requiring such a dialectic of one who would constitute its historical meaning. As such, the Bomb is not discussed here in a continuous manner but flares up throughout the book, similar to the way a traumatic kernel forms the deepest nodal point of a dream—the nightmare from which the rest of the dream forms, in a sense, the effort to awake.⁵¹ The connections that the Bomb enables us to make are of a similar order: depth-psychological rather than rational or empirical. Thereby the dead of Hiroshima never become what would be truly horrible—an example used to illustrate a thesis. Their status, rather, is that of a cause—that which drives the discourse and constitutes the heart of its inwardness. If, as Benjamin argues, "the dead are in danger," the only adequate response is to give them a voice that fully unleashes their power to vex the minds of the living.⁵²

To which I would add a final, heretical idea as the true stake of the following inquiry. If the connections we establish lead us to rethink thought in a way that supplants the logic of rationalistic mediation, our inquiry will

constitute, for history, a recovery of what Shelley had in mind when he claimed that “the poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”⁵³

But to see how that might be so we must begin with Shelley’s burning coal at that moment when it is lit, when experience first breaks through the shields and forces the astounded and terrified subject to engage the dynamics of *internalization*.