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# Re-flexion: Genocide in Ruins

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Since the early 1990s, the term “genocide” has been used more and more persistently as a powerful instrument in popular discourse and in geopolitics. Indeed, the term seems to have passed into the troublesome field of common sense.<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that the meaning of “genocide” has become more clear, so much as to say that it has taken on an uncritical air of self-evidence. As a result, we are confronted with something akin to what Louis Althusser, writing in 1946, called “the International of Decent Feelings,” a consensus among certain postwar intellectuals that one “can avert the fatality of war by conducting an international moral campaign.”<sup>2</sup> According to Althusser, those intellectuals claimed that Europeans could put the catastrophe of World War II to rest and prevent similar catastrophes in the future simply by acknowledging everyone’s mutual humanity. Foreshadowing what would later become his influential critique of humanism, Althusser examined the peculiar form of this putative human alliance:

We must ask ourselves what this alliance really signifies. For we are confronted with a phenomenon that is international in scope, and with a diffuse ideology which, though it has not yet been precisely defined, is capable of assuming a certain organizational form: it is said that Camus envisages creating protest groups bent on denouncing crimes against humanity before the conscience of the world, while the “Human Front” is contemplating the use of cinema or radio to induce humanity to

abandon war. One senses, in these attempts, a mentality in search of itself, an intention eager to embody itself in concrete form, an ideology seeking to define itself, entrench itself, and also furnish itself with means of action. If this mentality is international, and in the process of taking institutional form, then a new “International” is in the making. There is perhaps something to be gained from trying to discover what it conceals.<sup>3</sup>

For Althusser, this “new ‘International’” conceals the sociohistorical complexity of catastrophic events beneath a politics of moral outrage proclaimed in the name of an abstract humanity held together by a fear about a generalized threat to humanity.<sup>4</sup> By the end of “The International of Decent Feelings,” this critique itself gives way to the twenty-eight-year-old Althusser’s own, Marxist-Christian notion of humanity.<sup>5</sup> However, we need not follow the young Althusser into such comforts. Let us rather consider what and how a particular iteration of “genocide”—sustained by its own International of Decent Feelings—conceals.

Starting in the 1970s, Armenian diasporic politics began to settle into an entrenched, institutionalized form of Althusser’s “new International.” As such, it offers a foundational instance of the current, much more widespread politics of genocide, which global powers—especially the United States—regularly and cynically instrumentalize. All too often, critiques of such politics are prohibited by nationalist and/or humanist investments, themselves animated by the fear that any critique will aid and abet the revisionists, deniers, and—in the case of ongoing campaigns of mass violence—the executioners, who themselves still operate vigorously within the framework of what Marc Nichanian has called the “genocidal will.”<sup>6</sup> However, a number of us working on the fringes of the Armenian diaspora have rejected this prohibition on critique in the hope of generating a certain active, radical, deinstitutionalized internationalism: a politics of mourning that rejects both the genocidal will and genocide’s international of decent feelings, and whose relationship to the past opens intimately to self-estrangement and the future.<sup>7</sup> In the spirit of this ongoing work, in this essay I want to show how “genocide,” from the moment of its coinage in the 1940s, entombs both critiques and alternative visions of the human in the name of “civilized man.” I then suggest that Armenian-Canadian filmmaker Atom Egoyan’s *Calendar* (1993) offers us a reflection on the ruination of this tomb. Finally, I argue that Armenian-American filmmaker Tina Bastajian’s experimental short *Pinched Cheeks and Slurs in a Language That Avoids Her*

(1995) thrives amongst these ruins, offering us a glimpse of an other life, unconcealed.

### Tomb

The modern conception of genocide—indeed the very term itself—was defined, coined, and promulgated by Raphael Lemkin.<sup>8</sup> A Jewish refugee from Poland and a legal scholar specializing in international criminal law, Lemkin eventually emigrated to the United States in 1941 and became an advisor to the US War Department. Yet his influential 1940s writings on, and activism against, genocide were preceded by a now forgotten, failed effort during the 1930s that nonetheless still structures the concept of genocide. Responding in part to the relatively recent massacres of the Armenians, Lemkin first tried to make mass violence subject to international law with his 1933 Madrid Proposal, which defined what he called “two new international crimes:” the offense of *barbarism*, or the attempted extermination of “a racial, religious or social collectivity,” and the offense of *vandalism*, or the attempted destruction of such a collectivity’s “cultural or artistic works.”<sup>9</sup> After this proposal failed to gain international support, and in the context of the unfolding Holocaust, he coined a new word, *genocide*, that would gather these two offenses into one crime for international courts to prosecute.<sup>10</sup> As he put it in publications from 1944 and 1945,

The crime of the Reich in wantonly and deliberately wiping out whole peoples is not utterly new in the world. It is only new in the civilized world as we have come to think of it. It is so new in the traditions of civilized man that he has no name for it. It is for this reason that I took the liberty of inventing the word, “genocide”. . . . It required a long period of evolution in civilized society to mark the way from wars of extermination, which occurred in ancient times and in the Middle Ages, to the conception of wars as being essentially limited to activities against armies and states. In the present war, however, genocide is widely practiced by the German occupant.<sup>11</sup>

If we take Lemkin’s writings from the 1930s and 1940s together, then, we learn that “genocide” names the crime of being both a barbarian and a vandal. This crime, he explains, is “so new in the traditions of civilized man” that “civilized man” “has no name for it.” A certain fanciful historical narrative thus underwrites Lemkin’s politics of nominalism: between the “wars of extermination” “in ancient times and in the Middle Ages” and the crimes of Nazi

Germany, “civilized society” was characterized by a civil warfare “essentially limited to activities against armies and states.” One might even say that, for Lemkin, Euro-American civility was defined by the restraint it had long shown in matters of war.

Lemkin’s stunning failure to name the centuries-long, catastrophic violence of Euro-American colonialism and slavery—which thrived during his “long period of evolution in civilized society”—is immensely paradoxical and productive. By naming genocide’s unnameability, Lemkin renders Euro-American civility as a traditional norm and genocide as both a premodern practice and a recent aberration; yet that utterance itself unnames Euro-American civility’s long tradition of catastrophic global violence. Consequently, catastrophic violence is made foreign to “civilized man” by a silence that casts enslaved and colonized peoples outside “the civilized world.” Cast out of civility, the enslaved and the colonized are implicitly linked with the uncivilized barbarism and vandalism that characterize Lemkin’s premodern Europe, on the one hand, and his aberrant Nazism, on the other.

Against Lemkin’s fanciful narrative of the ancient history and aberrant present of genocide, we can posit the ancient origins of Lemkin’s own presumptive opposition between civility and barbarism/vandalism. The word “barbarism” is Greek in origin, from *barbaros*, itself an onomatopoeic word that referred to anyone who was non-Greek and spoke a non-Greek language; apparently the utterance “bar-bar” figured the sound of non-Greek to the ancient Greeks. The word “vandalism,” in turn, stems from the Latin word *Vandalus*, the name of one of the so-called Eastern Germanic peoples who began to press upon the borders of the Roman Empire in the third century, entering the Roman Empire in earnest by the fifth century and even sacking Rome in 455. Though Lemkin abandoned his 1933 Madrid Proposal, and thus the terms “barbarism” and “vandalism,” in favor of his neologism “genocide,” these ancient terms are nonetheless silently embedded within “genocide” as elements of its intellectual history and as conditions of possibility for its juridical coherence. Recalling this genealogy here shows us that “genocide” is more than a name for an empirically determinable crime; it is rather a performative that invokes the barbarian and the vandal in order to cast them out from, and thus to craft, “civilized man.” Which is to say, Lemkin’s distinction between the civilized and the barbaric or vandalistic is an effect of his theory of genocide, although he would have us believe that “genocide” simply describes what is essentially a preexisting, empirical distinction between the civilized and the uncivilized. The Euro-American history of slavery and colonialism suggests, rather, that Lemkin’s

“civilized man” has long been intimately intertwined with what Lemkin represents as an ancient barbarism and vandalism that suddenly reappear in Nazism’s incivility.

Crucially, the theory of genocide must continually reiterate the putative distinction between civility and incivility in order to sustain their fictive opposition and to suppress their entanglement. This is a central feature of the international of decent feelings that “genocide” has become, particularly among Armenians in the diaspora: the incessant repetition of the charge of genocide, the dogged pursuit of documentary proof of genocide, the dream of finally and fully establishing the fact of our own death.<sup>12</sup> This international, in turn, has the powerful effect of suppressing the long history of social, cultural, political, and economic entanglements between Turks and Armenians, Turkishness and Armenianness. As Althusser writes in the passage that I quoted earlier, “one senses, in these attempts, a mentality in search of itself, an intention eager to embody itself in concrete form, an ideology seeking to define itself, entrench itself, and also furnish itself with means of action.” “Civilized man”—as one who is infinitely cultured and modern, as one who is only ever the victim of and the litigant against genocide, as one for whom the barbarian and the vandal are absolutely other—in fact needs the barbarian and the vandal, just as so many Armenians need the figure of the genocidal Turk; the former exists only to the extent that it continually invokes and casts out the latter.

As a performative that dips into the ancient world to make itself make sense, Lemkin’s “genocide” uncannily echoes another figure from the ancient world: the Greek *metoikos* or metic, literally one who is *meta* (“with,” “across,” “after,” “behind,” or generally “changing the place of”) the *oikos* (the “hearth,” “home,” “place of welcoming and hospitality,” and in particular a women’s realm).<sup>13</sup> Largely because of the variety of meanings of *meta*, the *metoikos* has been variously and somewhat controversially translated as “homechanger,” “one at home with,” “settler from abroad,” “resident alien,” and “immigrant.”<sup>14</sup> Whether the *metoikos* is understood as one who improperly resides in the *oikos* “with” those who properly belong there, or as one who is apart from or entirely disruptive of the *oikos* itself, the term names a person who is neither a proper part of the state/*polis* as a Greek male citizen would have been, nor a proper member of the household/*oikos* as a Greek woman or a servant would have been.

A particularly apt mobilization of this term comes from Sophocles’s *Antigone*, a text long central to Western conceptions of law, violence, mourning, and kinship. In the play, Creon, the king of Thebes, issues “a proclamation . . . forbidd[ing] the city to dignify

[his nephew Polynices] with burial, [to] mourn him at all" (1.227–28) because Polynices had chosen to fight and die on behalf of Argos against Thebes.<sup>15</sup> But Polynices's sister Antigone defies her uncle Creon and insists on burying her brother. What is more, she defends her act in the face of Creon's interrogation. To punish Antigone, Creon orders that she be entombed alive. Says Creon, "Take her away, quickly! / Wall her up in the tomb, you have your orders. / Abandon her there, alone, and let her choose— / death or a buried life with a good roof for shelter. / As for myself, my hands are clean. This young girl— / dead or alive, she will be stripped of her rights, / her stranger's rights [*metoikias*], here in the world above" (1.971–77). Already *metoikos* by virtue of her act of mourning, Antigone has even her status as a resident alien revoked by Creon's sentence of entombment because of her defiant defense of her act. She is doubly excluded by Creon, then: a resident alien who must reside amongst the dead, a *meta*-gendered subject denied both the male *polis* and the female *oikos*. Cast outside the city and the hearth, strange and homeless, ordered to live an inhuman life, entombed Antigone is meant, from Creon's perspective, to give meaning to the state and the home by serving as their ongoing limit. In his enforced prohibition on mourning, then, Creon insists on the state's power to define what counts as the human. Mourning becomes an instrument of the state, subject to its normative juridical power.

In Lemkin's texts, the term "genocide" functions as a prohibition akin to Creon's law: a crime against "civilized man" committed by the alien, barbarian, or vandal who must be cast out for "civilized man" to mourn his losses and to maintain his coherence. That is, while "genocide" claims simply to prosecute barbarism and vandalism, like Creon's sentence it rather at once defines and delimits the human, rendering and civilizing the human by rendering and entombing the inhuman. Lemkin's coinage of "genocide" thus does not simply name a new, modern crime; it invents a modern, gendered, Euro-American civility alongside a premodern, non-Euro-American and aberrantly European barbarism and vandalism. That invention is a condition of possibility for, and an enduring characteristic of, the concept of genocide. When we utter "genocide" today, then—even when we do so with the most decent of feelings for human suffering—we do not simply name a horrific crime. We also risk giving that crime a very specific kind of horror: namely, a horror that is essentially cast out from our most intimate space of being and assigned a radical alterity, but whose casting out must be continually performed to keep the horror external to our selves.

It is this casting out—this creation and entombment of the inhuman in the name of a selfsame, righteous humanity—that so

often characterizes the politics of “genocide.” We could call this politics the work of genocide, over and against the work of mourning. That is, if—as David L. Eng and I have argued elsewhere—the work of mourning offers an ongoing, improvisational relationship with catastrophic loss, a relationship that remains open to the new meanings such loss can generate, then the work of genocide offers an incessant and repetitive calculation of catastrophe, a calculation that stipulates catastrophe’s singular and unchanging significance.<sup>16</sup>

However, both the work of genocide and Creon’s account of the *metoikos* prove to be fragile. Just as Lemkin’s “genocide” must struggle to sustain its foundational distinction between civilized man and the barbarian or vandal against the history of their intimate entanglement, so too does the *metoikos* carry a trace of such entanglement, a trace that opens onto the work of mourning. Once again, *Antigone* offers a striking instance of this trace. Antigone twice calls herself *metoikos*, but this self-assignment works differently than Creon’s sentence. Says Antigone, “[U]nmourned by friends and forced by such crude laws / I go to my rockbound prison, strange new tomb— / always a stranger [*metoikos*], O dear god, / I have no home on earth and none below, / not with the living, not with the breathless dead” (1.937–42); and again, soon thereafter, “Such, such were my parents, and I their wretched child. / I go to them now, cursed, unwed, to share their home— / I am a stranger [*metoikos*]! O dear brother, doomed / in your marriage— your marriage murders mine, / your dying drags me down to death alive!” (1.954–58). While Creon attempts to push Antigone beyond even the position of the *metoikos* by entombing her alive, she clings to that position from within the tomb: “always a stranger . . . I am a stranger,” a stranger to the living and the dead, a stranger to the human itself, as Judith Butler has suggested so powerfully in her interpretation of the play.<sup>17</sup> For Antigone, then, *metoikos* becomes a name for a death that is not quite dead, for a life that is not quite alive: a name for a liminal, exilic existence, neither quite human nor quite inhuman.

Strikingly, this position of *metoikos* to which Antigone clings becomes, in the play, a potentially powerful position from which to challenge Creon, the *polis/oikos* distinction, and the very opposition between human and inhuman. Placed beyond the limits of Creon’s institutionalized humanity, Antigone goes to her “strange new tomb” defiant, refusing to accept Creon’s prohibitions, indeed questioning their very ground. Consider one of her last utterances: “What law, you ask, do I satisfy with what I say. . . . What law of the mighty gods have I transgressed? / Why look to the heavens any



more, tormented as I am? / Whom to call, what comrades now?" (1.999–1000; 1.1013–15). To the end, beyond it even, Antigone raises questions about the basis of Creon's authority, the justice of her own act of mourning, and the forms of kinship and community. Unanswered in the play, her questions echo from the "rocky vault," exposing its fragility, breaking its seal, threatening it with ruination.

Antigone's questions present today's Armenian diasporas with a critical challenge: If the catastrophic violence of the Ottoman state played a central role in creating those diasporas, then how might that violence be mourned without positioning diaspora as a problem to be solved? That is, how might that violence be mourned without reinforcing either the kind of sovereign authority or normative modes of kinship and community for which Creon stood; or the kind of homogenized nationalism for which genocide itself is a condition of possibility; or the kind of "new internationalism" that Althusser questioned? Can one interrupt the work of "genocide," and break open the Armenian Genocide's entombment, without reproducing the terrible logics of denial? What forms would this interruption take, what spaces might it open up? How might Armenian diasporic culture act and speak amongst the ruins, in the wake of catastrophic violence, about today and for a politics of the future, in the spirit of the work of mourning?

Raphael Lemkin claimed that there was "no name" for the kind of crime the Reich committed, which led him to coin the word "genocide." However, it would be more precise to say that there was no *one* name; that is, there was no juridically generalizable, universalizable name. Prior to Lemkin's coinage, there had long been many Armenian names for what would come to be called, in Lemkin's wake, the Armenian Genocide. As Marc Nichanian explains, Armenians who bore witness to the mass violence of the Ottoman state through 1915 used such names as *yeghern*, *medz yeghern*, *darakrutiun*, *aksor*, *chart*, and—in the stunning example of Zabel Essayan's still neglected account of the 1909 killing of Armenians in Cilicia, *Among the Ruins* (1911)—*aghed*, which Nichanian translates as "catastrophe."<sup>18</sup> Why, then, are such names effectively inadequate for Lemkin, who in many of his writings takes the Armenians as an exemplary case of genocide, a kind of *arche*-genocide? It is not because they fail to name catastrophic violence, for they name such violence repeatedly and diversely. Rather, they fail to offer Euro-American civility the homogenizing, juridical logic of "genocide," in which a singular, aggrieved plaintiff makes a claim against a singular, accused defendant. That is, these many Armenian names fail to create the barbarian and the vandal, to entomb

them as the inhuman, and to craft the human as a universal, “civilized man” whose grievances can be pursued within the formal and abstract terms of international law.

In a sense, returning to this plethora of names—before “genocide,” if you will—leaves the catastrophic violence we mourn without a singular referent. The irreducible dissemination of diaspora is not, then, the lamentable outcome of the destruction of an ideal homogeneity. Rather, that which was destroyed was itself unfixed, and that destruction opens onto unprecedented futures that too remain unfixed. Such a return turns the catastrophe we have too comfortably come to call “genocide” into a catachresis, the rhetorical name for a figure without an adequate literal referent. This catachrestical return, in effect, leaves the genocidal tomb in ruins.

### Ruins

Ruins proliferate in contemporary Armenian diasporic culture—ruined churches, ruined houses, ruined fortresses—as if to figure an ongoing encounter with Essayan’s *Among the Ruins*, which Nichanian has called “a book of mourning, written against the interdiction of mourning.”<sup>19</sup> Most often, these ruins work to figure the tragic loss of cultural greatness, something akin to Lemkin’s vandalism. However, Atom Egoyan’s 1993 film *Calendar* offers a fleeting hint of a counterintuitive understanding of the ruin.

In a meticulous but fractured narrative style, *Calendar* depicts the entangled lives of three characters, called by the credits the Photographer, the Translator, and the Driver. The Canadian-Armenian Photographer (played by Egoyan) and Translator (played by Egoyan’s wife Arsinée Khanjian) are married, and travel to Armenia so that the Photographer can shoot a series of twelve stills of ancient, ruined, and abandoned churches and fortresses to be used for a wall calendar—one of those ubiquitous, static signs of national pride tacked up in so many diasporan households. While in Armenia, the couple hires the Driver (played by Ashot Adamian), who is an Armenian citizen, as a guide. During their travels, the Translator (who speaks Armenian and English) and the Driver (who speaks only Armenian) fall in love, while the Photographer (who speaks only English) becomes increasingly estranged and embittered. Leaving his wife in Armenia with the Driver, the Photographer returns to Canada, where he proceeds to live and relive his traumatic experience of estrangement and alienation by hiring nine escorts of different ethnicities to have scripted dinner dates with him in his house. During each of the nine dates—one per month

from March to November—the escort is apparently instructed to leave the table after the last of their wine has been poured, make a phone call, and act like she is flirting with someone in a language the Photographer does not understand while he listens and reflects upon his trip to Armenia and the affair between his wife and the Driver. From these reflections, we learn that, while in Armenia, the Photographer became estranged not only from his wife, but also from what he thought was his language, his culture, his place: “[B]eing here has made me from somewhere else,” he explains at one point. As Anahid Kassabian and I have argued at length elsewhere, *Calendar* traces the obsessive, masculinist manner in which nationalism asserts itself in the diaspora, as well as the potential fragility of that assertion.<sup>20</sup> Here, I would like to invoke *Calendar*’s ever-so-tentative exposure of the vertiginous freedom that opens up—beyond *Calendar* itself—when that assertion crumbles.

Toward the end of the film, the Photographer reflects on his alienation from what he thought was his homeland, the state of Armenia. In one of the last sequences, we are presented with six quick shots: (1) a grainy, handheld video image, tinted blue and shot by the Photographer, of the Translator singing a song in Armenian and sitting with the Driver at a kitchen table in an apartment in Yerevan; (2) a stationary shot of a church and a fortress on a hill of grass and wildflowers, to be used for one of the calendar stills; (3) a shot of one of the Photographer’s dates talking on the phone, with that very calendar still in the background, intercut with (4) a shot of the Photographer thinking to himself while his date talks on the phone; (5) once again the grainy, blue-tinted video image of the Translator and the Driver singing at the kitchen table, followed by (6) a stationary shot of the fortress by itself, which overexposes to white. Over all these shots, the photographer intones, “A church and a fortress. A fortress in ruins. All that’s meant to protect us is bound to fall apart. Bound to become contrived, useless, and absurd. All that’s meant to protect is bound to isolate, and all that’s meant to isolate is bound to hurt.”<sup>21</sup>

Within the terms of *Calendar*, ruins provoke a melancholy life. Released from the protection of nationalist imagery, barred from the naturalized narrative of glorious origins, unable to instrumentalize the past for the familiar diasporic politics of “Recognition, Restoration, Reparation” (to quote from the hit Armenian Genocide song “P.L.U.C.K.” by L.A. alt metal band System of a Down), the Photographer is lost in absurdity, isolated and wounded. This sequence’s final overexposure to white figures a kind of featureless, blinding oblivion within which further representation can find no immediate purchase. The general temporal rigidity of the film—its

logic of repetition, both on the level of plot (the dates) and on the level of form (the recurring sequences, the oscillation between still-camera shots and grainy video)—resists teleology, opposing the meliorist logic of “civilized man” and dwelling instead in a temporality of delay, pause, perhaps even threshold.

In its final scenes, *Calendar* does allow us to glimpse something beyond this melancholic oblivion. The Photographer is ultimately released from his obsession with the traumatic trip to Armenia when he interrupts the script of his ninth date and begins to talk more spontaneously with the final escort about memories and ideas that have nothing to do with the trip. Yet the film still leaves us trapped with the Photographer in the midst of a certain heteronormative desire. He is able to desire the desire of the other in his spontaneous interaction with his final escort, but we still learn little of her outside the role the Photographer has scripted for her. Consequently, the film never releases her from the escort service’s gendered circuit of monetary exchange, and she remains an instrument for the Photographer’s self-discovery. Indeed, she is taken for granted as a kind of reproductive labor. After all, the Photographer is finally released from his trauma during the ninth date of the ninth month, in the midst of a miscommunication in which the final escort says, “I can see it [an Egyptian heritage] in you,” but the Photographer hears her say, “I *conceive* in you.” He is felicitously conceived and reborn, the film suggests.<sup>22</sup> *Calendar* may have moved us from a melancholy nationalism, but it guides us toward a persistent gender melancholia.<sup>23</sup>

However, *Calendar*’s overexposure to white need not leave us here. Eduardo Cadava has urged us to read Walter Benjamin’s meditations on history and photography—themselves written in the midst of the catastrophe of European fascism—as an embrace of the power of the ruin.<sup>24</sup> History and photography both offer “words of light:” stories meant to illuminate a truth about the past, and images of the real reproduced by a technology of light. Yet, for Benjamin, these “words of light” do not necessarily offer “a sudden clarity that grants knowledge security,” nor do they offer that clarity’s putative opposite: a melancholic despair in the face of fragmentation and opacity.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, it is fascism that is characterized by the hyperbolic attachment to an ideology of realism, and “many forms of pragmatism, positivism, and historicism”<sup>26</sup> are also characterized by a manic search for the real coupled with an inevitable despair when confronted by realism’s fragmented and opaque impossibility. Rather, for Benjamin these “words of light” figure the sudden and incomplete flashes in which history is apprehended and images are arrested, punctuated by the pulses of darkness that

set off instances of illumination. The stories history tells and the images photography yields are thus gathered from, and always intimately related to, fragments and ruins. Those stories and images bring life to death: “For Benjamin, history happens when something becomes present in passing away, when something lives in its death.”<sup>27</sup> Benjamin thus sees revolutionary potential in a criticism, an aesthetics, and a historical materialism that remain attentive to the ruin as a kind of life, even as they seek illuminations of meaning.

In the spirit of such “words of light,” as well as the defiant and persistent questions that echo from Antigone’s tomb, let me suggest that *Calendar’s* overexposure to white can spark questions *Calendar* itself seems unable to ask, stories it seems unable to tell, images it seems unable to show. Ruins are oddly liminal forms, collapsed somewhere between the structure’s imagined, original condition and its idealized, excessively pristine restoration. They interrupt the narcissistic echo of the original in the rebuilt, they strip the tain of the mirror that promises to reflect same to same, they live on without improving. To those who sound dissonant in this echo, those who never find themselves reflected in the nationalist spectacle, ruins might just signal an opening, a crumbling “rockbound prison” from which we might glimpse an other life.

### Re-flexion

In 1995, Los Angeles filmmaker Tina Bastajian wrote and directed a ten-minute film in which we can glimpse such life: *Pinched Cheeks and Slurs in a Language That Avoids Her*. The film opens—as if picking up from *Calendar’s* overexposure to white—with a white screen that dissolves into a *mise-en-scène* that mimics early-twentieth-century avant-garde photographer Florence Henri’s “Self-Portrait, 1928” (figure 1). We see Henri’s vertical, rectangular mirror propped up on a white table against a white wall, yet emptied of Henri’s central signifiers: there is no self to portray, and there are no silver balls to reflect. We immediately hear a young woman speaking a few simple words in Armenian and soon see reflected in the mirror an olive-skinned girl in a red dress, white headband, and white patent-leather cowboy boots skipping across the floor behind the table. The voice-over quickly interrupts her own, child-like Armenian with the exasperated and slightly Boston-accented English phrase “Aaaoh, I, I can’t remember.” A black woman in a white headband and scarf and a black sweater then appears seated at the table, where Henri is depicted in “Self-Portrait, 1928” (figure



**Figure 1.** Florence Henri, *Self-Portrait*, 1928, © Galleria Martini & Ronchetti, Genoa, Italy (<http://www.florencehenri.org>).

2). Throughout the rest of the film, one hears in the background a nearly indistinct chatter of many voices.

During the first half of the film, in the mirror the girl and the woman silently act out a story, set under “a hazy 1970 Sunday sky,” about a gathering of Armenians after church, a story told in great detail by the voice-over from the perspective of the girl. The girl’s story tells of her mix of estrangement and inclusion at the Sunday gathering:



**Figure 2.** Still from Tina Bastajian's *Pinched Cheeks and Slurs in a Language That Avoids Her* (1995).

I'm the droopy brown-eyed girl off to the side, waiting for a moment of belonging. So as usual I choose to go inside to help the old ladies serve lunch after church. Stale Havana cigars linger, while adult conversations avoid me. I pass bald men with ears full of gray hairs and older ladies slumped over with black dresses. They squeeze and then twist my eight-year-old cheeks between their fingers. They tease me in a language I do not feel comfortable to answer back to. I learn to pretend to understand because I get fingers shaken at me when I do not know this ancient language, Armenian [0:53–1:45]. . . . I escape to the kitchen, to where it is safe, to where the aunties make the coffee. This is magical coffee. It's dark and thick and when you finish drinking it you turn the cup upside down and later pictures and stories appear inside. Ladies tell stories of the future, like secrets [2:08–2:30].

The voice-over also speaks of how the adult Armenians greet the woman, who attends the Sunday gathering, with timeworn Armenian racism, figured by the film's background chatter:

Now no one has time to pinch my cheeks. I hear words collecting around the table. The adults' whispering grows louder. I wonder what the excitement is. I hear certain words and phrases. Something is happening. I feel the room separate. They are talking about someone. These words are

not good and are not mine. What they say is not new to me. I have heard this before. Are they talking about me? Maybe they see my stained dress. No, they talk about a woman, a visitor, someone new, an *odav*, other, they say, not an Armenian. Maybe they are telling secrets. No, 'cause they are talking too loud. [2:50–3:38]. . . . Words shift the room around, and I stand next to this woman. No one sees me. I see too much. Words come in our direction, and I overhear them talk about the woman near me. I stand apart from mouths that slant slurs. That she doesn't belong here. Noses turn up at her. "Why is she here" they say over again. "Black. *Seva mort* [literally: of black skin]. Who has brought this black woman here?" [3:51–4:43].

Linking these two voice-over sequences is an interaction between the girl and the woman at the table. In the mirror, we see the girl serve coffee to the woman, and we hear the voice-over explain, "We smile at each other different and alike. She speaks to me in our language and I can understand her. She is my mother tongue and she doesn't pinch cheeks" (3:38–3:50). During the second half of the film, the woman at the table describes in Armenian to someone out of the frame of the mirror—perhaps the girl—how to make Armenian coffee and how to read your destiny from the grounds that gather in the cup. After the woman has finished, she stands up and walks out of the frame of the mirror, and the voice-over concludes: "The ancient language slides swiftly off her tongue, floods the walls of their hollow ears with her language they call their own" (9:28–9:36).

Like Henri's "Self-Portrait, 1928," *Pinched Cheeks* thematizes the power of framing over the image and the story. The girl and the woman at the table reframe the culture and language the Armenian adults at the Sunday gathering desperately claim as their own, as if enacting the magic of the coffee as it makes "pictures and stories appear inside" its cup. However, whereas Henri ironized the phallic power of the apparatus by embodying the Modern Woman of the 1920s with a pose that some have called androgynous, the woman at the table in *Pinched Cheeks* presents a different challenge to the norms of race, gender, and sexuality that are so crucial to Armenian diasporic nationalism.<sup>28</sup> This challenge has come into relief each time I have seen the film screened in the United States. Invariably, a viewer who performs his or her Armenian identity with an apparently high degree of comfort and confidence will ask incredulously how the woman at the table seemed to speak Armenian so well, as though the character's speech were somehow unfit or unnatural coming from the actor's body. I have heard more than one viewer insist that the filmmaker must have dubbed the voice



onto the character. This aphasia in the face of the character of the woman marks a set of uneven but interlinked foreclosures that structure normative Armenian diasporic subjectivities.

The film itself explicitly thematizes the systematic and violent way the Armenians at the gathering foreclose the articulation, embodied by the woman at the table, of “Armenian” and “black”: as the girl recounts, “Words come in our direction, and I overhear them talk about the woman near me. I stand apart from mouths that slant slurs. That she doesn’t belong here. Noses turn up at her. ‘Why is she here’ they say over again. ‘Black. *Seva mort*. Who has brought this black woman here?’” This last question is never answered by the film. *Pinched Cheeks* offers nothing by way of a biographical narrative of the woman, nor anything like a positivist account of how Armenians were declared “white by law” in two forgotten US federal courts cases from 1910 and 1925.<sup>29</sup> Even descriptions of the film often reflect an ambivalence about the woman’s identity, alternately naming her “a black Armenian woman,” “an African woman who . . . was in fact half Armenian,” and “part Ethiopian, part Armenian,” while the filmmaker has mentioned that J. Khoroizian, the actor who plays the woman, grew up in Beirut.<sup>30</sup> Recalling Cadava’s reading of Benjamin, *Pinched Cheeks* does not offer us “a sudden clarity that grants knowledge security.” Rather, the racist foreclosure described by the voice-over and performed by the background voices collides with the identificatory encounter between the girl and the woman at the table, itself described by the voice-over and reenacted in the mirror.

Although Bastajian has said that J. Khoroizian is a gay man, the film itself does not offer quite the same self-consciousness about gender and sexuality as it does about race, for the narrative never explicitly thematizes drag or queerness or trans people.<sup>31</sup> This diegetic reticence about J. Khoroizian’s queer performance situates gender and sexuality on the margins of *Pinched Cheeks*’ more central concern with race and nation. Visually, however, we could say that these exegetical margins assert themselves in the scenes of the girl performing her girlness in front of and behind the woman at the table: throughout the first half of the film, the girl skips and twirls across the room, smoothes her hair with a headband, and has her cheek pinched by a hand that reaches into the frame of the mirror’s image. These scenes echo a trope of many trans narratives, linking a gendered childhood to a trans adulthood in a way that raises questions about how gendered and sexed identities are secured.<sup>32</sup> Interpreted through this trope, the personal pronoun of the film’s title—*Pinched Cheeks and Slurs in a Language That Avoids Her*—can no longer be taken for granted. Who is this “her”? And

what does her “her-ness” consist in?<sup>33</sup> The film holds back from these questions, as the woman and the girl are condensed into the pronoun’s singularity such that *Pinched Cheeks and Slurs in a Language That Avoids Her* might itself be said to avoid “her.”

When the girl withdraws kinship from the gathered Armenian aunts and uncles and redirects it toward the woman, then, she offers us an ambivalent identification, one at once subversive of and implicated in the norms of the Armenian diaspora: “She is my mother tongue and she doesn’t pinch cheeks,” “The ancient language slides swiftly off her tongue, floods the walls of their hollow ears with her language they call their own.” When the girl assigns the woman the position of “my mother tongue,” does this transaction rework the raced, sexed, and gendered norms of diasporic nationalism, or does that reworking falter, sliding too swiftly into the familiar figure of the nurturing mother country, linking “she” and “her” too smoothly, even drawing comfort from a dynamic that Toni Morrison calls American Africanism?<sup>34</sup>

I want to suggest that the film’s uneven nexus of race, gender, and sexuality makes these questions unanswerable, and it is this unanswerability that allows us to see and hear *Pinched Cheeks* amongst the ruins of Armenian diasporic culture. *Pinched Cheeks* offers something other than a late-twentieth-century Armenian version of Henri’s ironic gender play, or what László Moholy-Nagy, drawing on Hermann von Helmholtz, called the “The New Vision.”<sup>35</sup> For it is not so much irony as *catachresis*—the figure without an adequate literal referent—that Bastajian’s film sets in motion. Catachresis saturates *Pinched Cheeks*, from the “Her” of its title to its diegetic reflections in the mirror. As I mentioned earlier, the film offers no recognizably stable identity referent for the woman at the table—no plot or narrative account of her origins, no third-person history of black, trans, or genderqueer Armenians, no confessional autobiography. The characters are always only presented as images reflected in the mirror, which prevents the viewer from indulging in even the filmic fantasy of directly seeing the bodies to which those images might refer. What is more, those images repeatedly move across and fade in and out of the mirror, appearing and disappearing in different positions while the *mise-en-scène* remains stable and unchanged. The constant background voices are disembodied and often unintelligible. In turn, the girl’s life is unmoored, as she stands “off to the side, waiting for a moment of belonging,” out of place in her “stained dress,” uncomfortable with “this ancient language, Armenian” to the point of pretending to understand. When the adults at the gathering aim their words at the woman, “no one sees” the girl even as she stands next to the woman.

Consequently, when these catachrestical subjects interact, their interactions are effective but without ground. Their common act (“we smile at each other”) is uncommon (“both different and alike”). When the woman speaks in “our language,” which is also “her language they call their own,” we no longer know precisely to whom “our” refers. The “mother tongue” the woman “is” presents a sudden kinship of the moment, forged in the flash of a smile and the exchange of narrative, altogether unlike the girl’s labored, alienated kinship with the aunts and uncles who “pinch cheeks” at one moment and disparage the raced *odar* with “mouths that slant slurs” the next. And yet, this sudden kinship is not utterly delinked from the aunts’ and uncles’ norms, for its lexicon is also their lexicon. “The ancient language” that is “her language” is neither nostalgically original nor statically restored, neither Creon’s *polis* “free of defilement” nor *Calendar*’s church and fortress stills. Rather, it “slides swiftly off her tongue” and “floods the walls of their hollow ears”—in motion, actively changing shape and form, like animated, living ruins.

Judith Butler has suggested that, by the end of *Antigone*, Antigone herself has become catachrestical, something like an other humanity without a stable referent, a beyond-the-human that paradoxically lays claim to a certain humanity, an undecidability that looks toward unfounded futures:

[Antigone] is not of the human but speaks in its language. Prohibited from action, she nevertheless acts, and her act is hardly a simple assimilation to an existing norm. And in acting, as one who has no right to act, she upsets the vocabulary of kinship that is a precondition of the human, implicitly raising the question for us of what those preconditions really must be. She speaks within the language of entitlement from which she is excluded, participating in the language of the claim with which no final identification is possible. If she is human, then the human has entered into catachresis: we no longer know its proper usage. And to the extent that she occupies the language that can never belong to her, she functions as a chiasm within the vocabulary of political norms. If kinship is the precondition of the human, then Antigone is the occasion for a new field of the human, achieved through political catachresis, the one that happens when the less than human speaks as human, when gender is displaced, and kinship founders on its own founding laws. She acts, she speaks, she becomes one for whom the speech act is a fatal crime, but this fatality exceeds her life and enters the discourse of intelligibility as its own promising fatality, the social form of its aberrant, unprecedented future.<sup>36</sup>

From within the tomb, Antigone offers an excess or a remainder—full of questions, without an adequate literal referent or determinate political aim—beyond the sentence Creon thought he had decreed. From the remains of Antigone’s tomb, amongst the ruins of *Calendar’s* churches and fortresses, *Pinched Cheeks* enters into such catachresis.

What, then, has happened to “genocide” in Bastajian’s film? Utterly unspoken, it seems to have been forgotten, even carelessly left behind. And yet if “genocide” does not simply stipulate and condemn the inhuman, but rather crafts a normative distinction between humanity and barbarism, a distinction that reanimates the logic of the *metoikos*, then in the spirit of Antigone’s persistent reclaiming of resident alienation, *Pinched Cheeks* questions that distinction. As the girl meets the woman on the outskirts of a domestic gathering, having escaped the familiar confines of aunties and uncles gathered after church under a hazy Sunday sky—or, rather, as that meeting is reflected to us, framed and performed without adequate reference to its origin, its very reiteration wresting iteration from repetition—the possibility of an other kinship emerges, a diasporic possibility whose inadequate referent lies in its catastrophic genealogy. We could call this the work of mourning, over and against the work of genocide.

*Pinched Cheeks and Slurs in a Language That Avoids Her* reflects not what Armenians are, but what we might become, such that “we” remains insistently diasporic and irreducibly catachrestical. The film does not return to us what we know or what we want to know, but rather turns us from where we were going. Its images bend without snapping back into shape. It flexes us. Ruination without reconstruction. Re-flexion without return.

## Notes

This essay began as a talk at the Evasions of Power Conference at the University of Pennsylvania in 2007; thanks to Aaron Levy of the Slough Foundation for including me in the conference. An earlier version of this essay, “(Re)flexion: Genocide in Ruins,” was published in *Evasions of Power: On the Architecture of Adjustment*, ed. Katherine Carl, Aaron Levy, and Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss (Philadelphia: Slough Foundation, 2011), 155–78. The participants in the GASWorks works-in-progress seminar in Gender, Sexuality, and Women Studies seminar in women’s studies at Penn read and discussed a draft in the fall of 2008; thanks to those who attended, and to Penn Women’s Studies—especially Shannon Lundeen, Luz Marin, Demie Kurz, and Heather Love—for organizing the seminar. The paper was also presented and discussed in Istanbul at the Hrant Dink Memorial Workshop, May 2011; I thank the participants, especially Ayşe Gül Altınay, for their feedback. Karen Beckman,

Emma Bianchi, Heather Love, Neery Melkonian, Josie Saldaña, Melissa Sanchez, and Dillon Vrana discussed the essay with me at length and offered many insights. I thank the editors and anonymous reviewers from *Discourse*, particularly James Cahill and Genevieve Yue, for their helpful suggestions and enthusiastic interest in the piece. Finally, Tina Bastajian generously conferred with me about her film over e-mail between Amsterdam and New York City—a diasporic praxis indeed.

<sup>1</sup> For one empirical indication of this trend, consider the sudden rise in references to the term “genocide” after 1990, according to Google’s Ngram Viewer, [http://ngrams.googlelabs.com/graph?content=genocide&year\\_start=1970&year\\_end=2011&corpus=0&smoothing=3](http://ngrams.googlelabs.com/graph?content=genocide&year_start=1970&year_end=2011&corpus=0&smoothing=3). An exemplary text is Samantha Power’s *A Power from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Louis Althusser, “The International of Decent Feelings,” in *The Spectre of Hegel: Early Writings*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 1997), 21–35, quotation on 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–23.

<sup>4</sup> According to Althusser,

This “International” of humane protest against destiny rests on a growing awareness that humanity is threatened, and has become, in the face of the threat, a kind of “proletariat” of terror. Whereas the labouring proletariat is defined by sociological, economic, and historical conditions, this latter-day “proletariat” would seem to be defined by a psychological state: intimidation and fear. And, just as there is proletarian equality in the poverty and alienation of the workers, so too this *implicit proletariat* is said to experience equality, but in death and suffering. . . . We have only one recourse left, they bluntly tell us, in the face of catastrophe: an holy alliance against destiny. *Let men learn, if there is still time, that the proletariat of class struggle can only divide them, and that they are already united unawares in the proletariat of fear or the bomb, of terror and death, in the proletariat of the human condition.* (*ibid.*, 23–24)

<sup>5</sup> Althusser says,

*The proletariat of fear is a myth, but a myth that exists, and it is particularly important that it be exposed as such by Christians.* For, as Christians, we believe that there is a human condition; in other words, we believe in the equality of all men before God, and his Judgement, *but we do not want the Judgement of God to be spirited away before our very eyes; nor do we want to see non-Christians and, occasionally, Christians as well, commit the sacrilege of taking the atomic bomb for the will of God, equality before death for equality before God . . . and the tortures of the concentration camps for the Last Judgement.* (*ibid.*, 27)

<sup>6</sup> On this thematic, see Marc Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*, trans. Gil Anidjar (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), originally published as *La Perversion Historiographique: Une réflexion arménienne* (Paris: Editions Lignes et Manifestes, 2006); Nichanian, *The National Revolution*, vol. 1 of *Writers of Disaster: Armenian Literature in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Gomidas Institute, 2002); Nichanian, “Catastrophic Mourning,” trans. Jeff Fort, in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 99–124; and David Kazanjian and Marc Nichanian, “Between Genocide and Catastrophe,” in Eng and Nichanian, *Loss*, 125–47.

<sup>7</sup> I am thinking, for instance, of the Blind Dates: Armenian and Turkish Artists in Dialogue series curated by Neery Melkonian and Defne Ayas in New York City ([www.blinddatesproject.org](http://www.blinddatesproject.org)), and the March 2008 conference at Columbia University,

“Speaking Beyond Living Room Walls: The Armenian Diaspora and Its Discontents,” also organized by Melkonian. The Hrant Dink Memorial Workshop in Istanbul has also been an important site for collaboration and debate on these problematics (<http://myweb.sabanciuniv.edu/hrantdink-workshop/home/>). My work with Anahid Kassabian, cited in note 16, has also been in this spirit. Marc Nichanian’s work, cited in note 6, has greatly influenced all these efforts, despite Nichanian’s own skepticism about any “politics of the future.” (On this skepticism, see Kazanjian and Nichanian, “Between Genocide and Catastrophe,” 145–47.)

<sup>8</sup> Raphael Lemkin has recently received some attention in the public policy work of Samantha Powers. See Powers’s “*A Power from Hell*,” 1.

<sup>9</sup> Raphael Lemkin, “Acts Constituting a General (Transnational) Danger Considered as Offences against the Law of Nations,” trans. Jim Fussell, [www.preventgenocide.org/lemkin/madrid1933-english.htm](http://www.preventgenocide.org/lemkin/madrid1933-english.htm); originally published in French as “Les actes constituant un danger général (interétatique) consideres comme delites des droit des gen,” in *Explications additionnelles au Rapport spécial présenté à la Vème Conférence pour l’Unification du Droit Penal à Madrid* (14-2 O.X. 1933) *Librarie de la cour d’appel ed de l’order de advocates* (Paris: A. Pedone, 1933), and in German as “Akte der Barbarei und des Vandalismus als *delicta juris gentium*,” *Anwaltsblatt Internationales* 19, no. 6 (1933): 117–19.

<sup>10</sup> Raphael Lemkin, “Genocide as a Crime under International Law,” *American Journal of International Law* 41, no. 1 (1947): 145–51, quotation on 146.

<sup>11</sup> Raphael Lemkin, “Genocide—A Modern Crime,” *Free World* 9, no. 4 (1945): 39–45; and Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), 69–95.

<sup>12</sup> Marc Nichanian has been an especially astute critic of this positivist Armenian effort to prove our own death. See Nichanian, *Historiographic Perversion*; and Kazanjian and Nichanian, “Between Genocide and Catastrophe.”

<sup>13</sup> Thanks to Emanuela Bianchi for discussing the *metoikos* with me. The term is discussed in her unpublished manuscript “Tragic Encryptions and Resident Aliens: Feminine Materiality in and beyond the Ancient Greek Household.”

<sup>14</sup> See David Whitehead, *The Ideology of the Athenian Metic*, Cambridge Philological Society supplementary volume 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1977); and Valerie Reed, “Bringing Antigone Home?” *Comparative Literature Studies* 45, no. 3 (2008): 316–40, esp. 324.

<sup>15</sup> All citations to *Antigone* refer to Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays: “Antigone,” “Oedipus the King,” “Oedipus at Colonus,”* trans. Robert Fagles, Penguin Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> See David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, “Introduction: Mourning Remains,” in Eng and Nichanian, *Loss* (see note 6), 1–28. As Anahid Kassabian and I have argued elsewhere, this work of “genocide” drives the relentless heteronormativity of Armenian diasporic nationalism. See Anahid Kassabian and David Kazanjian, “From Somewhere Else: Egoyan’s *Calendar*, Freud’s *Rat Man*, and Armenian Diasporic Nationalism,” *Third Text* 19, no. 2 (2005): 125–44; Kassabian and Kazanjian, “Melancholic Memories and Manic Politics: Feminism, Documentary, and the Armenian Diaspora,” in *Feminism and Documentary*, ed. Diane Waldman and Janet Walker, Visible Evidence (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 202–23; Kassabian and Kazanjian, “You Have to Want to Be Armenian Here: Nationalisms, Sexualities, and the Problem

of Armenian Diasporic Identity,” *Armenian Forum* 1, no. 1 (1998): 19–36; and Kassabian and Kazanjian, “Naming the Armenian Genocide: The Quest for Truth and a Search for Possibilities,” in *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location*, ed. Erica Carter, James Donald, and Judith Squires (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), 33–55.

<sup>17</sup> Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Kazanjian and Nichanian, “Between Genocide and Catastrophe,” 127.

<sup>19</sup> Nichanian, “Catastrophic Mourning,” 101.

<sup>20</sup> Kassabian and Kazanjian, “From Somewhere Else.”

<sup>21</sup> On the DVD edition of *Calendar*, see chap. 11, 53:44 through 55:14.

<sup>22</sup> For a more extended reading of this scene, see Kassabian and Kazanjian, “From Somewhere Else,” 136–41.

<sup>23</sup> On gender melancholia, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Thinking Gender Series (New York: Routledge, 1990), esp. 57–72; and Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 132–66.

<sup>24</sup> Eduardo Cadava, “Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History,” *Diacritics* 22, nos. 3–4 (1992): 85–114; Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); and Cadava, “Irreversible Ruins,” [www.cepagallery.org/exhibitions/ruinsinreverse/frameset.html](http://www.cepagallery.org/exhibitions/ruinsinreverse/frameset.html). See also Jacques Derrida’s meditations on the ruin in *Memoirs of the Blind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>25</sup> Cadava, “Words of Light,” 87.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>28</sup> On Florence Henri and the Modern Woman, see Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer, eds. *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Mary Louise Roberts, “Civilization without Sexes:” *Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917–1927* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). See also Emily Apter’s review of these texts in *South Central Review* 22, no. 3 (2005): 133–39.

<sup>29</sup> The cases are *In re Halladjian*, 174 F.834 (C.C.D.Mass. 1909); and *United States v. Cartozian*, 296 F.173 (S.D.Cal. 1925). See Ian F. Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*, *Critical America* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 67–72, 99, 130–31, 205, 207.

<sup>30</sup> Personal communication by Tina Bastajian. For the descriptions, see Armenian Film Festival 2004 Program Schedule, [www.armenianfilmfestival.org/AFF2004\\_schedule.html](http://www.armenianfilmfestival.org/AFF2004_schedule.html); Hasmik Khalachyan-Cañas and Tamara Karakashian, “ASO [Armenian Students Organization] Sponsors Armenian Film Festival,” [http://armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/hye\\_sharzhoom/vol21/may70/film.htm](http://armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/hye_sharzhoom/vol21/may70/film.htm); and a flyer in the author’s possession.

<sup>31</sup> Personal communication by Tina Bastajian.

<sup>32</sup> Thanks to Heather Love for suggesting this point to me, and for bringing my attention to Jackie Kay’s novel *Trumpet* (New York: Vintage, 1998). This passage—which

describes a picture of Joss Moody, the novel's central trans character, when he was a child named Josephine Moore—resonates powerfully with the more suppressed narrative of gender and sexuality in *Pinched Cheeks*:

What happened to Josephine Moore? Look at this photograph. There she is, bright as a button, chocolate brown eyes. The picture is grainy and if it had sound it would crackle and spit. There she is. . . . She is wearing a pleated skirt. Her knees are bare, but she has on white ankle socks. A white blouse. No matter how long you stare at the photograph, the clothes she is wearing will not change. They are locked in their own time, with their own stitches. But every time you look at the little girl's face, you will see something different in it. (254)

<sup>33</sup> I am most grateful to Sarah Dowling for raising questions about the title of Bastajian's film that helped me immensely.

<sup>34</sup> Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

<sup>35</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Jump over the Bauhaus," *October* 15 (1980): 102–10. Krauss refers to László Moholy-Nagy's *Painting, Photography, Film* (Boston: MIT Press, 1969).

<sup>36</sup> Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 82.