Humanities

Borderlands of the Sacred
Bio-Cognitive Mapping in the Age of Apocalypse

Caleb Wexler

The following is an excerpt from a longer piece. For full text, please visit https://scholar.colorado.edu/concern/undergraduate_honors_theses/44558f37b

Introduction

Smoke plumes rise like alien fungus over the Rocky Mountains and the California coast. Along the front range, the ash from forest fires falls like snow along the Front Range, and last week my roommate casually texted me "It's apocalyptic today." Environmental collapse was once considered a distant possibility, the stuff of speculative fiction. Today we recognize it as a steadily encroaching reality which, with every burnt gallon of petroleum, slouches ever closer. Every summer and winter bring record temperatures, once-in-a-lifetime storms strike in twos and threes, and entire species vanish forever on a daily basis, while we inhale and imbibe toxic chemicals from a poisoned and dying planet. The reckless greed of capitalist logic, the drive towards infinite growth on a finite planet, has forged a Damocles sword which hangs above the neck of each new inheritor of this global estate. The question of environmental catastrophe is no longer "if" but "how bad," or, as the title of Roy Scranton's recent book puts it, "We're Doomed. Now What?" We've created a society where the status quo is untenable, and the hegemony of capitalist realism has ensured that the only alternative we dare to imagine is the kind of post-apocalyptic wasteland popularized by dystopian science fiction. As Fredric Jameson famously said, "It is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism."[1] Now that the end of the world is no longer a theoretical abstract, perhaps we no longer need to only imagine the end of capitalism; perhaps the end of the world can be something radically different from its usual conception. If we reject the assumption of dystopian fiction, that the end of the world as we know it is a purely destructive event, then we can reimagine the apocalypse as that which affords us the opportunity to build a better world in the ruins of the old.

Apocalypse, as it is conventionally understood... is a cataclysm which marks the binary division between the world as we know it now, and a destroyed world. This reduces all possible actions into a similar binary of those which maintain the status quo and those which hasten the cataclysm. Past crises have been more amicable to this notion. The Cold War for example presented a real possibility of nuclear armageddon, but it was an armageddon which had to be actively created. Consequently, it was possible to simply maintain the world as it was in order to avoid destruction. This is not so with the climate crisis. It is exactly the status quo that is bringing us to a cataclysm which requires only our passivity. If we broaden our understanding of the apocalypse to the moment of rupture between a world which operates in all the familiar patterns, and a radically different world whose character is yet to be

1 Jameson, "Future City."

determined, the field of action is expanded to include actions which do not maintain the world which is, but usher in the world that may yet be.

[...]

The necessary question this raises is, what philosophical and cultural changes are necessary to navigate this transformation? In...this paper I will pursue close readings of key texts to argue for biocentrism as the necessary organizing principle. Biocentrism does not place humanity in a paternalistic relationship with the earth, but rather locates humanity as an embedded part of the biosphere existing alongside non-human animals in a non-hierarchical mutualistic existence. Climate change requires such an understanding because its most sensational effects are often distant. Biocentrism, because it locates the individual as an essential part of the biosphere, generates a universal responsibility without relying on the hierarchies of other environmentalisms which reproduce the anthropocentrism that created climate change in the first place. Only by discarding the *Anthropos* and accepting the environmentally embedded humanity of the *Bios,* can we rightly recognize our place in the global ecological network and begin a process of healing for the whole of the biosphere.

[...]

To discuss the era of global crisis without considering the present historical moment of global pandemic would seem to me, at best, negligent. Communicable diseases often heighten fears of the other as contact with anyone perceived as an outsider becomes a possible vector of transmission. Certainly COVID-19 has sparked widespread xenophobia. However, communicable disease also makes visible the networks of connection which constitute us as a community, while simultaneously showing the arbitrary nature of spatial borders, such as those around nation-states. *Contagious* (2008), Priscilla Wald's book-length study of outbreak narratives, studies how communicable disease can be used to reinforce xenophobic fears but also makes the connections that constitute communities visible....

The global pandemic has made it clear that we collectively and individually share in the vulnerabilities of the biosphere as a whole; the wellbeing of the most bio-isolated urban community—such as the concrete landscapes of Los Angeles or New York City—becomes inseparable from the status of the global ecosystem when a disease can jump from a population of animals in one country to cover the globe in a matter of weeks. The pandemic thus becomes an undeniable representation of humanity's inextricable embeddedness within the biosphere....

This understanding of the pandemic becomes deepened when we look at it through a trans-corporeal lens. Trans-corporealism shows that the human body is not a closed, abiological object but is instead always already constituted by, and thus both in and of, its environment. Just as contagion makes networks of human connection, it also makes visible the transmission of (viral) matter between the body and the biosphere. COVID-19 is therefore understandable as a site of transmission between species where the closed category of the anthropomorphic body becomes the porous body in-and-of the biosphere. The human body is, on a cellular level, not separable from the non-human. Consequently, the narratives and arguments employed by Wald...describe the humanist cosmopolitan potential of contagions, such as AIDS or SARS-COV-2, are directly translatable into a post-humanist eco-cosmopolitanism.

[...]

"Isn't This Suppos'd to Be the Age of Reason?" *The Historically Contingent* Anthropos *in* Mason & Dixon

The drive for infinite growth on a finite planet has brought us to an era which will be defined by cataclysmic climate change. The apocalypse is now, and this opens the question: What will be the next epoch? To see the present not as a sudden emergency but as part of the "one great catastrophe"[2] of history, we need to orient ourselves like the Angel of History: backwards. To this end, I propose a critical investigation into the historical contingency of the Anthropocene, a "critique that takes the form of a possible transgression."[3] The Anthropocene functions on the ontology of anthropocentrism, the philosophy that positions humanity as being something apart from, and above, the rest of the biosphere. Through a historical critique of the epistemic origins of anthropocentrism, we might "separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think."[4] The aim then is to better understand how the *Anthropos* is constructed in order to see how we could be otherwise. In so doing, we open the possibility of a bio-cognitive mapping to "endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system,"[5] particularly the global biosphere. In such a global understanding the *Anthropos* is replaced with the *Bios,* a post-human subject which exists in a non-hierarchical relation of interdependence with the whole of the living biosphere. By exploring biocentric epistemic and literary practices, we can imagine a future epoch that recognizes the embeddedness of humanity in a global biosphere, living and struggling alongside the non-human—an epoch we might call the Biocene.

In striving to free ourselves from the confines of *Anthropos,* we should first recall that, according to Foucault, "the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them."[6] This section will therefore pursue a historical critique of anthropocentrism through a reading of Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*. Pynchon explores the cartographic formation of America with unparalleled insight into systems of power/knowledge that transform the relationship between humans and nature. These systems create borders that transform the land from a home to a resource and separate man from nature. *Mason & Dixon* is not a historical document; however, it is a novel deeply concerned with critiquing the present through an understanding of the past. By situating a contemporary critique in the past the novel better enables us see history...as one continuous catastrophe, and to enact a critique which aims, a Foucault puts it, "to analyse the present by discussing the past, ... by treating it as if it were more like the past, in all its strangeness."[7] Indeed Pynchon suggests that an actual history could not do this job as well as fiction. As the narrator, Wicks Cherrycoke, says in *M&D*:

Who claims Truth, Truth abandons. History is hir'd, or coerc'd, only in Interests that must ever prove base. She is too innocent, to be left within the reach of anyone in Power,—who need but touch her, and all her Credit is in the instant vanish'd, as if it had never been.

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2 Benjamin, "Theses", 257.
3 Foucault, "Enlightenment," 45.
4 Foucault, 46.
5 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 54
6 Foucault, "Enlightenment," 50.
7 Mils, *Michel Foucault*, 79.

She needs rather to be tended lovingly and honorably by fabulists and counterfeiters…Masters of Disguise to provide the Costume, Toilette, and Bearing, and Speech nimble enough to keep her beyond the Desires, or even the Curiosity, of Government.[8]

History is always formed within a relationship of power/knowledge; fiction is at least honest about having been written, not discovered. This leaves the possibility for alternate, subjunctive narratives and for the reclamation of truth from power. Pynchon's fictionalization of Mason & Dixon's journey is therefore just the thing for critiquing the forms of power/knowledge foundational to the American cultural imaginary.

[…]

Welcome to the World of Our Posthumanity

Trans-Corporealism and Eco-Cosmopolitanism in Welcome to Our Hillbrow

[…]

In *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative*, Wald uses fictional, journalistic, and academic depictions of communicable disease to examine the outbreak narrative. One of her main focuses is how the narratives we form around contagion informs the narratives we form around one another. For example, she highlights how outbreak narratives can stigmatize immigrant groups and depict them as being more primitive and thus more likely to contract and spread disease.[9] However, Wald argues, contagion narratives demonstrate a shared global vulnerability that defies the abilities of political borders to block. Therefore, while they may temporarily inspire xenophobia, contagion narratives are ultimately community forming: "The social experience of a disease, the image of communicability, and the materialization of interdependence that characterizes depictions of epidemics suggests an epidemiology of belonging through which people might experience their emergence as 'a population.'"[10] My primary criticism of Wald's work is that it is essentially anthropocentric. She uses contagion to generate a cosmopolitan vision which surpasses national borders but includes only the human. She challenges the characterization of certain practices as primitive, but not the categories of *primitive* and *civilized* themselves as reifications of a teleology which conflates progress with distance from the non-human. Furthermore, the focus on the "outbreak" narrative identifies the emergence of disease into a human population as the moment when it becomes an object of interest. However, biocentrism demands a decentering of the human. My aim is to extend Wald's analysis to the non-human and show contagion as materializing connections between the human and the biosphere in the same way it materializes connections within a human population.

[…]

Contagions are materializations of the social connections that make up our global human society, but beyond that they materialize the constant interchange of matter between the human and the environment.… We ought to apply this understanding to the COVID-19 virus which is so often on our minds these days. We are daily reminded of the risk of infection, but this shared vulnerability also serves as a reminder of material interdependence. The pandemic

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8 Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*, 350.

9 Wald, *Contagious*, 8.

10 Wald, 18.

illustrates, unignorably, viscerally, that however much we construct ourselves as *Anthropos,* and understand ourselves to be segregated from the *Bios,* we are viscously porous bodies, always being transformed by, and transforming, our environment. Because of their ability to locate the individual within the network of the biosphere, diseases like COVID-19 might even be considered a representational system within a broader practice of bio-cognitive mapping.... The climate crisis demands that we reconstitute ourselves as a part of the biosphere, and the pandemic shows us that we need only recognize that we always have been.

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Fanning the Flames of Discontent

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The following is an excerpt from a longer piece. For full text, please visit www.colorado.edu/honorsjournal/

Editor's note: In this essay, Bobby Seale quotes a poem by Ronald Stone that incorporates offensive language. The journal editors have starred out the language, without changing the source or the author's meaning, based on our sensitivity to the Honors Journal readership.

In 1966 Bobby Seale and Huey P Newton, before they founded the Black Panther Party, were arrested in Berkeley, California. The charges: obstructing the sidewalk and assaulting officers. The cause: poetry. Seale was reciting Ronald Stone's anti-draft poem "Uncle Sammy Call Me Fulla Lucifer" (outside a restaurant appropriately named the "Forum") when:

> Some uniformed pig cop walked up. He stood around ten or twelve feet away. I said, "You school my naive heart to sing red-white-and-blue-stars-and-stripes songs and to pledge eternal allegiance to all things blue, true, blue-eyed blond, blond-haired, white chalk white skin with U.S.A. tattooed all over."
> Man, when I said that, this cop walks up and says, "You're under arrest." I got down off the chair, said, "What are you talking about, 'You're under arrest?'
> Under arrest for what? What reason do you have for saying I'm under arrest?" (Seale 19)

It's Seale's question for the cop, "What reason do you have for saying I'm under arrest?" that I want to focus on here, not in the sense of what pretense did the cop invent for arresting Seale, but what makes poetry so powerful, so threatening to authority, that it made this cop feel the need to arrest a man?

Poetry is powerful, in part, because it opens a space for telling our stories and our history, and it helps us to imbue those stories with significance. An example of this is the poetry of Voltairine de Cleyre. De Cleyre was an anarchist and a poet in the 18th century whose politics and writing were shaped by the Haymarket affair, and the deaths of the Haymarket martyrs (August Spies, Albert Parsons, Adolph Fischer, George Engel, and Louis Lingg) (King). In her poetry, de Cleyre celebrates the sacrifice and memory of the martyrs, but she does so as a call to present action. In her 1897 poem "Light Upon Waldheim"—named for the cemetery where the Haymarket martyrs are interred—de Cleyre wrote:

> Light upon Waldheim! And the earth is gray;
> A bitter wind is driving from the north;
> The stone is cold, and strange cold whispers say:
> "What do ye here with Death? Go forth! Go forth!"

This poem pays homage to the dead who "martyred lies, / Slain in our name, for that he loved us much", but more important than the act of mourning is the call to "Go forth!" The dead deserve to be honored, but this poem communicates that the best way to honor them is with our actions, not our tears, and the monument's whisper, "What do ye here with Death? Go forth! Go forth!" seems to prefigure the later call of the famed labor organizer Mother Jones to "Pray for the dead, and fight like hell for the living" (40). The significance this poem creates for the past is thus as fuel for the fights of the present and the future.

"Light Upon Waldheim" is one example of a much larger trend in political poetry, the celebration of a history of struggle. In the introduction to a recording of "There Is Power in a Union", Utah Philips relates this story:

> A long time ago I was sitting in a cafe in Worcester, Massachusetts called "Alice and the Hat" and there was a fellow sitting next to me. I was working for the laborer's union. They were doing a labour education program, and the television set was on and Cesar Chaves was on the evening news leading that first big march in Sacramento, and this fellow who'd been holding his union card for 26 years said, "Bunch of wetbacks. Why don't they ship 'em back to Mexico. Takin' jobs away from American workers", and I could've got mad, but then I had to stop and think, well what did he get in school, what did he get in his work experience, what did he get even from his own union that gave him some tools to understand what it was he was seeing on that television? If he had grown up with a true and sure knowledge of who he was and where he had come from he would have been a whole lot more pissed off than he was, and he'd have known exactly who to be pissed off at too, I tell you that. Well that's why we do these songs... these songs are a better and more accurate picture, idea, of who we are and where we have come from than the best damn history book that you ever read, you know? And like Clair Sparks said, a radical feminist from southern California, said, "The long memory is the most radical idea in America."

This is a long quote, to be sure, but I felt it important to transcribe in full because it describes so well the role of music and poetry in telling our history, and illustrates so well what is lost without "the long memory." The worker in Philips's story is angry because he's become alienated from people he should see as fellow laborers, instead of competitors. Philips implies that the worker shares a common enemy with Chavez and those marching with him, but he lacks the tools to see "exactly who to be pissed off at." What Philips calls, "the long memory" is not just a distant historical record, but a living past which makes the present intelligible. According to Philips, if this worker was more connected to the long memory, he'd have understood the continuity between the struggle of his union and that of Chavez. When it reminds us of the sacrifices of the past, poetry becomes the vehicle by which the long memory is transmitted.

It's a simple enough matter to preserve the historical fact of an occurrence, but Bobby Seale wasn't arrested for reading a textbook. The mere act of recording doesn't give poetry power. Writing on the importance of history, Walter Benjamin said:

> There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply.

("Theses" 254)

What Benjamin makes clear here is that our awareness of the past creates an obligation to it. Those who fought and fell in the past did so for the sake of the future, and the messianic power that Benjamin refers to is our ability to redeem them, to make good on their sacrifice. The long memory, as a way of telling history, maintains our relationship to this past, makes loud its echoes, and it also reminds us of our obligation to it. This is why it is not enough for the speaker of de Cleyre's poem to cry over the graves at Waldheim. She must "Go forth!" and fulfill her obligation to the past, and more importantly, in reminding the reader of the grave at Waldheim, she reminds us that we too have been the beneficiaries of other's fight, and that this gift given to us by our predecessors obligates us to continue their struggle. Poetry therefore presents a living past which still makes demands on the present.

The long memory is one of the key elements of political poetry, and one of the best examples of this is the poem "I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night" written by Alfred Hayes, and recorded as a song by Pete Seeger, Joan Beaz, Tom Morello, and many others. Hill, the titular subject of the song, was a labor organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World, as well as a poet and songwriter, until his execution by firing squad in 1915 ("Joe Hill"). In this poem, Hayes describes a vision in which Joe Hill tells him that he "never died", and the speaker relates:

> Says Joe "What they can never kill
> went on to organize,
> went on to organize"
> From San Diego up to Maine,
> in every mine and mill,
> Where workers strike and organize
> it's there you'll find Joe Hill,
> it's there you'll find Joe Hill!

This poem, like "Light Upon Waldheim" is animated by a reverence for the past and a struggle for the future. It is not enough for Hayes that Joe Hill remains alive in the memories of the living, he remains alive only in the *struggle* of the workers. It was not enough for Hill himself either; before his death he sent a telegram which is often paraphrased, "Don't Mourn, Organize" (Callahan). The long memory is only realized when it is manifested as praxis.

[...]

Seale's arrest followed his recitation of the anti-draft poem "Uncle Sammy Call Me Fulla Lucifer" written by Ronald Stone, and, while it may not immediately be apparent why this poem would prompt his arrest, reading it in the context of the tradition of political poetry makes clear what the cop and the crowd understood instinctually. The poem centers on the inherent contradiction of calling on a people that have been, and continue to be, oppressed to worship and serve a country. The lines, "You jam your emasculate manhood symbol, puff with Gonorrhea, / Gonorrhea of corrupt un-realty myths into my ungreased, [n****r] ghetto, black-ass, my Jewish-Cappy-Hindu-Islamic-Sioux..." ("Black Panthers Arrested") don't invoke specific figures, like the poetry of de Cleyre, Hayes, and Yeats, instead invoking the memory of whole groups of people—similarly to Behan's use of the memory of the "Arabs" and "Zulus" slain by the British empire—oppressed and murdered by the same nation that young men were being drafted to serve. This poem relies on this history to make its point. The essential tension of this poem is between this history and the demand on "my naive heart to sing / red-white-and-blue-stars-and-stripes songs and to pledge eternal allegiance to all things blue, true, blue-eyed blond, blond-haired, white chalk / white skin with U.S.A. tattooed all over." The poem may not present itself as a history lesson, but it is

still a work very much concerned with maintaining the long memory.

As much power as "Uncle Sammy Call Me Fulla Lucifer" derives from the same sources as other political poetry, it also generates a force all its own. Where it differs from some of the other poems discussed in the essay is its language. This poem engages with historical tensions in language that is immediate, visceral, and drawn from the common parlance of its audience. Voltairine de Cleyre's poetry, for example, is written primarily in an elevated language that disconnects it from its audience; it's written in a way that no one in the labor movement spoke. Stone's poem, by contrast, is written in the vernacular spoken by its black American audience. This is clear from the first line, "Uncle Sammy don't shuck and jive me." The language of the poem connects immediately with the audience. The imagery it creates, such as "your emasculate manhood symbol, puff with Gonorrhea," is visceral, and its message is direct and clear. There's no room for misunderstanding in "Fuck your motherfucking self, / I will not serve."

The power of Seale's recitation was immediately apparent. Even if they didn't understand why it was powerful, the cop and the crowd understood that it was. Utah Jones tells us that "the long memory is the most radical idea in America," and Seale showed us how true that was. Poetry gives voice to generations of oppressed, makes clear the simple power of refusing to forget that oppression, and most importantly reminds us that our obligation to the past can only be honored by continuing their defiance. As Cindy Millstein said, "We have to carry that rebel spirit in our bones. We have to feel our ancestors in us who fought for those before, and we have to know we're being charged with fighting for them now, and that other people will fight for them in the future," and that's exactly what poetry lets us do. There can be nothing more threatening to the forces of oppression than poems fanning the flames of discontent.

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Violence and Meta-Narrative in Shakespeare's Tragedies

Caleb Wexler

The following is an excerpt from a longer piece. For full text, please visit www.colorado.edu/honorsjournal/

...And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges.
—Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Hamlet and *Macbeth* both represent societies in upheaval following the death of a monarch. In both cases, the usurper is taken to be a singularly tyrannical ruler whose removal will return the nation to order and peace. However, the supposed tyrants of both plays are in actuality nothing more than symptomatic expressions of their underlying social conditions. By looking at how the past is represented, this paper will show that these are societies which are built upon, and maintained by, political violence. Furthermore, this essay will compare these plays with each other as well as other works in the tragic tradition to show that these plays become tragic because the characters are consumed by historic processes defined by political violence. Understanding the plays to operate in these terms makes it clear that because the rulers are treated as being a problem in and of themselves, the underlying conditions of these societies are never changed, and for this reason the plays take on a cyclical character, where the conditions at the play's end are fundamentally the same as its beginning. Consequently, we can understand these plays to be a critique of authoritarian violence and the complicity of individuals in maintaining tragic systems.

Integral to these stories is a state maintained by violence. In both plays the state is shown early in the play to be predicated on violence, and order is either maintained or restored through it. However, in each case violence creates the groundwork for more violence, so order thus obtained is only temporary. In "On Violence," Hannah Arendt makes it clear that instability is a necessary feature of violence because:

> The very substance of violent action is ruled by the means-end category, whose chief characteristic, if applied to human affairs, has always been that the end is in danger of being overwhelmed by the means which it justifies and which are needed to reach it. Since the end of human action...can never be reliably predicted, the means used to achieve political goals are more often than not of greater relevance to the future world than the intended goals. (Arendt 106)

Thus, the various ends which these plays' character hope to achieve by violence are, as will be shown, less important to the outcome than the violent means, which threaten always to consume the ends.

[...]

Looking at the succession of rulers, we see that violence doesn't restore order, rather it imposes a cyclical structure on the plays. Let us begin with the rule of Prince Hamlet's father, Hamlet the Dane. What little we learn of the king's rule is related in the remembrances of Horatio in 1.1. He was a conqueror who expanded Denmark's rule through war, as

when he killed King Fortinbras. King Hamlet was so defined by warfare in life, that in death he wears "the very armor he had on / When he the ambitious Norway combated" (1.1.59-60). Therefore the defining feature of Hamlet the Dane, and by extension the Danish state, is violence. Claudius similarly begins his rule with the murder of his brother, and later plots to have Hamlet killed in order to maintain the security of his rule. This of course sets the stage for the revenge plot, as well as the deaths of Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Laertes. Furthermore, in the bloodbath of 5.2, the means-end threat that Arendt identified comes to fruition. The supposed ends were the maintenance of political order (in Claudius's case), or the restoration of moral order (in Hamlet's case) but these are entirely subsumed by violence. The only suitable heir to this violent world is the young Fortinbras who, on his own quest for revenge, has brought his army to Denmark. This is why Hamlet, conscious of the chain of violence that defines Denmark's history, uses his dying breaths to vote for Fortinbras as the next ruler of Denmark. Thus the play ends with the essential violent structure of rule unchanged, and with another warlike ruler taking the throne.

[...]

Looking at *Macbeth* within the context of its succession of rulers, we see, as with *Hamlet*, a structure of authority which maintains itself by violence. Also like *Hamlet*, the structure of *Macbeth* is essentially cyclical; it begins in a place of political unrest, and ends with a looming threat of the same. At the outset of Act 1, Duncan is at war with a rebellion against his crown. Macbeth is one of the principle fighters in Duncan's army and is celebrated as one of the most violent, as when the Captain relates that:

> For brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name—
> Disdaining Fortune with his brandished steel,
> Which smoked with bloody execution,
> Like valor's minion carved out his passage.
> (*Macbeth* 1.2.16-19)

From the first act we see that order in this society, as in Denmark under the elder Hamlet, is maintained through violence. Macbeth then becomes the king when he and Lady Macbeth murder Duncan. From this point Macbeth is cursed with the knowledge of the usurper, the intimate knowledge of how fragile sovereignty is and how easily another could reproduce the usurper's own actions. It is from this position of knowledge that Macbeth becomes paranoid and recognizes that the stability of his reign relies on the murder of its prophesied threats, namely Banquo and his son—prophesied to be the progenitor of a line of kings in 1.3.68— and Macduff and his family—whom the witches warn Macbeth against in 4.1.70-72. Thus, like Duncan, Macbeth comes to rely on violence to maintain the stability of his rule. Finally, Macduff kills Macbeth and Duncan's son Malcolm is restored to the throne. Ostensibly Scotland can now return to peace, but there remains the threat of Banquo's son, Fleance. According to prophecy, Fleance or his heirs will take the throne of Scotland, meaning that the peace obtained by Malcolm is only temporary, and he's destined to fall to a rebellion, just like the one which began the play.

It is worth stopping for a moment to better define what is meant when I say that the play ends where it begins. The rulers change, but the form of rule does not. In each instance is a ruler who maintains order through violence, what we might call...authoritarian. We don't see Fortinbras or Malcolm's rule, but we see enough to get a sense of the kind of rulers they might be. Looking on Fortinbras's army, Hamlet reflects:

> Witness this army of such mass and charge,
> Led by a delicate and tender prince,
> Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed
> Makes mouths at the invisible event,
> Exposing what is mortal and unsure
> To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
> Even for an eggshell. (4.1.46-52)

What Hamlet admires here in Fortinbras is the kind of character with which the late king was described, that of a martial conqueror who goes to war even for the sake of "an eggshell". Given this description, we might very well suppose that he would be the same sort of authoritarian ruler as the elder Hamlet. Like Fortinbras in Act 5, Malcolm enters the action at the head of an army, casting himself, depending on perspective, as either the avenging hero or another usurper. What, more than anything, defines his rule is the looming presence of Fleance. Any analysis of *Macbeth*'s conclusion must pay heed to this one detail because Fleance's importance cannot be overstated. It is the threat of Banquo's line which first pushes Macbeth from being an usurper to being a tyrant, which he declares when he says "... To make them kings—the seeds of Banquo kings! / Rather than so, come fate into the list, / And champion me to th'utterance!" (3.1.70-72), and this same threat looms over Malcolm's rule. It's possible that in the future Fleance seizes power from his own ambition, in which case the play's ending threatens another Macbeth. It is equally possible that Fleance's eventual rebellion will be in response to a tyrannical rule by Malcolm, in which case the play ends with the threat of another Duncan. In either case, the witches' prophecy means that Scotland has another tyrant in its future, and the play's events are simply waiting to be repeated. Both of these plays thus have the same problem. While the individuals in power may change, the leadership form remains the same, and so long as the authoritarian form remains either present or imminent, we cannot but see the play as ending where it began.

We can further understand *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* as being not only similar, but intimately related plays. In "Macbeth and the Antic Round" Orgel reflects, "Suppose we try to imagine a *Hamlet* written from Claudius' point of view, in the way that *Macbeth* is written from Macbeth's.... This play would not be about politics but about how the dead do not disappear, they return to embody our crimes, so that we have to keep repeating them—just like *Macbeth*" (264). The implication of Orgel's analysis is that these plays are telling the same story from two perspectives, so what is that shared ur-narrative? I argue that it is what *Twelfth Night's* Feste dubbed "the whirligig of time". The whirligig of time can best be understood as history structured around sequences of self-perpetuating violence. As we see in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, these societies rely on violence and so always create the violence which eventually ruins them. In building the Danish state, Hamlet the elder sets the stage for Fortinbras the younger to invade; in seizing power through fratricide Claudius brings on Hamlet's revenge; and in preemptively attempting to eliminate rivals Macbeth creates the enemies who will later dethrone him. We can therefore understand the tyrants to be symptomatic not only of a temporary violent period in their countries, but of violence as an underlying historical condition.

[...]

Tyrants do not only echo those before them, but exist as symptoms of the whole system which gave rise to them.... When Marcellus attests, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (*Hamlet* 1.40.90) we must realize that the rot goes deeper than Claudius's particular crime of murder. The tragedy begins as the result of the historical structures of violence and the prevailing forms of rule, and the tragedy reproduces itself through the failure of the characters to change either these historical patterns or the forms of rule. The would-be heroes engage in "...changing [not] the world (or the system), but only its personnel" (Arendt 123). So when Hamlet ends the tyranny of Claudius, an authoritarian society remains, ready for Fortinbras to take his place; when Macduff and Malcolm overthrow Macbeth, the world is still one driven by violence and Fleance is waiting in the wings to begin the cycle anew.

As a result, the tragedy implicates all of its characters, hero and villain alike, in the maintenance of the tragic meta-narrative, and in any tragedy which sought true moral restoration, the hero would have to directly grapple with this meta-narrative.

In the final analysis, we see that *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* have at their centers the same driving historical forces, the same meta-narrative in which all the particular narratives of their characters are organized and related to one another. It is a narrative of violence, particularly political, authoritarian violence, which gives rise to specific tyrants, but is never overthrown with them because each violent reversal is just another turn in the violent cycle. Having developed this vision of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* we might, in the future, consider how the whirligig of time spins at the heart of other tragedies, as well as how works in other genres relate to similar issues of authoritarian violence—which are certainly present in Egeus's filicidal threats in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* in the paranoid tyranny of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale,* and in the gulling of Malvolio in *The Twelfth Night,* from which I've borrowed the phrase "the whirligig of time", to name but a few—without descending into tragedy. We might even use these lessons from Shakespeare to contextualize how we consider the tyrants that manifest in our own political world and the extent to which we treat them either as unique villains or as more deeply symptomatic of historical processes.

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In Search of Looted Art: The Nazi Theft of the Victor Family's Paintings

Darby Linn

The following is an excerpt from a longer piece. For full text, please visit https://scholar.colorado.edu/concern/undergraduate_honors_theses/4t64gp17p

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 600,000 pieces of art were looted by the Nazis during the Second World War.[1] While many of these works were recovered during and after the war, over 100,000 paintings, drawings, sculptures, and other mediums continue to be classified as missing.[2] Jewish art collectors and families with large personal art collections were targeted by Nazi art dealers and officers under Hitler's orders to confiscate Jewish-owned art. The confiscated art was used to finance German war operations, establish the power of the Third Reich, and satisfy high-ranking officials' desire for fine art. Art was not only confiscated from museums and galleries, but also from private Jewish homes. Such irreplaceable links to the personal lives of persecuted Jews inspires provenance researchers to do all that they can to recover these lost treasures through restitution. My thesis pieces together the traumatic experiences of the Victor family, reevaluates the restitution process for Holocaust victims, and analyzes the current endeavors of museums, auction houses, and archives in relation to Nazi-looted art.

Jewish victims and their heirs continuously search for their lost property, including art, even today. When preparing their individual cases, claimants often face challenges, such as the filing of numerous legal forms, language barriers, and a lack of personal funding. Other difficulties include limited surviving records, the frustration of denied requests, years of paperwork processing, small amounts of restitution, and the intimidating unlikelihood of finding the property that they are seeking. As the number of Holocaust survivors gradually decreases, the victims' children and grandchildren frequently claim restitution for physical and emotional damage on their parents' or grandparents' behalf. The collection of evidence and the review process for restitution cases may last many years due to the lack of priority given to old cases no longer on federal agendas and due to the sluggish nature of bureaucratic systems. The evidence necessary for the claimants to be granted restitution is almost impossible to obtain because records were often destroyed or forcibly left behind when Jewish families were forced to flee or were deported. The process designed to help those who lost everything requires from them what they simply cannot prove.

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1 Gilbert, Sophie. 2018. "The Persistent Crime of Nazi-Looted Art." *The Atlantic,* March 11. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/03/cornelius-gurlitt-nazi-looted-art/554936/.

2 Eizenstat, Stuart Ed. 2019. "Art stolen by the Nazis is still missing. Here's how we can recover it." *The Washington Post*. January 2. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/no-one-should-trade-in-or-possess-art- stolen-by-the-nazis/2019/01/02/01990232-0ed3-11e9-831f-3aa2c2be4cbd_story.html.

Proper restitution for Jewish victims can be considered as selective to only a few fortunate individuals with sufficient resources.

Restitution remains heavily debated. According to The Getty Research Institute, "restitution" is defined as "the action of restoring or giving back something to its rightful owner, or of making reparation for a loss previously inflicted; restoration of a thing lost, taken, or damaged."[3] Art restitution in the scope of the Second World War proves to be a challenge for victims and researchers partly due to auction houses, museums, and art institutions lacking transparency. This concept remains questionable when discussing Jewish victims, considering the irreparable damages, losses, and traumas they experienced at the hands of the Third Reich. In these cases, art restitution focuses heavily on returning a particular piece to its lawful owner as a symbol of healing or on providing compensation to victims and their families as an apologetic gesture.

[...]

My passion for helping Jewish victims through art restitution inspired me to develop an ambitious project concerning the Victor family. Dr. David Shneer, a distinguished professor in the Department of Jewish Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder, introduced me to Kassandra LaPrade Seuthe, an acquisitions curator, and Megan Lewis, a reference librarian, who are both employed at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). After I explained my interests in recovering Nazi-looted artworks, Seuthe and Lewis suggested researching the "Peter and Berta Victor Papers" within the USHMM's digitized collection. These papers concerned personal correspondences, legal documents, an autograph book, family photographs, and printed materials belonging to the Victors (Image 1), a Jewish family who lived in Berlin up until the summer of 1939. Records and photographs that belonged to Carl Victor (1879-1940) and Elsa Victor (1888-1942) indicated that the family owned oil paintings that went missing after 1939. The titles and artists of the paintings were not indicated in any of the family's papers. I determined that if the titles and artists of the paintings could be found within the family's records at the state and federal archives in Berlin, there was a possibility that the paintings could also be located within lost art databases. While there are no living members of the Victor family, finding their art would theoretically restore part of the family's legacy preserved at the USHMM. While at the German archives,[4] I planned to research the physical restitution claims filed by Peter Max Victor, the adopted son[5] of Carl and Elsa Victor, in order to better understand the family's story as well as find any indication as to what might have happened to the Victors' paintings.

[...]

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3 The Getty Research Institute, "Restitution." Los Angeles, The Getty Research Institute. http://vocab.getty.edu/page / aat/300417843

4 Through the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) offered at the University of Colorado Boulder, I acquired the funding necessary to organize my travels to Berlin, Germany for four weeks of research at the Landesarchiv and Bundesarchiv.

5 See page 12 of this thesis for the Victor family history.

Image 1: An circa 1930s photograph of the Victor family with relatives or friends: Carl Victor (top right), Elsa Victor (top left), and Peter Max Victor (bottom left).

Image 10: A 1939 photograph of Peter Max in Berlin prior to his emigration to Shanghai. He was nineteen at the time.

Image 2: A 1929 photograph of Carl Victor in the Victor family apartment in Berlin. Three missing paintings are faintly depicted hanging on the wall.

Image 3: A 1929 photograph of Elsa Victor in the Victor family apartment in Berlin. Three missing paintings are faintly depicted hanging on the wall.

CHAPTER TWO: THE RESTITUTION PROCESS

Peter Max first opened [his restitution] case in a 1952 letter to the URO [United Restitution Organization], requesting assistance with several claims that he wished to file. At the time, Peter Max felt helpless because of the lack of available support in Washington for the complicated form process and because of his sincere need for money. In examining a letter dated April 10th, 1953 between Peter Max and the URO, a requirement of proof for matters not normally documented was repeatedly requested. For Peter Max's case, the URO requested evidence to prove that Peter Max lived in Berlin before leaving Germany and that a witness, who was also in the Shanghai ghetto, testified that Peter Max was in the Shanghai ghetto (Image 16). The office also requested the details of his life story, including the events that led to the "damage."[6] While these three requirements seemed straightforward, Peter Max struggled to prove the smaller details within each category. Throughout the letters between Peter Max and the URO, Peter Max's impatience and desperation to settle his case becomes increasingly apparent. In 1959, Dr. Fabian of the URO requested further proof of Peter Max's life in Berlin and the Shanghai ghetto, to which Peter Max responded:

> This restitution case was started in 1957, and there are times, when I feel you are not really trying to represent me as you should. If you feel, that you – or the regional office in Berlin are unable to *help* me in my claim, then I would appreciate your returning my papers to me, so that I can try on my own. I am sure you must have many cases like mine, and I am also sure that very few documents were available. Somehow my sworn statements and letters should be enough. I did not try to save documents when I left Berlin, I tried to save my life.[7]

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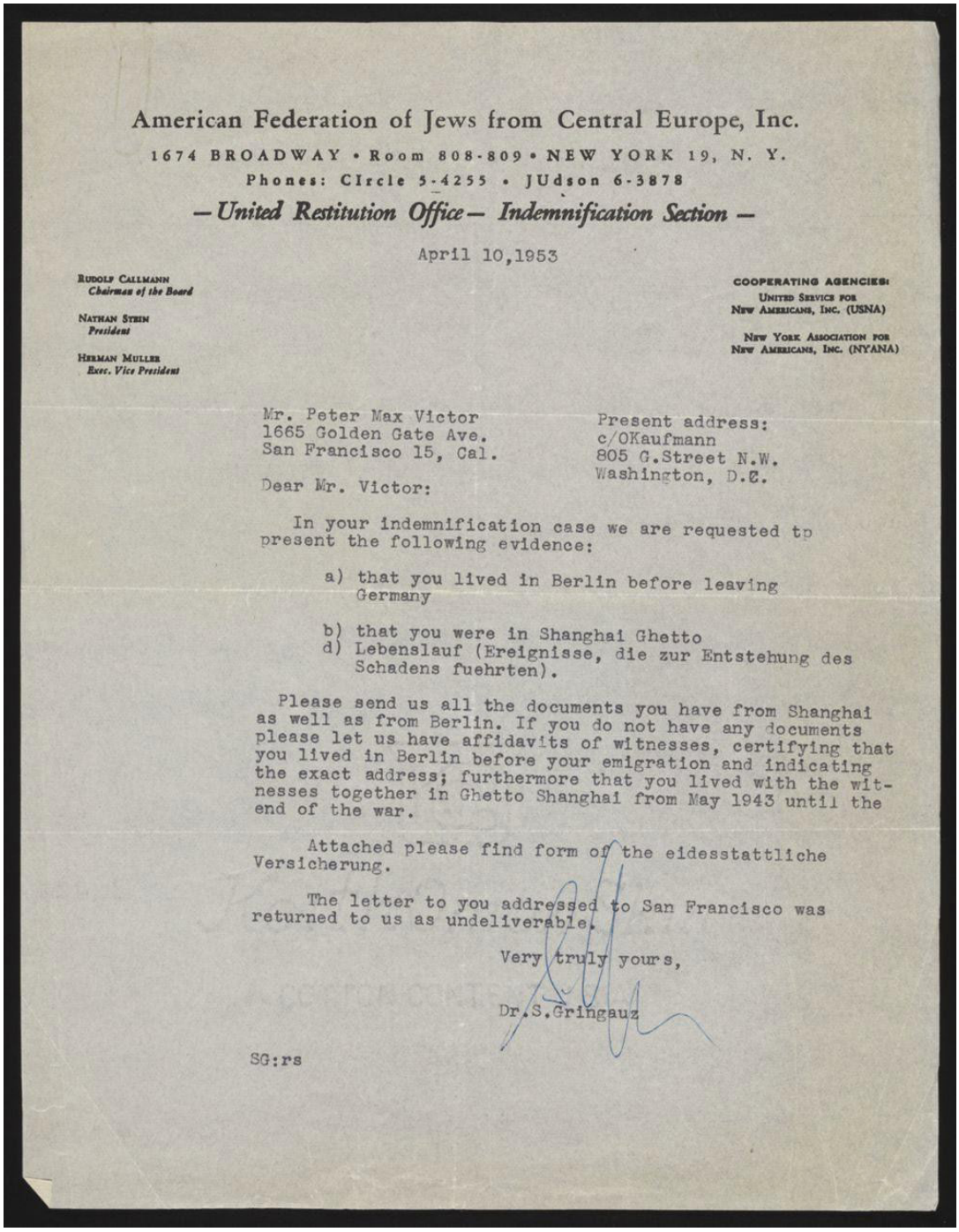
6 URO to Peter Max Victor. In "Peter and Berta Victor Papers". Washington D.C.: US Holocaust Memorial Museum, April 10, 1953.

7 Peter Max Victor to the URO. In "Peter and Berta Victor Papers". Washington D.C.: US Holocaust Memorial Museum, January 12, 1959.



American Federation of Jews from Central Europe, Inc.

1674 BROADWAY • Room 808-809 • NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

Phones: CIrcle 5-4255 • JUdson 6-3878

— United Restitution Office — Indemnification Section —

April 10,1953

RUDOLF CALLMANN
Chairman of the Board

NATHAN STEIN
President

HERMAN MULLER
Exec. Vice President

COOPERATING AGENCIES:
UNITED SERVICE FOR NEW AMERICANS, INC. (USNA)
NEW YORK ASSOCIATION FOR NEW AMERICANS, INC. (NYANA)

Mr. Peter Max Victor
1665 Golden Gate Ave.
San Francisco 15, Cal.

Present address:
c/OKaufmann
805 G.Street N.W.
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Victor:

In your indemnification case we are requested to present the following evidence:

a) that you lived in Berlin before leaving Germany

b) that you were in Shanghai Ghetto
d) Lebenslauf (Ereignisse, die zur Entstehung des Schadens fuehrten).

Please send us all the documents you have from Shanghai as well as from Berlin. If you do not have any documents please let us have affidavits of witnesses, certifying that you lived in Berlin before your emigration and indicating the exact address; furthermore that you lived with the witnesses together in Ghetto Shanghai from May 1943 until the end of the war.

Attached please find form of the eidesstattliche Versicherung.

The letter to you addressed to San Francisco was returned to us as undeliverable.

Very truly yours,

Dr.S.Gringauz

SG:rs

Image 16: The URO requested that Peter Max confirm the details of his life through witness testimonies.

Peter Max felt as though the restitution process was too demanding of victims who were barely able to survive, let alone retain any personal documentation after the war. In a 1957 letter, the URO returned document photocopies sent by Peter Max because the photocopies were not certified, and therefore not accepted by the German government.[8] They also requested information on Carl Victor's education, vocational training, the size of the container that the Victors brought with them to Shanghai, and the detailed list of furniture left behind.[9] Such information can be particularly difficult to produce for the descendants of victims filing claims on their relative's behalf since they were likely too young to learn or understand such information from their parents. The URO further mentioned that if there was insufficient documentation and records for any matter, affidavits of witnesses confirming Peter Max's personal details were necessary.[10] Peter Max, for example, was required to submit affidavits from three different witnesses, stating that he did attend specific schools in Berlin, that he could not finish his education as a Jew, and that it was his father's intention for him to study chemistry. The testimonies not only needed to state what Peter Max studied, where, and for how long, but they also had to state the witness's backgrounds and their relation to Peter Max. Based on how many Jews died during the war, the chances of being able to locate and contact three living witnesses with the knowledge of something as trivial as someone else's education were slim even immediately after 1945. Requiring witnesses be a requirement for a victim's claim makes restitution almost impossible to obtain.

The final rulings of Peter Max's restitution case raise the question of whether the legal process should be modified for victims in ongoing cases. The office explained that the request for compensation on the mixing machine, the car, and the chemicals and spices was denied because claims for damages under reimbursement would only be justified if the assets belonged to the persecuted, if the property was physically confiscated by the German Reich, or if the claimant had use for the confiscated objects, none of which were proven.[11] Peter Max was merely granted 2,311 DM[12] for his family's furniture and the emigration costs. According to the inventory list, the value of the furniture alone was estimated at 1,424 DM, which equals approximately $2,420 USD today.[13] Peter Max also received 415 DM from the Berlin Disconto Bank as compensation for his "damage to freedom."[14] Peter Max's small amount of compensation in return for such a lengthy and demanding restitution process, in addition to the rejection of some of his claims, illustrated similar cases of thousands of Jews who filed for restitution after the war.

[...]

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8 The URO to Peter Max Victor. In "Peter and Berta Victor Papers". Washington D.C.: US Holocaust Memorial Museum, September 4, 1957.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Oberfinanzdirektion Berlin. In "Peter and Berta Victor Papers", n.d.

12 Entschädigungsamt Berlin, *Verweisung an Haupttreuhänder*, 344181, Berlin: Wiedergutmachungsämter, 1958. Legal Document.

13 Peter Max Victor to Dr. H. E. Fabian of the URO, 1957.

14 Berliner Diskonto Bank. In "Peter and Berta Victor Papers", Washington D.C.: US Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.

CHAPTER THREE: AUCTION HOUSES, MUSEUMS, AND ARCHIVES

While Peter Max faced many difficulties from the claimant side of restitution cases, museums, archives, and auction houses continue to face the dilemma of becoming transparent or protecting their reputation. Museums, archives, and auction houses play key roles in both recovering art and coming to terms with current or historic collections containing questionable artifacts. The accessibility of these institutions serves as a vital component for tracing the provenance of a piece or understanding what ties those institutions had to the Third Reich. Out of fear for the safety of a museum or auction house's respected reputation, few institutions choose to publicly come forward about their historic collusion with the Nazis or with the art in their collections that were likely stolen during the Second World War. In cases where the provenance of the auction house or of specific artworks is not known, museums and auction houses often deny access to researchers to avoid any unwanted publicity or potential legal disputes....

[...]

I asked [Fanny] Stoye [the curator behind *The Obligation of Ownership*] for her observations on the current state of German auction houses, museums, and art restitution, which revealed her clear personal frustrations. She emphasized how significant gaps in art provenance research could potentially be closed with the help of auction house archives. She further described how these archives commonly deny access to vital information, even to provenance researchers whom the auction houses have hired. Institutions covering up their past collusions with Nazi art theft risk severely damaging their reputations in the case of Nazi-looted art being discovered in their possession today. Stoye explained how the "non-public institutions are not obliged to take on the topic of art provenance research" and that "many [institutions] are more likely to do provenance research [behind closed doors] out of greed or out of fear of losing very rare pieces from their collections."[15] What many museums and auction houses believe to be currently protecting them from bad press can actually cause them to be in graver danger than if they were honest from the beginning.

Fanny Stoye['s]...insights voiced many of the struggles I had while conducting provenance research on the Victor family's paintings. While the Victors' case differs from the Nazi-involved pasts of museums, auction houses, and archives, it does overlap concerning transparency. Despite that there are not any living members of the Victor family today, German archives and institutions repeatedly denied me access to certain documents or records. Even Peter Max struggled obtaining access to his own family's records throughout the restitution case, confirming that the restitution process remains too demanding of claimants.... While museums, auction houses, and archives have made improvements towards becoming more transparent over the years, much work has still yet to be done in digitizing collections. Such transparency not only creates a more open relationship with the public, but it also helps alleviate the work of the provenance researcher. Since Nazi looted art is scattered around the world, these institutions must take the steps necessary towards becoming accessible to not only the German public, but also to an international public through online archives, in-house linguists and translated request forms, and public resources that educate the essentiality of provenance research. The Victors' case serves as an example of why immediate change is necessary and why time is of the essence for

15 Fanny Stoye, email interview with author, August 3, 2019.

other claimants.

[...]

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