

Letters to Dad



Act I

The
Deceitful Daughter

Dear Dad:

I want to tell you about an artwork I am doing.

To date, my work has encompassed an investigation of how I come to be who I am. I have discovered that I am, in part, who I have been made to be through things like the stories I know or photographs that document relationships. I want to continue to understand how this happens and attempt to make up other stories. As I work with my material evidence, I recognize that being an artist is, in many ways, like being a detective, and taking this analogy further, I decided to work with the genre of murder mystery for an exhibition.

I will build a stage that almost fills the gallery, and on this stage I will design a home-like set where the story will take place, or has taken place. The visitor will step up onto the stage to find clues such as this letter, engraved cutlery at a table setting, and a computer program. The Main Menu for this program will be contained in a studio portrait of you. I have cast you as the Father. The program will allow the user to explore images and sounds found within the memory of the computer. So, the viewer will enter the set physically, and the portrait imaginatively.

Let me tell you more about the Father.

I realized that my assumptions about who has power, and what form that power takes, prevented me from evolving other relationships or other selves. I wanted to understand more about how the family makes us who we are, and why we struggle so much within this structure. I wanted to separate the patriarch from the man and imagine other possibilities, such as you and Len as a couple, or Mark and I not having children and each having a separate career.

I also realized that most of my early artistic influences were men; that until recently, artistic knowledges have mainly been put in place by men; that representations are constructed in the Name of the Father. So, I decided to murder the Father to make room for my own growth.

Emily Dickinson had similar concerns. "More specifically, one could argue that Dickinson conceives of her chief adversary as the Father, a composite image whose power and dominance she continually confronts to find a poetic freedom of her own. If such aggression towards the father is hardly an orthodox or



MARK RUWEDER

acceptable emotion to be voiced, it is a part of the family romance all of us share." (David Porter, *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1984)

I tell myself: resist the feelings of betrayal and disloyalty. They are misplaced. Puncture the silence; this taboo must be recognized and despised. I must allow myself the privilege of inventing feelings and circumstances beyond our troubled past and manufactured history. It

is paradoxical that *story telling*, and the use of the image of the Father, seems to be an effective strategy for pulling the man, who has his own interior life, away from the imaginary father.

I am writing this letter to you not because, after all, you are my father but because you too have a stake in your own identity. In this work you are, and are not, the father of the artist. Although you do not fulfil the model of an omnipresent Father, it is important that I address my specific circumstances if I am to defeat the ubiquitous power of the Father.

I am surprised that I am finding some difficulty in writing this letter. I recognize that our relationship is quite reserved. Although I am attempting to write about a very personal sentiment, I am not able to express it casually. Our exchange is always quite formal, and yet there is an expectation of intimacy. At this moment I am attempting to write personally but I don't seem to have anything to draw on. Was I always so restrained?

I don't want you to think that I am saying that I don't like you. I am not talking about *like* or *dislike*. I am attempting to separate the person from the father: to begin to know you, and so to know myself better.

I hope that you find some interest in this work. For me it has already meant much. I will try to keep you up to date with any progress.

Love,

Caroline

Letters to Dad

My friends and I are sitting at the kitchen table. I tell them that my family is not normal. I am reluctant to explain. (My father, and my relationship with my father are not normal. I know that this is always the case with fathers and daughters.) They say that, of course, no family is normal, as if somehow I do not understand this social institution or am exaggerating my particular situation. They look at each other knowingly. I have to tell them.

Tonight I was in the shower soaping under my arm. I had, for the last few seconds, been feeling a vague sense of erotic emotion. I may have had my eyes closed. I remember it now as if I did. The soap made my skin slippery. I have very little hair under my arm, like a child. I chose to touch a spot just next to the hair; a little piece of flesh I could grab and rub: a slippery, wet spot. As I did this I felt my body as a child; a child in a bathtub; a child with wonderfully soft, slippery, wet skin. I think I liked to touch my sister's skin, to rub her with soap. She was younger and softer. I remember. I liked to bathe with her because she was soft and round, and firm. I used to rub her all over with the soap.

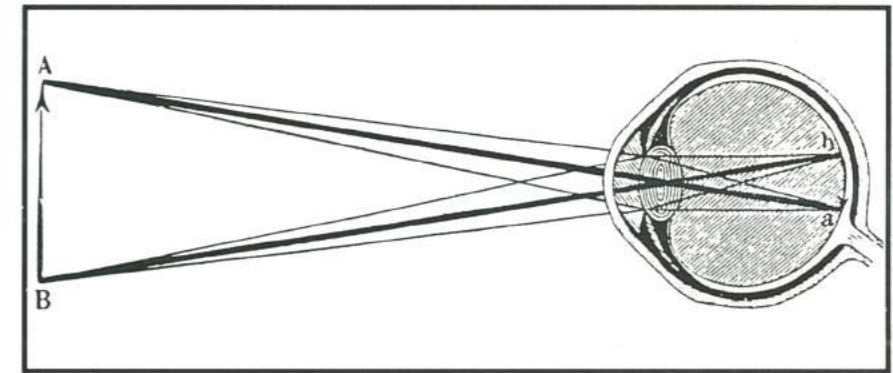
I think that, at that time, I thought she was my baby. Somehow, my memory of touching her is

a part of this old feeling. I have a photograph of her and me in a bathtub. I think it was taken when we were living at Grandma's place. I almost remember it being taken. I almost remember my father taking it. I feel a little embarrassed by the expression on my face. When I look at photos of other children, I see that they are posing for the camera. Was I doing that? Or posing for Daddy? My sister is not

expense of my relation with my mother.

A friend once asked me if my family was a two-party system: one child for each parent. I think I reacted with some surprise at the idea that this was not the norm. I was Daddy's girl and my sister was Mummy's.

Did I have a choice? I have a vague memory of moving away from that favoured position. But by then it was too late and I will never be able to escape. If I do, will I regret the loss of that fragile power?



What is of primary importance for vision, however, is the fact that the optical system of the human eye achieves a point to point correspondence between the object and its image cast on the nervous layer receptive to light. — M.H. Pirenne, *Optics, Painting and Photography*, University of Cambridge, London, 1970.

I wanted to free myself.

looking at the camera. She is posing for someone else. For my mother? We are both smiling. I want to be smiling for my mother too.

Was I competing with my mother? I don't remember.

I once told a friend that I had this photograph and that I had felt that my sister was my baby. Saying this out loud made the thought seem lewd, as if I had had my father's baby.

Tonight I enjoyed the eroticism of that slippery, warm, blind touch. I do not like the idea that I may have been enamoured with my father, especially if it was at the

Last year a six-year-old girl visited me at my summer home. We swam a lot. Then we would have a warm

shower together. She said something she had obviously been taught to say about not touching her. I think she was using me to test how it felt to say it. Later, after I got out of the shower and sat nearby waiting for her to be finished, I recognized that the playing she was doing in the water was a naive yet knowingly seductive dance. She was testing and enjoying the impact of her naked body.

While most women do not commit incest with their biological fathers, patriarchal marriage, prostitution, and mass 'romantic' love are psychologically predicated on sexual union between Daughter and Father figures. — Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness*, Avon, NY, 1973.

THE DECEITFUL DAUGHTER

Could murder free me? If I take his life, will it be mine forever? Are we bound forever anyway? Do I love my father? Why do these words terrify me?

EVERYTHING WAS DIRTY. Even the soap was dirty. The dirt had become a part of the bar and it had hardened. I remember looking at the soap. It was not getting smaller. As the fat left the soap, the dirt entered the bar and it was becoming hard. When we washed, we rolled it around in our hands and ran water over it. But it was not being used up. In contrast, I was about to disappear. I could no longer speak.

Blind love

It's the perfect house. It allows you to see exactly how life should be lived. It protects those within, at the same time as it welcomes those without. It has a wonderful consciousness in its living spaces. It is both a castle and a cabin.

It is a corrupt dwelling. It proposes a fiction you have to refuse. Its halls are threatening, and it is terrifying to approach. It is a subconscious being in and of itself. It is a hovel in a ghetto.

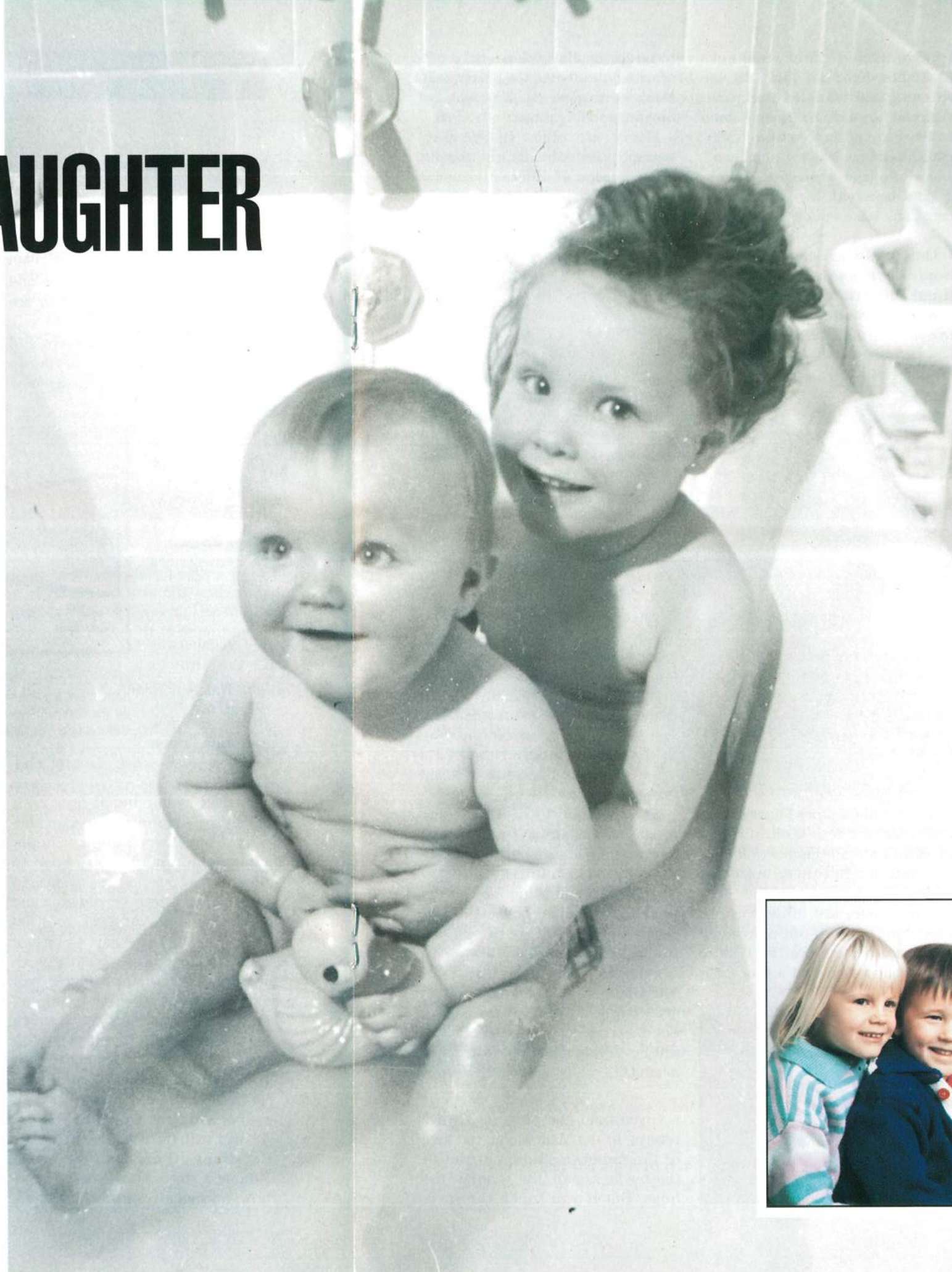
It's just a story.

...the memories of our childhood are just kitsch, badly staged, with false backdrops. Photos like that attempt to cheat death, as if there could be moments outside time, outside the narrative that we our-

selves must not only suffer but will, even as it effaces us and the people we love. Photos remain kitsch until we make them into elements of the consciously told story of our lives, aware of ourselves telling the story in anger and in love, showing the power of death in the laws and limits of form, and in the ongoing rush of the narrative. — Jay Cantor, *On Giving Birth to One's Own Mother*, Knopf, NY, 1991.

...a dirty little joke.

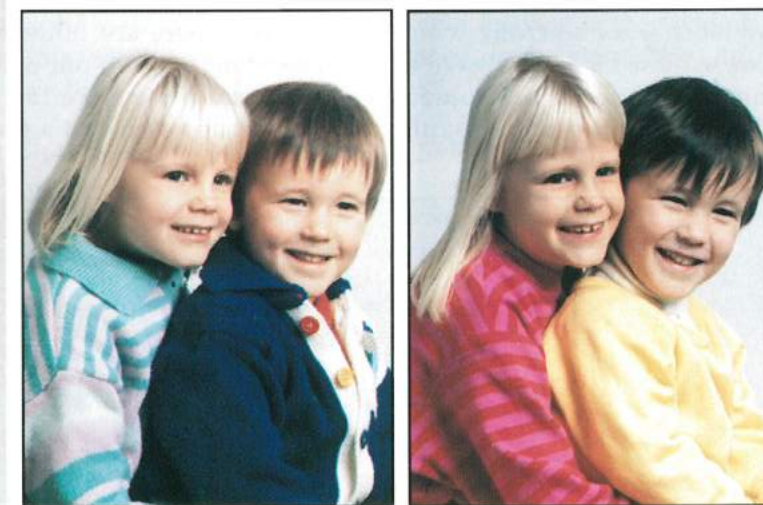
The secrecy in our family was overwhelming. We did not talk about money. The children were told they could not know about those kinds of things. We did not talk about work at home. Work was something we did elsewhere. Work in our home was invisible. Housework seemed to be done by someone else. Children did not look in other people's drawers, nor did we touch things on other people's tables. We did not look in books which were not ours. We did not touch papers unless we asked first. We only played with our own toys. We did not go into other people's rooms unless we were given permission. No one talked about sex. We did not even look in the direction of anything sexual. For me, as a young teenager, it was like a mystery to be solved. We did not talk about love. We did not express



emotion. We did not cry. We did not talk about family. There were some family that we pretended were not family. There were "black sheep" and "closets". We did not talk about things other people owned, nor about how other people acted. We supposedly did not talk about other people. Children did not speak unless spoken to. We never asked too many questions.

We rush on from page to page, investing our attention, our emotion, only to toss the book aside at the end, unsatisfied. Not because we want a good book to tidy everything up; rather, we want the questions the plot proposed, the ones that drove us on, to open into more questions, in an ever-widening context that interrogates us and our lives. A bad hysterical book brutally insists on its conclusions: This is the dead body; this is the murderer; the end. — Jay Cantor, *On Giving Birth to One's Own Mother*, Knopf, NY, 1991.

Oh, what pwetty eyes, you pwetty little girl. Here, buy my glasses and you'll see the Truth-Me-Myself tell you everything you should know. ...You see? No? Wait, you'll have everything explained to you, and you'll know at last which sort of neurosis you're related to. Hold still, we're going to do your portrait, so that you can begin looking like it right away. — Hélène Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa", translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, Summer 1976.



My father has always been special to me. Even as a baby, I gravitated to his body for reassurance. He was always there. He was always exciting, and when I was with him I was a part of that excitement: doing things, making things which people admired. He was skilled with his hands. I could make things too. It wasn't really very hard—embarrassingly easy, in fact—yet people were impressed.

Your eyes move around all the time. In effect, this is how a film projector works: the light throws an image onto the screen, the shutter closes, the film moves ahead one frame, the shutter opens again, the process repeats. When we watch a film, we are not aware that half the time the screen is blank. In our eye, an image is burned into the retina. When the eye shifts to another point of vision, the viewer is literally blind: no image enters, although we are not conscious of the blankness. There is an experiment you can do that will make this process evident. When you are talking with someone, you can see their eyes moving around, yet if you look in the mirror and let your eyes shift positions, you will not see the movement.

Was my father *sensitive*?

I remember becoming conscious of my father as a person. I grew to describe him as a weak man. I saw my mother as a strong woman. I knew these categories were false and inequitable, yet somehow I have inherited both qualities.

I have strength and weakness. I hate the weakness. I lose my confidence and want to just go to sleep: not to have to try and so not to have to fail, just to be too ill to even attempt.

Was he *weak* because she was *strong*?

One day, when my homework was not finished in time for school, my mother



calmed my anxiety by telling me to say that it was her fault. She had always been my protective device. Did this take my strength? Did she give me strength? Was she Dad's protective device too? Did he have to escape her strength? Is this how he found his?

Family photographs have been a part of my life, a story I have understood since I was a child. They speak of intimate moments and of celebrations. But there are other stories.

Surely there are other ways of describing a life. I am convinced that I can investigate the *fiction* and perhaps even find a way for it

to be retold. Maybe I can tell a better story; construct a better self. Not a permanent construction, but ongoing modifications.

There are clues in the photographs, in words and in objects. The collusion of different elements



can produce different stories. The fragments seem incomplete, as if they are lies. But sometimes lies can be revealing.

A friend went into therapy because she felt that she could no longer write, she had lost her voice. After many long discussions with her therapist, my friend realized that she had been sexually abused by her father. She confronted him and he denied it, absolutely. She said she remembered incidents when she was in her crib. He said no. She was sure. He was too.

The thing is, I know how she feels. The memory is true, but it is like a symbolic memory with something much larger than a single person doing the abusing. Maybe the father gets blamed because of his power but, in fact, we are all victims. My friend's need was to become the agent rather than a victim. Before a child learns to laugh at a *dirty joke* she hears the hatred. She was now remembering the hostility everyone else had learned to laugh at.

Given time, the program always returns to the Main Menu: the face of the father, a studio portrait of the businessman, the scholar, the boss. But if you touch the face,

poke the nose, click on the ear, the portrait dissolves to an image held behind the screen. Stories surface from the memory. The transitions reveal the terror, the death, the transformation of identity.

My friends liked my dad. He was a nice guy. He was one of those guys who could always tell you what you wanted to hear, who could always agree with you, even if you were contradicting yourself or if you were confused.

Was I *jealous*?

You may approach. You may not recognize the clues, may not know how to open the memory. You may struggle with the program, or breeze through it. Knowledge of the systems at work, or the time spent will cause the result to differ. The story depends on your choices. The pretext of detecting becomes a metaphor for discovery beyond suppositions.

To find the character of the father, she must leave the protected space of the daughter; the protection of the master's house. To do away with the father, she must make her motive explicit; she must act with a clear conscience.

Driven beyond endurance by the emotional fireworks that can characterize the aspiring family, trapped in the obliterating maze of relationships from which [she] can see no exit, [she begins] to foment an uprising. Its purpose is to reclaim [her identity], not spark a revolution. — Elliott Leyton, *Sole Survivors: Children Who Murder Their Families*, Seal Books, Toronto, 1990.

"Oh yeh? Well. That's just what you think."

The father had the right to *dis-*pose of the life of his children and

his slaves: the power of life or death. **Just wait till your father comes home.** But his power was really only the ability to take life or to allow it to continue. *My* murderous impulses surface from a defiant act of abdication of the role of the daughter. I will no longer play this character.

In a recent visit the father was seen hanging around as if he was waiting for something. He was like a young teenage boy who has a crush on a girl, but doesn't know what to say or how to introduce his interests. What does he want from her?

He tells dirty jokes at breakfast. She just sits there with her eyes locked onto her placemat. She feels



culpable and rude: she neither laughs nor protests. Did she learn something when she was a teenager? Did she learn that he has a different world-view; that she cannot change his? Or did she just learn not to talk back to her elders?

"I'm not going to be like you when I grow up. You'll see."

The father suspected that there would be glory in their relationship. The father was always special to the daughter. **He is in me; he is me.** Even as a baby she gravitated to his body for reassurance. **Or I am him.** He was always there. **He takes pride in my successes.**

They are his. He was exciting, and when she was with him, she felt that she was a part of that excitement: doing things, making things which people admired. He was skilled with his hands. She could make things too. **They are not his. He did not achieve them.**

There is a nastiness that is like a sneaky pleasure. Is it a way of distancing one's self? Or is it a kind of sadism, a way of connecting?

Dad was in the Second World War. I don't know what he did. He was in a medical corps. I remember two of his war stories:

They were in a place where they were receiving a lot of casualties: "working around the clock". Finally Dad got a break. He lay down on one of the cots for the injured. While he was asleep, his buddies pulled a blanket over his head and put him in a row of corpses. Needless to say, he was confused and shocked when he woke up. *Now I'd have to imitate his laugh to complete the story. It's like his punctuation. "Ho, ho, ho, ho."* (You can just imagine.)

He came home on leave. He arrived at night, unannounced, at his sister's home. She lived in a small town in the interior of B.C. He didn't knock at the front door. He went around to the back, where the family was sitting in the kitchen. He put his face in the window and tapped on the glass. "**Ho, ho, ho, ho.**" (You can just imagine.)

I showed a friend some of the photographs of my sister and myself when we were young. She could guess which of the two children was me, but it was just a guess. That child is becoming more of a stranger, even to me. ■

Photograph above: Main Menu in transition

The house guarded its many pitiful secrets. They were hidden under the genteel and respectable veneer. But the beautiful interiors could not reverse the terrible revenge the daughter was to exact in these rooms. Behind the doors and the venerable portraits there is a thread of tragedy that leads to the victim. It is a trail of treachery and intrigue; a story that will test your courage and ingenuity.

The corpse had been found. It appears as if the death was accidental, but you can rest assured that it was not. Now the guests are caught up in an intricate play within a play, chilled and shadowed by things not long past, and things yet to come. And each one of you has a motive for this murder.

She pursued her father across the ocean. She seduced him, then she slit his throat.

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Act II

Caustic Junctions

My memory always seems to return to his body. I knew that this would be how it was; how it will be. A murder mystery is a backwards motion; a narrative in reverse. So, here I sit. Prepared to murder. Struggling to hate, to aggress, to probe malice and let blood.

"You can care for or hate someone else only if there exists a 'you' to care or to hate, a 'someone else' to be cared for or hated, and the capacity to care for or hate or, more generally, [to] be in relation to others." – Muriel Dimen, *Power, Sexuality, and Intimacy*, 1989.

We did not want to know each other as people. We had no means of evolving the delicate exchange of care demanded of adult intimacy. There was only obligation.

I was dutiful. He was unmoving, exerting a force through his immobility. Am I possessed?

The tragedy is that I am and I am not. I am a middle aged girl; willful and obedient, knowledgeable and inept. I am determined; capable of decided action but at the same moment incapable and vacillating in my endeavours. I am immersed in this disparity.

I have lived in two homes for several years. Sometimes I feel I am in both places at one time. I am making a sandwich in the city and imagining myself standing in front of my sink in my summer home. I am driving my car and thinking of driving my boat. I am looking out of my window and seeing water instead of the traffic which is really there.

BY HEART

Things which I have 'learned by heart' are branded in my brain; their traces will never be lost, even if my conscious memory of them has completely faded. If this weren't so, I would spend the whole day dressing. Could I unlearn putting on my shoes or tying the laces?

Culture made body: table manners, toilet habits, diet, make-up, dress.

What about learning to swim? My body remembers how to do that, but its management and discipline still seems inadequate. Can I acquire freedom from this need for control? Can I allow the decay of my body? The death I seek is ultimately my own.

I often felt messy when I was in grade school. My hair wasn't right somehow. My socks fell down. When I look at class photographs I can see that I wore old fashion clothes, even then. We often shopped at thrift shops. I liked going with granny. I had a winter coat. I think it was cut down to fit me, but it was so heavy that I found it hard to move around in it. I liked wearing Oxford shoes. This was OK at private school, but when I changed schools my classmates thought the shoes were weird.

Imagine a group of light rays, all travelling in straight lines, eventually encountering something which reflects or refracts them – a mirror, a lens, a water droplet, a layer of hotter or colder air. There is an ideal case of this where all the rays are re-directed to another common point, the focal point. The result is a sharp image. This ideal case underlies the design of cameras, telescopes, microscopes, and so on.

In nature, though, the ideal case is almost never realized. Instead of causing the light rays to converge at a point, the reflection or refraction is far more likely to direct them so that they converge (if at all) on a line, or fan across a surface, or even form something as complex as a rainbow. The light concentrates along these lines or 'caustics', named for their burning intensity. – modified from Alexander Woodcock and Monte Davis, 1978.

Caustic junctions are formed where several bright lines of light come together, as they do in the rippling network sparkling across the side of my clinker-built boat.

"The most important variables in navigation tasks are scale, complexity, and familiarity." – Gillian Cohen, *Memory in the Real World*, 1989.

I feel like a map without scale. I know that I will soon see the ocean and that there is a cliff somewhere ahead, but I don't know how far or how large.

"The ability to classify and manipulate all types of form is achieved only by giving up concepts such as size, distance, and rate." – Alexander Woodcock and Monte Davis, *Catastrophe Theory*, 1978.

BY BRAIN

It's on the tip of my tongue, but the words have slipped my mind.

Memory is continually reorganized as a consequence of interrogation and retrieval. So remembering is not just a process of passively receiving impressions, but of creatively constructing a representation.

I will finish writing this sentence, get up from this chair, and go downstairs

to make lunch. I must remember to save the text before I get up. I will probably turn off the computer and cover it because the sun will soon shine in this window. I might not return for some time. I will take a book with me. Or perhaps I should print out the text so I can read it over lunch. I will turn on the printer and make a copy before I turn off the computer.

People have memories of me which are not the same as my own, and I have invented so many stories about my past, and my future, that I no longer know if I still have a true memory.

Did I turn off the computer?

"Indeed, the more we learn about the human memory, the less it seems to fit the stereotyped idea of a simple repository. It seems to be not at all like a storeroom, a library, or a computer core memory, a place where items of information are stored and kept until wanted, but rather presents a picture of a complex, dynamic system that at any given time can be made to deliver information concerning discrete events or items it has had experience with in the past. In fact, human memory does not, in a literal sense, store anything; it simply changes as a function of experience." – Gillian Cohen, *Memory in the Real World*, 1989.

I can easily distinguish memories generated internally from those produced externally by considering plausibility, sense in terms of my knowledge of the world (invisibility is unlikely), context and details: finally, I'd know it if I'd done it.

Memory has been described as being like the veins and channels etched by the passing water into a river bed. Remembering, then, is habitual, with sensory patterns easily following old channels. The difficulty would be to re-educate the structure.

As I watch the water splash against the rocks, or if I even take a photograph of the splashing, I know that I can see much more than I can say. As I watch my mind shifting across these words, recalling memories too numer-

ous to retell, following those which bring me nearer to myself, I know that I am losing many important moments. Touching a pattern more complex than I can articulate.

It's not clear why some memories are preserved.

Madam Torie, the old woman who taught Russian ballet, told me her first memory: Sitting by a white picket fence making mud pies and looking up. That's all.

Water flows from one basin to another and I resist.

Sitting in the sandpit in the garden looking at the sky through the leaves.

Being under wooden stairs with a friend and looking up at the light coming through the cracks.

Light skips across the water, momentary points of burning light. I change my mind.

Grandma tells me to go to sleep on the bus, but I can't. She tells me to make my mind blank. Maybe she describes a long black tunnel. I imagine and go to sleep. I vividly remember entering that blackness.

Light ripples in netted flashes. A web flowing across the surface and touching the bottom, reflecting itself upon the rocks without being visible within the body of the water.

My sister remembers that she had a dog when she was very young, or she used to remember that. She did not have a dog.

Glass casts no visible shadow. I write these words.

WITHOUT A BODY THERE IS NO MURDER. NO DEATH.

During recovery of full consciousness from retrograde amnesia (the loss of memory for events which occurred before the trauma) the more distant memories seemed to return first. Memories for the most recent years were, for a time, so completely lost that she believed herself to be several years younger.

ANGER

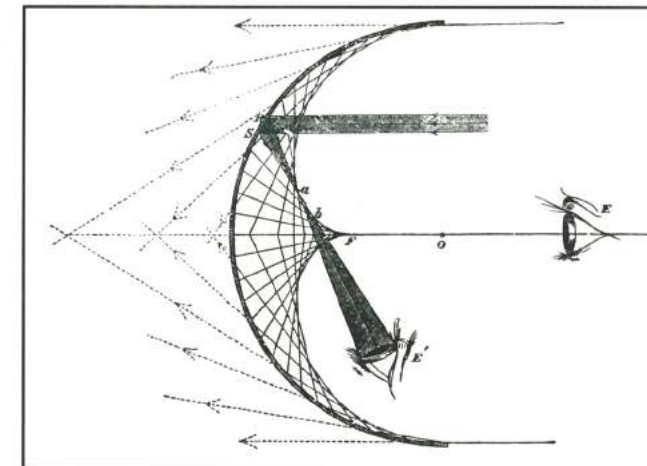
Seeing red, blind with rage. Flushed and furious. The heaving in my chest betrays a turbulent hatred.

VOMIT

I want to so badly. To disgorge my insides. To turn myself inside out. To heave and retch and reject my own heart.

TEARS

I cried. I saw a parade and cried. I watched TV and cried. I walked down the street and cried. I chose a teacup and cried. I woke up and cried. I got out of the car and cried. I watched a leaf fall and cried. I opened a book and cried. I washed my hands and cried. I folded the laundry and cried. I never



All rays reflected in a section of a concave mirror touch what is called a caustic curve. The brightest and most distinct image is formed at the cusp of the curve (F), when seen by an eye (E) on the principle axis. In the case of images seen obliquely, there is always some blurring. This is because the point of contact with the caustic surface is not the same for all rays entering different parts of the pupil of the eye. – modified from *A Textbook of Heat, Sound, and Light*, J.D. Everett.

used to cry before. Now my face is always wet and MY BODY ACHES.

The arrival of the curtain to the stage had a material influence on the structure of the play. The different parts of the action became more distinctly separated. It became possible to begin in the midst of a situation and end in the midst of a situation. The spectator could be rapidly initiated into the action, and more quickly released. – modified from *Freytag's Technique of the Drama*, 1968.

"Odd to think that the piece of you I know best is already dead. The cells on the surface of your skin are thin and flat without blood-vessels or nerve-end-

ings." – Jeanette Winterson, *The Cells, Tissues, Systems and Cavities of the Body*, 1992.

BY BODY

The young girl needs to use the toilet. She has begun to menstruate unexpectedly. She refuses to go into the bathroom while he is in there. He comes out, naked, except for a white face cloth held wrapped around his genitals. He is very angry because, he says, "I have more to hide than you do".

All these things were absorbed incidentally, like the verdant air surrounding my boat, or the landscape flowing over the wind-shield of the car, simultaneously seen and not seen, for I am intent on 'getting there'.

But surely they were absorbed, in a state of distraction. Do these silent packages of memory, secreted within those which are readily recalled, have a controlling power, an effect which binds invisibly?

Can you tell the swimmer from the swim? You must attend to the invisibility.

She was four years old. A little girl with a bare bottom, sitting on the toilet in a dirty, unfinished bathroom. Afraid to move for fear that she would die, or at least disappear. Was something happening in the other room? "I don't remember."

Don't listen. Don't move. Is someone looking? Who?

Your power is that you don't hear. Don't see. Your power is obliviousness.

The child begins to menstruate. A bloody curtain is drawn.

I do not look directly at myself as I look at you, as you can look at yourself. (I use a mirror to see my genitals.) I operate with a double vision, but I know that my life is lived at the edges of these optics, in the blurred ring between the two.

Fillette, the vagina is also a sheath formed around the stem of a plant, by the base of a leaf. You can simply pick it and look at it, tuck it under your arm. ■



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The Bodies' Voices — Between the Voices, the Images

Lettres à mon père / *Letters to Dad* is a work which speaks to me. It can be interpreted as a collection of memories, remembrances, events, and stories to share. Since 1991, I have witnessed the development of this project. I have seen the various elements of this trilogy unfold in several exhibition spaces. Both complex and refined, this manner of investigating the terrain of individual memory, incorporating fragments of fiction, commenting on the influence of technology in our daily environment and finally diverting certain aspects of these new tools, is nothing if not fascinating.

Letters to Dad tends toward a fragile balance between the material and immaterial. Corrine Corry embraces objects, furniture, books which are at the same time elements of a decor and fragments of a larger text to scan, to decode. The artist works with the presence of these objects: a familiar presence, intrusive, but also a prosaic presence. She depends on a quality of space which can carry the silence, the invisible. It is in this space that the instability of memories intervene, evoked, retold, shared, fabricated and manipulated. It is in this place that the voices inscribe themselves, superimposing themselves to provide an account of an altogether different quality of presence; they evoke a register parallel to experiences profoundly written in a body. These *inhabited* places reveal another way of telling a story (her story), of questioning the images: hers and those of others. The words, the voices, the texts written or read the letters exchanged, all will be methodically archived.

The **1st Act** examines the family. The public is invited to use a computer program to explore the portrait of the father or to turn the pages of a magazine in order to investigate the childhood memories staged by the artist. Here it is literally a question of a *mise en scène* where each element of the *decor* is placed on the stage, a false floor tipped at an angle of 10°. On the one hand, there is the invitation to sit in front of the computer to run through the stories that Corrine Corry offers. On the other, the overwhelming presence of this decor and

the furniture oscillates between presence and illusion. The **2nd Act** examines how memory intervenes in the genesis or the effacement of individual history, of identity. The space of the exhibition recalls the intimacy of a bedroom. It fills with voices, in response the movement of the observer who releases a mechanism allowing himself or herself to hear these voices. Three voices of women; three ages; three presences. A young girl dressed in white retraces stories that the artist has written: these are the blood stories. Several young girls will replace each other. Indifferent to the attention of visitors, each one is in a state of absence which is a virtual madness, in this retreat, in this silence which renders all communication impossible. This presence-absence in this space full of voices becomes progressively enchanting.

The **Entr'acte** offers a portrait which dissolves and resurfaces across various domestic objects. I see a self portrait impossible to fix, revealed by fragments of objects and bits of skin, in a movement of respiration and dissipation.

The **3rd Act** reassembles these three components and all preliminary material from their production; this last act continues to transform this material while suggesting more and more dense links between the different unities. It is *embodied* in an object, a cd-rom. It is the refuge of impressions, images, voices, letters exchanged between the different collaborators. It is the place where we are invited to loose ourselves. It is the place of the archive, the space of recognition. It is a time, a space *recreated* for re-viewing the works which have been exhibited over 7 years. Because finally, *Letters to Dad* is a project which started in 1990-1991.

So the work of Corrine Corry takes as a basis the work of memory and the play of fiction which incessantly intervenes. Differing degrees of objects presence revealing as many degrees of concentration, or of availability to the work, are therefore perceivable: gentle distraction, voluntary forgetting, chronic amnesia, pure detachment. The text has always played a primary role. The writing, and now speech, permits not only the elaboration and the development of concepts underlying the work, but

becomes equally the space where information, impressions, accumulated intuitions, shared stories crystallizes. The artist explores the power of the text to generate numerous forms of *images*: the writing and the different spaces where it is drawn; the role held by the correspondence exchanged between the artist and her collaborators; the translation as re-writing and as an act of interpretation of the work; the symbolic power of the voice which retells the stories *invented* by the artist and the strange sensation obtained by the superimposition of the voices and the stories, in a closed space. Her stories are also the stories of others. Here, the archival dimension (visual, audible, textual) associated with a desire to conserve all traces of the development of a body of work — that which is usually kept out of sight of the visitor — the sometimes trivial details which accumulate make the work different from any other. And further, Corrine Corry, by her generosity, recognizes the authorship of all her collaborators which is at once troubling and engaging.

An unobtrusive work, almost austere. Corrine Corry always keeps a distance from the demonstration of *prowess* associated with technology, with the notions of installation and with performance. Nevertheless, her reflection and research are tributaries of technological developments, a very personal investigation of notions of installation and of performance. For her, the connections are multiple: they divert the user of the research to a unique account. The stories intermingle, shuffle and at times cancel each other. Corrine Corry is an artist who does not insist. To us falls the responsibility of discovering one of the routes in these multiple connections. The complexity is concealed, never put forward, to instead valorise the inscription of the quotidian in the imagination, to indicate the crucial role of the process and that of the inscription of time in a work. The quietness of this work can be disquieting: there is a deafening violence resisting a reading, waiting to be heard. ■

Nicole Gingras

translation: Corrine Corry

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