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Serie Studies in American Literature and Culture

# Extra-Vacant Narratives

Reading Holocaust Fiction  
in the post-9/11 Age

*Alice Balestrino*



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In copertina: Muriel Hasbun, *Only a Shadow?* (1991/94), from the series Saints and Shadows.

*This book is dedicated to  
my mom, my aunt, and all  
the other Vallas of my life –  
they are my extra-vacant  
connection to reality.  
Impossibly yet necessarily.*



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## Introduction.

*I know what the fear is.  
The fear is not for what is lost.  
What is lost is already in the wall.  
What is already behind the locked door.  
The fear is for what is still to be lost.  
Joan Didion, Blue Nights*

### **Taking the Hospital Gown Off the Past Or, Theorizing Extra-Vacancy as Catastrophic Reading.**

In *Exit Ghost* (2007), Philip Roth imagines Nathan Zuckerman's new encounter with Amy Bellette, a WWII European refugee he met in 1956 and whom he fantasized as being Anne Frank in disguise. Their first meeting is recounted in the first novel about Zuckerman, *The Ghost Writer* (1979), and is then renewed in Zuckerman's last novel, set in New York City three years after the September 11 terrorist attacks. When Zuckerman sees her again in 2004, Amy Bellette is "a debilitated old woman with a head half shaved and a disfiguring scar" wearing a hospital gown she "had converted into a dress" (Roth 2007b, 157; 35). She shows the signs of the brain surgery she underwent for a tumor, a condition that not only disfigured her physical appearance but also affected her mental abilities. Zuckerman too copes with the consequences of a "cancerous prostate" treated with an operation that left him impotent and incontinent, and he is also experiencing episodes of "erosion of memory" and "senselessness" (1; 159). Against the background of New York in the aftermath of 9/11, Zuckerman and Amy Bellette are two old and debilitated characters who embody a sense of damage and fragility, as opposed to their younger selves in the 1950s, when she was so attractive to him because of her Holocaust past that their encounter was "rich with promise and expectation" (18).

Upon seeing her after a long time, Zuckerman realizes that Amy Bellette has been his “unknown reason for coming to New York” after “living mostly in solitude for eleven years” in the Berkshires (167; 27). His motive is to “complet[e] a meeting,” to “come back” to “a moment with a young woman who had held such a strong attraction” for him as a way to go back to the liveliness of his past (167). Zuckerman finds himself in a temporal overlapping of his past self and his present self as a ruined version of the old one: “I dialed [her] number now as a divided being no more or less integrated than anyone else, as the fledgling she'd met in 1956 and as the improbable onlooker (with the unforeseeable biography) that he had become by 2004” (150). He projects the same sentiments onto Amy, so much so that he doesn't “know whom to picture at the other end of the line: Amy then or now” (ibid.). Despite his aspirations, the only way Zuckerman and Amy Bellette can be their past selves is by living in their shadows: he measures his current life against the endless possibilities he had when he was younger, while she has been living and conversing with the ghost of her dead lover for thirty years. Their rendezvous, hence, is inspired by a mutual need to recover their past and the promises it nurtured, yet when they meet again, Zuckerman realizes that the “promise and expectation” of their first encounter “had obviously gone very wrong” (18). None of them can remember the restaurant where they arranged to dine and their encounter risks to turn into a missed occasion if not for Zuckerman, who decides to go and visit her at her place, a shabby apartment in a dismal complex where “the odor permeating the interior passages . . . could have been from the urine of cats or rats or from both” (166). “Coming back” to each other and to their previous selves “after that span of time, and after [he's] had cancer and she's had cancer, [their] clever young brains both the worse for wear” proves to be if not impossible, at least a disheartening and abortive choice (167).

The cipher of this doomed reunion is visible from the very first time Zuckerman spots Amy Bellette in a luncheonette in 2004: the hospital gown she wears. On her vulnerable figure, out of context, the hospital gown makes Zuckerman think that “either she's impoverished or she's crazy” and it also inscribes their second encounter within the semantics of medicine, especially because when he sees her, Zuckerman

has, like her, just come out of Mount Sinai Hospital (18). The hospital gown introduces a once attractive young woman now debilitated, a once “integrated” being now operated on, dissected. Shifting the paradigm of my reading from the literal to the metaphorical, Amy Bellette’s hospital gown seems to resignify the Holocaust past she has always represented in Roth’s literary universe: once a foundational (and hence “attractive”) aspect of her identity –subject to some sort of alteration as early as 1956, when Zuckerman made up a different, almost iconic version of her biography – now peculiar to an “impoverished,” ghost-like figure. Amy Bellette’s hospital gown denotes a striking correlation between the symbolic realm of illness and treatment and the cultural formation and circulation of US Holocaust memory; in 2004, “the astonishing reappearance and pathetic reconstitution of Amy Bellette” may reveal that US Holocaust memory has been ill, operated on, exploited and is now in tatters (36). Ultimately, the hospital gown emphasizes the biological implications of national narratives, displaying the post-9/11 medicalization of politics and construction of undesirable, “bare lives” as a biopolitical iteration.

On his part, Zuckerman too is chronically ill and is experiencing different forms of “leakage” as a “failure of function” and a “crisis waiting to alter” him for good (162). The erosion of his memory worsens when he returns to New York for some treatment and walks by “streets [that] appear comic and the people ridiculous. And yet it seem[s] like a real tragedy too” (64): the 9/11 terrorist attacks profoundly changed – both disfigured and debilitated – the city Zuckerman once knew, and the altered urban, political and psychological scenario affects the narrator’s understanding of New York and of his role as a writer now that he is back. Crucial from the beginning to the end of the novel is a critical reflection on the 2004 presidential election that widens the scope of Zuckerman’s inability to grasp the post-9/11 moment to encompass the whole of the US; his physical and mental leakage epitomize the sense of loss and helplessness felt at the national level in the wake of the September 11 attacks, while his desire to recover, to start anew by coming back to the grandeur of the past points to the ideological construction of 9/11 as an exceptional historical threshold for the US as well as to its biopolitical response. As the personification of the post-9/11 US,

Zuckerman looks at Amy Bellette and her Holocaust past as a possible model for the elaboration of a trauma that is personal but also collective, historical, and political. Firmly grounded in this memorial economy, the dispiriting reencounter between Zuckerman and Amy Bellette is the failed encounter between two equally exhausted memories; their unsuccessful rendezvous accounts for the impossibility to resurrect a regulatory (and fictional) narrative of the past to rehabilitate the present.

*Extra-Vacancy: Reading Holocaust Fiction in the Post-9/11 Age* envisions a complementary but different encounter between Holocaust literature and the post-9/11 age. It acknowledges the significance of the Holocaust as the milestone of the hermeneutics of trauma<sup>1</sup> in the post-9/11 memorial poetics, while also interrogating the ideological and cultural implications of this “encounter” which has been consistently advanced in US public discourse and political rhetoric as a means to reinforce the understanding of 9/11 as a transcendental and exceptional “trauma at home.”<sup>2</sup> In this respect, the image of Amy Bellette in a hospital gown hints at the exploitation of a “treated,” ideologically charged version of the past to inscribe post-9/11 Holocaust memory within a socio-cultural entanglement of individual lives and collective

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<sup>1</sup> Countless scholars have theorized the Holocaust’s “uniqueness” in history (cf. Fackenheim 2000), its momentousness as “limit event” (cf. LaCapra 2004), and its “uniquely devastating aspect” as “a radical historical crisis in witnessing” (Felman and Laub, 1992). Furthermore, the Holocaust as historical tragedy has undergone a progressive abstraction from its actual (temporal, spatial, cultural, political) context, and has been dislocated into a theoretical framework which construes it as the epitome of all catastrophes. This paradigm shift is possible and makes sense only insofar as the Holocaust retains its extra-ordinary traits and becomes the traumatic event *par excellence*, a landmark for all subsequent cultural discourses on trauma. On these grounds, the Holocaust has been variously conceived of as “the contemporary master-trauma” (Bond 2015, 99), and “the ‘gold standard’ in the Western memory regime” (Rothberg and Moses 2014, 29).

<sup>2</sup> For a thorough investigation of the conceptual parallels between the September 11 attacks and the Holocaust, see Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*; Dori Laub, “September 11, 2001 – An Event without a Voice” in *Trauma at Home*, edited by Judith Greenberg. For a critical study of the hegemonic dimensions of American Holocaust memory in the post-9/11 age, see Lucy Bond, *Frames of Memory after 9/11: Culture, Criticism, Politics, and Law*.



narratives, of personal times and public spaces, of *bios* and politics. The need to deconstruct such a discursive positioning of Holocaust narratives has motivated the choice of biopolitics as the main theoretical framework of my literary analysis, with the intent to emancipate post-9/11 Holocaust fiction from the normative version of the past as an ever-unfolding onto-political teleology in the present. In other words, in the present study of a selection of Holocaust-centered texts written by American authors in the wake of 9/11, I understand the hospital gown as a biopolitical device produced by and itself reproducing operative adaptations of the past, and I mean to take it off post-9/11 Holocaust literature.

I propose an interpretive method for reading post-9/11 Holocaust fiction that questions the hegemonic capital of these two events from within, because my approach – which I call “extra-vacant” – at once embraces and disputes the correlation between 9/11 and the Holocaust. The dialectics intrinsic in this encounter forms the core of the hermeneutic practice of reading post-9/11 Holocaust narratives “extra-vacantly,” that is by identifying and examining those literary techniques which uncover and put pressure on the discrepancies, the voids, the *vacui* within the Holocaust-9/11 exceptionalist discourse. In this regard, the definition of extra-vacant narratives refers to texts employing self-conscious, meta-fictional techniques showcasing their phenomenological and ontological *lacuna* as a means to perform the authors’ and the readers’ critical agency over the *vacui*. As I interpret it, the concept of the *vacuum* encompasses the 9/11 epistemological emptiness (its indescribability), and the ontological void caused by the destruction of the old, pre-9/11 world order, a condition that facilitated the ideological association between 9/11 and the Holocaust. Conversely, the authors’ and the readers’ critical agency exercised over the *vacuum* turns it into a vacancy. Because of its meta-critical intent, this vacancy is, in fact, an extra-vacancy: a vacant cognition magnifying its vacant genealogy. Also, the adjective “extra-vacant” hints at the word “extravagant” as in experimental, unnatural accountings which engender a de-familiarizing effect in the readers to draw attention to and showcase their vacant position towards the past.

Both occurrences – the Holocaust and 9/11 – have been frequently associated with the idea of “catastrophe.” Building on the etymological double meaning of catastrophe – from ancient Greek *κατὰστροφή*: “to come to an end” and “to overturn” – I recuperate the radical and counterhegemonic character of this word to frame the extra-vacant approach in epistemological terms (ending past theoretical and representational apparatuses) as well as ontological ones (overturning the modalities of the present and inventing new futures). Reading extra-vacantly is a catastrophic enterprise in that it aspires to radically alter the medicalization, that is the biopolitical deployment of Holocaust memory in post-9/11 US. In this respect, reading extra-vacantly means resorting to biopolitical categories which are grounded in and “rebel against” the social control of *bios* at the heart of political modifications: “it is a step that is anything but easy because it would be concerned with bringing life into relation with biopolitics not from the outside – in the modality of accepting or refusing – but from within,” thus crafting a “dimension of constructive deconstruction” (Esposito 2008, 12).

In this book, I draw upon the idea that 9/11 has been consistently connoted and comprehended within the US public sphere as a form of *vacuum*. This stance has enabled the progressive transformation of 9/11 from historical event into ideological construct: the initial perception of the occurrence as unbelievable and unreal, followed by its introjection in the collective consciousness in the form of a *simulacrum* in Baudrillardian terms culminates in its eventual narrativization into a “state fantasy” which adheres to and expands the rhetorical tradition of American exceptionalism. Many scholars in the field of transnational American studies have investigated this latter iteration of American exceptionalism, including Donald Pease who argues that the “Ground Zero” state fantasy reveals the foundational violence of this ideology, a violence resumed in the aftermath of 9/11 for the sake of the Homeland Security State (2011). Along similar lines, William Spanos identifies 9/11 as “the liminal moment of American history that bore witness to the *fulfillment* of the logic of American exceptionalism” (2013, 300). These positions trigger a critical understanding of the exceptionality of the American model as predicated

upon the systemic exceptionalization of violent acts over the course of history as unprecedented, extraordinary, unreal. In turn, these continuous exceptions generate voids to be ideologically coated by and within the state fantasy's representation of the US as exceptional.

It is at this theoretical threshold that biopolitics comes to play a key role in the implementation of the "Ground Zero" state fantasy as an operative component in US policies and, conversely, in its critical deconstruction. Regarding the political deployment of the Ground Zero state fantasy, biopolitics is key because the institutionalization of the exceptionality of Ground Zero seems to be coupled not only with the introduction of a new state fantasy, but also with the establishment in the US of a juridico-political "state of exception" in Agamben's sense – a case I call the "state fantasy of exception(s)." I contend that the state fantasy of exception(s) has been fertile ground for the symbolic association of the exceptionalism of Ground Zero with "The Holocaust" understood as "an ideological representation of the Nazi holocaust" as exceptional (Finkelstein 2000, 3). In this respect, the state fantasy of Ground Zero is an exceptionalist ideology that needs to be historically validated by an external construct, the Americanized version of the Holocaust as the "contemporary master-trauma" (Bond 2015, 99), a "moral reference point . . . explicitly used for the purpose of national self-congratulation" (Novick 1999, 13). The "at once antagonistic and supplementary" relation between these two exceptionalist narratives crafts the interpretive frame of 9/11 as a distinct trauma at home: unintelligible, unimaginable, and exceptional, a contention predicated upon the *auctoritas* of the Americanized Holocaust (Agamben 2005a, 80). In turn, the latter is renovated and re-exceptionalized through new ramifications within American intellectual life. According to Giorgio Agamben, indeed, any state of exception is a biopolitical device based on *auctoritas*, that is "the property" to confer "legal validity on the act of a subject who cannot independently bring a legally valid act into being." In other words, the *auctoritas* authorizes, makes valid a status which is structurally vacant and dependent. Conversely, the *auctoritas* itself is a dependent capacity because, in order to be exercised, it needs an extraneous activity to validate (2005a, 75-76). Hence, the supplementary and mutually exceptionalizing dynamic existing between the ideological

constructs of the Holocaust and Ground Zero in the US. In other words, the exceptionalist exemplum of the Holocaust seems to be the symbolic significance on which the state fantasy of exception(s) of Ground Zero has drawn in order to have 9/11 adhere to the traumatic index of exceptionality.

However, biopolitics can also serve the opposite function and recuperate the agency of the subject against the normative background through the exercise of a constructive deconstruction. In this light, this book aims at reversing the Ground Zero exceptionalism and pursues this de-exceptionalizing intent in reading post-9/11 narratives at critical play with the Holocaust. I aim to reimagine the comparative associations between 9/11 and the Holocaust so that they do not entail a dogmatic comprehension of Ground Zero as exceptional but, in fact, build the case for a counterhegemonic ethics in looking at catastrophic events transnationally and trans-historically. I position my critique of post-9/11 Holocaust literature within a multifaceted, multidirectional<sup>3</sup> framework that intends to question the Ground Zero stage of American exceptionalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the choice of this timeframe, I privilege the analysis of the Holocaust in postmemorial fictions rather than in testimonial literature.<sup>4</sup> These texts are written in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks by Jewish-American authors but, in my discussion, I will not dwell on their ethnic identity and religious specificities as possible decisive traits of their literary endeavors. On the contrary, I aim at investigating the Holocaust through a universalist lens, beyond the margins of a specific cultural sphere and looking into the dynamics that shaped US Holocaust memory in the post-9/11 age as a national project. These authors try to bridge the distance between their historical situatedness and the Holocaust through the exercise of their peculiar postmemorial agency: since their experience of the Holocaust is always already mediated, postmemorial authors are prone to re-elaborating, retelling, and above all reimagining the multifaceted realit(ies) of the Holocaust,

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<sup>3</sup> I refer to Michael Rothberg's notion of multidirectional memory, elaborated in his *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*.

<sup>4</sup> I here refer to Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory in *The Generation of Postmemory; Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*.

thus creating narratives dominated by ontological questions. Therefore, the novels I examine concern and profitably express the ontological instability brought about by the catastrophe, by resorting to narrative strategies which encourage a critical engagement with the Holocaust altogether opposed to passive reception (which is, instead, a component of state fantasies).

This approach may profitably de-centralize, de-territorialize and effectively criticize 9/11 narratives, as suggested by a number of scholars in the field of trauma and memory studies.<sup>5</sup> This de-exceptionalizing effort generates a relocation of the trauma of 9/11 that stretches the rigid, historical and geographical boundaries through which the terrorist attacks are comprehended in post-9/11 fiction (the latter usually restricts its scope to the representation of New York, in the months immediately preceding and/or following the event). In this respect, the discussion of Holocaust-related texts written after the 9/11 attacks may effectively expand the canon of the genre that has come to be defined as “post-9/11 Fiction.” In turn, the dimension of post-9/11 postmemory and its recourse to imagination as aesthetic as well as ethic response to catastrophes could eradicate the Holocaust from the one-dimensional, politicized imagery of the national fantasy and shape a counter-hegemonic, critical reading of post-9/11 Holocaust fiction. Such a model would presuppose an understanding of the genre of “post-9/11 fiction” in chronological and not thematic terms.

By adapting postmemory to my conceptual infrastructure, the notion of the vacancy (as the agency exercised over a vacuum) becomes central not only in ideological terms, but also in methodological and ontological ones. In this regard, the fact that extra-vacant narratives employ self-conscious, meta-fictional techniques showcasing their phenomenological remove and their ontological *lacuna*, encourage authors and readers alike to exercise their own critical agency over the vacuum, which is thus transformed into an extra-vacancy. Thus post-9/11 authors of Holocaust fiction become *auctores* in the Agambenian understanding of the term, as those who incompletely complete an

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<sup>5</sup> The narrative of 9/11 as a “trauma at home” has been investigated, among others, by Richard Gray, Michael Rothberg, Susannah Radstone and Susana Araújo.

insufficiency that always already precedes them (Agamben 1999a, 150). Through a catastrophic reading, extra-vacant narratives prove to be grounded in a contingency which actualizes the impossible through an act of speech in which a subject bears witness to an ontological *lacuna* and to the very impossibility of speech. Contingency is an “operator of subjectification.” Through the de-transcendentalizing act of witnessing that contingency thus implies, the subject becomes an integral *auctor* who turns something possible “into existence” and constitutes a world in which possibility exists and touches (*contingit*) the real (Agamben 1999a, 137).

I will hence read the critical category of the *auctor* in extra-vacant narratives as the antithesis of the *auctoritas* in the claims of the Ground Zero state fantasy of exceptions, in that the *auctor* inverts the sign of the nationalistic, uncritical validation enforced by the *auctoritas* of the Americanization of the Holocaust onto the exceptionalist state fantasy from negative to affirmative. This shift from *auctoritas* to *auctor* represents the biopolitical “deconstructive construction” at the heart of this critical project.

Operating within its own liminality between Ground Zero exceptionalism and Holocaust exceptionality, vacuum and vacancy, the national and the global, the contemporary and the trans-historical, *auctoritas* and *auctores*, my analysis of post-9/11 Holocaust texts seeks to avoid an overdetermination of any of these elements, subversively embracing the imperatives of the American exceptionalist logic in order to investigate and deconstruct from within “a state in which the state of exception (and its biopolitics) [has] become the rule and the camp its political paradigm” (Spanos 2016, 55). Ultimately, this study asks: what does the camp as biopolitical paradigm mean and look like in the post 9/11 age? The theoretical and narrative answers presented are themselves liminal and vulnerable to superimpositions and interferences between the two distinct modes (exceptionalist and counterhegemonic) of connecting the Holocaust and 9/11, but I see this liminality as a critical vantage point. While sometimes multidirectional associations may inadvertently contribute to the ideology that sees post-9/11 Holocaust references as reinforcing the equation between Holocaust exceptionality and Ground Zero exceptionalism, on a closer look the fact that these

narratives work within similar parameters makes them an enabling technology to flip, to reverse the dogmatic analogies into dialogic networks. In other words, these liminal and unsettled texts narrate and concern Amy Bellette's hospital gown only to tear it open and take it off the past.

As noted, extra-vacant narratives allow authors and readers the space and the agency to partake in the multidirectional network that these works aspire to create, sharing the responsibility of being *auctores* themselves. Repositioning the subject (the author and the reader alike) at the center of historical discourse, the texts I will examine inquire into the ethics of postmemorial, post-9/11 witnessing and interrogate the liminal convergence of distinct modalities and multiple temporalities in the contingency of the act of narrating. As a matter of fact, subjectivity is the locus in which "the biopolitical struggle for Being" is fought and the subject is what is at stake in this process (Agamben 1999a, 147). The "weapons used in this biopolitical struggle" are the different categories of modality - possibility, impossibility, contingency, and necessity - which are not "innocuous logical or epistemological categories," but are, in fact, "ontological operators" (146) defining biopolitical experiments concerning the "subjectification and desubjectification" of the subject (148). Building on the centrality of the subject's agency as opposed to the regulatory state fantasy, of the *auctor* as opposed to the *auctoritas*, my literary analysis is structured according to the two parameters which Agamben conceptualizes as "the ontological operator[s] of subjectification" (Agamben 1998, 146): contingency and potentiality, which make the act of testimony possible.

The first two chapters develop the theoretical framework employed for the literary analysis of the following chapters. In chapter one I chart the continuum of the ideological symbolism of the 9/11 vacuum and the political narrativization of the "Ground Zero state fantasy" and I explain the biopolitical implications of what I call "the state fantasy of exception(s)." I also present an example of an affirmative, multidirectional, and extra-vacant juxtaposition of 9/11 and the Holocaust: a panel from Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* in which the artist's family is represented as mice (his aesthetic code

associated with his Holocaust work) withstanding the cowboy boots falling upon them (an allegory of President Bush's post-9/11 cowboy politics).

In chapter two, I further the discussion of the poetics of extra-vacant narratives and of the hermeneutic approach of reading extra-vacantly by introducing in their formulation a number of biopolitical notions that articulate critical tools to address the interplay between the post-9/11 biopolitical paradigms and the onto-political dimension from which they emerged, the Holocaust. I detail the deconstructive construction that is the transition from the *auctoritas* of the Americanization of the Holocaust to the *auctor* as a self-validating subject. I also insist on the ethical ramifications of Holocaust testimony in the post-9/11 age: indeed, postmemorial *auctores* – those who bear witness for the witness, in Derridean terms – comprehend and radicalize the always already vacant connotation of testimony, and it is this lacuna that makes their doubly impossible testimony possible in the end. Ultimately, it is within and through this lacuna that the counter-hegemonic, catastrophic act of reading extra-vacantly can take place. Resorting to another image from *In the Shadow of No Towers*, the “holes that were always there,” I explain that this lacuna is at once the limit and the “hiatus of potentiality” of postmemorial testimony (Hirsch 2019b, 420).

In chapter three, I analyze counterfactuality as a narrative exercise framing the Holocaust within the contingency of circumstances which remained only potential in the actual course of history. Transitioning from its necessity (not [to be able not to be]), the camp becomes a paradigm applicable to other historical realities in order to investigate them from a multidirectional perspective. Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004) and Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007) are two Holocaust uchronias in which vacancy takes the shape of a divergence from actual history and, in so doing, “restores possibility to the past, making what happened incomplete and completing what never was” (Agamben 1999b, 267). The cipher of extra-vacant alternate histories is their divergence from the chronology of the actual world, as well as from a teleological conception of history. Extra-vacant uchronias are acts of speculative thinking which juxtapose, on the same ontological level, actual and potential configurations: they imagine counterfactual



outcomes for historical circumstances. The resulting blended space is framed within blurred ontological contours which outline an estranging and presentist relation to the past. To this extent, the time of extra-vacant uchronias is a remaining time, a time that counters teleological and ideological constructions of the past.

In the fourth chapter, I reflect upon the inverse ontological transition, which is the shift from actual into potential, a passage that rewinds Holocaust necessity into its past contingency as a potential (not to be). In this sense, the Holocaust past is narrated as contemporary, with the potential to elaborate complex inter-traumatic networks beyond the restraints of a strict adherence to chronology and to individual cognitions. These texts are dys-chronias: personal accounts that formally alter the chronology of the events narrated by subverting their ontological hierarchy because characters live simultaneously in more than one temporal dimension, past and present are equally (and impossibly) actual and, thus, they are contemporary. The autofiction of Michael Chabon's *Moonglow* (2016) revolves around the blended figure of the subject as author/narrator/protagonist and is deeply in conversation with an ontologically unstable relation to the dimensions of facts, fiction and memory while insisting on the necessity of undoing normalized narrations of the past. The unnatural temporality of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) at once widens the multidirectional phenomenology of postmemorial authors and reinstates their potentiality which is retained "even when [it is] not actualize[d]" (Agamben 1999b, 245).

In conclusion, the extra-vacant readings of post-9/11 Holocaust fiction that I present in this book foreground and subvert the biopolitical structure sustaining the ideological apparatus that associates the Ground Zero exceptionalism with the exceptionality of the Americanized narrative of the Holocaust. In this view, reading extra-vacantly is a truly catastrophic practice that overthrows and resolves existing conditions, as the final part of the Greek tragedy does - which is called, indeed, "catastrophe." Catastrophe is the moment that both unravels and concludes the dramatic action by "recenter[ing] the flaw on the individual responsible" (Pavis 1998, 44). Similarly, by refocusing the attention on the subject, that is the *auctor*, reading extra-vacantly intends to pursue

this same catastrophic and counterhegemonic move in the epistemics and hermeneutics of post-9/11 Holocaust literature.