

Oki, Michiko (2021) Hunchback as a Visual Paradigm of Violence in Modern Art: Géricault, Dix, and Salomon. In: *The Body in Theory: Essays After Lacan and Foucault*. McFarland, pp. 80-91. ISBN 978-1-4766-7855-9

Hunchback as a Visual Paradigm of Violence in Modern Art: Géricault, Dix, and Salomon

Michiko Oki

This paper aims to explore the image of the hunched posture, which recurrently appears in the works of Théodore Géricault, Otto Dix, and Charlotte Salomon, and to conceptualize it as a visual paradigm that signals the violence of normative power found in contemporary biopolitics as defined by Michel Foucault. I will investigate the significance of the hunched posture in the discourse of the body in modernity, particularly in relation to fragmentation and normalization in social and art-historical contexts. Through this analysis, I seek to articulate the power of the hunched posture to question upright figures as the normalized image of the human being fostered by biopolitical administration.

Working in turbulent times from the French Revolution to the Restoration, Géricault's motifs are expressed in a range of figures from male nudes, warriors, corpses, and bodies with severed limbs to the insane. Those figures mark the woundedness, failure, and deprivation of the canonical image of a socially formulated body, all at the culmination of colonial projects and at the transition from sovereign power to state power. Dix, a returning soldier wounded in the First World War, painted people living on the fringes of society such as veteran cripples, prostitutes, dancers, and circus performers in the decadent reality of postwar Germany. These figures of people living on the fringes were later transferred to his depictions of hunched saints and Christ's Passion after Dix was expelled from the academy by the Nazis. And, finally, Salomon created an autobiographical picture book *Leben? oder Theater?: Ein Singspiel* during her life as a refugee in the South of France before her death in Auschwitz. In this autobiographical work, the difficulties of her life as a German Jewish woman living throughout the 1930s and '40s are

desperately illustrated, involving as well the chains of suicide in her family.

In their works, hunched figures appear among bodies in various violent circumstances, especially among those who are devastated from within by the loss of physical and psychological reality, a loss produced by a collective orchestration of violence over human life in modernity. Collectively, these three artists' representations of devastated hunched figures embody the crucial phases of the development of the modern state. They inscribe the time when sovereign power is increasingly transformed into a dispersed mode of power in biopolitical form, when violence takes shape more and more as an invisible power that normalizes and controls the human body.

Hunching against Uprightness: The Normalization of the Body in Modernity

The body has become a significant topic in cultural studies as well as in art history now that the work of Foucault has been widely applied in the humanities, especially his idea of the “docile body” proposed in *Discipline and Punish* and subsequently elaborated with the idea of biopolitics in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Thanks to the inclusion of Foucauldian concepts into art history, the issue of the body is now discussed as a social and political field necessarily intertwined with the way in which the body is visualized and represented (Mirozoeff 9).

In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault defines biopolitical power as a modern form of power that, from the seventeenth century onward, functions less as a system of punishment or prohibition than as techniques of normalization and control that go well beyond the state as such (133-154). Such power is exercised in everyday life through the disciplining and normalizing of bodies, perceptions, and discourses. Its aim is to create manageable, productive subjects and to fashion them as objects of use. Here power is diffused, its substance is masked,

and its violent intervention in human life becomes too opaque to identify. As power becomes omnipresent and invisible, the place of violence also becomes ubiquitous and more and more difficult to detect, since it takes shape as the many and varied shades of the norm. The omnipotence of violence in the shape of the norm is one of the prominent characteristics of the modern state after the seventeenth century. Sovereign power is transformed into biopower, and the place of power and violence shifts from the extreme states of warfare and death to the physical and psychological dimensions of everyday life. These are the issues at stake in the contemporary Western intellectual, cultural, and artistic contexts since Foucault's theorization of biopolitics has enlightened our perception of the body. In this context, upright human figures appear as a prototype of the biopolitical power exercised over the human body, and the hunched posture emerges as a counter figure ripe for oppression. The posture of hunching becomes an awkward affront to the upright bipedal figure when uprightness is positioned as the canonical (or orthopedically correct) image of a human being. It appears as a posture symbolic of laziness, inaction, or unhealthiness as against the discipline of a healthy, productive, upright body. It suggests a collapse of human power, reminding us of our obscure resemblance to apes. In the process of normalizing the human body and life within modernity, the hunchback acquires a peculiar space, which designates something not quite human but also not quite nonhuman. It is where several creatures coexist and various possible expressions of the human figure surface.

With the rise of taxonomy and statistics, which aim to approach people as population, bipedalism becomes a necessary condition of the human figure not only for biological reasons but also for differentiating human culture from that of animals. The discourse of bipedalism as opposed to quadrupedalism, in which the former is supposed to have evolved out of the latter, was essential in order to determine the criteria of how humans should look. This evolutionary

scenario by which all creatures head towards full humanity perpetually requires the depiction of a canonical human figure. The human figure must be shown as distinctly different from all other creatures but also partially connected to them. When a nearly complete skeleton of an extinct species of genus *homo*, Neanderthal, was discovered in 1908, it immediately provoked an active argument in the field of prehistoric archaeology. Since it was neither ape nor homo sapiens, evolutionists hoped they had found the “missing link” between them in this unknown species of Neanderthal, which looks slightly less than human. French paleontologist Marcellin Boule, who first analyzed the Neanderthal skeleton and reconstructed the specimen, depicted it as having “a less perfect bipedal or upright carriage than in modern Man” (252).¹ As seen in the case of the discovery of the Neanderthal, the bodily feature of the spinal curve and its accompanying hunched posture were employed to differentiate contemporary human beings from other hominine creatures.² The production of the subsidiary category of nonhuman was actively played out in the figure of the hunchback, which, in turn, determined how contemporary humans should appear.

The hunched posture also marks the transition of the human psyche to the disembodied sphere of intelligence. For Sigmund Freud, the human’s adoption of an upright position plays a role in the origin of repression, which, in turn, paves the way to civilization. Prior to elaborating his theory of repression, first in his letters to Wilhelm Fliess in 1897 and later in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud conceived that something organic played a role in the psychological mechanism of repression (*Civilization* 99-100). He claims that the origin of repression is related to the diminution of olfactory stimuli produced by the upright bipedalism. As the human acquires an erect posture, his nose is distanced from the sexual zone and detached from olfactory stimuli involving the smell of excreta. This process of acquiring an erect posture turns the value of

excreta as a part of his own body into disgust, which, in turn, gives birth to intellectual development (*Complete Letters* 280). Upright physical movement advanced the civilizing process by segregating the facial zone, where olfactory, oral, and visual senses are organized, from the sexual zone. The movement of bodily elevation caused a fragmentation of sexuality that brought about a psychological charge of guilt and shame, thus adding a moral dimension to the intellectual process of human development. At the same time, it provoked a desire for purification and cleanliness—that is, a desire to transcend the physical dimension of the human body. Georges Bataille’s bizarre idea of the solar anus and the pineal eye reaching towards the sun “as erect as a penis” would uniquely illuminate what upright movement brings about on the fringes of repression in psychoanalytical term (75).

Muselmann and Hunchback

In the modern process of normalizing the body, the hunched posture is employed to justify the biological, psychological, and ideological necessity of the upright human figure. Thus, the well-disciplined upright body appears as the other side of the drowning hunched figure. This complicit relationship was most tactically materialized in Nazism, the extreme formation of sovereign power under a totalized biopolitical administration. Foucault defines Nazism as the most immediate combination of the disciplinary power of biopolitics and the fantasies of the blood myth. Under this administration, the human body was reduced to the biological existence of the population, radically exposed to a political field of discipline and domination (*History of Sexuality* 149-150).

It is not a coincidence that the well-disciplined upright body, most blatantly seen in visual works or films produced in the Nazi era such as *Triumph of the Will* (1934) or *Olympia* (1938), appears alongside the so-called *Muselmann* in the concentration and extermination camp.

Muselmann was the term used by fellow prisoners in the camp to refer to those who were physically and mentally debilitated by malnutrition or illness and who became absent-minded, bending over as if in Muslim worship. *Muselmann* is the most radical manifestation of “bare life” in an extreme realization of the biopolitical paradigm, to which all who live in contemporary society are potentially exposed in one way or another (Agamben 85). Erik Vogt precisely states the increasing need to cite the camp in contemporary intellectual practices: “the inhabitant of Nazi concentration camps is not the other to modern society, but its dark symbol” (79). In a sense, the hunchback is an uncanny double of the normalized upright human figure, a double that makes visible the invisible violence of the norm. This symbolic dimension exemplified by the hunched existence of *Muselmann* informs my attempt to conceptualize the hunchback as a visual paradigm that signals the violence of contemporary biopolitics. This visual paradigm is explored in particular in my discussion of Salomon, whose work and life as a victim of the camp embody the height of biopolitical violence.

Fragmented Bodies in Modern Art

In modernity, the process of fragmenting and dehumanizing the body is the condition for the reformation of the human body and human life as one biological continuum and as a utilitarian unit of labor. The organic totality of the body, the ideal body as conceived throughout ancient Greece to the Renaissance and then to the Classical period, has broken down. The idea that the human body is never complete and harmonious but a disjunctured entity has become fundamental to this new discourse. In fact, art historians such as Linda Nochlin have contextualized the loss of the totality and the fragmentation of the human body as part of the process of modernity. In this discourse, the breakdown of the conventional approach to the representation of the body has been given both a negative and a positive narrative in terms of

actual bodily mutilation and the body's social and psychological implications (Nochlin 23). From the actual decapitation of the king during the French Revolution to the experience of disintegration in the fluid reality of modern life under capitalism, fragmentation signifies revolutionary strategies in both political and artistic spheres. This fragmentation can be most evidently seen in the representation of devastated bodies in the works of Géricault and Dix, as I will discuss later.

The body in modernity carries the stigma of castration and wounding resulting from historical trauma. At the same time, the disintegrated body serves as a foundation for the new understanding of the unified body, which can be seen in avant-garde movements in general such as Surrealism, Futurism, Cubism, and Constructivism. The artists involved in these movements attempted to "recover" the lost totality of the human body through a classical aesthetic after the First World War, which literally fragmented and destroyed human bodies on an unprecedented scale through the use of new technologies. These art movements sought new understandings of the body in fragmentation and in the invention of new forms of synthesis to incorporate abnormal bodies (Carden-Coyne 31-32).

In this context of modern art, which deconstructs/reconstructs the body in a dialectical tension, I explore the allegorical figure of the hunchback as one critical paradigm of the body in modernity, for it interrupts the schema of the upright body as an elevating biopolitical norm. In the following sections, I will investigate the figure of the hunchback in an analysis of paintings by Géricault, Dix, and Salomon, an analysis whose aim is to illuminate the violence of a scheme of uprightness that perpetually neglects the vulnerable physical reality of the human being.

Théodore Géricault at the Wreck of the Enlightenment

In Géricault's painting *Le Naufragé* (1817-1818), known as a study for *Le Radeau de la*

Méduse (1818-1819), a naked man exhibiting an enormous sense of fatigue is just about to emerge from the boiling sea. His muscular body is so tense that the flesh appears to ripple and swell, as if it could burst open the next moment. His hunched torso is an exaggerated representation of heaving muscle distinct from the rest of the body, which is correctly articulated. The muscle is strangely animated, as if it were going to overcome his whole body. In contrast to the roughness of the sea and the rippling of his muscles, he embodies a great sense of exhaustion and resignation, clambering over the rock to hold onto it. Here there is neither the heroic atmosphere of survival nor human victory over the wild force of nature. There is only an excess of energy for which there is no outlet, gradually taking over his masculine body. This peculiar juxtaposition of drowning fatigue and excessive energy is typical of the hunched figures appearing throughout Géricault's figurative paintings.

Throughout his career, Géricault worked with great enthusiasm on the representation of the male body, mostly in the nude, in an anatomical precision reminiscent of the neoclassical style. Among his paintings are quite a few hunched or bent figures whose torsos are mostly covered by excessive muscle. In the series of male nudes *Académie d'Homme* (1816-1817), some male figures are depicted in a powerfully masculine hunched posture with their spines curved flexibly, figures that apparently look like those well trained ideal male bodies inspired by classical sculptures. These masculine hunched men also appear in works such as *Paysage à l'Aqueduc (Le Soir)* (1818) and *Scène de Déluge* (1812), one of the series of shipwreck pictures along with *Le Naufragé*.

All of these hunched postures of masculine men culminate in Géricault's masterpiece *Le Radeau de la Méduse*. As is well known, it depicts the nightmarish scene of survival after the shipwreck of the *Méduse*, which sailed from Rochefort, France, for Senegal in 1816. It was a

disaster often ascribed to the corruption and incompetence of the restored French monarchy and its colonial project. In this picture is the figure of a man that crystalizes the imagery of the hunched figure appearing throughout Géricault's paintings. At the end of the row of bodies diagonally orchestrating a dramaturgy of survival in a second of emotional sublimation is one man sitting hunched and facing opposite the man who is the focal point and who is waving towards a distant ship. Everyone except this hunched man is lost in emotional upheaval and the hope for survival. The hunched man, on the other hand, stares into the air indifferently, isolated from the drama of despair with a sense of silent but profound anger.

The intensity of *Le Radeau de la Méduse* is largely due to two focal points: the gaze of the hunched man and the back of the man waving towards the ship. Here a sharp contrast between self-referential distanciation and oblivious absorption plays a part in composing the picture. Evidently Géricault's intention was to endow this hunched man with a significant role. The mass of people on the raft makes an ensemble, weaving a narrative of a disastrous event that Géricault endeavored to imagine by interviewing survivors, sketching corpses in the hospital, and studying severed limbs and heads at the asylum. But, with his angry and fatigued detachment from his surroundings, the hunched man breaks into the narrative of the disastrous shipwreck of the *Méduse*, undoing the structural order that holds together the readability of the scene. The hunched man is sitting in the middle of decomposition, from which the last vestiges of the vital force left on the raft are squeezed upward through the ascending piles of bodies to the waving man. As if he were countering the waving man, who embodies the force of survival, he has his back turned to the roaring energy of life, an ultimate state of being among those who are drowning. Here again drowning fatigue and excessive energy coincide just as they do in *Le Naufragé* in the figure of a hunched man.

As Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby argues, *Le Radeau de la Méduse* embodies a complex facet of France's body politic built around colonialism at that time. Among passengers taken on the raft, the majority were soldiers who were mostly the remnants of the Revolutionary army of citizen soldiers. These soldiers who joined the colonial regiments were poor, uneducated, criminal, or foreign, and thus they were considered "the dregs of the French army" and morally degraded (172). Because of this way of viewing them, the soldiers sent to France's colonies were not considered as representatives of their country but as a potential threat that had to be exiled from it. By the time of the shipwreck of the *Méduse*, rather than a conquest of civilization over savage, the colonies represent "aliens," i.e., nonhumans as opposed to humans. The significance of the colonies was extended from the geographical "outside" of black slaves to a cultural/social "outside" of degraded soldiers as well as criminals, foreigners, and political prisoners. These colonial "aliens" needed to be exiled not only from home but also from mankind in order for French citizens to secure their own humanity, and this preservation of their own humanity was accomplished by generating the inhuman within themselves and excluding it as "alien." The social disorder caused by the revolutionary upheavals exposed a mechanism for maintaining the modern state, a mechanism founded on the generation of a norm. Thus, the passengers on the raft are a crystallization of a complex political agenda reflecting the self-interest of the restored monarchy and a body-politic constructed on a system of inclusion/exclusion supported by colonial projects.

As is well known, later in his career Géricault drew a number of severed limbs and heads as well as portraits of the insane. In these motifs, he explored representations of the body detached from any dignified moral posture that guarantees a normative social face. His turn to the nonhuman quality of the human body is significant. On the one hand, *Le Radeau de la*

Méduse shows his democratic vision to support society's most marginalized bodies through his idealized representation of a group of people excluded from a normative society, fighting for their survival and claiming visibility for their existence.³ On the other hand, through the suspension and lassitude accumulated in the hunched man, *Le Radeau de la Méduse* shows Géricault's increasing curiosity about a place where identity construction through body image fails.

As Norman Bryson argues, the fatigue perpetuated in Géricault's male figures is an allegorical expression of the breakdown of masculinity that structures Western political thought as it culminated in the Enlightenment and subsequently became aligned with the colonial project (228-259). Géricault's hunched postures surface precisely in the midst of masculine male bodies that rule the world. They signal a place where the enlarged masculinity of humanism, of the Enlightenment, replaces the sovereignty of a king with the white male as a normative biological category upon which mankind is classified. Géricault's hunched figures mark a shift from the violent exploitation of another's life to one's own, from a force capable of conquering the savage "other" with the power of civilization to a force capable of generating the "other" within oneself. In Géricault's work, the hunched posture foreshadows the place of dehumanization at the turn of the eighteenth century, when people were potentially inserted into a domain where their bodies were normalized and colonized by the force of biopower.

Otto Dix in the Aftermath of the First World War

The well-known characters of Otto Dix's paintings—sailors, circus performers, dancers, prostitutes, soldiers in the battlefield, veterans, and cripples on the street—are all extremely deformed, and among these characters on the fringe, hunched figures appear. They show in a comical and satirical manner the ugliness, misery, and decadence of human bodies whose

humanity is stripped away in German society in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. Dix's materialist curiosity regarding a fundamental uncanniness in human beings is largely drawn from his experience of the First World War, in which he served as a non-commissioned officer of a machine gun unit.

In *Prager Straße* (1920), a hunched man sitting on the street looks more like a puppet than a human with his hollow eyes and patchwork body of prosthetic wooden limbs. His stopgap limbs made out of pieces of wood are miserably primitive, almost of no practical use. In the foreground, a man in a clean suit with a bowler hat is swaggering about, acting ten-feet tall, but he has no lower half of his body. He sits on a wheeled board with sticks in his hands that he uses to propel himself forward. Behind him, partial bodies of mannequins displayed in the show-window wear beauty aids such as corsets and bust improvers—techniques of disciplinary intervention in the female body to achieve an upright torso—oddly juxtaposed with the hunched, castrated male body.

As a returning wounded soldier from the First World War, Dix himself was very much aware of the veteran's ambiguous position as the site of contemporary neurosis in which social fear is accumulated. Spectacle and simulacrum are generated around social fear of castration and dehumanization, which is politically malleable in the face of the normalization of human life and body (Fox 255-256). Even the most horrific experience of psychological and physical pain can be objectified into a commodity for display. It can be used for identity construction as a patriotic self-sacrifice or simply put up for sale as a spectacle of strange, hybrid creatures that are half object and half human. Dix's humorous depiction of the politics of shame in *Prager Straße* is also explicit in *Die Kriegeskrüppel* (1920) and *Der Streichholzhändler I* (1920). In these images, he portrays tragically how the veterans' empty pride remained in their broken bodies.

From the 1930s and throughout the 1940s, particularly after being dismissed by the Nazis from the Dresden Art Academy, Dix recurrently painted the motifs of Death, the Temptation of Saint Anthony, and Saint Christopher in strong allegorical tones. Hunched figures appear throughout those paintings. For example, *Triumph des Todes* (1934) is a collage of various figures such as the soldier, the war cripple, the commercial sex worker, and the hunched old woman. In the center, Death is wearing a crown and wielding a huge scythe as if he were going to mow down the protagonists. A golden light with blooming flowers and a bird's nest containing eggs warmly illuminate the area in the foreground, where young lovers are in sexual ecstasy and a baby is crawling. Next to the crawling baby is an old, hunched woman digging in the ground, perhaps to plant something or to dig a grave. A blind war cripple without legs is looking up towards the image of Death, guided by a barking dog next to him. There is a sense of circular movement among these protagonists as if life and death were perpetually penetrating each other in a Möbius strip-like manner. Here the hunched figures sprawl on the threshold between life and death, disturbing its equilibrium.

In *Die Sieben Todsünden* (1933), the hunched, old woman transforms into a witch on whose bent back a little boy is sitting, wearing a mask-like pale face that obviously alludes to Hitler. According to Dix's notes on this painting, the witch represents Avarice, who carries the whole theater of the other six figures of sins on her hunched back (Hartley 208-209). The iconography of *Die Sieben Todsünden* evolved into *Die Versuchung des Heiligen Antonius* (1937) and *Die Versuchung des Heiligen Antoniu II* (1940). In these paintings, the image of the hunched witch in *Die Sieben Todsünden* is replaced by Saint Anthony's enduring supernatural biblical temptation during his ascetic life in the desert. On his hunched back, he carries hallucinatory monstrous creatures representing his earthly desires and fears in the ultimate state

of physical debilitation.

In *Der Heilige Christophorus I* (1938) -*VI* (1944), Dix recurrently depicts the biblical story of Saint Christopher when he takes a little Christ child on his back across the river. As he walks, the river swells, and the little Christ child gets heavier and heavier until Saint Christopher notices that this little child is someone gravid with importance. The little Christ child is supremely heavy because he carries sins from the entire world, and Saint Christopher excessively hunches in order to carry such a heavy entity. In his later years, Dix started to draw the passion of Christ in an emphatic expressionist style such as *Ecce Homo III* (1949) and *Kreuztragung* (1960). Saint Christopher, who was bending over to carry a heavy little Christ, is now Christ himself, who is carrying a heavy cross on his hunched back. Looking closely at how Dix depicts the little Christ on Saint Christopher's back, we can see the consistent narrative that he attributes to the hunched figures: his depiction of Christ, here, looks dominant and authoritarian rather than divine and merciful. Furthermore, Saint Christopher's facial expression has taken on a look of discomfort, as if he were annoyed by having to carry a passenger on his back, rather than one of grateful epiphanic astonishment.

Accused of being a "degenerate artist" in his later career, Dix cloaked his social satire in religious garments, marking a parallel among the social outcast, including the war victim, a saint's martyrdom, and Christ's Calvary. In Dix's work, the place where the hunched posture appears is consistently related to the dominance of power under which someone's life becomes necessarily hunched both in a political and in a religious system. Dix worked on the issue of violence more and more allegorically after the Nazis came to power and turned their symbolic power into actual violence. Thus, from *Triumph des Todes* (1934) to *Der Heilige Christophorus VI* (1944), a swastika appears as a symbol of power in the shape of those figures sitting on

someone's hunched back with their limbs spread—Death, Hitler, Woman, and even Christ, which are eventually led to the cross. Far from affirming religion in these shifting figures sitting on a hunched back, Dix consistently criticizes the authoritarian politics that exercised oppressive power on human life in his time. He traces this form of politics back to the cross, the symbol of Christianity now swollen into a gigantic emblem of power systematically overlaid on people's lives. This power, imposing notions of sin and guilt, evolves into techniques of discipline and punishment fundamental to modern biopolitical power. The hunched figures in Dix's work remind us of a persistent recurrence of the grotesque physical reality that cannot be transformed into the canonical upright human figure—a physical existence particularly exposed in the postwar social confusion in Germany throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Charlotte Salomon at the Rise of the Nazis

In the last image of her autobiographical series of paintings *Leben? oder Theater?: Ein Singspiel* (1941-1942), Salomon painted herself sitting with her back to us, engaged in drawing a landscape by the sea. On her hunched back appear dominantly inscribed the words "Leben oder Theater." She seems unaware of the inscription, as if she were like one of the condemned people in Kafka's *In the Penal Colony* on whose backs the particular law each one has violated is inscribed by a horrific machine of execution. Throughout *Leben? oder Theater?*, the hunched posture appears on all of the major protagonists of the story including this one, who carries the title of the work on her back.

Salomon created the book entitled *Leben? oder Theater?: Ein Singspiel* in 1941 during her stay in the South of France as a refugee escaping from Nazi-occupied Berlin. It is a picture book comprised of 769 autobiographical *gouache* paintings, which are divided into three sections: a Prelude, a Main Section, and an Epilogue. The paintings are accompanied by

corresponding narratives, dialogues, lyrics, or suggestions of musical melodies. As a whole, it is presented like a storyboard for an operatic performance. Images are painted in an expressionist style, and their composition is in the manner of a comic strip. The images and texts describe factual scenes from Salomon's public and private lives as well as her own psychological visions. They deal mainly with the difficulties in family relationships, love affairs, and the position of German Jews in the immediate aftermath of the rise of the National Socialists to power. Salomon's struggle against the suicidal tendency in her family is most evident.⁴ In contrast to the brightness of southern France full of sun and sea, where she worked intensely on the book, a sense of distress and anger rings out from the series. Her rough expressionist style and fragmented pictorial composition suggest an impending emergency, as if she had to make an urgent statement in the face of the injustice of her precarious life.

In the course of Salomon's narrative reconstruction of her life, the hunched posture repeatedly appears in the figuration of the three protagonists, particularly in the scene related to death and creation: Salomon herself, engaged in painting; Salomon's grandmother, obsessed with fear at the suicides perpetuated in her family; and her lover Alfred Wolfsohn, Salomon's stepmother's German Jewish voice trainer, absorbed in the creation of operatic works. For instance, in the Prelude Section, as inscribed in the text on the images, the grandmother is contemplating how full of suicide her tragic life has been, her brother killing himself first, followed by her mother and then her two daughters (JHM no. 4254, 4300).⁵ As her thinking tragically unfolds, she hunches her shoulders and clasps her hand to her head. In another image from the Epilogue, Salomon is taking care of her grandmother, who already had attempted suicide several times by then (JHM no. 4867, 4868). Here the hunched figure is Salomon herself, who had just found out through her grandfather about the truth of her mother's death. In the

Epilogue section, most of the paintings are expressed in rough, violent brushstrokes without any detail, showing a sense of despair and anger. A major part of the Epilogue concerns her grandmother's agony in fighting against her own suicidal impulses. In one of the scenes in which Salomon takes care of her grandmother, Salomon sits beside the bed, and her figure appears as nothing but a colored shadow with her back severely arched (JHM no. 4867, 4868). Several images later, her grandmother has killed herself by jumping out of the window.

While Salomon's grandmother bends over out of her anxiety and her obsession with death, Wolfsohn and Salomon hunch over in their creative activities. Alfred Wolfsohn, who appears under the name Amadeus Daberlohn, is depicted writing a manuscript in the Main Section (JHM no. 4685, 4693). As he becomes more absorbed in his writing, he starts to hunch over more and more. Salomon herself also appears hunched when she is intensely engaged in painting (JHM no. 4319, 4348, 4351, 4354, 4599, 4600, 4708). In Salomon's work the hunched figures reflect the extreme state of the human psyche both when facing death and when absorbed in creation. Here we can see her artistic attempt to displace and transform her suffering into the form of a narrative structure. She particularly explores the therapeutic and creative effect of the inhuman dimension of the human manifesting itself in extreme experiences such as the loss of her family, the suicidal impulse that haunts her kin, and the worsening situation of Nazi violence.

Behind Salomon's hunched figures are Wolfsohn's theories. Wolfsohn plays an especially profound role in Salomon's artistic development, and, in a sense, *Leben? oder Theater?: Ein Singspiel* is an application of his theory of voice.⁶ Wolfsohn was a pioneer in the realms of voice research and training, exploring the possibilities of the human voice not only as an instrument of theatrical and artistic expression but also as psychic development and therapy. He was horrified and fascinated by his experience of hearing the cries of dying soldiers during

the First World War as well as the voices broadcast from elsewhere in Hitler's Berlin. Drawing on this aural experience, he envisioned the nature and possibilities of the voice as an embodiment of a non-linguistic, inhuman dimension in the human being that is able to reach the unconscious and extend the psychic capacity to deal with the fear and trauma caused by radical exposure to violent circumstances.⁷

Paul Newham, himself a practitioner of Wolfsohn's method, notes that Wolfsohn's method is particularly underpinned by Jung's concept of "shadow," which points to "the darker and down-pointing part of the personality" (329). It reveals what is below the social face: the animalistic/animistic state of the human being. Having access to this "shadow" is a way to sublimate the experience of death into a source of expressive energy able to revitalize life. Most importantly, for Wolfsohn, "shadow" appears mediated by "a living corpse" such as he himself had witnessed and experienced in the extremity of war (Newham, *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 325). This "shadow," this human yet nonhuman living corpse to which Wolfsohn was exposed in the war (perhaps it appeared to him something like the *Muselmann*), lurks in Salomon's work as the hunched figures of Wolfsohn, of herself in the act of expression, and of her grandmother facing her fear of death.

In 1939, Salomon escaped to the South of France; subsequently in 1943, she was sent to Auschwitz and gassed to death on the day of her arrival. Ironically, the hunched figures in Salomon's work, which were inspired by Wolfsohn's creative, therapeutic, "good" living corpses, end up prefiguring the systematic appearance of their own darkest side: the helpless, speechless, drowning hunched figure of the *Muselmann* in the camp. The tremendous capacity of the inhuman within the human to nurture the creative lives of Wolfsohn and Salomon is both realized and atomized in the total biopolitical power exercised on human life in the camp. In a

sense, Salomon's hunched figures bear witness to the secret of biopolitics: the systematic invention of the inhuman within the human as a source of exploitation. Her hunched characters emerge out of an allegorical affinity between the living corpse created by a war and the *Muselmann* in the camp, where the human body is dehumanized for the sake of extracting the biopolitical substance somewhere between life and death.

Concluding Remarks

This paper examined the violence peculiar to normative power in contemporary biopolitics, especially since the turn of the nineteenth century, and its allegorical expressions in the hunched figures in the works of Géricault, Dix, and Salomon. The work of these three artists revolves around a threshold opened up by biopower somewhere between life and death where nonhuman, hunched figures dwell: the survivors of shipwrecks, guillotined heads and limbs, returning soldiers, war cripples, and victims of the camp. These hunched figures illuminate the distortion fundamental to the construction of modern human subjectivity. The hunchback appears to be, or is assumed to be, the other of the normalized upright human figure, for the hunchback's body radically exposes its docility and vulnerability within the mechanism imposed for normalizing human life, perpetually generating a distortion between human and nonhuman, activity and paralysis, that permeates the world from the concentration camp to contemporary society. But the hunchback is not, in fact, our other, and when we realize this, we might be filled with horror or dread, reminded of a deformed image of ourselves (of our own hunched sphere of "bare life") and fearful of losing our consistency as an upright human subject. At the same time, however, we are irresistibly fascinated, haunted, and enlightened by this dark realization that bridges the gap between victims and witnesses, observed and observers.

By discussing the hunched figures in these art works from the perspective of the body in art history and critical theory, particularly that of biopolitics, my aim has been to explore the interdisciplinary methodology needed to address the violence of the norm that is not necessarily physically traceable or even symbolically intelligible. The creaturely dimension of human life that is rearticulated through biopolitical discourses elucidates not only the biological/technological but also the symbolic inscription of life into the realm of power relations. Here the literary imagination and the rhetorical figurations are at work in narrating life, increasingly resembling the fictional/allegorical qualities that structure works of art or literature. In this symbolic dimension embedded within the violence of the norm exercised by biopolitical power, art reveals its critical possibility to make the invisible or symbolic modes of violence intelligible.

Endnotes

¹ Boule's intention was to juxtapose human and Neanderthal as two independent species and to argue against the revolutionist view in general, which perpetually looks for the missing link in order to orchestrate the biological hierarchy with the human sitting atop. As for Boule's anti-revolutionist position, see Hammond (15-17).

² Later comprehensive studies of other Neanderthal raised questions regarding the way Boule's analysis characterizes the Neanderthal primarily by its hunched posture. The lack of curvature necessary for a fully erect posture in the skeleton of the Neanderthal that Boule reconstructed was proven to be the product of a pathological deformation (Straus and Cave 348-363). For the cultural representation of the Neanderthal, in newspaper articles, that reflects the complexity of

the caveman as not only a scientific but also a political and religious site onto which various desires and morals were projected, see Sommer.

³ For the leftist politics implied in Géricault's representation of colonial bodies in *La Méduse*, see Ryan and Chenique.

⁴ As for the analysis of Salomon's work in terms of the issue of Jewish women in relation to modernity and suicide, see Buerkle and Pollock.

⁵ Each image in *Leben? oder Theater?: Ein Singspiel* is numbered with JHM, a reference to the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam, which houses Salomon's work.

⁶ For an analysis of the influential relationship between Wolfsohn and Salomon particularly focusing on Wolfsohn's aesthetic theory as described by Salomon in the texts of *Leben? oder Theater?: Ein Singspiel*, see Timms.

⁷ For a detailed study of Wolfsohn's theory of voice, see Newham, "Jung and Alfred Wolfsohn" and *The Singing Cure*.

Works Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Zone Books, 1999.
- Bataille, Georges. *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*. Translated by Allan Stoekl, et al., U of Minnesota P, 1985.
- Boule, Marcellin and Henri V. Vallois. *Fossil Men: A Textbook of Human Palaeontology*, Thames and Hudson, 1957.
- Bryson, Norman. "Géricault and Masculinity." *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, edited by Norman Bryson, et al., Wesleyan UP, 1994, pp. 228-259.
- Buerkle, Darcy. "Historical Effacements: Facing Charlotte Salomon." *Reading Charlotte Salomon*, edited by Michael P. Steinberg and Monica Bohm-Duchen, Cornell UP, 2005, pp. 73-87.
- Carden-Coyne, Ana. *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* Oxford UP, 2009.

- Chenique, Bruno. "On the Far Left of Géricault." *Théodore Géricault: The Alien Body: Tradition in Chaos*, edited by Serge Guilbaut, et al., Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 1997, pp. 94-114.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Penguin, 1991.
- . *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Penguin, 1998.
- Fox, Paul. "Confronting Postwar Shame in Weimar Germany: Trauma, Heroism and the War Art of Otto Dix." *Oxford Art Journal*, vol. 29, 2006, pp. 247-267.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, translated by James Strachey, et al., Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1961, pp. 64-148.
- . *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1877-1904*. Translated and edited by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, Belknap Press, 1985.
- Grigsby, Darcy Grimaldo. "Cannibalism Senegal: Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*, 1819." *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France*, Yale UP, 2002, pp. 165-235.
- Hammond, Michael. "The Expulsion of the Neanderthals from Human Ancestry: Marcellin Boule and the Social Context of Scientific Research." *Social Studies of Science*, vol. 12, 1982, pp. 1-36.
- Hartley, Keith. *Otto Dix 1891-1969*, Tate Gallery, 1992.
- Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *Bodyscape: Art, Modernity and the Ideal Figure*. Routledge, 1995.
- Newham, Paul. "Jung and Alfred Wolfsohn." *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, vol. 37, 1992, pp. 323-336.
- . *The Singing Cure: An Introduction to Voice Movement Therapy*, Rider, 1993.
- Nochlin, Linda. *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor of Modernity*, Thames and Hudson, 1994.
- Pollock, Griselda. "Theater of Memory: Trauma and Cure in Charlotte Salomon's Modernist Fairytale." *Reading Charlotte Salomon*, edited by Michael P. Steinberg and Monica Bohm-Duchen, Cornell UP, 2005, pp. 35-72.
- Ryan, Maureen. "Liberal Ironies, Colonial Narratives and the Rhetoric of Art: Reconsidering Géricault's *Radeau de La Méduse* and the *Traité Des Nègres*." *Théodore Géricault: The Alien Body: Tradition in Chaos*, edited by Serge Guilbaut, et al., Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 1997, pp. 18-51.
- Salomon, Charlotte. *Charlotte Salomon: Life? or Theatre?*. Translated by Leila Vennewitz, Royal Academy of Arts, 1998.
- Sommer, Marianne. "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Neanderthal as Image and "Distortion" Early 20th-Century French Science and Press." *Social Studies of Science*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2006, pp. 207-240.
- Straus, William L. Jr., and A. J. E. Cave, "Pathology and the Posture of Neanderthal Man." *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, vol. 32, no. 4, 1957, pp. 348-363.
- Timms, Edward. "Creative Synergies: Charlotte Salomon and Alfred Wolfsohn." *Reading Charlotte Salomon*, edited by Michael P. Steinberg and Monica Bohm-Duchen, Cornell UP, 2005, pp. 105-113.
- Vogt, Erik. "S/Citing the Camp." *Politics, Metaphysics, and Death: Essays on Giorgio Agamben's Homo Sacer*, edited by Andrew Norris, Duke UP, 2005, pp. 74-106.