

## Abandoned Apartment Building



1997/98, chromogenic print, 18 x 36 inches

—Stan Douglas

## Alma's Beauty College



1997/98, chromogenic print, 18 x 36 inches

—Stan Douglas

## Ammonia

A simple compound composed of nitrogen and hydrogen,  $\text{NH}_3$ , or ammonia, is the precursor to gunpowder and fertilizer. (Tim McVeigh of Oklahoma City fame, graphically demonstrated the connection between the two). Ammonia is also used to swab decks, and in my family it symbolizes the cleared-off decks of the messy past; a deliberate attenuation of the unprecedented savagery of the twentieth century.

One such attenuation is the vague story bequeathed me by my grandmother (now passed on) about her “cousin” Fritz Haber, the famous German chemist. According to my grandmother, Hitler himself met with Haber and asked him to continue his work for the Reich. “But I’m a Jew,” Haber protested. “I decide who’s a Jew around here and who’s not,” the Führer exclaimed. In my grandmother’s narrative, Haber “escaped” to Switzerland, where he died of what was officially a heart attack, though she maintained that he was really assassinated by the Nazis.

The story of a heroic family confrontation with Hitler was kicking around in my mental attic for years. A few weeks ago, I was building a website for my course in twentieth-century history at the Polytechnic. With World War I on my mind, I detoured into a few searches for my lost “cousin” and found that my grandmother had erased a lot, and perhaps embellished some. Ammonia produces mists, but it’s also indispensable to smelling salts, which I tried to administer to some of my family’s memories.





On the Net I found that Haber won the 1918 Nobel Prize for Chemistry for the Haber-Bosch process, which synthesized ammonia from nitrogen and hydrogen in the air. The award, which cited Haber for inventing cheap synthetic fertilizer—a discovery that held out the promise of eliminating world hunger—was seen as a deliberate attempt by the Swedish Academy to rankle the Allies, who had already labelled Haber a war criminal, though he was never prosecuted. A fervent German nationalist who did not limit himself to fertilizer, Haber had also invented poison chlorine gas and directed its first deployment as a weapon at the Second Battle of Ypres in 1915. The great inventor, who believed deeply in the justness of the Wilhelmine social order, saw the development of chemical weapons as his patriotic duty. His first wife Clara, also a chemist, begged him to stop, without success. On the very night in 1915 that Captain Haber left to install cylinders of poison gas on the Eastern Front, Clara committed suicide.

If one criterion for receiving a Nobel is a discovery that fundamentally alters the history of the century, then Cousin Fritz certainly deserved the prize. The Haber process was one of the most life-saving and life-taking inventions of the twentieth century. Before his invention, gunpowder and fertilizer had to be made from mounds of Chilean guano, also known as seagull shit. Since Britannia still ruled the waves in the early twentieth century and could effectively blockade German-Chilean trade, the Kaiser would have lost all his shit shortly after the war began if Haber hadn't figured out how to produce nitrates out of thin air. World War I would have ended in months instead of years. Paradoxically, the Haber process also made possible the "Green Revolution," which vastly increased the world's food supplies. Even here, on the plus side of my putative kinsman's record, there is a blot: the same fertilizer led to massively polluting agribusiness.

Yet Haber, educated in an era when science was still considered a branch of philosophy, seems like a much more nuanced and genteel personality than these bare facts might suggest. He is still a figure of stature in Germany; his old chemistry institute was renamed after him in 1953. Devastated by Germany's defeat in World War I, he continued his work during the Weimar period, trying to solve the problems of the German nation through chemistry. Attempts to pay off Germany's reparation debt through secretly extracting gold from seawater came to naught, but he continued to work in the more promising fields of chemoluminescence, the kinetics of gas reactions, and spectroscopy, and attracted many of the leading physical chemists of the day to his Institute (then the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute) at Dahlem, a suburb of Berlin.

Some details of my grandmother's story have been borne out and some not; oddly, her story skipped a generation. When I turned to my mother for more details, she said that she'd never heard of any of it, though the name Haber was vaguely familiar to her. She asked her brother, who is five

years older, but he knew nothing. The only information she could dig up was geographical. Her grandfather, Daniel Stern (known as Max), was born in Breslau, probably around the 1860s. “Grandma told you a lot of things she never told me,” she added, somewhat defensively, explaining the assimilationist ideal of her parents when she was a kid. My mother never even knew that my grandmother was supposed to be sent from her home in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, to Germany to live with a rich aunt and be educated there when she was nineteen years old—a story that my grandmother told me dozens of times.

Unfortunately, war broke out in August 1914, a month before school was to start. My mother did remember that when the war broke out my grandmother had to stay home and work in the Englander department store in Pittsfield to put her less talented brothers through university and professional schools. I remember my grandmother’s seething indignation, even at the age of ninety, at this injustice. It prompted her to educate my mother at Bryn Mawr College.

There are holes in the narrative I still can’t fill. My mother says that English was the language of her grandparents’ household; my great-grandmother Stern was born in America. When my grandmother was alive, I never thought to ask her how she expected to get an education in Germany—there was not a shred of evidence that she spoke a word of German except for an occasional oath, such as “*Gott im Himmel!*” Was this the remnant of a fluency that became politically unfashionable in 1917 when the United States entered the war? Perhaps she planned to learn German on her arrival; perhaps in the patriotic hysteria of the time, it was better to forget that you had ever spoken German as a second language.

All that my mother recalled about her German ancestry was that her grandfather Max was from Breslau or Hamburg, that he came to America around 1880 in order to evade compulsory service in the Imperial German Army. He became a jeweler in Roxbury, Boston, then moved to Pittsfield and later to Washington Heights in Manhattan. He seemed like a well-educated but unhappy man, mired in a strange culture, with too many children to support. The comfortable German bourgeois world he presumably left behind eluded him in America. Max’s death in an auto accident on the streets of Manhattan in 1933 came just a few months before Haber’s. My mother recalls with some resentment that she was completely sheltered from any sign of death; she was seven and was sent to stay with a cousin instead of attending the funeral. She never heard my grandmother’s story that Max had just returned from his first trip back to Germany, on the brink of the Nazi takeover, bearing the only words we still have from him: “*Das ist nicht mein Deutschland!*”

Fritz Haber was born into the now lost world of the German Jewish bourgeoisie in Breslau, Silesia in 1868, approximately the same time and place as

Max Stern. My great-grandfather was a little older, and if it is true (as my grandmother asserted) he attended *Gymnasium* with another famous Breslau scientist, Charles Proteus Steinmetz. There is some evidence that Haber might have been related to my grandmother, though it is not conclusive. Haber's son married Margaret Stern, from Breslau; his biographer reports that Haber "liked the Stern family, old Breslau residents." He also had cousins named Spiro, another family name my mother remembers. My grandmother sponsored the immigration of Hans and Eric Spiro and their families to America during the 1930s, and housed them for more than six months. Hans was a dentist and the family departed when he got a position in a Colorado sanitarium. Like Haber, the Spiros had been baptized. Refugees from Jewishness, as well as Germany, after they got to Denver, my family never heard from them again. Though Haber may have been related to these people, there is no record that Haber visited my great-grandfather on either of his two trips to New York in 1909 and 1923.

The website of the Fritz Haber Institute notes that after "being directed" to dismiss "racially undesirable" staff members, Haber submitted his resignation on April 30, 1933 and applied for retirement on October 1, 1933, though "his own dismissal had indeed not yet been demanded by the new dictator." Shortly after Haber left, the government appointed Gerhardt Jander, an inorganic chemist with strong Nazi connections as director, over strong objections from the institute. By 1934, Jander had fired most of the scientists.

Haber's supposed confrontation with Hitler never happened. My grandmother's version sounds like a confusion of conversations that Haber had with officials of the Nazi ministry of Art, Science, and Popular Education, after being ordered to fire the other Jewish scientists in the institute, and a conversation in which Haber's collaborator on the industrial exploitation of ammonia, Karl Bosch, confronted Hitler in a personal interview. When Haber resigned, he couldn't even get to see the responsible minister, Bernhard Rust, much less Hitler, though the lesser officials he did see tried to persuade him to stay on the job. In any case, the Führer didn't seem to care a whit about losing scientific talent. He told physicist Max Planck that "if the dismissal of Jewish scientists means the annihilation of contemporary German science, then we shall do without science for a few years."

My grandmother correctly placed Haber in Basel at the time of his death, January 29, 1934, though he didn't "escape" to Switzerland. He first emigrated to Britain, and stopped off in Switzerland while on his way to the Daniel Sieff Research Institute (later the Weitzmann Institute) in Palestine. Haber had suffered for a long time from several serious health problems, including angina pectoris, aggravated by the Nazi takeover. When he died, his brother-in-law, Dr. Rudolph Stern was at his side; Haber's heart attack was not a cover for an assassination attempt.

As I write this, the radio is playing the *Leonora Overture No. 3*, perfect music for meditating on the heroic project of nineteenth-century German Romanticism that went so tragically awry. In my nuclear family, the residue of Germanness was heard but not spoken, sublimated you might say. My mother took me to the orchestra to hear German music from the earliest times.

It's not hard to explain why my grandparents never told their children much about their German relations, especially of a German Jew whom some considered a war criminal. Being German in America was not popular after 1917, and neither was being Jewish. Paradoxically, American anti-Semitism shocked Haber during a visit in the 1920s, when he saw a sign on an Atlantic City hotel that said "No Jews." My mother's parents, both born in the United States wanted to be unexceptional Americans, though I don't think they succeeded. Their wish, after 1917, to obliterate their European past, to construct somehow an identity subtly Jewish, profoundly American, left no room for their Germanism.

#### Note

I have only drawn on the available English language secondary sources for this memoir, including Fritz Haber Institute Webpage <http://www.fhiBerlin.mpg.de/history/history.html>, Sept. 18, 1999; and Morris Goran, *The Story of Fritz Haber* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967). The new biography of Haber in German by Margit Szoelloesi-Janze (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1998) was not available by deadline. See also Fritz Stern, *Einstein's German World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999)

—Jonathan Soffer

## Appearance

A word for the twentieth century

1. It is not what shows itself, not φαίνομενον/φαίνω/φα/φωσ, but a servant or messenger. Appearance announces-itself as not showing-itself; it is in the manner of not-showing-itself. Or it is the announcing of itself by something that does not show itself. Or it is the *mere* appearance of something that is of such a kind that it can never show itself. It reveals and conceals; it equivocates. Not the light, or the showing forth, but the glimmer. Alongside the phenomenon, appearance is derivative, possibly deceptive, and symptomatic, as if to be secondary were to be sick. Delirious, then, delusional. But listening in English, I hear "it shines." Horror and glory. *Erscheinung*: the shining world.

*We noticed a slight wind, rising, and some newspapers scudding through an empty street.*

2. The look or semblance of a thing, ἰδεα; or, an image or likeness, εἰδ-  
ωλον; or, I appear or seem, εἰδομαι. From whence, idea, eidolon, idol  
(Skeat):

*The being-such of each thing is the idea. It is as if the form, the knowa-  
bility, the features of every entity were detached from it, not as another  
thing, but as an intentio, an angel, an image. The mode of being of this  
intentio is neither a simple existence nor a transcendence; it is a paraexis-  
tence or a paratranscendence that dwells beside the thing (in all the senses  
of the prefix 'para'-), so close that it almost merges with it, giving it a  
halo. (Agamben 100.1).*

Languaged existence means the unavoidability of appearing “as” some-  
thing, such that the thing is not identical to its predicates, but does not  
exist apart from them either. The idea of the thing is its halo. Haloed  
somethings.

*What needs to be conceived here is precisely this relation that is neither  
denotation nor meaning, neither ostension nor anaphora, but rather their  
reciprocal implication. It is not the non-linguistic, the relationless object  
of pure ostension, nor is it this object's being in language as that which is  
said in the proposition; rather, it is the being-in-language-of-the-non-  
linguistic, the thing itself (Agamben 94.5).*

This is Giorgio Agamben's argument for the non-identity of the thing and  
its representation: matter in the mode of exposure, the material sublime,  
human being.

*Suddenly, the light thickened, as if it were about to congeal. We heard a high-pitched hum.*

3. Θε απαριτιον οφ θεσε φαχεσ ιν τηε χρωωδ;  
Πεταλοσ ον α ωετ, βλαχκ βουγη.

*Then cracks opened everywhere, and the light shattered into pieces.*

4. Eidolon, idol, face:

*The strong and active forces of sensuality on the surfaces of the expres-  
sive face double it with the laughter and tears of an idol and speak their  
exultant and ennobling, consecrating, words. These words uttered by  
nonteleological, repetitive, insistent, intensifying forces chant and do not  
discourse. They do not designate what anyone sees, but make visible an  
apparition over the one that utters them (Lingis 65).*

*What faces is what the meaning one might give to this surface cannot con-  
tain, an excess over and above the forms and their coded significance  
(Lingis 66).*

*We saw some people running*

5. flicker	flit	fly	twitch	skulk	jump
run	slink	tumble	slither	trot	lie
lumber					
snort	bellow	growl	screech	trumpet	purr
howl	bark	twitter	snarl	grunt	snore
scratch					
chatter	buzz	whine	hiss	lick	sing

and water leaking from a broken pipe.

#### 6. The space of appearance:

*Das In-Sein ist Mitsein mit Anderen.* For Heidegger, *Mitsein* falls into the idle chatter of the they-world; for Hannah Arendt, it is an essential precondition for political life and ethical judgment. A gendered difference, then, between being-for-death and being-with? The *fundamental categories of his existential analytic, rather than illuminating human plurality, testified to the progressing atomization, loneliness, and increasing worldlessness of the individual in the Weimar period in the 1920s* (Benhabib 56). Philosophy and history contend endlessly for exteriority, but both are summonings of time. The (archaic) *polis* is first a time-space, given over to the narrating and witnessing of words and deeds, the etching out of particulars. It is a place imagined for the gradual (timely) coming-to-appearance of an actor and agent, thus to display the *who-ness of speaking* in contest with the *what-ness* of social determination.

*The polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be. . . . It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly* (Arendt 177).

To see and be seen, to have one's public acts remarked and to witness the acts of others, is to participate in the making of reality. That is the function of this archaic *polis*. It is creative, rather than prescriptive, and as alien to the predictive aim of political science as it is to commodity culture.

And yet: *To be deprived of it [the polis] means to be deprived of reality, which, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance* (Arendt 178).

*Once we came across some dead animals.*

#### 7. Appearance becomes simulacrum:

To become weightless, coded, reproducible. To live through recognition, not intimacy. To suffer a reality deficit. To forget. To be like someone else.

To forego experience. If I am not recognized, I am not seen; if I am not seen, I do not exist; therefore, I dress. Fetish, not face.

*No more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept. No more imaginary coextensivity: rather, genetic miniaturisation is the dimension of simulation. The real is produced from miniaturised units, from matrices, memory banks and command models—and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times* (Baudrillard 3).

Frame, not reference.

Invisible hands; visible need. The means of redress: distributive justice. The ends:

Captain's log: Unknown virus on main hard drive. Losing control of vessel. Command in bad sector. System crashing. Deletions unavoidable.

The as-such of things. Chattering animals. Currents of air and leaves. Plays of light. The unseen. Murmurs. The beautiful (turned to the wall). Marine life. Species. Plants. I. You. We.

Reboot.

*Wor lllllllld w it hou t en d*

#### Acknowledgements

Author's note: Sources for this collage are listed by section number, in the order that they appear; direct quotations are distinguished in the text by italics.

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3.

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—Miriam Nichols

## Archaeology

Carthage, a twenty-minute walk from the house we'd rented in Sidi Bou Said, was a bustling suburb of highways, airport, government houses, and a few ruins. To perceive in those ruins the splendour of a powerful and magnificent society required more than a knowledge of history. It required faith and imagination, easily summoned when standing on Byrsa Hill on bright June mornings or afternoons, watching Cape Gammarth spool dunes into the sea. Ariana Lake. A string of Tunis hills against the mountain range of Jebel Ahmar. Further down, surrounded by eucalyptus trees and a lagoon, a village clustered around a mosque and a power station near the harbour of La Goulette.

Halfway down Byrsa Hill, the vestiges of the Punic quarter were pretty much as they must have been after the fire destroyed the city in 146 BC: a street grid-system of stone foundations; a cistern extending beneath a courtyard; a necropolis cut out of the hillside covered with corbelled vaults, revealing several graves.

From Byrsa Hill we proceeded along Rue Hannibal towards the Tophet. The Tophet of Carthage, first discovered in 1921, was the name given to an open-air area where Phoenicians and Carthaginians offered children in sacrifice to the protecting gods of the city, Baal and Tanit.

When Gilles and I got there with our son, Jonathan, we discovered the area cordoned off and an American archaeological team in the process of excavating new sites. We weren't allowed inside the cordoned area but when it became clear we wouldn't leave, one of the archaeologists walked over to us. A personable man, he explained that the work should

have been completed by now but had proven much more difficult than anticipated.

The archaeological team was sifting through six to seven hundred years of burials for tombstones and pottery urns in which the Carthaginians buried the bones and ashes of sacrificed children from newborns to four-year-olds. A few of the urns had been found whole but were so fragile a mere nudge would have shattered them. Two workers were carefully crating them for a reproduction of a burial site for a museum.

He showed us the contents of some of the pots; tiny bones, some in the shape of levers, some of wishbones, sections of a tiny, collapsed pillar, the pieces scattered in the palm of the archaeologist's hand. "Are those vertebrae?" I asked Gilles. As a doctor, he knew all about the body's cryptic components and functions.

"Seems like it," he said.

I pointed to a mound of bones on a canvas on the ground. "Isn't that a skull in there?"

"Yes. Can't be more than a year old," Gilles said.

"There's a hole in it. It must have been cracked."

"No. That would have been the anterior fontanelle. It hadn't closed yet."

I remembered the pulsations at the top of Jonathan's head when he was a baby. It had reminded me of the rising of water in a fountain and I'd been struck at how easily his small skull could have been emptied of its substance.

The archaeologist pointed to a row of small tombstones outside the cordoned area. "There are so many of them we can't get at them all," he said. Stelae, he called the tombstones, each one bearing symbols, some so faint they were almost impossible to make out. He ran his finger along the outline of a figure resembling a paper doll with a circle head, two stick arms on either side of a triangular body: Tanit the paper-doll goddess to which children were sacrificed.

The sacrifices had been carried out to appease the gods in times of crisis like bad weather or wars and also because of a religious belief that firstborns were best returned to the gods since they were naturally theirs by right. But, the archaeologist added, these were probably the justifications of a ruling class wanting to keep its wealth from being distributed among too many heirs. One stela depicting a priest carrying a frantic child to its sacrifice was going to the Bardo Museum in Tunis.

"I hate this," I whispered to Gilles. "I don't need to know this."

"It's history," Gilles said as he picked a wild flower sprouting against one of the stelae and pushed the stem through a buttonhole of my blouse. "We can't ignore history." The red flower, plucked from an overgrown garden rooted in layers of earth and urns, from a long succession of bloodlines and bones, bobbed in agreement as it arched toward the heart.

We thanked the archaeologist and were about to leave when I noticed

white shapes rising from a few of the excavated cross-sections within the cordoned area, perfect shapes of urns and of a musical instrument, a small triangular harp, all of them too white and intact to have been in the earth for hundreds of years.

“What are those?” I asked.

“Sometimes we come across holes in the earth indicating that an artifact was buried there. It might have been made of unfired clay or wood, which rotted or dissolved over time, like that little harp, leaving a perfect mould in the earth around it. We pour plaster into the hole, let it dry, then dig around it and get a clear impression of the empty space.”

They seemed so eerie these ghostly imprints released after all these centuries, especially the little harp which could have fallen from heaven. “It looks like one of the sides of the harp was carved in the shape of an animal,” I said.

“Yes, a horse,” the archaeologist replied. “The parents might have wanted the child to travel on its journey on a horse, accompanied by music.”

I held on tightly to Jonathan’s hand, his pliable, four-year-old bones safely locked in mine.

—Lola Lemire Tostevin

## Archiveology

The techniques of storing and accessing the vaults of cultural memory. Not to be confused with remembering.

Remembering: The recovery of fragments of the past that have become dismembered from the body of the present.

Memory: The art and practice of retrieval. Memory can be manufactured, fictionalized, invented, distorted, reinvented and restored; it can be measured in RAM and in missed opportunities.

Forgetting: What is not photographed is left out of the image bank.

Image Bank: The storage of cultural memory, of infinite capacity. Searchable by random and linear techniques.

Ruins: Evidence of temporal processes; the traces of cultural decay.

Recycling: The obliteration of cultural decay; the effacement of history and the redemption of waste.

—Catherine Russell

## Art Hysterical Discourse

Revisioning the rapture.

—Ken Allan

## Avant-Garde

A new perfume by Calvin Klein.

—Janine Marchessault

## Beaver

Beaver hats, beaver tails, beaver droppings, beaver club, beaver colony, beaver hunt, busy beaver, sheared beaver, beaver-beaver (censored) citizen beaver?

Canadian history is informed by the culture of the beaver on so many levels that any debate about the nation becomes a truly sexual experience. Anyone interested in the history of this country has crossed paths with extremely rich narratives of the nation, in which the quintessential Canadian experience is often documented as a matter of beaver [snap]shots. Those narratives written by early French explorers, British diarists as well as very serious Canadianists—mostly male, and sometimes female—describe the she-nation through graphic imaginings of beaver fur, detailing the luxury of colours, shades, softness and darkness of the fur patches, nicely distributed according to the specifics of North American geography. Some accounts go so far as to claim that the best furs are to be found around Lake Ontario and in Québec, and that this rich brown glamorous fur is a matter of the northern exposure of the pretty beaver. In a very telling and significant way, these natural scientific descriptions of the beauty of the nation propose a constant crossing between beaver the beast, beaver as the route to penetration of the land, and the beaver-beaver as a sexual embodiment, a space conveniently framed as female, as female sex, as the she-nation. (For the record, the Jesuit periodical *Relations* and Canadian historian Harold Innis's famous book on *The Fur Trade in Canada*, offer the most exciting erotic taxonomies of fur geographies hands down). Looking at these epic journeys into beaver land, one cannot help but notice how the little beast is treated as a first-class citizen.

This historical queer fascination for the beaver found a strange echo in the governmental dams of Ottawa and Quebec during the summer of 1999. Suddenly, the cute, funny, puffy little beaver was the “sex” object of a national scream from coast to coast. The beaver, the first-class citizen of this country, was outed as *sexually confused*. The unique Castor