Postmodernism and the Autobiographical Subject: Reconstructing the "Other"

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Between 1945 and 1980 more than five thousand autobiographies were published in the United States. Autobiographies and autobiographical studies focused on ethnic groups and women have especially proliferated in the last two decades in the wake of feminist scholarship and the burgeoning field of ethnic studies. Thus, despite pronouncements about the end of autobiography and postmodern challenges to traditional notions of the self, autobiographical narratives proliferate and scholarly studies on them abound. Tensions between the postmodern theorists, on the one hand, and the emerging narratives of marginalized groups, on the other, however, surface in readings of ethnic autobiography. Institutionalized efforts to incorporate literatures of the cultural other, and efforts to expand the canon, have meant that autobiographies of women and ethnics receive particular attention in the academy, as scholars become more receptive to cultural diversity and complexity. In this spirit, ethnic autobiographies often serve representative functions, evoking so-called minority literatures, cultures, and subjectivities. Maxine Hong Kingston's Woman Warrior, for example, may be seen to represent a Chinese-American voice, whereas Richard Rodriguez's Hunger of Memory may signify a Chicano voice. Because of such representative status, the burden of these texts becomes enormous, and how we read these texts raises profound questions; therefore it becomes imperative to develop a theory of autobiography that acknowledges the importance of marginalized voices, but avoids essentializing individuals and groups; that takes into account complex relationships between cultures and discourses that produce the speaking subject, but avoids viewing language as a transparent representation of the imagined real. Given the complexities of our postmodern world, the multiplicity of struggles, and the growing economic and social disparities revolving around differences based on race, class, gender, and ethnicity, and granting the assertion that autobiography presents readers with an image of the human, how we read and comprehend cultural difference raises critical questions with significant consequences. If understanding diverse cultures and multiply positioned persons remains an ultimate goal of cultural knowledge, helping us to live together cooperatively and harmoniously, then we must radically rethink how we read, understand, and teach autobiography, especially ethnic autobiography.

Autobiography, Postmodernism, and Cultural Other

I begin with three propositions critical to autobiography, which situate this essay in three discourses: postmodernism, feminism, and ethnic studies. First, autobiography serves important ideological functions in the culture. Addressing a central issue in postmodern debates, Paul Smith, in his recent book Discerning the Subject, argues that autobiography "cannot be underestimated as a privileged form of ideological text wherein the demand that we should consist as coherent and recognizable 'subjects' in relation to a particular knowledge appears to be rationalized." Further, he asserts that the form has acquired generic power "to construct and legitimate a 'subject' which will guarantee juridical social relations" (1056). The proliferation of life stories and the scholarly attention given to autobiography appear to corroborate these assertions. Since the autobiographical narrative makes its presentation of the human seem natural, autobiography remains a literary category, or popular form, and a genre possessing ideological power in short, it serves a political function. In a culture that
values individualism and empirical knowledge, the speaking "I" tends to validate prevailing knowledge, and so the form is privileged. Because of this function, scholars of autobiography can learn from postmodern theories that examine ideologies embedded in discourse. In addition, drawing on structuralist and post-structuralist thinking, Smith affirms that language cannot transparently reveal an essential and unified historical subject; rather, the speaking subject, historically situated and positioned in multiple and contradictory discourses, places the "I" in the world in positions conceptually possible in language.

The nature of the speaking subject, then, remains a critical arena for autobiographical and feminist discussions, which leads to the second proposition: the autobiographical self must be understood as socially and historically constructed and multiply positioned in complex worlds and discourses. Sidonie Smith, in *A Poetics of Woman's Autobiography*, writes that the autobiographical form is "androcentric and has reproduced the patrilineage for the last 500 years" (26); further, she argues, "autobiography has assumed a central position in the personal and literary life of the West precisely because it serves as one of those generic contracts that reproduces the patrilineage and its ideologies of gender" (44). If Smith is correct (and I believe she is) that the form is androcentric and elevates the Renaissance male human being, the question becomes, how does the not-male human being, perceived in the culture as the Other, represent the self? By cultural Other, we generally consider those persons negatively constructed in the dominant symbolic order: not-male, not-white, not-American, etc. Sidonie Smith argues that until the twentieth century women could only represent themselves in scripts male discourse had constructed for them as nun, witch, wife, or queen. Alternatives to these scripts remained linguistically and culturally unimaginable; thus, when cultural others would represent themselves in print, they were forced to use the prevailing symbolic order or remain silent.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., described this dilemma for the not-white in African-American writing. He claimed writers used a "double voiced" discourse, "making the (white) written text 'speak' with a (black) voice." The not-white, writer thus, faced an analogous problem of writing the self into being through the language of the oppressor as the not-male, writer and the analogy informs us about women's predicament historically in writing autobiography. The metaphor clearly problematizes the speech of the cultural Other, raising the central question of how we understand the speaking subject positioned outside the dominant symbolic order. The metaphor of a "double-voiced discourse" distinguishes between white speech and black voice and by analogy, we could argue, male speech and female voice. Nevertheless, risks seem present here for the metaphor tends to essentialize the categories of voice and experience by naturalizing a black voice, a female voice, or a black experience, a female experience, and by ignoring the complex forces that produce voices and experiences. Do not the language communities we occupy shape perception of experiences? And why should we emphasize dualities? Does not the cultural Other reside in multiple linguistic or discursive communities not unlike Mikhail Bakhtin's illiterate peasants in *The Dialogic Imagination* who discovered that they lived in several languages: the religious community of prayer; the folk community of song; the official state language of petitions; the language of daily life and that these language systems, indissolubly linked to different ideological approaches to the world, contradicted each other (29596). As

scholars focused on autobiography we need to acknowledge the (white) androcentric scripts dominating Western culture and establishing the realms of the possible. Nevertheless, how we speak about contradictions emerging from the speech of the cultural Other remains critical.

These observations lead me to the third and last proposition about autobiography, focusing
attention on ethnic studies: we need to explore alternative strategies for reading and understanding autobiographies, and ethnic autobiography offers a rich site for this exploration. Michael M. J. Fischer argues in his essay "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory," that "ethnic autobiography and autobiographical fiction can perhaps serve as a key form for exploration of pluralist, late industrialist, late twentieth century society." He offers three reasons for this: first, ethnicity is constantly reconstructed with each generation in other words it is not static; second, there are no role models for hyphenated Americans, the Chinese-American, the Mexican-American, etc; and third, ethnic autobiographies are forced to find a voice or style that incorporates the several components of identity. Fischer insists, therefore, we must develop a concept of the self that is pluralist, multidimensional, multifaceted and one which might be a "crucible for a wider social ethos of pluralism." 3 Fischer's strategy for exploring ethnic autobiographies includes noncognitive mappings of consciousness present in the autobiographical narrative, such as psychoanalysis, dreamwork, metaphor, and transference. While these noncognitive tracings represent linguistic markings and are thus linked to prevailing discursive practices embedded with ideologies, the value of using noncognitive strategies suggests a way of examining the cultural Other in autobiographical writings and avoids the risks of the double-voiced discourse. I argue in this essay that the chronotypeliterally time/spaceprovides a meaningful noncognitive and nonlinguistic strategy for examining the subject of autobiography, a concept that serves as a framework for Bakhtin's discussion of Western literature in The Dialogic Imagination. I intend to illustrate its value in this essay; however, first, I return to a summary of the issues these propositions raise about autobiography.

These three propositions all share assumptions about the importance of autobiography in the culture, suggesting that the kind of subject represented in autobiography serves a cultural purpose, and they all presuppose a relationship between the speaking subject and the uttered discourse. Nevertheless, tensions emerge at the intersection of these propositions, raising at least three critical issues that resonate with larger cultural debates. The first issue revolves around the uses and purposes of autobiography. Does the form function only to guarantee juridical social relations, as Paul Smith argues, or can the form also serve to challenge dominant ideologies and prevailing social relations? The second issue focuses on the meaning of the speaking subject in autobiography: in short, do we read at the center of the autobiography a self, an essential individual, imagined to be coherent and unified, the originator of her own meaning, or do we read a postmodern subjecta dynamic subject that changes over time, is situated historically in the world and positioned in multiple discourses? Intimately connected to these issues is the third: how we theorize the relationship between the subject and the language the writer uses to represent the "I" of the speaking subject. Do we assume a transparent language implying that a speaking subject automatically conveys in language an intended meaning that is immediately apprehended, or do we understand that the discursive practices in which the speaking subject is situated and positioned shape possible utterances, which remain fragmented and partial, inadequate to represent the "I" who speaks? The implications here are profound because how we answer affects how we understand and read those marginalized in the culture.

I argue that in the pluralistic American society we must challenge the notion of the humanist and essentialist self at the center of the autobiography and recognize the multiply situated subject in autobiography, socially and historically shaped. In such a context ethnic autobiographies provide a meaningful site for exploring multiple subjectivities with implications for the larger culture, as Fischer argues. However, I propose a more critical reading of ethnic autobiography than Fischer's strategies, which rely on linguistic markers; since ideologies are also embedded in metaphors and
dreamwork, ethnics may also articulate prevailing ideologies in these terms. Thus I suggest we need to question any easy relationship between discourse and the speaking subject, particularly the assumption that experience produces a voice that, for example, being woman means speaking in a woman's voice. The metaphor of the double-voiced discourse, implying a language and experience of the oppressor and the oppressed, risks naturalizing these categories. The metaphor problematizes neither language nor experience and denies their links and ambiguities, masking the postmodern claim that discourses shape the very way in which we experience the world. Roland Barthes's assertion that the subject can be defined as "an effect of language" suggests the complex relationship between the subject and language. If we acknowledge that human beings are positioned in multiple and contradictory discourses, then the effect of that multiplicity shapes the subject. Barthes also argues that "all those outside power are obliged to steal language" as the poor have had to steal bread. The metaphor invites us to ask how persons write their subjectivities in stolen language and at what point, if at all, does the stolen language speak differently for the one who must steal it? In other words, Fischer's call for a more invisible way of examining the subject of autobiography becomes particularly valuable for examining the subjectivities of those constructed as the Other in the culture. Using noncognitive approaches to read autobiography, specifically a chronotopic analysis, we can visualize the consequences of discursive practices on the speaking subjects and explore the implications of these effects both individually and culturally. The chronotopic analysis permits us to examine the subjectivities in autobiographies both those elevated in the culture to guarantee certain juridical social relations and those that may provide resistant subject positions and to unmask cultural ideologies embedded there. With such a reading, I suggest that autobiographies might also provide a site for challenging prevailing social relations.

In The Dialogic Imagination M. M. Bakhtin argues that our image of what is human is always concretetemporally and spatially positioned in the universe. Bakhtin's term for this time-space dimension, chronotope, borrowed from mathematics, expresses "the inseparability of space and time." Bakhtin argues that our image of the human being is "intrinsically chronotopic." In the literary context, he claims, the "chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins. ..." Further, the abstract elements in fiction and "the philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work. Such is the representational significance of the chronotope" (250). He also argues that this category functions to situate historical figures in time and space to make that place in the world seem natural. Certainly one could argue from Bakhtin's observations that it is through the flesh and blood power of the chronotope that ideology operates, making a certain social order seem natural because it is seen to reside in the flesh and blood. We might argue that this is the hidden effect of language.

The work of the linguist Emile Benveniste also supports a chronotopic analysis of autobiography. In Problems in General Linguistics Benveniste argued that within any system of signification personal pronouns are never missing, yet unlike other designators "they do not refer to a concept or to an individual"; the personal pronouns belong to a class of words that "escape the status of all other signs of language" they remain indeterminate until an individual uses the word "I," addressing, and distinguishing itself from, a "you." The reality to which the "I" then refers is to the reality of discourse: "it is in the instance of discourse in which I designates the speaker that the speaker proclaims himself [sic] as the 'subject.' " Benveniste writes that when language is so organized "it permits each speaker to appropriate to himself [sic] the entire language by designating I" (226). The other class of pronouns that share the same indeterminate status as personal pronouns (I/you) are those words that "organize the spatial and
temporal relationships around the 'subject' ... 'this,' 'here,' 'now' " (226). These time and space indicators are always determined by the "I" that is proclaimed in discourses. Thus the "I" who speaks in discourse determines the spatial and temporal "here" and "now," "there" and "then." These linked pairs of linguistic indeterminacy are precisely the terms of autobiographical chronotopes: I/you; here/there; now/then. As the autobiographical subject speaks, the "I" constructs a here and now and thus defines the time-space of utterance, of being, also defining imaginatively the "you" (the reader). The there and then posit the opposite of the here and now, and thus we find through the chronotopic analysis of the autobiography the critical indeterminacy of language within culture. But it is precisely in these paired terms we also encounter the discursive power of language to shape the imaginative universe of what is human. They define the here and now of the speaker and provide the time-space through which we imagine the speaker, an image of the human. Autobiography is intimately linked to chronotopes. Because autobiography possesses power to shape an image of the human, as the reader imagines the speaker in the here and now of the speaking "I," the chronotopic: placement provides a powerful means of situating the speaker in the universe, because the chronotopic image is an effect of language, but generally invisible.

A chronotopic analysis becomes especially valuable for reading the autobiographies of the marginalized Other because in such an analysis the reader can see the effect of language. In other words, we can imagine where discourse positions the subject in the universe. If we accept Barthes's assertion, that "the subject is an effect of language," focusing on the chronotope permits us to examine concretely that effect. Implicit in that examination would be such questions as, what ideological forces led the subject to these chronotopes? What kinds of identities and social relations are possible within those chronotopes and what are not possible? What cultural meanings do we associate with those times and spaces? What ideological significance can be attached to the historical subject's chronotopic positioning? A chronotopic analysis of three autobiographies serves to illustrate the possibilities in the approach.

Chronotopic Analysis of Three Ethnic Women's Autobiographies

Three Russian-Jewish immigrant women who came to North America at the turn of the century Mary Antin, Anzia Yezierska, and Emma Goldman situate themselves chronotopically in their autobiographies very differently. Their historical lives, however, invite comparisons. Born in late nineteenth-century Eastern Europe into Jewish families affected by official anti-Semitic policies, they all immigrated to the United States between 1885 and 1895 (part of the mass immigration during this period) and settled in immigrant communities of Boston, New York City, and Rochester, New York. Acquiring fluency in English, they all developed active public lives as writers and speakers; they all married and, with the exception of Goldman, bore and raised children. All remained in the United States, with the exception of Goldman (involuntarily deported), and all lived relatively long lives. They all addressed, directly and indirectly, attitudes toward America and their positions as women; all spoke ambiguously about family and ethnic identity, sometimes associated nationally (with Russia or Poland), sometimes religiously (with Judaism); all confronted Americanizing social institutions with their undercurrent of xenophobia and latent anti-Semitism; and all were affected by poverty and by political, economic, and social struggles. The chronotopic positioning in their autobiographies, however, remains vastly different for each immigrant woman: America-
identified autobiographical Antin is situated primarily in the American school as an adolescent; dislocated autobiographical Yezierska, seeking an American home that she never finds, boards a train at the beginning and end of the autobiography, signifying that absence; and autobiographical Goldman, occupying multiple times and spaces generally forbidden to women, to mainstream Americans, and middle-class readers, challenges the naturalized images associated with prevailing views of Americans, women, and human beings. (In discussing these autobiographies, to avoid implications that we know a coherent self contained in pronoun references, I will distinguish (minimally) between the historical subject, referring to the biological life; the autobiographical narrator, the "I" who writes the narrative; and the autobiographical subject the speaking "I" in the narrative). 

Mary Antin's autobiography, *The Promised Land*, was published in 1912. Nearly three-quarters of a century later, when Princeton University Press released a new paperback version in 1985, the volume had gone through thirty-four reprintings. Frequently excerpted in anthologies and discussed in scholarship on immigration, the work has been described as a "classic immigrant autobiography" representing the model immigrant transformed into American (Dearborn, *Pocahantas's Daughters* 10). Albert E. Stone argues that the autobiography "dramatizes the historical experience of Americanization in frankly mythic terms" and that Antin "represents herself as the prototypical immigrant transformed into a new self by changes of name, clothing, language and religions" (4). James Holte in *The Ethnic I* argues that the volume is "justly famous" and that Mary Antin provides "an example of Americanization at its best" (31). Traditionally, critics thus suggest that Antin's narrative conveys a natural and inevitable process of Americanization, and that when the autobiographical subject articulates a national discourse in her assertion, "I am remade, I am American," this utterance is understood as an ontological transformation of the historical subject. A chronotopic analysis of the autobiographical subject, however, reveals the problems of identifying an essential self with the speaking subject, of equating a historical Mary Antin with the America-identified "I" of the autobiography.

*The Promised Land* moves chronologically from the Old to the New World, beginning in the Pale of the Settlement in the late nineteenth century and ending in the New World when Mary Antin, as an adolescent schoolgirl, proclaims her transformation to American in a "second birth." The first half of the autobiography, comprising both a personal narrative and a communal history, begins:

When I was a little girl, the world was divided into two parts; namely, Polotzk, the place where I lived, and a strange land called Russia. All the little girls I knew lived in Polotzk, with their fathers and mothers and friends. Russia was the place where one's father went on business. It was so far off, and so many bad things happened there, that one's mother and grandmother and grown-up aunts cried at the railroad station, and one was expected to be sad and quiet for the rest of the day, when the father departed for Russia. (I)

The narrator re-creates her own youth within the context of a larger narrative of Jews in czarist Russia. The community of *we* in the first half of the autobiography signified her immediate family, the extended family, the people of Polotzk, Jews within the Pale and those within the historical community of Jews, and is distinguished from the *they* (gentiles particularly Russians). The chronotopic positioning emerges from this *we*. Thus the topos, spatial boundaries of Antin's universe, revolves around the safe and unsafe: the here (Pale) usually remained safe, while the there (outside the Pale) generated fear. The narrator writes, "I do not know when I became old
enough to understand. The truth was borne in on me a dozen times a day. ... It was the first lesson a little girl in Polotzk had to learn ... we must not be found outside the Pale, because we were Jews" (45). Similarly, the chronos in the first half of the autobiography revolves around the same opposition: the now (of czarist oppression) and the then (before oppression, when David was king and Jewish girls were princesses). The chronos and topos both evoke a collective history. Gender differences did exist in the Pale, those imposed from without by Russian racist policies which conscripted Jewish men into the czar's army, but not women, inflicting tortures, mutilations, and forced baptisms and those imposed from within by orthodox traditions which designated separate arenas for males (the Heder and synagogue) and females (the home, where the kitchen was "a girl's real schoolroom" [34]). Despite these distinct spatial arenas based on gender, the primary subjectivities of the Old World narrative revolve around ethnic difference. Consequently, narrator Antin in the Old World linked the autobiographical "I" to historical, cultural, religious, and communal narratives defining herself collectively inside Judaism inside the Pale, inside a history that ennobled her, and inside a family contrasted with an outside world of secular and oppressive rule. Within that world of spatial and temporal boundaries, autobiographical Antin articulates an "I" that remains primarily a "we" in a collective time and space; and the primary marker of subjectivity remains ethnic.

In 1894 Mary (then Maryashe, or Mashke for short) Antin, along with her mother and siblings, immigrated to Boston to join her father, Israel Antin, who had left Polotzk three years earlier. The second half of the autobiography is set in America, where the autobiographical subject was "made over." The first New World chapter repeats the title of the autobiography, "The Promised Land," and focuses on the Americanization process, culminating with the day the father delivered the Antin children to school. The schoolroom, site of subsequent chapters, becomes the critical signifier of America and a central chronotope of the autobiography. The narrator writes that the first day of school was "magnified a hundred times" in her memory and will be remembered long after "I forget my name" (199). As identification of the autobiographical Antin with America centers in the schoolroom, that site also signifies Americanization discourses.

Americanization, understood generally as a process of assimilation to Anglo-Saxon culture, is attached historically to a specific movement at the turn of the century when mass immigration of thousands of non-Anglo, non-Protestant, non-English-speaking populations alarmed American gatekeepers sufficiently so that many feared civilization and the supposed natural order of things were threatened. While xenophobes sought immigration restriction, more reform-minded agents sought to halt the collapse of the moral order through education: the English language, Anglo-Saxon culture, Protestant virtues, and middle-class cultural values could redeem civilization and humanity, reformers thought. American schools played a key role in this transformation of the alien into the American, and language, namely linguistic competence, often served as the critical sign of patriotism, morality, and humanity.

Autobiographical Antin narrates the initiation into the discourses of the school, and especially of the teacher. George Washington served as a primary signifier of the Americanization discourse for autobiographical Antin: because he was a "king in greatness" and he and Antin were "fellow citizens," autobiographical Antin felt "nobly related." The autobiographical Antin occupies the space of the schoolroom for much of the remainder of the autobiography, along with spaces related to the school by virtue of the knowledges they represent, namely, the Boston Public Library; the private library of Dr. Hale, the "grand old man of Boston;" and, by extension, the Hale House Settlement, where Antin is introduced to the Natural History Club and nature.
Like the school, both in the knowledge it contains and in the architectural order it signifies, the Boston Public Library represents ideologies of Americanization and Western rationality. Although the Boston Public Library became known as the "People's Palace" after Oliver Wendell Holmes's dedicatory poem, the library's beaux arts architecture, associated with the classical ideals of ancient Greece and Rome, and its lavish construction (which made Holmes's label partially ironic) signify a democratic that is, the people's topos. But that label is ironic for the library also signifies an elite culture. The kind of knowledge elevated in the library becomes clear when the autobiographical Antin visits her sister Frieda and reads in Frieda's tenement kitchen not what might be called the people's stories (not Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew, or even American literature) but what the authorities at the school and library said should be read and valued: the classics, specifically, Cicero, Ovid, and Virgil. (The sisters especially liked to read the Aeneid.) The elite nature of this knowledge is reinforced when juxtaposed with Dr. Hale's library on Highland Street. Going to Hale's library before school and the Boston Public Library after school, autobiographical Antin was able to endure the slum: "Who would feel cramped in a tenement with such royal privileges as these," she proclaimed. "One could be happy a year on Dover Street [the slum] after spending a half hour on Highland Street [location of Hale's upper-class home]" (34546). The contradictions residing in this topos signifying American cultural assimilation become explicit when we consider that these spaces the school and library offer no meaningful residence in any sense; the knowledges they represent denied Antin, as woman, the franchise (legitimacy) as she wrote; and the economic insecurity of Dover Street, contrasted with Highland Street, contradict the alleged American Promises the autobiographical subject affirms.

In the final chronotope of the autobiography, the reader finds the Antin autobiographical subject in front of the Boston Public Library, an adolescent who has just returned from a Natural History Club outing to the sea, having been left on the steps of the library. Autobiographical Antin holds a specimen jar from her nature collection and reflects on being the "youngest of America's children." The final topos of the autobiography aligns the Antin subject with two dominant epistemologies of Western culture - elite cultural knowledge housed in the Boston Public Library, before which she stands, and scientific rationalism, which collects, labels, and controls nature, signified by the day's catch in the specimen jar. The school and library, the primary chronotopes of the autobiography, and the sites of her narrative rebirth, merge in this final image. And by aligning the speaking subject with these knowledges, the narrator would secure the autobiographical Antin as an American. However, the reader cannot imagine her beyond the steps of the Boston Library. Although the historical Antin was "nearly 30" when the autobiography was written (and she had studied at Barnard, married, borne a child, and moved to New York), the life of the autobiographical subject ends with the adolescent on the steps of the Boston Public Library. The Antin subject the reader meets in this autobiography is an adolescent who reached neither adulthood nor maturity; she is neither a sexual nor social being. The Antin subject is rooted in no specific place or community. Female sexuality (along with marriage and parenthood) dissolve in the final chronotope, along with ethnicity. The assertion of Americanness erases both gendered and ethnic difference as well as embodiment.

Consequently, the meaning of rebirth as an American remains an abstract utterance, contradictory and without real meaning. We might argue that this explains why the work is frequently cited as a "classic immigrant autobiography." In 1918, a few years after the publication of The Promised Land, the historical Antin suffered from what was diagnosed as neurasthenia, from which she never really recovered. Surely the psychic struggle of the historical Antin is not unrelated to the enormous contradictions between the idealized American represented by the autobiographical subject, for whom adulthood, sexuality, and difference remained unimagined and unimaginable,
and the actual conditions of the historical Antinwoman, wife (separated), mother, Russian-Jewish immigrant, author. For historical Antin, dominant cultural discourses provided no language for these positions, rendering them unimaginable; consequently, narrator Antin lacked a language for articulating the contradictory positions of the historical Antin. To suggest that the America-identified autobiographical Antin represents the so-called real Mary Antin denies the historical Antin the contradictions and complexities of that life, while it renders the notion of classic immigrant auto-biography abstract and provides the reader no glimpse of what it means to be an adult American, female and ethnic.

Anzia Yezierska also immigrated with her family in the early 1890s as a preadolescent, but she published her autobiography, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, in 1950, nearly a half-century after Mary Antin's publication. The book was initially applauded by critics, but Louise Levitas Henriksen, Yezierska's daughter, asserts it "died almost immediately" (273). A critique of American culture embedded in the narrative may explain its sudden death in the wake of McCarthyism of the early 1950s; however, today, in the context of ethnic studies and feminist scholarship, publishers have reprinted and anthologized her autobiography and her fiction, and several biographies of her have appeared. As feminists re-discover writings of foremothers and ethnic studies scholars recover immigrant writers, Yezierska's works have been interpreted generally in the context of either literary studies or social history, "as an interpreter of the Jewish immigrant experience" (Kessler-Harris v). Within these traditional frameworks, scholars often assemble fragments from fiction, the autobiography, or historical records in order to grasp a presumed essential Yezierska. The search invariably disappoints. In *American Literature*, Eric Sundquist claims that *Red Ribbon* "portrayed less the true Yezierska than an author still sometimes acting the part of the 'sweatshop Cinderella' " (121; emphasis mine). The expectation that the reader might find a true Yezierska, and the subsequent disappointment of not finding it, means the Yezierska herself is critiqued not only for avoiding truth but also for hiding behind a mask. Mary Dearborn argues in "Anzia Yezierska and the Making of an Ethnic American Self" that though the writer "was in fact 'made' by others, by the nascent public relations industry, it is important to keep in mind her conscious participation in the process" (117). Dearborn's concept of self-invention implies that although Yezierska had help, she originated her own meaning; further, the association of this self with public relations implies a deception that hides the alleged true self. Thus pursuit of an essential, or true, Yezierska, like pursuit of a real Mary Antin, fails because language cannot represent the totality of the being. However, the expectation of finding a coherent self not only masks the discursive practices and cultural ideologies shaping the possible and the desirable, but also devalues the historical subject for failure to represent an unrepresentable totality, or for failure to represent that impossibility truthfully. If readers abandon notions of an essential Yezierska, it is possible to explore cultural tensions and meanings surrounding gender and ethnicity in American discourses; unlike Antin, the autobiographical Yezierska occupies American spaces as an adult.

In *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, the Yezierska narrator, like narrator Antin, addresses the difficulty of being foreign-born in America and the struggle to become a person. Also like Antin, the Yezierska narrator erases gendered positions in the autobiographyas a wife, mother, and teacher in female-dominated fields such as domestic sciencealthough these were positions the historical Yezierska occupied. However, unlike Antin, autobiographical Yezierska reaches adulthood and occupies that temporality through most of the
autobiography. Further, while narrator Antin moves chronologically and spatially from the Old to the New World, narrator Yezierska juxtaposes the Old and the New so that the autobiographical subject occupies both simultaneously. The New World basically provides the topos for the autobiography; however, the Lower East Side of New York City (geographically in the New), signifies the Old generally through imaginary figures whose voices intrude in the New World (American) spaces.

The autobiography's three divisions signify three ideological spaces where autobiographical Yezierska sought residence, or a metaphoric home, away from the Lower East Side and its evocations of the Old World: Hollywood, signifying material well being, but also the decadence of the consumer culture; the uptown literary world of New York City, signifying artistic achievement, but also a cultural elitism; and, in the third section, the Writer's Hall of the Federal Writer's Project (momentarily a utopia) and a rural New England community, signifying a national past, but also a provincial and xenophobic historical memory. In the midst of the American spaces memory of another world surface as the narrator inserts the voice of imaginary characters signifying the discourse of the father, Jewish ethnicity, and a spiritual world. This oppositional voice of the father is embodied in several Jewish men (imaginary, the biographers tell us): Boroch Mayer, whose fan letter requesting a ship ticket to die in Poland impels her to leave Hollywood; Zalmon Shlomoh, the hunchbacked fish peddler who draws her to Hester Street and bequeaths to her his lodge money; and Jeremiah Kintzler, the Spinoza scholar in the Federal Writer's Project who spoke of utopian longings.

Collectively, these ideological spaces signify tensions between American and ethnic discourses, primarily in the 1920s and 1930s. By juxtaposing these two temporal arenas the historical present and the memory of a past, Old World, ethnic culture autobiographical Yezierska dramatizes the struggle to find a meaningful space to reside in the universe. Initially, autobiographical Yezierska is drawn to the American spaces Hollywood, uptown literary world, rural New England to escape the poverty and struggle of the Lower East Side; she eventually rejects and is rejected in each space. On the other hand, autobiographical Yezierska does not simply embrace an ethnic past that offers her no strategies for living in the present world: recalling her dead father's spiritual life at the end of the autobiography, the narrator writes, "he ignored the world I had to live in and compromise with. Centuries yawned between us" (218). No place provided sanctuary. Consequently, in the beginning and end of the narrative, autobiographical Yezierska occupies a train, signifying her inability to find a place in the universe: in the first chapter she has boarded a train for Hollywood; in the last, she sits aboard a train, leaving New England for unknown destinations.

Autobiographical Yezierska first appears in part one looking out of a Lower East Side basement tenement and cooking "stale tea leaves" when she receives news that Goldwyn has offered $10,000 to develop a film script for her award-winning collection of short stories, Hungry Hearts. Within pages the autobiographical Yezierska emerges from a train in Hollywood and is driven by a limousine to the Miramar Hotel, where her room contains "criminal luxury," including extra towels, two faucets, and canary toilet paper. The opulence attracts and repulses: "I had earned all this . . . proof that I was really a writer" (42). Later, as a dinner guest at Rupert Hughes's home, the narrator reflects: "Where have I seen this visionary space before . . . when I was in the dark hold of the steerage . . . when I was sewing buttons in a factory . . . when I walked the streets" (58). Fascinated by the material comfort that seemed to confer personhood,
autobiographical Yezierska exclaims: "For once in my life I was where I wanted to be. For once I was part of everything. . . . I've arrived! I'm in with Hollywood royalty! Pushcart clothes and all I am the guest of honor at the feast . . . that's America!" (61). However, while occupying the luxury palaces, autobiographical Yezierska articulates its opposite and evokes the father's critique: "Not me [was] invited to this dinner, but the sweatshop Cinderella" (55). And so there is confusion: "On Hester Street, I knew my way," writes the narrator. "Black was black; white was white. Right was right; wrong was wrong. Now Black, white, right wrong nothing was real anymore" (41). Denied a complexity that includes that past, the narrator asserts that in Hollywood, "I stood empty, homeless outside of life. Not a woman, not a writer" (87). The two competing ideologies hail the autobiographical Yezierska Hollywood (signifying material success, mobility, and consumerism) and the Lower East Side (signifying piety, godliness, community, but also poverty); and both discursive communities disturb her. Thus, although Boroch Mayer's letter requesting money serves to pull autobiographical Yezierska away from Hollywood and back to New York City, once there, she finds the fictionalized Mayer dead, and she cannot bear the poverty of the Lower East Side. She moves to the Grosvenor Hotel on Fifth Avenue.

In part two, living on Fifth Avenue during the early 1920s, autobiographical Yezierska has achieved material and literary recognition, but after three years the "high-towered luxury" of the Grosvenor "still did not feel at home" (101). Thus she visits and recalls the Lower East Side through memory, but she resides uptown and occupies the spaces of the New York literary establishment. Both cultural arenas generate tensions for autobiographical Yezierska. Dining at the Algonquin Club, author Yezierska finds herself surrounded by literary agents who consider her a "prize" and the object of debate: Who discovered her? Who first published her? Who made her visible? Recognizing their "possessive solicitude" (which she likened to the Hollywood moguls), author Yezierska feels objectified and exploited; on the other hand, despite "an overwhelming nostalgia" that takes the autobiographical Yezierska back to the ghetto on the East Side, to the "pandemonium of familiar strains," to "this home that had never been a home" (1012), she cannot reside there. These two geographic spaces signify the tensions of the competing ideologies that autobiographical Yezierska can neither wholly accept or reject. Two men in this middle section embody these ideological tensions: John Morrow, a fictionalized representation of John Dewey, with whom historical Yezierska had a brief romance, and Zalmon Schломoh, the poor fish peddler and friend from the East Side. Morrow "recognized [me] as a person," the narrator writes, "he saw me, knew me, reassured me that I existed" (107). Together they visit the Lower East Side: "What I had found coarse and commonplace was to him exotic" (109). Through his eyes the autobiographical Yezierska rediscovers that space, but this "real American" sees her cultural world as exotic. She and this world become objectified by Hollywood and the literary agents, because exoticism both celebrates and objectifies. But Shломoh cannot hold her either: autobiographical Yezierska appreciates his humor (if she asked him about his luck, he would say, "except for health and a living, I'm perfectly fine"), and she shares his joy of romantic escapes from "unlived lives" (through Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" and Caruso's *Pagliacci*), but seeing Schломoh's hunchback and poverty make the autobiographical Yezierska also feel a "cripple," and his fish smells affront her perspectives learned in American discourses. Neither of these ideological spaces (the high-towered luxury and the streets of the Lower East Side, along with the men who embody these) provide a home where autobiographical Yezierska could take up residence, signifying the struggle with and against dominant and ethnic discourses.
Temporally, the final section of the autobiography occurs during the depression years of the early 1930s and is situated, first, in the living and working spaces of those employed with the Federal Writer's Project (FWP) and, second, in Fair Oaks, an imaginary New England village. The narrative portion devoted to the FWP represents about fifty pages (one-fourth of the autobiography), suggesting a temporal moment when autobiographical Yezierska found a meaningful home. The narrator emphasizes the shared experience of poverty and unemployment during the depression, dwelling especially on the sense of community that develops among poor writers of all races, classes, and ethnic backgrounds: held together by a "strange fellowship of necessity" and a common purpose of writing, the group laboring in the Writer's Hall evokes a microcosm of utopian America. In this world Jeremiah Kintzler, the Spinoza scholar from Warsaw, emerges as a spokesperson for the utopian potential embodied there, speaking for justice, equality, and the idealism of artist and scholar; he also signifies the father's discourse. The utopian moment of equality in a shared struggle is short lived, however: as the project becomes bureaucratized, the writers function as "wordage machines," and Kintzler, their inspiration, dies, exposing the empty contents of his briefcase. Autobiographical Yezierska leaves the project and travels to New England; her search for a home operates as the central metaphor in the last two chapters. Responding to a newspaper ad, the autobiographical Yezierska takes up residence in a farmhouse, where for a moment she finds "the peace and quiet of home." In time, however, the narrator discovers heraloneness, signified in visual objects: "prim, New England things . . . belong. They spoke of stability, security, a homeplace for generations" (213); and in the New England hills where she sees her own homelessness. The narrator dramatizes this isolation and separation in a high school pageant centered on the Mayflower, which provokes discussion between autobiographical Yezierska and a neighbor about cultural histories. Autobiographical Yezierska points out parallels between Plymouth Rock and Ellis Island, and she views "the Pilgrims as immigrants and dissenterslike me." The New England neighbor, however, reading the meaning of the historical narratives differently, sees autobiographical Yezierska as a Jewish immigrant, an "outsider." The sting of once again being the alien provokes the autobiographical Yezierska to board a train leaving New Englandfor a destination unknown. On the train, the narrator reflects that she carries the past with her: "The ghetto was with me wherever I wentthe nothingness, the fear of my nothingness" (219).

The train serves as a critical topos for the adult autobiographical Yezierska seeking a place to reside, a home, in the universenot as an object but as a person. Seeking personhood, autobiographical Yezierska enters the ideological spaces of Hollywood, the Algonquin, Writer's Hall, and rural New Englandsignifying America; but she both rejects and is rejectedsignified by the metaphor of the train. The reader, therefore, meets an autobiographical subject, framed by trains, in search of a literal and metaphorical home, a subject who has achieved literary and financial recognition by "writing herself into personhood," yet a person who cannot find a meaningful residence in the historical and material world. The Yezierska subject shares spaces with the wealthy in Hollywood homes, with literary elites in the Algonquin Club, and with Mayflower descendants in New England farmhouses; but in each of these spaces the memory and fish smells of poverty inscribed in consciousness represent a history and complexity not permitted, while everywhefemalealeness is erased. Yet the tenements of the Lower East Side signify a medieval world view, economic exploitation, and poverty, where meaning lies buried and unimaginable. Although the Yezierska subject, unlike the Antin subject, occupies the temporal arena of adulthood, the metaphor of the train serves to signify alienation from a world in which the adult woman and ethnicfinds no meaningful space in which to reside, for in all those spaces the multiplicity of the subject positions she occupies must be denied or ignored.
Unlike autobiographical Antin, autobiographical Yezierska does not experience rebirth in the New World; nor does she simply reject the New World by embracing an ethnic past. If the Antin autobiographical subject utters the hope of a young adolescent immigrant girl on the steps of the Boston Public Library in the discourse of dominant American ideology, the Yezierska autobiographical subject, situated as an adult, articulates the problematic ideology embedded in that discourse for those positioned as Other. In short, the Americanizing discourses that defined personhood in patriarchal and Anglo-Saxon terms demanded denial of female positions (wife/mother) and alien positions (Polish/Jewish immigrant) except in so far as foreignness represented a place that one abandons. (Although the historical Yezierska had married, divorced, and raised a daughter during the temporal periods of the narrative, these positions are notably absent in the autobiography.)

If autobiographical Yezierska's search for a home in America ultimately fails, historical Goldman straggled to make the universe a home for all peoples. Consequently, autobiographical Goldman occupied multiple geographic places—forbidden spaces—signifying subjectivities radically different from those autobiographical Antin or Yezierska occupy, thus offering a chronotopic image of the American, female, ethnic, and indeed human being, that is radically altered and embedded with possibility.

Emma Goldman's two-volume autobiography, *Living My Life*, begun in 1928, was first published in October 1931 while she lived in exile in Saint-Tropez, France. Encouraged by friends to write, and eventually receiving an advance from Alfred Knopf, historical Goldman hoped the book would provide financial security for her remaining years and gain her reentry to America when the injustice of her exile became evident (Wexler, *EG in Exile* 132). Neither of these purposes was realized, however, but the reception to the autobiography was primarily favorable: Alice Wexler cites one critic who described it as "the most extraordinary document ever penned by a woman," one that "certainly ranks with the great autobiographies of the world" (154). Nearly sixty years later, the two-volume publication is still in print and critical discussion of the work continues. Wexler argues that the autobiography "mythologized Goldman's life, creating a larger-than-life female hero with little of the depression, anxiety, bitterness, jealousy, or loneliness so evident in her letters. It was this figure who increasingly preempted the historical woman in the popular imagination, for *Living My Life* would become the main source of information about Goldman, and for a long time, about anarchism in America" (156). Thus the historical and the autobiographical Goldman collapse in the imagination of most readers in the twentieth century. Scholarly attention to Goldman's autobiography has persisted up to the fiftieth anniversary of her death in 1940, though it is strikingly absent in discourses where one might imagine it, particularly in studies of ethnicity and women's autobiography. Werner Sollors and Mary Dearborn, who have written extensively about American culture and ethnicity, virtually ignore Goldman, and although feminist scholarship has generated significant biographical studies, namely those by Alice Wexler and Candace Falk, Goldman is also strikingly absent in studies of women's autobiographies. Estelle Jelineck accords her a few lines within "Exotic Autobiographies Intellectualized" in *The Tradition of Women's Autobiographies*. It is within traditional academic disciplines that Goldman has received the most attention—especially literary and historical studies; however, relying on prevailing standards of aesthetic taste and historical veracity, traditional approaches to Goldman's autobiography often lead to harsh and misleading judgments and, I suggest, diminish the effect of the autobiographical subject for the contemporary reader.

Critics, Wexler notes, have pointed out "incongruity between her [Goldman's] ideological aspirations and the imaginative forms in which she expressed them" (147). Attacking her for
relying on "stock figures" and "cliches of American popular romance," critics use terms such as sentimental, popular, conservative aesthetic tastes, and romantic to disparage narrator Goldman for not putting her radical ideas in radical forms. A recent example of this critical perspective is found in Peter Conn's essay on Emma Goldman, "A Glimpse Into the 21st Century: Emma Goldman." Overall Conn's approach aims to be sympathetic to Goldman; demonstrating Goldman's commonality with Henry James and other Americans of the period who possessed a "divided mind," Conn seeks to reveal her "American family resemblance" (315) and thus make her less alien. The argument, however, rests primarily on Goldman's language what Conn seems to consider jarring religious metaphors for a Jewish anarchist (New York City as a "baptism" and Berkman's imprisonment as "a Calvary") and descriptions of her love affairs, which draw on the "tradition of romantic love" and "Harlequin love songs." He concludes that Goldman's "vision of the future was entangled in the debris of the past" (313). By identifying Goldman with her language (and, one might argue, reducing her to it) and emphasizing disembodied ideas, Conn links her with Henry James (an Anglophile from an upper-class, patrician family, who became a British citizen in 1915). In the process, he not only depoliticizes Goldman's life and ideas, he also ignores the discursive possibilities available to Goldman. How did anyone write about female sexuality, human intimacy, and love in 1928? As Michel Foucault has so persuasively demonstrated, discourses on human sexuality in Western culture, dominated by the medical profession and religious institutions, revolve around constructions of health and morality and in the last century by Freudian psychoanalysis undesirable frameworks for describing intimate human relationships. Popular romance remained an alternative. That autobiographical Antin and Yezierska virtually excluded expressions of love underscores the problem as cultural. Further, that radical aesthetic forms do not automatically produce radical ideas is evident in Gertrude Stein's Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, which virtually ignores sexuality and eroticism. What remains remarkable about Goldman is that, chronotopically, she takes readers into forbidden spaces, such as her bedroom, when neither autobiographical Antin, autobiographical Yezierska, nor Gertrude Stein, could. Yet, unlike writers of erotica, autobiographical Goldman also takes the reader out again, also claiming other spaces for women, namely public spaceslecture halls, union halls, the streets as she occupies them herself.

Clearly, literary approaches that focus primarily on linguistic patterns, metaphoric allusions, and traditional aesthetic standards remain inadequate for reading those positioned as the Other, who must steal language. On the other hand, assumptions about the transparency of historical veracity lead some critics of the autobiography, reports Wexler, to charge that narrator Goldman distorted the truth and that portraits, particularly of Alexander Berkman, Ben Reitman, and Johann Most, were motivated by an act of revenge (149). Wexler cites two particular limitations of the autobiography noted by historical critics: that she wrote of the anarchist movement as though she were the center and that she avoided discussing the ideas of anarchism. Chronotopically, however, the autobiographical subject occupies all the spaces the dominant culture forbade herfemale embodiment of these spaces becomes itself an anarchist statement. Further, the attribution of personal motivations, such as revenge, seems to mask the larger critique of patriarchy embedded in the autobiography. From the framework of postmodern feminism and cultural theories, contemporary readers can appreciate Goldman's struggle against patriarchal power and control. Though lacking contemporary language for that critique, narrator Goldman used her positions as anarchist and feminist to resist patriarchal oppression both within
dominant institutions and among male anarchist friends with whom she shared a larger political agenda, but who were often blind to their own formations in oppressive patriarchal ideology. Ed Brady, anarchist leader and mentor, wanted Goldman to marry him, to abandon her public life, and to assume woman's natural position as mother. Goldman's refusal to be possessed in marriage or to assume a subordinate position in a heterosexual relationship evokes a contemporary feminist position, which she could assume at the turn of the century because of her multiple subject positionsparticularly those of anarchist and feminist. Examination of chronotopic positions of autobiographical subjects permit us to see more clearly the effect of radical discourses, and such an analysis helps contemporary readers appreciate the power of those positions and thus of the autobiography.

In the opening of Living My Life the narrator positions autobiographical Goldman at the moment of arrival in New York City from Rochester, New York, not the Old World: "It was the 15th of August 1889, the day of my arrival in New York City. I was twenty years old. All that had happened in my life until that time was now left behind me, cast off like a worn-out garment" (3). Although historical Goldman had been in the United States for four years, had married, and worked in Rochester, what provokes the rebirth is the imprisonment and execution, 11 November 1887 in Chicago, of anarchists charged with murder in the Haymarket Riot. Unlike autobiographical Antin's rebirth as American, which leaves her in adolescence, autobiographical Goldman's rebirth as a political radical positions her as an adultchronotopically, in New York City at twenty-prepared to struggle against injustice in America. Narrator Goldman closes the autobiography in 1928 (the time of her writing) reflecting on efforts to release Sacco and Vanzetti, Italian anarchists also charged with murder, imprisoned (1921-27), and executed (22 August 1927). Although the Goldman narrator covers the period from her birth in 1869 to the time she began to write the autobiography, she frames the life story with these two events that dramatize American injusticethe Haymarket Affair and the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. The strategy of framing the autobiographical narrative with these events, rather than immigration to or deportation from the New World, aligns the autobiographical subject with a communal history, particularly of the anarchists in the United States and struggles against injustice, rather than an individual history. This stimulates the reader to reflect on the injustices historical Goldman spent a lifetime fighting and serves to focus on the cause of justice rather than a personal story.

The framework also contains Goldman's deportation from the United States in 1919 and self-exile with Alexander Berkman in 1921 from post-revolutionary Russia after the Kronstadt revolt and massacre. By situating these events in the middle of the narrative, the autobiographical Goldman occupies the centers of Western capitalism (America and western Europe) and Marxism (the Soviet Union), signifying what Jean-Francois Lyotard calls "the grand narratives," whose credibility and value have been questioned in the postmodern era. But historical and autobiographical Goldman also leaves these sites, in effect diminishing their authority. Historical Goldman was exiled from both these geographic and political arenas (involuntarily from the United States in 1919, voluntarily from the Soviet Union in 1921); however, by foregrounding neither event in the autobiography, the Goldman narrator calls attention to the struggle against injustice within both grand narratives and delegitimizes the power and authority of both systems. The effect is to align the autobiographical subject with postmodern critiques of these grand narratives. Although the bulk of the autobiography is set in America, where historical Goldman spent half her life (1885-1919), by framing the narrative with the Haymarket tragedy and the memory of Sacco and Vanzetti (evoked on the last page), narrator Goldman foregrounds the injustices and the struggles against these. The primary chronotopes signify that critique.
The autobiographical subject, primarily an adult, occupied spaces unimaginable to autobiographical Antin or Yezierraspses theoretically closed to women. In late nineteenth-century American discourses addressing gender, the ideology of separate spheres prescribed appropriate spaces for males and females: males occupied public arenas, females the private arenas, namely the home. Autobiographical Goldman's presence in the proscribed public spaces, particularly on the streets, challenges those ideologies. One moment early in the autobiography illustrates this pattern, which is repeated throughout the narrative. In 1891 radical German, Jewish, and Russian socialist groups in New York City decided to mark International Labor Day on 1 May, secured Union Square for the celebration, and promised anarchists a platform to speak. When the platform was denied the anarchists, Emma Goldman was lifted onto a socialist truck. The narrator writes, "I began to speak. The chairman left, but in a few minutes he returned with the owner of the wagon. I continued to speak. The man hitched his horse to the truck and started off at a trot. I still continued to speak. The crowd, failing to take in the situation, followed us out of the square for a couple of blocks while I was speaking" (I:80). The image of historical Goldman speaking from the back of a wagon, pulled down the street away from Union Square, and followed by a receptive audience signifies not only a woman occupying male/public spaces, but a radical female claiming the right to speak amidst radicals who would silence her. The image evokes the way in which autobiographical Goldman throughout the autobiography occupies forbidden spaces. Perhaps the one site that most signifies the forbidden spaces she occupies, and the anarchist critique, were the prisons. "For people with ideals," writes the Goldman narrator, "prison is the best school" (I:116), alluding to Alexander Berkman and inverting autobiographical Antin's celebration of the schools. Historical Goldman's formal schooling, three years in a Realschule in Konigsberg, consisted of cruelty, as well as sexual and physical abuse (I:11617), an experience surely contributing to her critique of the schools as another oppressive state institution (and anticipating Althusser's analysis of the School (replacing the Church) as a primary Ideological State Apparatus, functioning with the Family in late capitalism as the dominant ideological institutions).

Indicted on three counts for a speech at Union Square "inciting to riot," although all witnesses agreed there was no riot at Union Square, historical Goldman was sentenced on 18 October 1893 to one year's imprisonment at Blackwell's Island Penitentiary. Though the exchange at the trial suggests she was tried for her beliefs, especially for rejecting a Supreme Being, the judge pronounced sentence and called her a "dangerous woman" (Drinnon 6061). In Blackwell's, fellow inmates initially shunned the incomprehensible anarchist, who refused to attend required church services; however, narrator Goldman writes that by defying prison authority (refusing to oversee workers in the sewing room and refusing the matron's request to translate a letter to an inmate written in Russian) historical Goldman won their hearts. The narrator concludes the chapter on imprisonment with reflections on its meaning in her life. Admitting she owed her development to many, autobiographical Goldman says,

and yet, more than all else, it was the prison that had proved the best school. A more painful, but a more vital, school. Here I had been brought close to the depths and complexities of the human soul; here I had found ugliness and beauty, meanness and generosity. Here, too, I had learned to see life through my own eyes and not through those of Sasha [Alexander Berkman], Most[Johann] Ed[Brady]. The prison had been the crucible that tested my faith. It had helped me to discover strength in my own being, the strength to stand alone, the strength to live my life and fight for my ideals, against the whole world if need be. The State of New York could have rendered me no greater service than by sending me to Blackwell's Island Penitentiary. (I:148)

By occupying this forbidden space she not only inverts the prevailing ideology and allies herself
with victims of injustice, but she gives dignity to those who share that space, not only in Blackwell's but in other prisons where she empathizes with victims of injustice; there, her conviction was reinforced that crime is a result of poverty and the endless chain of injustice and inequality. Historical Emma Goldman, one might argue, was deported precisely because she occupied forbidden spaces, ideologically and politically, but also spatially, for women as well as for Americans. And by occupying forbidden spaces the autobiographical Goldman challenges prevailing images of Americans, women and human beings.

If prisons signify the forbidden spaces autobiographical Goldman occupied, the spaces she did not occupy also signify her multiple and contradictory subjectivities. The place prescribed for women in the culture remained the home (that elusive place autobiographical Yezierska never found), a place to contain female subjectivity, to keep women economically dependent on men, to control sexuality in bonds of marriage an institution Goldman equates with prostitution. Historical Goldman took up residence where she could find it and continued her work; so, too, perpetual motion marks the autobiographical subject but, unlike autobiographical Yezierska's quest for home, autobiographical Goldman assumes a home wherever the struggle for justice takes her. Thus she finds residence in apartments, hotels, offices of *Mother Earth*, a brothel, prisons, with friends or family, on the Museum of the Revolution in travels across the United States, Europe, the Soviet Union, and Canada.

Traditionally, the ideological space of the home also signified the site of motherhood. Diagnosed with an inverted uterus and unable to bear children, historical Goldman never took steps that might have reversed that condition, although Wexler argues she may have suffered from endometriosis. Nevertheless, reflections on motherhood appear in the autobiography:

> My starved motherhood was that the main reason for my idealism? He [Ed Brady] had roused the old yearning for a child. But I had silenced the voice of the child for the sake of the universal, the all-absorbing passion of my life. Men were consecrated to ideals and yet were fathers of children. But man's physical share in the child is only a moment's; women's part is for years years of absorption in one human being to the exclusion of the rest of humanity. I would never give up the one for the other. But I would give him my love and devotion. Surely it must be possible for a man and a woman to have a beautiful love-life and yet be devoted to a great cause. We must try. (I:15354)

Although not occupying the sacred space of the idealized American home (a privately owned, detached, single-family dwelling) and not taking up her supposedly natural female position of mother, autobiographical Goldman assumed alternative positions outside the home, dignifying the not-mother/female and legitimating the spaces outside the prescribed home. On the other hand, in her position as midwife she empathized with the struggles of poor women, asserting that "women and children carried the heaviest burden of our ruthless economic system" (I:187). Further, because Goldman resisted patriarchal ideologies that devalue spaces designated for women, she could take up those spaces joyfully and defiantly. Unlike autobiographical Yezierska, who erases positions held in female-dominated professions, autobiographical Goldman speaks of being a "proud holder of two diplomas, one for midwifery and one for nursing" (I:174) and she worked for years in these professions. Goldman occupies forbidden spaces and refuses to occupy prescribed places, but in the process she dignifies delegitimized spaces and the people residing there, while she redefines prescribed spaces.

Within the range of forbidden and prescribed, autobiographical Goldman assumes multiple...
spaces throughout the narrative, evoking multiple subjectivities: as woman, Russian-born immigrant, radical, Jew, anarchist, feminist, agitator, lecturer, writer, daughter, sister, aunt, friend, fellow-prisoner, lover. The narrator writes, "I was not hewn of one piece, like Sasha or other heroic figures. I had long realized that I was woven of many skeins, conflicting in shade and texture" (I:153). The multiplicity of subject positions are reflected in the multiple chronotopic positions autobiographical Goldman occupied, those that speak of a radical public life-delivering speeches at Union Square, lecturing on anarchism and drama at American universities, addressing an anarchist congress in Amsterdam, nursing the poor, defending herself and others before judges, or riding the Museum of the Revolution across Russia to collect materials of the revolution. And those spaces that speak of a personal life-exchanging ideas in private homes with friends, viewing dramatic productions in theaters, celebrating victories in restaurants, and lovemaking in her bedrooms. The multiple chronotopes evoke the various subjectivities that challenge patriarchal and Americanizing discourses, suggesting a range of social relations and ideological positions foreclosed in prescribed spaces by dominant cultural narratives. Autobiographical Goldman evokes for contemporary readers alternative subject positions to those of the dominant discourses by occupying forbidden spaces; she consequently challenges prevailing ideologies surrounding an image of the presumed cultural Other, especially the female, and points to alternative chronotopic images for all human beings.

If Bakhtin is right that our image of the human being is always spatial and temporal that is, concretethen the value of a chronotopic analysis for exploring autobiography seems manifest, particularly if we look for less visible and noncognitive ways of reading the speaking subject and the cultural Other. The chronotopes are not natural or self-evident categories, but culturally prescribed, and embedded with cultural meanings. Autobiographical Antin, allied with signifiers of American discourses, situated in the schools as an adolescent, assumes her place in a prescribed space, meaning adulthood for the ethnic woman becomes unimaginable. Autobiographical Yezierska, seeking home in dominant American spaces, while drawn to an ethnic past ill-equipped for a contemporary world, finds no place of residence for the multiply positioned ethnic woman. Autobiographical Goldman, however, occupies multiple and contradictory spaces, transgressing the prescriptions of patriarchy and nationalism. Thus she posits alternative subjectivities for a postmodern, feminist cultural vision. Reading autobiographies chronotopically, especially those of the cultural Other, permits us to read differently to apprehend the effect of discourses in which the autobiographer is situated by examining the subject's temporal and spatial placement in the world. Further, such an approach also permits a cultural critique of prevailing ideologies.

Postmodernism, Autobiography, and Subjectivity Reconsidered

Postmodernism, Chantal Mouffe argues in her essay "Radical Democracy," need not imply an outright rejection of modernity, but we must reject the "Enlightenment project of self-foundation" (meaning the autonomous, unitary, meaning-making self). Nor, she argues, need we abandon the political project of modernity equality and freedom for all. Rather, she asserts,
"we must ensure that the democratic project takes account of the full breadth and specificity of the democratic struggles in our times. It is here that the contribution of the so-called postmodern critique comes into its own." She continues her argument:

How, in effect, can we hope to understand the nature of these new antagonisms if we hold on to an image of the unitary subject as the ultimate source of intelligibility of its actions? How can we grasp the multiplicity of relations of subordination that can affect an individual if we envisage social agents as homogeneous and unified entities? What characterizes the struggles of these new social movements is precisely the multiplicity of subject-positions, which constitute a single agent and the possibility for this multiplicity to become the site of an antagonism and thereby politicized. (34)

For contemporary readers who wish to understand the multiplicity of subject-positions that constitute a single agent, ethnic autobiographies provide a site for developing that perspective; they enable us to see the concrete effects of multiple discourses in the culture, and thus permit a better understanding of cultural construction of difference. Mouffe writes of this importance:

To be capable of thinking politics today, and understanding the nature of these new struggles and the diversity of social relations that the democratic revolution has yet to encompass, it is indispensable to develop a theory of the subject as a decentered, detotalized agent, a subject constructed at the point of intersection of a multiplicity of subject-positions between which there exists no a priori or necessary relation and whose articulation is the result of hegemonic practices. Consequently, no identity is ever definitely established, there always being a certain degree of openness and ambiguity in the way the different subject-positions are articulated. What emerges are entirely new perspectives for political action, which neither liberalism with its idea of the individual who only pursues his or her own interest nor Marxism with its reduction of all subject-positions to that of class can sanction, let alone imagine. (34-35)

Clearly, in order to appreciate the multiple ethnic groups and struggles that characterize our postmodern world, we must develop new theories of the subject and new ways of reading narrative texts. Postmodern theories begin to provide us with a vehicle for understanding the multiplicity of subjectivities. Applying postmodern theories and a chronotopic analysis to autobiography can help us to appreciate and understand the multiple struggles and diverse social relations emerging on a global terrain by tracing the effects of discourse on a subject. Furthermore, postmodern theories enable us to reread our own cultural stories differently; a chronotopic analysis, especially, permits us see the effect of discursive practices on subjectivities, both in canonical and marginalized literatures, so we can consider whether as a culture we wish to cultivate these subjectivities or critique them.

A chronotopic analysis of so-called classics in American autobiography demonstrates the spatial and temporal limitations of our cultural and autobiographical traditions. The speaking subject, particularly those frequently cited as representative Americans such as Benjamin Franklin, Henry David Thoreau, and Henry Adams, often the center around which other American autobiographies are perceived to revolve represent the temporal and spatial arenas in which readers are asked to imagine the so-called American self. Positions of power in revolutionary America and France, isolation at Walden Pond, and Boston's Beacon Hill or Harvard, sites of "representative" American autobiographies, do not signify chronotopes in which women, blacks, and the poor can imagine themselves; yet the time-space dimensions of these representative American selves serve as an invisible effect of their self-representation, the plane on which the reader is asked to imagine those persons, thus aligning those temporal and spatial arenas with Americanness, and humanness. The issue is not only that cultural standards have prevailed over aesthetic ones in shaping canonical American literature an argument that Nina Baym has effectively made but also that the notions of cultural essences that have ruled naturalize particular
temporal and spatial arenas in which the racial, ethnic, and gendered Other has been denied access. Yet these have stood as images of the human and remained idealized in the name of a common cultural heritage and canonical integrity. Consequently, the pattern for imaging of the human being in American literature and autobiography—intrinsically chronotopic—excludes the Other. A chronotopic analysis, especially in the context of cultural discourses on race, class, gender, and ethnicity, suggests ways to interrogate subject positions elevated in the culture that ensure certain social and juridical relations.

One contemporary ethnic autobiography illustrates the value of this approach. Richard Rodriquez's *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriquez*, first published in 1982, and frequently reprinted, is often read by Anglo-Americans as a representative Chicano autobiography, while it generates deep controversy within the Chicano community. Richard Rodriquez, a second-generation Mexican-American immigrant, begins the autobiography as he enters school in Sacramento, California; he ends it thirty years later while writing the narrative, after completing a dissertation on Renaissance literature (doing research at the British Museum). In a sense, however, the autobiographical subject never leaves the schoolroom, the space that confers legitimation as American. Like the Antin subject in *The Promised Land*, autobiographical Rodriquez identifies with the dominant cultural ideologies, making the chronotopic parallels striking: both narratives isolate the "I" from the ethnic community in a rather solitary struggle; both subjectivities reside primarily in the schools; both close the autobiographies at the time of leaving school; both exclude adulthood and a collective experience in the temporal and spatial dimensions represented. Strikingly, both narratives have circulated widely in the culture. If the Antin subject and the Rodriquez subject represent subjectivities that guarantee prevailing social relations, we can recognize an ideological pattern that crosses gendered and ethnic differences: both ethnicity and gendered subjectivity remain contained, temporally and spatially, in the schoolroom. Neither the Jewish immigrant woman nor the second-generation Chicano becomes adult. This containment further masks complex political and economic histories as individualism, upward mobility, and Anglo cultural superiority appear naturalized. In some ways the chronotopic image of the contained Other in ethnic autobiography remains more problematic than that found in canonical literature because such images seem to emerge from the alleged voice of the Other and so naturalize and legitimate dominant cultural images of the transformed American while containing the Other in preadult, childlike states, there, bounded by the schoolroom. Chronotopic analysis, therefore, becomes invaluable in examining subjectivities in ethnic autobiographies.

This raises again the question of the uses and purposes of autobiography. Because autobiographical subjects reproduce prevailing ideologies, the issues raised by autobiography are not simply literary or historical, but cultural ones. If we consider culture in the broadest sense to be what is prescribed and what is prohibited, then as autobiographies naturalize certain subject positions they serve to prescribe these positions and guarantee social relations implied by the subject. Thus, the Antin subject that identifies with dominant American institutions naturalizes that alliance for all immigrants. The question remains whether oppositional or resistant subject positions can also be represented in the autobiographical form. To borrow Bakhtin's metaphor, can we identify in autobiography the centrifugal forces, which move away from the center, as well as the centripetal forces, which move toward the center? We may agree that the Antin autobiographical subject represents the centripetal field of force, the Goldman subject represents centrifugal forces, and the Yezierska subject represents a position struggling with and against the center; however, we must avoid seeing these as positions
emanating from essential selves. If we place these subjects chronotopically in the narrative and identify the discursive practices in which they are situated, we can trace the effect of discourses on subjects and identify multiple subjectivities in which they live. And as we begin to distinguish between narrator, historical subject, and autobiographical subject, we can avoid essentializing individuals, or the groups in which they live, and can associate subject patterns with discourses. Thus, whereas the Antin subject legitimates subject positions that guarantee prevailing social relations, Emma Goldman represents resisting positions and discourses, which might also hail the reader.

Finally, how do we read and understand the speaking subject of autobiography? Clearly, in the context of our postmodern world, we reside in multiple and contradictory discourses; the historical and economic conditions in which human beings live are also multiple and contradictory. To posit an essential self denies those contradictions and conditions. To imagine Mary Antin, for example, as an essentialist self, as the origin of her own meaning, speaking in an authentic voice, makes those dominant utterances, and the ideologies they mask, appear natural and legitimate; but it also denies her adult life and sexuality; it denies her gender and the multiple positions assumed as woman; it denies the traces of her ethnic past that remain after the transformation to American; and it denies the struggles in all these contradictions. When publishers anthologize these narratives and thus reproduce the subjectivities outside any historical contexts, these omissions become especially problematic for the readers. Furthermore, the desire to find a self in autobiography inevitably fails because of the impossibility of language to represent a whole. This search, however, led Patricia Spacks to claim that Goldman produces "an autobiography with no self at the center" (127). To make such an assertion denies the multiple subject positions that Goldman assumes throughout the autobiography; it also denies the reader the potential of being hailed by the resistant discourses the Goldman subject utters. To claim an essentialist self is to deny the way in which historical conditions, material forces, and cultural discourses shape articulations of the self. A theory of the subject in autobiography must posit the existence of multiple and contradictory subjectivities as the effect of multiple discourses at a particular historical moment.

Those threatened by postmodern theories of the subject seem to equate an attack on the coherent, autonomous self as an attack on human beings. Katherine Goodman in her volume on women’s autobiography in Germany defends the "concept of self and the authenticity of experience" arguing that "conceptualizing a dispersed subject may be necessary for women and genealogists who wish to avoid hierarchies if they are to liberate the subject, any subject at any time, from universals. But the concept of the ‘self’ is essential if we are not to remain fatalistic and without a sense of choice" (xvi). Clearly, we must distinguish between the humanist self and human beings and rethink our notion of the human, rather than cling to a view of supposed choice deeply embedded in the ideology of the Enlightenment which denies the lives of millions for whom "choice" remained nonexistent or severely circumscribed. Our notions of the humanist/essentialized self naturalized in the last five hundred years in Europe as rational, coherent, unified, but also androcentric is powerfully linked to American traditions of individualism. The humanist/essentialist view of the self tends to mask the way in which we are constituted in language and positioned differently depending on race, class, gender, or ethnicity. And because the humanist/essentialist model tends to universalize its view of the human being, it tends to dehistoricize individuals, to ignore the dialectic of the historical moment and ideological practices that shape subjectivities. When individuals do not conform to
perceptions of what appears to constitute the human, individuals tend to blame themselves or to be blamed rather than to acknowledge the ideologies, structures, economic and material conditions that produced less-than-human human beings. Further, making the humanist self seem natural tends to legitimate the violence done to the presumably less-than-human and is used as an explanation for poverty, degradation, and the multiple social and economic ills produced by systemic injustices.

Thus to cling to a notion of the meaning-making, coherent, unified individual both generally and at the center of an autobiography seems a travesty. The travesty is especially evident in the midst of a postmodern world characterized by fragmentations, by multiple and contradictory narratives, by global struggles of the oppressed, and by a collapse of modern epistemologies and political systems. Because autobiography has acquired power in the culture to legitimate certain subject positions, autobiographical studies can be a site from which to not only challenge essentialist notions of the human being, but also to examine the effect of discourses on subjects, both those that seem to guarantee prevailing social relations and those that critique them. Autobiographical studies might also therefore provide a site for cultural critique and social change.

Notes

1. Mary Louise Briscoe, ed., American Autobiography, 19451980, ix. Immigrant Women in the United States, compiled by Donna Gabaccia, cites more than four hundred entries under "autobiographies." The proliferation of autobiographical studies focused on ethnic groups in the United States is reflected in current Modern Language Association's bibliographies. Recent conferences on autobiography (international, multicultural, and cross-disciplinary) suggest a broad interest, as well as the multiple perspectives employed in examining autobiography; for example, "Autobiography and Self-Representation," held 34 March 1990 at the University of California Humanities Research Institute, University of California, Irvine; "The Maine Autobiography Conference," from 29 September to 1 October 1989 in Portland, Maine; and "Autobiographies, Biographies and Life Histories of Women: Interdisciplinary Perspectives," 2324 May 1986, at the University of Minnesota.


3. Michael M.J. Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory," 19596. Frances E. Mascia-Lees et al., "The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology," argue persuasively that the volume omits women anthropologists and ignores the valuable contributions feminism can bring to anthropology. The writers argue that feminism and postmodernism remain dichotomous, that whereas feminism is a radical movement with a political agenda, postmodernism is not. Given these operating assumptions, the writers concede postmodernism to conservatives and ignore such writers as Chantal Mouffe and Julia Kristeva, certainly feminists and postmodernists. For a powerful discussion of the political imperatives linking feminism and postmodernism and the importance of theorizing those relationships, see Teresa Ebert's Patriarchal Narratives and 'The 'Difference' of Postmodern Feminism.' See also Feminism/Postmodernism, edited by Linda J. Nicholson.
William Boelhower, another scholar whose work has focused on immigrant and ethnic autobiography, draws upon poststructuralist thinking, especially semiotics, to examine the constructions of identity in ethnic literature in the United States, especially in *Immigrant Autobiography* and *Through a Glass Darkly*. Like Fischer, however, Boelhower simply ignores the category of gender, as well as recent feminist scholarship.

4. Certainly, Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (Toronto, New York, Bantam Books: 1982), the autobiography of a second-generation Mexican-American speaks a dominant assimilationist discourse in which American school experiences become an avenue for upward mobility and erase an ethnic past. Its wide circulation and support among Anglo-American readers suggests that the narrative serves to privilege certain Mexican-American subjectivities and so support prevailing social relations (see also notes 6 and 7 below).

5. Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, 79, 167. Several discussions on the multiply positioned subject I find especially meaningful: Kaja Silverman’s *Subject of Semiotics* is a particularly useful source; also meaningful is Terry Eagleton’s discussion of Lacan and the distinctions among the “Is” of the speaking subject in *Literary Theory*, especially chapter five; and Julian Henriquez, et al., *Changing the Subject*, has been invaluable in demonstrating the necessity of changing our notion of the essential self and the social consequences of not doing so.

6. Ramón Saldivar, "Ideologies of the Self," is the only study I am aware of that employs the chronotopic analysis of ethnic autobiography. The comparative study that focuses on Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger of Memory* and Ernesto Galarza’s *Barrio Boy: The Story of a Boy’s Acculturation* (1971; Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 1980) emphasizes, however, the topos rather than the chronos. Briefly, Saldivar contrasts the private, school-focused, and individualized world of Rodriguez, with the public, integrated world of Galarza, evoked in the topos of the road and the barrio. He argues that Rodriguez’s work masks its ideology, whereas Galarza’s work affirms the conviction that the public is also private. He also contrasts the “exceptional time” of Rodriguez with the time of “dailiness” in Galarza, though less attention is given to the temporal dimensions. Saldivar’s provocative analysis makes important contributions to our understanding of these autobiographies. (The essay is reprinted in Ramón Saldivar, *Chicano Narrative*.)

7. What is significant is that while the autobiographical Antin subject—the model—does not reach adulthood, neither do the two autobiographical subjects Saldivar contrasts in his chronotopic analysis that emphasizes topos. Neither autobiographical Rodriguez nor autobiographical Galarza reach adulthood. Although the Rodriguez autobiographical subject is roughly contemporaneous with the histori-
Galarza's narrative time frame during a discussion at the Maine Autobiography Conference; Padillo noted that the chronotope of Antin's conclusion was similar to Galarza's.)

I suggest that Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior* reflects a similar pattern. Although the autobiography includes multiple adult female figures, the "I" remains a child throughout the narrative. In the second story, "The White Tiger," the "I" becomes an adult warrior, but only in a vision, and then as a general. Thus only through dreaming can the narrator emerge as an adult, but there she must also mask femaleness as she becomes a (male) general. (I am grateful to Wendy Kozol for her observation about the imaginary and disguised figure in "The White Tiger.") Because *Woman Warrior* is so thoroughly appropriated in the academy (and, like the Antin and Rodriguez autobiographies, often serves to represent ethnic, in this case Chinese-American, autobiography) this chronotopic position of the autobiographical "I" does not seem insignificant. One possible consequence of the institutional appropriation of ethnic autobiographies in which the speaking subject remains contained in time and space (as the school child) is that this image perpetuates a pattern of colonization, however subtle and invisible, by containing the gendered and ethnic Other in childhood.

References


