Hertha Sweet Wong, Berkeley Book Chats, October 24, 2018

Timothy Hampton: Welcome to Berkeley Book Chats. I'm Timothy Hampton, director of the Townsend Center for the Humanities. Berkeley Book Chats showcase a Berkeley faculty member engaged in a public conversation about a recently completed work. This popular series highlights the richness of Berkeley's academic community.

Today's conversation features Hertha Sweet Wong of the English Department discussing her book Picturing Identity: Contemporary American Autobiography in Image and Text.

She is joined by Linda Rugg of the Scandinavian Department.

Linda Rugg: All right, first of all, it's a great honor for me to be asked to be in conversation with Hertha about this book. Sometimes when a colleague produces a book, you've been living with them and the book for a long time and this we've been conversation and thought process on different little aspects surrounding this book as friends and colleagues for a while. This book is incredibly ambitious and it fulfills, I think, its ambition in terms of covering a broad array of (cell phone, aside) covering a really broad array of different forms of media, different cultures, different continents—there are different continents involved here—and the interface, not only in each of her artists between text and visual representation, but also within the book itself because it's a big challenge to create your own intermedial text, because that's what this is. It is also an intermedia text.

Linda Rugg: I first met Hertha, and I don't know if Hertha is going to remember this, but it was a long time ago and it was at a conference where I heard her giving a paper on her first book, which was also a very rich book about a subject that not very many people, including myself, knew about, pictorial representation from Native Americans. I was so excited by what she had to say at that time and I thought, "Okay, this is a person I want to talk with some more." At that time, I wasn't at Berkeley but then I came to Berkeley and I was able to enter into conversation with Hertha. Another aspect of what Hertha has done here is combined her very rich background in English literature and American cultures and American literature with her experience in art practice where you really dove in and we're working in the department there as Chair.

Linda Rugg: One of the things that also came up in our conversations is how much you've been able to engage your students with many of the aspects of this Texas as a work that encompasses not only Hertha's thought and her research and her experience with the artists, interfaced with some of the artists. But also, with her students where she was able to introduce her students to a lot of the very challenging and very rich material in this book. The very first thing I want to do is congratulate Hertha on having produced a beautiful book. I understand the amount of time, effort, and passion that went into the creation of this book and so it almost feels like, "Yes, this is our accomplishment." But it's totally Hertha's accomplishment and I'm really eager to hear more about what Hertha has to say about it.

Linda Rugg: One of the things that I thought about asking you was ... and then this just gives you a little bit of a chance also to introduce the book. I know that there is a thread that runs through all of these that has to do with the construction of identity, history, memory, and trauma for many of these people. The creation of art out of history and memory and trauma but what led you to these particular people? What attracted you to their work and what made you think, "Okay, these people belong in this Kaleidoscope together?"

Hertha Wong: That's a good question. Okay, well, thank you for all those kind words and thank you for showing up today. My selection process was based actually originally on formal aspects of the work. I was teaching a lot, not necessarily all of what's in the book, and I was interested in exploring different image texts relations. Some produced by writers or people who identified primarily as writers, others who identified primarily as artists but who were both writing and making and doing so in innovative ways. I really was interested in autobiography, your self-narration and self-representation narration meaning the story over time representation could be just a snippet of a moment that was not just using images in some illustrative mode. It's not just a little thing like you read along and inset in the middle of the autobiography of the memoir. Here's a picture of me when I was two, okay, that's when we lived at such and such.

Hertha Wong: That is a very different engagement between image and text, then what I was coming to discover could happen in a variety of ways. So, when I found things that seemed to be particularly interesting to me and offered questions around like how do you conceptualize the page? In comics, they talk about, well Art Spiegelman talks about that page is a unit of space and time and how you're going to break that down, and that's done through frames and panels and the gutter in between them or these conventions that get activated. They create a very unique reading experience. I was interested also in the experiential aspect of it. The sense that when you're looking at many of these, you're looking and reading and what comes first and how does that work. Most of these require readers, viewers to slow down and figure out what is the relationship between here this bit of text and this image, or in the case of artist books, how do I even read this? This is a book but it looks like a leaf or it looks like a tablet.

Hertha Wong: I have some images I can show you that would make it more concrete but how do you begin? A page might be something that looks like a little wooden slat and you can move those around. So, artists books are in dialogue with the history of the book as a form, as a time-based medium. That it's basically looking at an object through the eyes of a book and it's a whole history. There's one book artist I talk about who I talk about how she creates these architectures of cognition because as you enter each book, and they're all unique from this tiny to huge, you have to figure out how to navigate it. We're so used to conventional reading where just runs down the page and we are not conscious that we're even doing that. That's just what we do. I was also interested in the ways that we're reminded that text is also image and it's just that we've agreed to interpret these marks on the page in certain ways that we then read them really quickly and assume we know what they mean.

Hertha Wong: Some of the people I work with have done WordArt, so there's nothing but a painting of words and how do you account for the textures and the shapes and the colors and the juxtapositions and sets of relations in those? I was interested in this kind of proliferation of possibilities that was really going on. In my mind, I saw that what I was finding was that the people that I was most interested in all seemed to be beginning to produce in the '70s and '80s, post-civil rights movement when the silos of disciplinary isolation were becoming more permeable. Where they were breaking down in some instances and people were

experimenting. Sometimes that experimentation was just messy and not very ... or maybe productive as a part of getting to someplace else, but other times it was actually quite brilliant.

Hertha Wong: So most of the people that I write about are also really thinking about relational subjectivity. In other words, was rather than Is. They're insisting on even though supposedly the identity has been deconstructed out of existence, people keep reconstructing in and cobbling it even if it's contingent, even if it's variable, even if it's multiple. That fluidity and without necessarily doing something like say Nicky Lee does where she challenges the idea of anti-stable identity by morphing into various communities, dressing, speaking, behaving, hanging out with people, a participant observer status within a particular subculture. Then she takes all these photographs of herself and she looks like she could be a Japanese tourist, she looks like she could be in a, what do they call it, a trailer park with primarily poor people who are white. She looks like she could be fitting in this African-American hip hop group and so on.

Hertha Wong: There's the sense that she loses herself as a Korean-American woman in these various identities. The people that I'm talking about are really insistent that they have shared histories and they have shared communities. Not that it's all cohesive but that there is a way to engage that. So, when talking about the I, that it's really about the we. What many of these authors and writers and artists had to do was to create a more level playing field by undoing histories of misrepresentation. All of those were visual as well as written, and then creating new ones in order to even have them be visible at all because otherwise the old stereotypes and representations just dominate. There's a fair amount of work that goes on in that regard. There's a lot of dialogue back and forth also with historical precursors and so on. Like it's folded into some of the literature. Basically, getting back to your original question, I wanted to have a sprinkling of a whole spectrum of possibilities, none of which really look anything like the others.

Hertha Wong: Thinking about these image text relations and something that I've called for a long time, visual autobiography, which was actually a term I found out was coined by Joe Spence in about 1980-something, maybe '70-something. But there's finding a vocabulary for what I was interested in has been really, really a big part of the challenge. If I can show you maybe one slide, if I can find it. Yeah, so I started off calling it visual autobiography, I taught with Lou who was a photographer, a course that was cross listed with visual studies and architecture with English. It was a creative writing course. It was also crossed listed with American Studies in Hughes. We were trying to get people who were primarily makers and people who were primarily writers to get together to talk about this thing called visual autobiography. But then I went through terms like intermedia autobiography and inter-art, which I liked, but nobody else did.

Hertha Wong: Then it gives in certain sub-circles of the art world where people claim what they know, intersectional autobiography also has some possibilities. Transmedia autobiography, hybrid autobiography, autobiography in image and text. That finally the editors thought that that subtitle made more sense, was more comprehensible to more people than if trying to use one of these that might be considered more trendy or specialized. But I think those are, with slight distinctions, can be used in place of each other. They each have slightly different focus or emphasis. Another term that I really ... Oh, I also want to say that I think with the rise of like graphic memoir or graphic narrative, it's really the rise of it being taken seriously in academia. They're struggling to come up with those kinds of vocabularies as well.

Hertha Wong: One of the things that is just I like to remind people that marks on the page that words are images also but also that all media is transmedia. There is some way that it crosses over into others. That even text is not simply some kind of pure form isolated from every other. Dick Higgins introduced a term, intermedia, that I thought was pretty interesting and he did it and then he revised it after about 20 years. Well, he says its artwork that seems to fall between media, it's conceptually between media other already known, it's working which the visual element. It's fused conceptually with the word, this is a really big deal for a lot of artists books but although not all artists books use words. He distinguishes it from multimedia and that just means that they're working in more than one medium whereas there's fusion is really what the focus is on for him. He later says that actually this intermedia, it's really interesting, is it seems to be a temporary place.

Hertha Wong: Once it's become established as a particular form unto itself, it ceases to be intermedia and just becomes another medium. Which I think is an important issue, so I think there are some of the works that I talk about that are genuinely intermedia and others that they have more of a vocabulary and more of an acceptance in certain already accepted media. I just wanted to say that.

Linda Rugg: Yeah, that's really helpful. One of the questions that came up for me as I was looking at this is that it's, of course, visual and in your book you have also the textual and the visual blended together, you know, speaking to each other. But it's also the case that these artworks evoke other senses, right?

Hertha Wong: Yeah.

Linda Rugg: You have, in some cases, you have objects that have three-dimensional being in space and you also have you have quilts. What do you think about the other senses being engaged with these artworks and how do we account for that as scholars when we're really working ourselves in a medium that is pretty much restricted to the page?

Hertha Wong: Yeah, that has come up because there were people who are wanting to come up with a multisensory theory about art or literature, particularly, art. The one book I could find that tried it was really, really was a collection of essays and it was really more about orality. There was one thing about the visual and there were certainly nothing about the sense of taste or smell or-

Linda Rugg: Touch, yeah.

Hertha Wong: ... touch or anything like that. It really it was interested in doing something that it didn't even fully attempt to do. I think that's an area that really is ripe for development. One of the artists in particular that I talk about, actually, incorporates sound into her installation piece. She's a folklorist and a photographer and I can actually show you a slide quickly. Let me get through these, sorry. Really, it's hard to see, her name is Carrie Mae Weems, who's an African American artist and folklorist and she created ... She's primarily a photographer and her early work was sequences of photographs and accompanied by text. One big project in 2000 she printed her photographs onto these diaphanous fabrics and hung them from the ceiling creating this installation piece. Then so there were these images and then text and you were entered this kind of architectural stylophonous structure made of words and images.

Hertha Wong: There's also a soundtrack to it and there were images on the walls, and so you have this very interactive experiential piece that you literally have to go into. That's the only one of the ones I talk about that really uses sound and it's some of the voices that she recorded of some of the work she was doing. This was her work called the Hampton Project, some of you may be familiar with in which she would go into the archives of Hampton, what's now Hampton University. But it's one of the early free schools for blacks and about 15 years later they admitted native young people. Mostly people who had been defeated in the words, they brought them into the school, another kind of prison. She excavates that history and starts linking African-American and Native American histories as they relate to her family and her community.

Hertha Wong: In doing that, she's bringing back voices from the archives. She's trying to give us this photographic installation piece that animates the archive in a critical way retelling the story that or a perspective that Hampton didn't like to hear or they banned her from showing the exhibition at the school but it traveled all over and was very well received.

Linda Rugg: Your edification of this particular artwork and the way in which the viewer enters in and this emphasizes what you're talking about earlier how the experience of reading is transformed by these artworks that you're featuring here. Especially, the interface between the viewer/reader, however you want to be. You have to reconstruct yourself, right, as a viewer and reader at the same time, right?

Hertha Wong: Yeah.

Linda Rugg: But I was just wondering about this experiential aspect and the way in which the viewer or reader is constructing him or herself while confronting these works. I wondered a little bit about your own experience when you're confronted with these works. What is it in these works that makes you rethink your position as a viewer or reader? How does this expand your perspective on what representation is about and potentially what these narratives also are about what meaning those narratives have for you the viewer?

Hertha Wong: Well, I think there's enduring self-discovery, self-critique, self-examination that's going on in the self, not in this neuro-individualistic sense again but in a more collective sense. I think that's just been an enduring interest of mine whether I'm reading literature or not. The ways that these kinds of works make me become self-aware of my own literal positioning. In this Carrie Mae Weems, you're literally walking through. You can see an image and behind that there's another piece of fabric and you can see the text, and so you get this sense of a palimpsest, because this is something that often happens in artist books where you can have a vellum piece. Then maybe there's text and behind it is an image so you can read the text if you open it up this way all by itself, but when it's overlaid over the image, it takes on another resonance.

Hertha Wong: You have this sense of layers and depths of conversations that are going on. Some of it hearkens back to these temporal dimensions of history and memory and some of it hearkens to more crosstalk between and among individuals. There's that kind of a thing. Sitting in Mills College where they have all of Julie Chen's art books. It's just really a delight. You have to go there to see them, you can't check it out of the library or buy it and put it on your shelf because that's just not the kind of object it is. That I always thought was great fun and I'm going to show you one example of her work. So, we can get a sense of this. That's one, it's this one. This is a book of hers called Bumblemont, a fine assortment of books and it's presented as she's punning on the candy and the good word and all of

that. She presents, and usually artist books are in a particular box. In fact, there's a specialty, there are people who do nothing but make books that are resonant with a particular artist book.

Hertha Wong: It has to be something that's in dialogue with what's inside, it has to be so it's conceptually as important as the book or the books themselves. Here's this candy box and inside she has, what was it, five books, six books, something like that? Yeah. Then we take each of those out and here they are five of them. Each one, there's letterpress and so, for instance, this is done without an accordion binding on the side like these in the shape of leaves. Each one of these little leaves is a page. You have to peek into it to be able to read it because you can't just open them up like a real book. This one is like one of those little kids' games with the little silver balls inside and you try to get it to go where you want and it's in the shape of a labyrinth and it's a very meditative little poem about life and its spiraling time thing. This one looks like this little soap but it's a folding book that you can take out.

Hertha Wong: Each one of these is a page and you can print on both sides and so on. You have to just figure out how to navigate it. This is a, basically, a two-page book that's just the front and the back and she plays with before and after pro and con and all of these dualities. Here it's a book that I went to talk with her in her studio, I said, "Can you help me? What is this called?" It doesn't have a name, it's an eight-sided structure that she created it and she called it a flipbook. But a flipbook is something that most people think of what you just flip through the pages and you get these images moving like an animation or something but in a material form. What happens with this one is you can flip these around and on each of these little surfaces is a word or a couple of words and they're all you read them differentially but they're all like in relation and you have to work really, really carefully to see what's hidden beneath.

Hertha Wong: If you're not really inquisitive, you're going to miss half of what she's written there. So much of what she does is thematizing memory loss just with erosion of time, this erosion of ourselves over time and she's thinking about that and personal loss and all of that. Hers, she's much more abstract about what she talks about. You don't know what she likes to eat for lunch or anything like that. Some of them are more like that and others tell more personal stories. But that's a very physical engagement and what's the concept of the page? Where's the binding? How do we start? How do we end? Where do we go from here?

Linda Rugg: Are you allowed to touch? It's in the Mills College, right, and it's in the museum?

Hertha Wong: It's in the Special Collections.

Linda Rugg: It's in the Special Collections, so are you allowed to touch it?

Hertha Wong: With gloves.

Linda Rugg: It'd be treated like a manuscript at the bank craft or something like that where you have to be very careful with it?

Hertha Wong: Yeah.

Linda Rugg: But it has in the special status as a book, it's also one of a kind, right? She's just not making-

Hertha Wong: She makes a certain number, and then obviously most of them get deposited there. I first encountered her when I was in San Diego. For some reason I was looking down there in a Special Collections and then I saw Julie Chen's work with stood out to me as so amazing and it ends up she's right here. I got to go to her studio and talk with her about and I was so dumbfounded but also relieved when she didn't have a vocabulary for what I was talking about. I had all these questions written out ready for it, "Now what do you call this when you do? "I don't know, I just do it." I had to try to figure out how to describe some of these things.

Linda Rugg: Mm-hmm (affirmative), you had to make up a vocabulary. We don't have much time but I want to ask you this stupid question. The kind of question that people often ask me that I am completely dumbfounded. I have no idea but it's the question that my students ask me. I wrote a book about films and they said, "What's your favorite film?"

Hertha Wong: Oh, no, not [crosstalk 00:31:12]-

Linda Rugg: Let me ask you this, I'll try to make it a more intellectual than that. Let me see if I can make it intellectual. What I mean by that is actually is there work of art among the ones that you were dealing with that spoke to you particularly where you felt like, "I must talk about this work of art, it has taught me something, it has moved me. I need to convey this to other people." Is there one that you would single out and that you would like to talk about?

Hertha Wong: Sure, well, I'll jump to another slide. I think I would have to go to Faith Ringgold, another African American artist and her quilt.

Linda Rugg: The quilts, yeah.

Hertha Wong: This is one called Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima, and it's one of her early quilts and she gives Aunt Jemima a story and it's just brilliant. What we see here, these are pages read with text, so one, two, three, four, and you go up here, five, six, seven, eight, nine. She's numbered them so you know how to go, what you need to go to. They're alternating with the images and all of these are paintings of relatives, of Aunt Jemima who's featured here in the center. She creates this whole fictional family and they're all different races and various shades and so on. She gives her this delightful story and then she kills her off and gives her a proper African funeral. It's playful, it's smart, it's doing that talking back, rewriting of racist stereotypes. Also, is really engaging with the concept of the page in an interesting way.

Hertha Wong: So that a quote square becomes a page. And then it's also the thing that I kept realizing in working on all these different kinds of things is that there are certain things that crossover that I found very interesting so the concept of the page certainly in any book form and artists books in particular. Theresa Charles dictate, she is playing and she's linking the page to the screen. And then in comic books it's obvious and in story quilts it comes up in a new way. Quilt gives me the concept of the page but also framing, so this is called the French Collection. It's a series of quotes that she made, and keep in mind, these are huge and I did have the opportunity to see Ringle's quotes in person and it was stunning to walk into the gallery and be overwhelmed by this color and the texture and there were these little school kids getting actually history lessons from their teacher about race in the United States.

Hertha Wong: But here she creates this autobiographical persona that doesn't look anything like her, and here they're dancing in the low and that she's thematizing motherhood this particular woman. Married a Frenchman, had two children, he died, she stayed in France and sent her children back to the U.S. with a woman who take to raise them and it's like this tough choice about being a woman, being an artist, being a mother, being an African-American. She says that everything in America, everything American in America is about race, that's a quotation from her. So, she thematizes that but also genders it and makes a whole story around it. The other thing it's been told in epistolary form and what you can't see is that up here there are I think like six letters and down there. The text frames the image throughout and so you go back and forth. Of course, then for the real object, it's really, really hard because it's so high and so low.

Hertha Wong: You have to literally move your body and get some help in order to be able to read it. But that's another way that there's forced physical engagement with the object, with the piece. Here she's also doing the whole critique. The kids are dancing and they're not paying any attention to the heavy, gilded important framed artwork in the background. William Murray is looking directly at us, so there's a sense that a part of visual studies critique of art history is that modes of looking in everyday life and not the ways we're told we need to look at when we're looking at important art and we're told why it's important and so on and so on with all of the things that try to keep us from getting too close to the art. What are those? The velvet ropes and all that, and the architectural wave that got museums are designed to move you from one space to another and tell you what's important to look at.

Hertha Wong: Just unpacking a whole lot in just this one, and she goes on to tell the full story. With this I feel like it's just so rich on so many levels. There's the personal even though it's not explicitly about her life, it is about her life and her choices.

Linda Rugg: Yeah, in your experience of walking to the museum and then feeling these are very powerful. That was our signal that it's time for us to turn things over to the audience. As Tim mentioned earlier, is it one microphone?

Tim Hampton: Yeah.

Linda Rugg: One microphone, okay. It's a small room though and so any of you who have questions or comments for Hertha are invited to ask for the microphone and speak. There we go. Oh, it has a cord too, so careful.

Speaker 4: Hi Hertha.

Hertha Wong: Hi.

Speaker 4: Congratulations on the publication of the book. Earlier you had talked about how when you were selecting the artists you chose to feature in the book that trauma was the theme that connected them. I was hoping you could say a little bit more about the relationship between these kinds of intermediate forms, especially, with books. And how they might be more effective in portraying trauma or maybe more effective in terms of healing from trauma?

Hertha Wong: Yeah, that's a really interesting question. I think, I don't remember, I know I should remember this, but I don't remember who said that after the Holocaust we can't even create art, we can't write, we can't ... It's kind of the end of everything, and yet people continually do. Not only about the Holocaust such as Art Spiegelman's Maus that I talk about, but about all kinds of trauma and then

the Holocaust studies hasn't morphed. It was the launching point for a lot of trauma theory applied to a lot of different areas. I talk about Peter Najarian who is Armenian American and he did not experience the Armenian Genocide, but he experienced as a second-generation person, his mother's experience and her survival and issues that get passed on to him and what he doesn't know and so on and he grapples with that in his life. As well as other things but that's a big one.

Hertha Wong: I think the sense like say with Spiegelman, and I would say also with Theresa Cha who is dealing with this dislocation due to Japanese colonization of Korea. This longing for some return or for some homeless or for some healing and never ever having that fully realized. But the important thing is to keep on seeking it, to keep on, I guess, to not giving up. Part of that is through not letting it be erased from history, personal history as well as more collective history. I think it's part of an overall struggle to find an appropriate means of representation for what in many trauma theories say and this is now being challenged more and more that is unrepresentable. Even though it's claims to the unrepresentability of trauma, there are all kinds of efforts to do so. I know recently, well maybe not so recent, a couple of years ago, schwab and blinking I never-

Linda Rugg: [crosstalk 00:40:32]-

Hertha Wong: Gabriela Schwab had a book about being the survivor of Germans and what it meant to be a survivor of perpetrators as being potentially ... No, I won't say potentially as traumatic but being traumatic in its own way and having the courage to face that and talk about that. She talks about haunting legacies and every one of the people and I think probably most human beings have some haunting legacy to deal with in their lives or their families. As you see this exploration as an attempt, not as necessarily the best or only way.

Linda Rugg: Yeah.

Speaker 5: I'm interested in the question of trauma and representation as well. It seems to me that one of the things that you're pointing to with the focus on reading as experience rather than reflection has to do with the unrepresentability of trauma and the way in which one can reach it, not through reflection, but through some creation of experience. What I was thinking about the way in which this kind of representation eliminates, in a certain way, eliminates temporality because what seems to be focused on here is the moment in all its layering.

Hertha Wong: That's very interesting.

Speaker 5: Rather than a linear notion that doesn't have the same kind of layering. I just wondered whether you could say something about the relation of trauma in the ... I don't know the book so I don't know what you've done, but could you say a little bit more about how it connects to representation in the book that you've written?

Hertha Wong: I would say that I would like to think that these pieces are ... I like what you call reading as experience. I think that's absolutely true but I don't want to eliminate reflection because it's a part of it. It's like this, not even a duality, but a multiplicity of parts of the brain that get fired up and the body for that matter in some of these interactions. But I really like that your phrase reading as experiential and embodied in a way.

Speaker 5: And then does it get put into a narrative? What's the relation of narratives?

Hertha Wong: Let me show you a different ... Oops, I'm going the wrong direction here. Different slide. OI just added it, it should be there. Okay. This is from Spiegelman and I hope this addresses it because he's very directly dealing with trauma and the Holocaust and being the survivor of survivors. The way that transgenerational trauma gets passed on and in what's spoken and what's not spoken, in what's visible and what's attempted to be erased and so on. I think of Art Spiegelman's Maus, most of you are probably familiar with it as having a ... I used to think it had three narratives, now I think it has four. It has the story of Spiegelman getting his father story, that whole process, it has the father's story and it has the story of the vexed relationship between the father and the son. But it also has an absolutely silent story of Ep's mother, the mother who commit suicide, a mother whose diaries are destroyed by her husband.

Hertha Wong: We learn about this, over the course of the two volumes and she comes to represent those who were lost who never got to testify or give testimony or have any shred of their existence acknowledged. We've got the mediated story of Vladek, his father and a whole critique of that mediation. We've got this nothing there, therefore Anja as Spiegelman refers to his mother. How do you tell a story of loss ...? Not loss, how do you tell a story of a ratio of annihilation, all right? It's a real challenge but I think he does that by the way he weaves his absent mother throughout and the way that she stands for more. Also, I think, in Maus just the use of the animal metaphor, most of the animals represent nations except for the Jews who are nice whether they're Polish or German or whatever. It's an interesting way too and then his use of masks where right here he's sitting at his desk wearing a Maus mask.

Hertha Wong: Nope, that's not it. Anyway, he is wearing a Maus mask and people pass as polls which mean it's supposed to mean that they're not Jewish and it's a way to survive the use of masks to talk about identity. There's a very powerful image of inside of a camp where somebody's claiming, "I'm not Jewish, I'm this or that," and he's drawn both ways and it doesn't matter to the Germans. They think he's Jewish, he's Jewish, and so it's all about the power. There's one image here and the temporal part of it, let me just say that, this one image is really I think just typical. This is already taking down his father's stories but this is the past right here with a heavy shading. You have the beginning of this story in Vladek's voice but the markings on Art's pant legs blend into the past. It's a very beautiful image of him mediating past and present as [inaudible 00:47:16] for his father.

Hertha Wong: There are just little subtle things like that, that he does throughout. Another way he frames the past is the son and the father and then this is a frame of them leaving as they're trying to escape, of the father and mother leaving as they're trying to escape. What you don't see here that is also very important is that this road is in this shape of a swastika which shows you that they're never going to escape the grip of the Nazis. And then I think the one that was not in Maus but was drawn by Spiegelman and was published elsewhere takes this even further. Now we're into his kids are grown up and they are now a third generation, and he creates this image of himself and his daughter who's playing with a Mickey Mouse and then haunting the big backdrop of these image of hanged life that comes directly out of Maus.

Hertha Wong: This shadowing of the past as if there's no escaping it is then put forward even into the next generation. That sense of when does transgenerational trauma ever be ... Is it possible to be extinguished?

Speaker 6: Thanks, this is very interesting and stimulating. I'm thinking about Maus and the way the absent mother and also the absent brother are present in the book through their photographs which are reproduced there as a frontier piece in one

case and then in the other case as part of Art's own story. I'm thinking about the way for Maus that the production of the narrative as first as a comic book in the case of what is it called about that comic book that he makes about his mother early on which then gets incorporated into ... I forget the title [crosstalk 00:49:17]-

Hertha Wong: Yeah, Prisoner on the Hill Planet?

Speaker 6: Exactly, yes. I'm wondering thinking about that, about the way in which the book contains the photograph which is perhaps although it's not presented this way as a trigger or almost a fetish for something that's absent which pilates and also sets off that anxiety around loss. I'm wondering about the role of books in general. And the relationship that they have as autobiographical text to some of the works which are not books like Carrie Mae Weems' work which is perhaps the best thought of as an installation or quilts or objects that are artists books, but are much more at least in the images that you have. Like objects rather than books, I wonder if there's some kind of tension going on in the question of self-representation or self-identification? Whatever we're going to call it, that is the work of autobiography that these artists are actually pushing against perhaps narrative, perhaps linearity and all of the things-

Hertha Wong: Narratives, yeah, sure.

Speaker 6: ... that are attended with the book medium itself. Yeah, so if you could just-

Hertha Wong: Yeah, I was just going to give you an example from Theresa, Theresa Cha, who was really a conceptual artist, an experimental filmmaker. Where is she? Come on. This is just an example of texts that she messes with and if you read like we normally would read this side and then that side it doesn't really make any sense. What you have to figure out in addition to using a lot of a cinematic style I call it but it could be where she's turning a page like a screen. You have to figure out that she really wants us to read this way so going across and down and following the spread and not just the single page. Again, she's doing all kinds of ways, all kinds of physical manipulations on the page and around the page to get a sense of disruption of the difficulty of articulation of all of the ways that we're stifled.

Hertha Wong: She does that through what she writes and she does it with some of the images that she includes. There was one other thing I wanted to say about Maus, oh the photographs. I talk about those photographs as the one you said comes in the frontest piece of the dead brother that he never ever met, and then there's one of in Prisoner on the Jill Planet of him and his mother and then there's one of the fathers quite late and wearing a jail, a prison outfit that some photo booth which I still ... if anybody knows anything about that practice, I just can't get my head around that. That they were already commercializing it before he even got home. At any rate, I think if you take those three photographs, the only three that it reproduces and you put them together, you have the Spiegelman family that never existed but should have, right? Then you think about Marianne Hirsch's notion of Holocaust photography.

Hertha Wong: When you're looking at what looks like a photo of a family but what you're really seeing if you know are all the people who are not there that should have been, right? It's not what it's in the photograph, it's what's in the viewer that makes that Holocaust photography. He's playing around with all of that and, well, maybe he's not playing with the concepts that Hirsch finally comes up with. Then the rest of the photographs, he sketches, he draws them so there are a lot of photographs in there but only three reproduced.

Speaker 6: Thanks.

Hertha Wong: Thank you. [crosstalk 00:53:32]. Okay, thank you.

Speaker 7: Yeah, you raised the question of recovery from trauma. Another approach was Charlie Chaplin's making a film called the Dictator. Charlie Chaplin knew what was happening to the gypsies, which predated the Holocaust by six, seven years. He made the film called The Dictator in which he satirizes Hitler to great success as a film. Years later he was asked, are you Jewish? He gave such a classy answer; his natural accent was British. He said, "I can't say I have had that honor." Because he's a gypsy. This is a very established fact of history.

Hertha Wong: Oh, I didn't realize that, oh, interesting. Yeah, well, I-

Speaker 7: [inaudible 00:54:36].

Hertha Wong: Thank all of you.

Timothy Hampton: We hope you enjoyed this Berkeley Book Chat, and we encourage you to join us in person or via podcast for future programs in the series.