It is hard to write anymore about representation. The essay form itself, with its unending self-consciousness, seems to drive me to want to talk about myself from the start. Perhaps also it is another form of self-consciousness want to say to strip the nervousness, when the topic of representation is broached. Wasn’t it that we were supposed to stop representing them a long time ago. Wasn’t it the age of the different, when my job was to make space for other voices, make visible new languages in order to efface myself?

Or did it turn out that that was the not-so-subtle modernist/postmodernist project all along? Didn’t Schellings want to say in himself the nervousness of the era? Wasn’t that Cage’s? Or that great poem with which Tim Clark began his chapter on Pollock: ‘I shall make a poem out of nothing at all / it will not speak of me or others…’ penned by William IX of Aquitane?

If representation was then to be a more active project, one which Gayatri Spivak has recently considered (implicitly) as “learning to learn from the subaltern,” then the quandaries of representation and others remain paramount for contemporary art. The very fact of this foregrounding was the most essential aspect of Slought Foundation’s *The Return of Horse: Painting in the Ambivalent Present*, which opened on Nov. 14.

The curatorial essay accompanying the exhibit (indeed hanging at the gallery entrance and tactically framed with an interesting group of tourism souvenirs) of the outward means of transportation is that the horse and the outward means of representation that is painting. Moreover, by placing the horse as the go-between Philadelphia and New York (between which one could not travel without a horse, or two, or not so long ago), it brought to the fore questions of the traffic of objects and people in the art world as we, just south of the center, have come to understand it. The circulation of damages, the question of the body, the repressed, ever return, to disrupt the sedimented view of culture that we have collected! The horse’s head in fact is no longer represented - it is now called upon to represent itself, these questions, remain. One of the show’s pieces, by Natalie Frank, is a combination of video testimony about the Rwandan genocide and a few accompanying painted portraits. The work is part of a project Frank seeks to bring testimony about the 1994 genocide to the world stage in order to “inspire a global sense of responsibility to prevent human rights atrocities.” This is no doubt a noble goal, but it is not one that I am sure lives up to the standards of representation.

The Voice of Rwanda-type message is something that one might take from any number of standard discourses on representation, but it does not live up to the trenchant argument advanced, for example, in Mahmood Mamdani’s *When Victims Become Killers*, where he reverses the standard interpretation of events in Rwanda and shows precisely how a misrepresentation of the Hutus and Tutsis and reinforced the genocide in the first place. For him, the question of representing Rwanda is then not to call on a banal response couched in human rights discourse, because, to quote (or inuit) the banality of the genocide and its machinery of inventing and representing Africans (the very Hutus/Tutsis distinction itself) in order to call into question one’s own voice in the discussion. This question is not why the representation is not working but the letting speak nor the making speak, it is the difficult (infinite?) conversation which is the condition of speech itself. Such a conversation is unfortunately absent in Frank’s work.

So much of the discourse on representation in modern art has been haunted by the infamous statement of Theodor Adorno, “To write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” But it is not frequently enough noted the revision Adorno gave this statement in *Negative Dialekts*, where he writes: “Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems.” Indeed, this is crucial for a critic like myself to keep in mind, and to recall that although there is a limiting condition to Frank’s work, it does form an important part in the archives of genocide. But Adorno does not let off the hook here. He continues, “But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living…”

It is tempting to poetically lay away this statement, as Adorno himself does, as a matter of the trauma of survivor’s guilt. But the question is, I think, much more powerful and necessary as we think through the questions of representation, for they move the domain from the register of the art to the practice - indeed the very possibility - of everyday life itself. How do we live in the face of a world which has abandoned all its values? What forms of representation might help us answer this question?

There was only one horse at the Slought show, and it did not appear in any of the three artists’ work. Rather, it was in a simple cartoon on the bathroom wall, where he reverses the standard interpretation of events - of culture that we have collected! The horse’s head through the painting in the cartoon does just that by relying on a certain trope: the painting represents a real horse’s head. The decidedly anti-Magrifique stance of the patron is what gives the joke its humor: of course, the real horse’s head is no more a painting than a painting of a pipe is a pipe. But the humor here is also the subversion. The horse in fact is no longer represented - it is now called upon to represent itself. But like Coco Fusco & Guillermo Garcia-Pena’s *Real Horse’s Head*, it is the representation which is forced to question itself, to learn from itself. Tongue-in-cheek though this may be, the point stands that the hope that representation is the true thing that we, the modernists, want to lose himself in the ecstasies of India? It is tempting to psychologize away this statement, as Adorno himself does, as a matter of the trauma of survivor’s guilt. But the question is, I think, much more powerful and necessary as we think through the questions of representation, for they move the domain from the register of the art to the practice - indeed the very possibility - of everyday life itself. How do we live in the face of a world which has abandoned all its values? What forms of representation might help us answer this question?

The Shah’s Nuclear Weapons

Iran’s supposed “nuclear threat” is in the forefront of the Western media. Israel’s nuclear capabilities or India’s nuclear arms program appear to be of little or no concern (indeed, they are more or less overlooked by the United States). The underlying message is that allies have the right to nuclear arms but enemies do not.

However it is important to remind ourselves that the United States is the only country in the history of the world to have used nuclear bombs. The death toll of approximately 165,000-275,000 Japanese citizens should, in principle, diminish their credibility as the international moral authority on the nuclear issue. Every Iranian surely knows Iran and the United States have not always been enemies. In 1953, the CIA organized Operation Ajax in Iran to remove the democratically elected leader, Mohammed Mossadegh, who had become a banal response couched in human rights discourse. This is no doubt a noble goal, but it is not one that I am sure lives up to the standards of representation.