Sarah Kofman, philosopher and survivor of the Holocaust, contributed to the treatment of the traumatic narrative as something to be feared and suppressed, yet she also broke from this tradition with the writing of her autobiography, Rue Ordener, rue Labat, which detailed the horrors she suffered during the German occupation of France and the aftermath of her father’s death in Auschwitz. This thesis aims to show that while her autobiography was a drastic separation from her previous writings, in which she denies any such telling of a traumatic story is necessary, all of Kofman’s final texts that were written immediately preceding her suicide express a certain urgency with regard to her personal history. This project considers how Kofman treated her autobiography, from paradoxically hiding and showcasing it, to her claims that it didn’t exist outside of her bibliography.
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Introduction

Sarah Kofman, philosopher and survivor. She herself would probably not approve of this introduction, namely because I have already linked the two things she put so much energy into keeping separate: her past and her career in the public eye. Kofman did not just have any past, though if one followed her bibliography only until just before 1987’s *Paroles Suffoquées*, one would never have known it. Kofman’s story, that of a young Jewish girl in hiding during the Second World War whose rabbi father was deported to a concentration camp and subsequently killed, was not of central importance when one spoke about her work in academia.

It is often the case in contemporary French academe that substantial commentary is not written on living philosophers. In her book on Derrida, Kofman dryly mocked this convention: ‘Death alone, this is how tradition would have it, legitimates commentary, the criticism of texts newly elevated to the dignity of an oeuvre of which it is now licit to bring to the surface the themes and the theses.’

Such is the case for Sarah Kofman. It wasn’t until late in her own life that she attached the title *Holocaust survivor* to her name in one of her works, for she could not be both the philosopher she desired to be and a survivor at the same time.

One of Kofman’s final works, *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, marked a moment of drastic separation from her previous philosophical and theoretical works in which her own autobiography, terror, and trauma were not only not the subject of analysis, but were deemed impossible to convey. Kofman routinely and emphatically denied any necessity in telling a traumatic experience after the Holocaust and became a very vocal advocate for silence. Therefore, reading Kofman becomes a challenge from the onset of any analysis of her works. Is one reading the philosopher or the survivor? How can one connect these two distinct parts of her life when she herself wanted desperately to keep them apart?

In *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, an adult Kofman, reflecting upon what she is about to do, tells us that each of her previous works has led her to this moment, to this work. “Mes nombreux livres ont peut-être été des voies de traverse obligées pour parvenir à raconter ‘ça.’” Her autobiography was so drastically different from anything she’d written before that she felt the need to predicate

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the story with this sentence. All one would have to do would be to pour through four decades of hundreds of articles and over twenty books on subjects that ranged from Nietzsche to Rousseau, Freud to Derrida to find the path that led to it, to this thing. But, what is it? What did she consider it? Would one that is not Kofman be able to follow that same path and gain some understanding?

In Kofman’s life work, a work in which she constantly lectured, wrote, published, and spoke, she is remarkably silent about her own life. She wrote without actually ever saying what she needed to say. Are all of these works of not speaking actually telling us something? What is the content of her silence? My hypothesis is that there is a logic in everything that Kofman wrote and said, an intentionality that allows the reader to find the intertextuality between her own life and her life’s work, and no where is this more critical than in the works Kofman produced after her autobiography. In two short years, Kofman was able to write four works on varying subjects (a philosopher, a work of art, a work of fiction, and herself) before her sudden suicide in 1994. The urgency with which she produced these works articulates a necessity, something that must be said and therefore something that must be explored if one is to begin to unravel the philosophical knot that Kofman has created for her readers.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I will explore Paroles Suffoquées and show how this is the moment in which one should recognize a shift in Kofman’s philosophy. She struggles with writing about her father (or rather his death and memory), about Robert Antelme, and about Maurice Blanchot. Most significant however, are the moments in this work where Kofman starts to question her previous thinking about her traumatic history. The exhibition of Kofman’s biographical moments before Rue Ordener, rue Labat is key in unlocking her message at the end of her life. Kofman wants her readers to examine the path by which she traveled in order to reach this point, this work where she was able to unite her own trauma with her father’s. I argue that after Paroles Suffoquées readers of Kofman must examine the entire body of her work in order provoke the true message of what Kofman wanted to say at the end of her life to her friends, colleagues, and to her reading public.

The second chapter of this thesis is dedicated to Kofman’s analysis of The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde, L’Imposture de la Beauté (1995) where she puts forth four distinct stages that make up the being of the protagonist: bad influence, mirror stage, screen, and the impossibility of mourning. These four stages culminate in the double, or copy catching up with the
original. The double, considered dangerous, threatens to destroy the order and intentionality that the original has created. All of the lengths to which Dorian Gray goes to repress the danger of his double eventually are for naught, as one can not truly stifle a moment that is so important as a traumatic, defining experience. Kofman states that the work that one uses to escape the terror begins to resemble it, ensuring that one cannot truly and completely forget. One cannot remain distant or sustain a permanent separation from such an important moment in one’s life, and one must return to it again and again in a game of repetition. Jean-Luc Nancy quotes Kofman where this idea seems to recur: “‘A necessity reigns which merges into the repetition of the same in difference.’” In repeating the same avoidance of terror and trauma, Kofman was safe from what she feared most. In repeating the same behavior of silence and avoidance, did Kofman find a second identity? I am referring to this secondary identity that is the philosopher, not the young girl during the Holocaust, not the adult survivor telling her story, but the individual who found in philosophy a shelter from a dangerous subject.

My final chapter focuses on two texts. First, Le Mépris des Juifs (1994) addresses the alleged contempt that Friedrich Nietzsche had for the Jews. Kofman argues against this contempt and focuses on Nietzsche’s desire to be born again as French in order to escape from his anti-Semitic roots. Kofman minimizes the personal connection she has with this subject as a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust. Here, we see remerging a philosophical distance that readers of Kofman should be familiar with. However, when read alongside the other texts Kofman wrote at this period of her life, this book becomes less of a philosophical discourse, and more of a personal struggle to maintain her philosophical voice. Finally, I will discuss a work that was unfinished at the time of Kofman’s death, “Conjuring Death: Remarks on The Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Nicolas Tulp (1632)” (written in 1994).

Throughout this thesis, I will incorporate an overall analysis of Rue Ordener, Rue Labat, her final testimony, with the goal of tracing the link who existence she suggests in the opening pages. My hypothesis is that the differences among these final four texts may not be as distinct as was once thought and that there is a very subtle line that connects them, a line of which Kofman herself may not have been aware. These texts represent the desire to sustain her philosophical voice, even when it was no longer possible and the struggle to tell the untellable story. Tension

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between these irreconcilable imperatives may have been a factor in her tragic death. These are the words she left us and within them, the message she needed to convey.
Chapter I

The Beginning of the end

In discussing Sarah Kofman today, fifteen years removed from the end of her life, with the crucial distance that is required to read her philosophical oeuvre critically, it is imperative that one begin where her bibliography ends. Rue Ordener, Rue Labat, Kofman’s intimate autobiography detailing her experience during the Occupation of France, appeared just a few short months before her suicide on October 15, 1994. This work marks the first and only time in Sarah Kofman’s writing history that an entire work was dedicated to her own personal experience, an experience to which she repeatedly and emphatically claimed it was impossible to attest. In closely reading her autobiography and several of her philosophical works, it becomes apparent that she constantly struggled to maintain a separation between her philosophical, public life and her life of intimacy and privation. In her last few years, I would argue, this struggle became more and more apparent as the power of her autobiography, which could not be ignored, overwhelmed and complicated the philosophical writing in which she had been residing for decades.

Kofman’s autobiography commences not with the traumatic narrative that she had kept at bay for so many years, but with present-day Sarah, the philosopher, seemingly addressing her reading public, her contemporaries, and her friends. While she never specifically addresses anyone in these two short paragraphs, I would argue that those she expected would read this work would understand what it was to write, would know that she herself had dedicated her life to doing so, and would recognize exactly what was at stake in this work. “De lui, il me reste seulement le stylo. Je l’ai pris un jour dans le sac de ma mère où elle le gardait avec d’autres souvenirs de mon père.”

Sarah, reflecting on her own work, her own life, details this single, solitary object which is all that physically remains of her father’s life. This pen, taken from her mother’s bag, accompanies her through the duration of her schooling and leads her to her life’s work. Writing about her father, Berek Kofman, who was deported in 1942 and killed while interned at Auschwitz, is not a novel concept in Kofman’s oeuvre. While there has never been an entire work dedicated to her own autobiography and her own “coming to terms” with the events of the Holocaust, her father’s experience had appeared in several of her other works, most notably Paroles Suffoquées of 1987.

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which she dedicated to three individuals: to Maurice Blanchot, to Robert Antelme, and finally, “A la mémoire de mon père, mort à Auschwitz.”

The opening page of *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, is, however, the first and only time in which the memory of her father is inextricably linked with her profession of writing. Kofman continues on this opening page: “Il m’a ‘lâché’ avant que je puisse me décider à l’abandonner. Je le possède toujours, rafistolé avec du scotch, il est devant mes yeux sur ma table de travail et il me contraint à écrire, écrire.” The indistinct boundary between the pen and her father is shown in the usage of the pronoun *il* in these two sentences, which could be translated into English as either *he* or *it*. “He/It failed me before I could decide for myself to abandon him/it. I’ve kept him/it always, patched up with tape, he/it is in front of my eyes on my desk and he/it obligates me to write, to write.”

The physical act itself of writing is described here as something that is almost forced upon her by the presence of this pen and/or the memory of her father. This pen, this material object which gives a presence to her long-absent father, functions in two contradictory ways: not only does it oblige Kofman to write and to write continually throughout her life, it also fails her in its very use. Before she could decide, for herself, to give it up, it abandons her. Kathryn Robson, in her book *Writing Wounds*, states that

an indirect link may be made with the opening page of Rue Ordener, rue Labat when the narrator describes how she writes with her father’s pen, long since broken, in front of her. She may not be able to write with it directly, but the implication is that she is translating her father’s silence, figured in the pen that cannot be written with.9

I would argue, however, that the power felt through the presence of the pen, is not that of her father’s silence being translated through her words at this moment in her autobiography, but rather the necessity that she has long felt to write in a certain *philosophical* way in order to create an intangible shelter in which to hide herself from the threatening truth of her story. This pen, her father’s pen, before her eyes, is a constant reminder of what was forever lost in 1942. These painful memories, and the details of her personal trauma which she will outline intimately in *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, have remained almost entirely hidden until now, as if they possessed an almost *dangerous* quality. In order to be protected from these memories, it was necessary to

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7 RORL, 9
8 Translation my own
forget, to repress, to bury what Kofman could not bear to face. It was necessary to write in the language that she knew best.

Kofman continues in the second paragraph of her autobiography with this telling and complicated sentence: “Mes nombreux livres ont peut-être été des voies de traverse obligés pour parvenir à 7aconteur ‘ça’.”10 This ça, this it, is the focus of a debate in Kofman studies. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that there is an obvious course of development throughout her philosophical works which have led her to this moment, this work, and the ability to recount what she had so far been unable to face. One can say for certain that it is not simply the story of her father’s deportation, as this is not the first appearance of that story in her writing. In the introduction to their co-edited book, Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman, Penelope Deutscher and Kelly Oliver offer their analysis of this sentence. “Kofman opens her autobiography with the suggestion that her works of philosophy have been a way of recounting ‘ça.’”11 On the contrary, I would have to argue that Kofman is saying the exact opposite of what Deutscher and Oliver claim in this statement. Her works of philosophy have not been a way of recounting this ambiguous ça. Rather her earlier works had carved out a circuitous path by which Kofman was obliged to follow in order to reach this moment. It is only upon reaching this moment that she is therefore able to recount the story of ça. Her previous writings and ça are not at all one in the same and they are certainly not interchangeable. One could even go so far as to say that every work that Kofman wrote before Rue Ordener, rue Labat, served the purpose of evading her own personal traumatic story and I would argue that not writing about ça in those earlier works was the only way that she could arrive at the moment of writing about it later.

Deutscher and Oliver continue in this introduction by commenting on Kofman’s reading style. “She left her life as though daring commentators to read her own philosophical works as Kofman herself had read so many other philosophers, reading the life as text in interconnection with the literal texts. If Kofman had worn the masks of Freud and Nietzsche, she provoked her commentators to wear the mask of Kofman.”12 According to Deutscher and Oliver, Kofman reads Nietzsche and Freud as if Nietzsche and Freud were themselves reading Nietzsche and Freud, a seemingly impossible, and confusing, task. Therefore, we, the readers of Kofman, are to read

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10 RORL, 9
11 Penelope Deutscher and Kelly Oliver, Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 7
12 Deutscher and Oliver, 7
Kofman while *wearing the mask of Kofman*, mimicking the manner in which she herself tried to read Nietzsche and Freud. What does *wearing the mask of Kofman* entail for a reader? How does one enter into the psyche of this philosopher in order to read like her? If one was able to wear this mask and read Kofman as she herself would read Kofman, I would argue that the reader would in no way be able to unpack the intricate details of her last few works, and would find as many roadblocks in the search for meaning as Kofman herself probably found. However, wearing the mask of Kofman, the face of a philosopher, the disciple of Maurice Blanchot, the Jewish woman, the Holocaust survivor, all things that I am not, perhaps does not imply that I cannot retain my analytical distance from the subject. For a mask is, after all, just a mask, intended to allow an individual to *play the role* of another while maintaining one’s individual cogitative capabilities. If then one is to read Kofman in this manner, one cannot limit the analysis to this text alone. We must examine what came before and inevitably what came after. There is a distinct path that led Kofman to this moment, one that passes through each and every text that she had written up to this point.

In order to follow the path that has led Kofman to this point, one must examine the moment at which, in her own opinion, her true philosophical writing ceases to be possible. In a 1991 interview with the German philosophical journal *Die Philosophin*, Kofman was asked about her intention in writing the text *Paroles Suffoquées*, which was originally to be a contribution to a larger dedicatory work by various philosophers honoring the work of Maurice Blanchot. While this compilation never came to fruition, Kofman eventually published her own portion independently in 1987, containing, as I previously mentioned, a dedication to Blanchot, Robert Antelme, and her father. In this interview, Kofman clearly states that, “in attempting to write about the Shoah, it became clear to me that after *Paroles Suffoquées*, I could no longer write didactically and philosophically.”  

While it may appear to her readers that she is writing a philosophical text, in *Paroles Suffoquées* Kofman strays from her *true* philosophical language, one that impedes the production of a personal testimony, and argues for a non-importance of the self. The philosophy of her career had always been one that embodied restraint and a withholding of personal information. *Paroles Suffoquées* marks a loss of command over her true philosophy as it is the first instance where Kofman writes about her father’s deportation and death, a subject about which she had often deemed it was impossible to write; however, it is done in a very calculated

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and restricted manner. Her father’s deportation is addressed with extremely factual and distanced details, attesting to his existence while maintaining that it was very distinct from her own. Kofman’s writing about her father in Paroles Suffoquées is purely, and I argue, intentionally analytical, sporadically inserting data-like information throughout her homage to Maurice Blanchot. In stark contrast to Rue Ordener, rue Labat, the autobiographical elements are limited to just three mentions of her father and one sole sentence in which she highlights her status as a female Jewish intellectual who has “survécu à l’holocaust.” While these moments of biography exist, they are by no means the focus of the work, which remains an homage to the work of Blanchot above all else.

It is not sufficient to comment on these moments of biographical importance and simply mention that they exist in the broader dimension of another work. It remains significantly important how they exist within this text and how they function in the larger conversation about Kofman’s autobiographical writings. The first moment where her father’s existence is mentioned is, again, in the dedication. It is essential to note that in the dedication Kofman does not write her father’s name, yet she directs the attention of the reader rather poignantly to his memory and his death. It is to his memory and his death that Kofman wishes to devote this work alongside the dedication to Robert Antelme and the homage to Maurice Blanchot. At this moment, before the actual text even begins, Kofman establishes a connection between these men, and I would argue that this relationship has an overarching meaning that can only be unveiled with further examination of the texts which were to follow Paroles Suffoquées. These men, all extremely different, not only in philosophy, but in their respective occupations and in their intimacy with Kofman, are not only individuals for whom Kofman had great respect, they are also highly representative of the vastly different stages of her life. Maurice Blanchot was her philosophical mentor and advisor; Robert Antelme represents the ideal, the eloquent survivor who was able to tell his story; and finally her father’s memory and death which connects Kofman to her childhood and to her religion. This is as important and influential in the conception of Paroles Suffoquées as the work of Robert Antelme and the philosophy of Maurice Blanchot, for her father’s status as a Jew is the thing that most separates him from the two other men in the dedication. While Kofman brings these men together, creating a text in which they can all reside and be honored, she also sets her father apart by not naming him in the dedication. In her attempt to unite the three in writing,

14 Paroles Suffoquées, 13
she highlights exactly what makes her father dissimilar from the other two, his *difference*, that is to say his *Jewishness*, a trait that she herself shares. While Kofman does eventually refer to her father by name, it is not in conjunction with Antelme and Blanchot, as if she was attempting to conceal a certain part of her father, his name, behind the appearance of the other two. In fact, as I will show, *Paroles Suffoquées*, is a text full of contradictions and secrets, that reads like a game of hide-and-seek. The only way for the seeker to uncover what is hidden is to think like the writer, or to wear her mask.

Even more important in *Paroles Suffoquées*, are the two other instances where the memory of her father breaks through the analytical, interrupting, and even breaking, the linearity of her philosophical argument. Kofman begins the second chapter discussing death since Auschwitz and arguing that all men, Jews and non-Jews, now die differently “parce que ce qui a eu lieu – là-bas – sans avoir lieu, la mort à Auschwitz, a été pire que la mort.” She then evokes a citation from Blachot’s *Après coup*, which states that humanity itself had to die in Auschwitz, a death which still endures to this day. The Holocaust, and specifically Auschwitz, is for Kofman, following in the steps of Blanchot, the absolute of history after which any true representation of history is impossible. Kofman quotes Blanchot at the very beginning of *Paroles Suffoquées*: “‘Que le fait concentrationnaire, l’extermination des juifs et les camps de la mort continue son œuvre, soient pour l’histoire un absolu qui a interrompu l’histoire, on doit le dire sans cependant pouvoir rien dire d’autre. Le discours ne peut pas se développer à partir de là (…).’” In other words, this *must* be said, without daring to take the next step and actually talking *about* it. According to Blanchot, to say the words, *this happened*, is necessary, yet one cannot move past this moment, for the story of what happened can no longer be told. As quickly as this is pointed out to the reader, one is faced with what seems to break the power of this argument. Kofman inserts her father’s fate into the discourse of Blanchot followed by three questions without responses: “Parce qu’il était juif, mon père est mort à Auschwitz : comment ne pas le dire ? Et comment le dire ? Comment parler de ce devant quoi cesse toute possibilité de parler?” This intimate detail from Kofman’s personal history has never before been expanded upon until now, and one sees a visible struggle in this passage to maintain the philosophical control over this event and *say* it, because *how can one not say it?* To whom is she asking these questions that bring with them much anxiety and inner

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15 *Paroles Suffoquées*, 15
16 *Paroles Suffoquées*, 11; quoted from *Le Pas au-delà* by Maurice Blanchot.
17 *Paroles Suffoquées*, 15-16
From where did she expect responses to come? These questions are not rhetorical in any sense, but seem to represent a conversation that Kofman may very well have been having with herself in her search for how to speak about her father, or about the fact that he was Jewish, without actually telling a story about him. The response relies on what she knows best even as it refers back to her predecessors to protect this moment of revelation and to keep her from going any further. This event, the death of her father in Auschwitz, is her *absolu* which is connected with the absolute of history. Echoing the voice of Blanchot, after this moment, it is not possible to tell her story, yet it is necessary to speak constantly without actually speaking about the event itself.

Kofman does not reveal anything about her father in this passage that could not be found in a thorough research of the archives of the Shoah: birth and death dates, born in Poland, died in Poland, the date and number of the convoy of his deportation. She adds sterile and systematic facts about gender and age makeup of the convoy on July 16, 1942, precise numbers on how many died during the work detail, how many survived, and how many were immediately gassed upon arrival.

Not only does this memorial, with its stark yet impressive facts about her father’s convoy, display an absence of pathos, but Kofman’s description of this horrific event does as well. Restrained and lacking any of the emotion that one would expect the death of her father to evoke, Kofman’s words read like a text book, giving only facts and no opinion; her description lacks the emotion one would expect to accompany a conversation about the death of one’s father, yet the necessity to write about him is there. She adds a page from the list of names on the memorial immediately following this passage. The name of her father is not underlined or highlighted in anyway, hidden in the crowd of names of the other deceased individuals whose voices cannot be heard. “Cette voix laisse sans voix, vous fait douter de votre bon sens et de tout sens, vous fait suffoquer en silence. ‘Le silence comme un cri sans mots; muet pourtant criant sans fin.’”

As Kofman states

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18 *Paroles Suffoquées*, 16-17
19 *Paroles Suffoquées*, 17
throughout this text, there is no voice that can do justice to this experience. There are no words that can fill the hole in history, not to mention the hole in her life, which has been created by Auschwitz. Her father’s voice has been silenced, yet his memory and his death are inscribed in this text and are able to speak, using Kofman’s term, without power. The traumatic, untold experience of those who cannot speak is understood in the silence of this memorial much in the same way that the magnitude of her father’s death and its impact on her life is understood in her restrained and factual account of his deportation.

Kofman does not linger on the subject of her father’s death for more than a few short paragraphs, and immediately returns to her homage to Blanchot and an analysis of his story, l’Idylle, yet her father’s memory does not stay suppressed for long. In fact, as Madeleine Dobie points out in her translator’s introduction to this text, “The different sections often appear to be paratactically connected rather than to constitute a narrative continuum or sustained argument. This complex structure, in which different themes and approaches are juxtaposed without being consistently synthesized into a unified whole, may be read as a textual staging of the difficult encounter among the contrasting imperatives of history, autobiography, and critical writing.”

Kofman states in Paroles Suffoquées and in multiple interviews that her history and the story of her father are only of public interest in relation to the larger shared history of the Holocaust. She herself structures this text so that the story of her father does not stand alone and that her story is barely visible. Her father’s memory and death are continually interwoven with the words of Blanchot and the analysis of Antelme, as if constantly reminding the reader that one should not focus on just one of these aspects of the text. However, it would not be incorrect to say that it is Blanchot’s philosophy which takes center stage. Nevertheless, the moments when her father’s experience comes to the forefront are striking and seem to indicate a breakdown in the theory Kofman so loyally follows up to this point.

There is an obvious disconnect between Kofman’s personal history, which appears in fragments scattered throughout the text, and the philosophical discourse that seems to surround this experience like protective armor. These moments of self-revelation are disjointed, as though placed in this text not in an effort to strengthen her argument through personal testimony, but rather out of an irrepressible necessity to state what happened to her father because, how can it not be said? In fact, the randomness of her personal testimony indicates that the emergence of her

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20 Smothered Words, viii
story may have been more of an uncontrollable, requisite act, rather than a calculated and planned step in her writing. In 1992, Dr. Judith Herman published *Trauma and Recovery* which addresses the manner in which survivors of traumatic events remember, and how they tell the truth about their trauma, “prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims.”  

The healing process itself is highly individualized, dependent upon each survivor’s unique experience. However one thing that remains constant is that it is impossible to bury atrocities. Herman disputes the claim that one can simply deny or ignore the traumatic experience, no matter how strong the desire to do so may be.

The overarching homage to Maurice Blanchot in *Paroles Suffoquées* is evident, as I’ve shown before, in the numerous citations and ideas that Kofman borrows from his philosophy in coping with a traumatic experience and in dealing with the written word after Auschwitz, yet she is still able to write the words to explain rather coherently the details of her father’s deportation and death. No matter how disconnected and factual the story appears, these moments of personal history are truly the beginning of the end for Kofman. She herself recognizes that this is the end of the philosophical distance she had been able to maintain throughout the majority of her life from her personal testimony. From this point on, she is unable to separate herself either intellectually from her father’s death or from her own title as *survivor*. Her fidelity to Blanchot is forever broken with the writing of this text and her philosophical armature begins to crack with these three autobiographical moments. As in the final mention of her father’s story, where Kofman recounts what she believes she knows to be true about her father’s death, the information, again, appears very suddenly, without introduction as if it was something that she could not help but say in this moment. After several pages of an analysis of Blanchot’s *L’Idylle*, in which, she states, “tout est toujours ambigu,” she makes the abrupt transition to Auschwitz and proves that indeed everything is always ambiguous. Kofman continues: “il y a un temps du travail mais aussi un temps de la fête : un ‘aussi’, l’indice même du temps, du temps du récit et de son enchaînement, est toujours possible.”  

The emphasis here is placed on the word *also*, that there is a time for work, but *also* celebration in *L’Idylle*. Yet, there is a temporal meaning to this *also* according to Kofman: *also* indicates that time, the time of the story and its *enchaînement*, or everything that will inevitably follow the time of the story, is possible. In her English translation of *Paroles Suffoquées*

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22 *Paroles Suffoquées*, 41
23 *Paroles Suffoquées*, 41
(Smothered Words), Madeleine Dobie translates *enchaînement* as *continuity*, but I would like to put more emphasis on the relationship of causality that the term *enchaînement* brings to this sentence. The beginning of this paragraph is, in and of itself, a chain reaction of meanings which start in a very different place than where it ends. Kofman moves from the story of the *Idylle*, to work and celebration, followed by time and the time of a *récit* (which is *always possible*), and ends with the reappearance of her father’s memory and death at Auschwitz.


_Auschwitz_ : l’impossible du repos : mon père, un rabbin, a été tué pour avoir voulu respecter le shabbat dans les camps de la mort ; enterré vivant à coups de pioche, pour avoir – ont rapporté des témoins – refusé de travailler ce jour-là ; afin de célébrer le shabbat, priant Dieu pour eux tous, victimes et bourreaux, rétablissant dans cette situation d’impouvoir et de violence extrêmes un rapport qui échappait à tout pouvoir.

Within Auschwitz, the event which contains the time of the story of her father’s death, there is also an *enchaînement* of episodes which lead to his death. There was a path of events which led to this moment, when her father was killed, much like there was a path of other writings which led to the possibility of *ça* in *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*.

We see a breakdown in Kofman’s earlier claim that a *récit* about Auschwitz and/or after Auschwitz could not exist. Although this passage is short, Kofman does, in a very linear way, tell the story of her father’s death and his earlier deportation.

Après avoir été prévenir les juifs de sa synagogue d’aller se planquer, car il savait qu’il y aurait une rafle, il était revenu à la maison prier Dieu, qu’on le prenne lui, pourvu que sa femme et ses enfants soient épargnés. Et il ne s’est pas caché, il est parti avec le flic ; afin que nous ne soyons pas pris à sa place en otages, il aura subi, avec des millions d’autres, cette violence infinie : mourir à Auschwitz.

Although Kofman works backwards, starting with his death and ending with his deportation, she does tell the story in a manner that makes sense to the readers. As if even she herself understood this, she immediately reverts back to the words of Blanchot, beginning the next chapter with the now familiar claim that after Auschwitz no story is possible. This fragmented appearance of her father’s story followed by an immediate return to her philosophical beliefs is again indicative of Dr. Judith Herman’s earlier claims that this is necessary in order to move through the process of healing. “The psychological distress symptoms of traumatized people simultaneously call attention

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24 *Paroles Suffoquées*, 41-42
25 *Paroles Suffoquées*, 42
to the existence of an unspeakable secret and deflect attention from it.”26 The goal of fragmenting her experience was perhaps meant to deflect attention from it, or to use Kofman’s own terminology, to suffocate the experience within her philosophical analysis. However, hiding the experience within the larger context of Blanchot’s philosophy and the analysis of Antelme’s Espèce Humaine only focuses more attention upon the moments of self-revelation due to their stark contrast with the message around them. Madeleine Dobie argues that Kofman, as a survivor of the Holocaust and as a Jewish woman intellectual, she felt that it was her duty “…to pay homage to Blanchot for his unique writing on Auschwitz, fragmentary texts that express the concurrent necessity and necessary failure of such writing.”27 While at first glance, this would appear to justify the manner in which Kofman writes, there is more to the disjointed and random appearance of her story which attests to more than just a concurrent necessity and necessary failure of writing the récit of her experience. The abrupt transitions demonstrate a visible struggle with the difficult memories and the death of her father and point to the more pressing struggle with the understanding of her own Holocaust experience.

The details that Kofman divulges about her father’s death illuminate the fact that she herself did not fully comprehend exactly what happened to her father after he was deported to Auschwitz. Kofman states several times in her writing that her father was buried alive, his prayers stifled and suffocated by a slow and painful death which she learned from an unnamed witness. If her father was in fact killed for respecting the Sabbath, for praying for those around him, for refusing to work in order to follow Jewish law (and these are details that we may never be sure of), then Kofman not only believes that he was buried alive, but also that he was killed for standing up to the enemy in the name of his religion. However, it is highly unlikely that this account is true. Sarah Kofman’s father was not only Jewish, but a Rabbi who was well aware that, according to Jewish law, one would not be expected to uphold the edicts of the religion if one’s life was at stake. Kofman herself gives the readers proof that her father was not only aware of this, but that he believed whole-heartedly that one should transgress the law during this tumultuous time of war when not only his life was at risk, but also that of his wife and children. In the autobiographical essay “Sacrée Nourriture,” Kofman highlights one such instance during the time before her father’s deportation when finding food that conforms to the rules of kosher diet became increasingly difficult to procure.

26 Herman, 1
27 Smothered Words, vii
During the war, things became complicated. How to find anything to eat? How to continue eating kosher? During the exodus, in the train that took us to Brittany, the Red Cross distributed cocoa and ham and butter sandwiches. ‘Don’t eat that,’ said my mother. ‘Let the children eat,’ my father intervened, ‘it’s wartime.’ The ham and butter, once decreed impure, I found delicious, now purified by circumstances and parental authority.\(^{28}\)

The Jewish law was once again challenged by the laws of survival, and Berek Kofman chose the well-being of his children when the only other choice would have been starvation. Similarly, when confronted with the possibility of death for his refusal to work, it is difficult to imagine that he would have defied the law he knew so well, committing himself to observing the Sabbath over his own survival. Kofman conveniently does not include this passage in *Paroles Suffoquées*, nor in *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, which is undoubtedly more inclusive of her personal autobiography. In true Kofman style, the details about her father are dissected and become short anecdotes which must be pieced back together by the reader in order to construct a cohesive *récit* about his life.

To attain a complete understanding of what Kofman allegedly knows as fact about her father’s death in Auschwitz, we must consult yet a third text, *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, that contains the previously missing elements to the story.

Après la guerre, arrive l’acte de décès d’Auschwitz. D’autres déportes reviennent. Un Yom Kippour, à la synagogue, l’un d’eux prétend avoir connu mon père à Auschwitz. Il y aurait survécu un an. Un boucher juif, devenu kapo (revenu du camp de la mort, il a rouvert boutique rue des Rosiers) l’aurait abattu à coups de pioche et enterré vivant, un jour où il aurait refusé de travailler. C’était un Shabbat : il ne faisait aucun mal, aurait-il dit, il priait seulement Dieu pour eux tous, victimes et bourreaux.\(^{29}\)

Kofman accepts as fact that her father was not just killed during the Holocaust, but that he had suffered a slow and painful death at the hands of another Jew for adhering to Jewish law. There is no *difference* to highlight in her memory; this was not Jew versus non-Jew, rather a Jew who turned on another Jew. The Jewish kapo survived the war and was able to return to his previous life in Paris, fittingly as the owner of a butcher shop. While at this time I do not wish to explore any deeper the connection that this may have with Kofman’s tumultuous relationship with food, it is worth noting that in this scenario that she has two very distinct examples of the comportment of a Jewish person during the war. First, she has the memory of her father who, in her mind, was


\(^{29}\) *RORL*, 16
steadfast against the enemy in his relentless practice of his faith contrasted with the image of the
Jewish kapo who conformed and collaborated with the enemy in order to survive. Her father was
suffocated while the conformist survived.

While one cannot attest with certainty to the details of Berek Kofman’s death, an analysis
of the writing that Sarah Kofman has done on the subject is telling when set against the memories
she has from this period in her life. In Paroles Suffoquées, Kofman alternatively attempts to
conceal her story and call attention to it, which causes a break in her philosophical writing. The
words that are being smothered or suffocated are not only those of her father by the Jewish kapo;
Paroles Suffoquées also describes the experience that Kofman is attempting to relay about her
father’s death that is being stifled by the philosophical discourse that she employs throughout the
text. Kofman is suffocating her own traumatic experience and trying to cause another slow death,
that of the récit of her father, suffocating it within her overarching discussion of Maurice Blanchot
and Robert Antelme. In writing Paroles Suffoquées, she was attempting to cause the failure of her
own récit and to prove the validity of her previous claims of the impossibility of such a récit, but
the question still remains as to why she desired to see her own story fail.

It is necessary to return once again to the dedicatory message that Kofman provides for the
readers at the beginning of Paroles Suffoquées in which she mentions only her father’s memory
and death alongside the names of Blanchot and Antelme. What she remembers about her father’s
death is difficult to accept as fact as I have previously noted, tainted with second-hand information
that may or may not be true. However misinformed she may be and whatever the circumstance
may have been, one fact remains as true for Kofman as it does for those who read and analyze her
works: Berek Kofman died because he was Jewish. I have already established that this is what
distinguishes Kofman’s father from Blanchot and Antelme, but this is also what distinguishes
Kofman herself from them. However, Kofman did not want to be distinguished from these two
men; she did not want the world to focus on the difference, but rather on what was similar. The
difference was dangerous, an equivalent to death, suffering, and silence. But Kofman could not
escape being Jewish, she could not renounce the ties that she had with her father. Instead of
renouncing Judaism, she focused the world’s attention on something else.

Si Auschwitz n’est ni un concept ni un pur mot mais un nom hors nomination…s’impose à
moi, intellectuelle juive qui ai survécu à l’holocauste, de rendre hommage à Blanchot pour
ces fragments sur Auschwitz épars dans ses textes, écriture de cendres, écriture du désastre
Kofman is not Jewish, yet a Jewish intellectual who has survived the Holocaust and because of this it is imposed upon her to pay homage to Blanchot, not for his writing, but for his fragments on Auschwitz. He created fragments, thus she created fragments. He renounced the récit after Auschwitz, thus she renounced the récit after Auschwitz. As the Jewish intellectual, Kofman conforms to the ideologies of her mentor and assures her acceptance into the philosophical, male dominated world of academia, much in the same way that as the Jewish kapo, her father’s murderer was able to return safely to his former life in Paris after the war. Kofman learned from an early age that by disguising oneself and creating an alternative persona one was safe and would survive whatever atrocity one was faced with. For being Jewish, her father died; by conforming to the enemy, the Jewish kapo survived. Kofman herself was saved during the war by pretending to be the Catholic daughter of Mémé, her protector, during the war, which the story she tells in Rue Ordener, rue Labat. The lessons she learned as a child are carried over into adulthood; she is safe as long as she retains her philosophical capabilities, and so long as her status as intellectual was the focus and not the stigma of being Jewish.

Writing Paroles Suffoquées proved itself to be the ultimate test for the Jewish intellectual trying to conform to Blanchot’s philosophy about a récit after Auschwitz. Could Kofman demonstrate the failure of her récit by suffocating it within the words of Blanchot and Antelme? Could she smother her own experience during the Holocaust, thus rendering the story incomprehensible to her readers? My conclusion is that in attempting to prove the failure of the récit, she failed and upon completing Paroles Suffoquées, she undoubtedly realized that she had failed again. She claimed in 1991 that in her “attempt to write about the Shoah,” it had become clear after this text that she, “could no longer write didactically and philosophically,” and that she was, “forced to write in a quasi-poetic way.” Her philosophy failed her, for her story, though hidden and fragmented, was coherent and understandable. It was there, published proof that a récit was possible after Auschwitz.

Paroles Suffoquées was not an attempt at telling the story of her experience during the Holocaust, rather an attempt to conceal it. The three instances where her father is mentioned are not the watershed of information one might expect from an individual sharing her story for the first time.

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30 Paroles Suffoqués, 13-14; emphasis mine
31 “Writing Without Power”, 5
time, and Judith Herman’s work suggests that the restrained and fragmented information given to the reader at this moment is symptomatic of one attempting to cope with trauma.

People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy. When the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery. But far too often secrecy prevails, and the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom.32

Within her attempt to conceal her story, did Kofman recognize the truth that it was possible to recount her traumatic experience and possibly even necessary in order to recover from it? Undeniably there could not be two more contradictory texts than those of *Paroles Suffoquées* and *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, the latter being based on a philosophy in which the *récit* of a history, especially a traumatic one, is said to be impossible, and the former proving the fallibility of this claim. *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* was a shocking detour from her philosophy for the public in 1994 when it was published, but in considering the manner in which Kofman discussed the possibility of an autobiography in the past, it must have also been overwhelming for her to write as well. In an April, 1986 interview with *Le Monde*, Kofman addresses the topic of autobiography.

Je suis parvenue à un moment où je sens la nécessité d’écrire une ‘autobiogriffure’ biographique qui ne soit pas simplement une autobiographie à travers les textes. J’ai l’impression de n’avoir plus rien à dire et, pourtant, je me sens acculée à faire une autobiographie qui serait moi-même. Mais ce moi-même, n’est-ce pas un leurre ? N’est-ce pas un leurre de croire que j’ai une autobiographie autre que celle qui transparait dans ma bibliographie ?33

This article appeared shortly before the publication of *Paroles Suffoquées* and attests to the struggle that Kofman herself felt, but most likely did not understand, between what she wrote as a philosopher and what she was feeling the need to write as a survivor. This *moi-même* which may or may not exist, who could be her real self, is described here as nothing more than an illusion, a decoy that exists to draw her away. I am compelled to ask at this moment: away from what is she afraid of being lured? Is there something dangerous in exploring this *moi-même* which could exist outside of her bibliography? Without doubt, I believe that she saw something dangerous in her

32 Herman, 1
autobiography, in facing her solely Jewish self, unsheltered from the Jewish intellectual persona that had protected her for so long. In the Die Philosophin interview in 1991, she answers a question posed about her autobiographical project that is rumored to be in the works. “I might possibly write an autobiography one day. At the same time, I keep postponing the decision as though I would in this way postpone the date of my death.”34 Although we know now that Kofman committed suicide after the publication of her autobiography, the meaning that is to be derived from this statement should not be a literal one. The death that she speaks of here, I would argue, is the death of the Jewish intellectual self, of her philosophical identity. It is a death in the sense of a loss of a part of herself, which may or may not have had influence over her suicide. The fear was the death of Sarah Kofman the philosopher, not Sarah Kofman the woman. The appearance of her autobiography would mean the death of the philosopher who had attested to its impossibility for over twenty years.

Even more significant in this interview is the manner in which she herself sees her autobiography thus far. She asks the question, is it not an illusion to believe that I have an autobiography other than the one that shows through in my bibliography?35 In this interview from 1986, she is putting forth the eerily similar request that she will again state in the opening page of Rue Ordener, rue Labat: that those who read her work must look to her bibliography in order to grasp the full meaning of her autobiography. There is an undeniable link between Kofman’s philosophical oeuvre and her autobiography. It is at this moment in her life, near the time of this interview and during the writing of Paroles Suffoquées, that one sees the breakdown of her ability to distance herself from her traumatic experience. I would like to emphasize again here that Kofman herself was most likely unaware of the critical steps she was taking in Paroles Suffoquées in being able to face her autobiographical story. In several journals she addresses what she wrote about her father, but denies any link between her writing this text and her personal biography.

I was not making a biographical gesture. It is true that I speak of my father in my book and it was important for me to be able to write his name in this book…Besides, my father was not deported because he was ‘my’ father but because he was a Jew. That is why I make a point of writing about his death - no matter how uniquely heroic is was – in the context of the death of other Jews…36

34 “Writing Without Power”, 6
35 Translation my own
36 “Schreiben ohne Macht”, 6
Kofman renounces the personal significance of writing her father’s name, but then states that is was important for her to do so. She states that her father’s death was just one of many deaths of Jews at Auschwitz, yet his was heroic. He was her father but this is not what is vital. The emotional and contradictory manner in which Kofman deals with her father’s memory and death continues to follow the symptoms that Herman describes. After several years of this circuitous renunciation and exhibition of these biographical moments, Rue Ordener, rue Labat is written and published, breaking Kofman’s long-standing practice of separating what happened to her father from her own experience during the Holocaust. She finally is able to unite her own trauma with her father’s, beginning with the story of the last time she saw him on the 16th of July, 1942. In the painful moment when her father was taken away, the young Sarah and her five brothers and sisters stood in the street, clinging to each other and crying. As Kofman recounts this memory, she relates the cries of her and her siblings to a Greek Tragedy. “En lisant la première fois dans une tragédie grecque les lamentations bien connues ‘ô popoï, popoï, popoï’ je ne puis m’empêcher de penser à cette scène de mon enfance où six enfants, abandonnés de leur père, purent seulement crier en suffoquant, et avec la certitude qu’ils ne le reverraient jamais plus : ‘ô papa, papa, papa’.”³⁷ This moment of overwhelming intimacy, as she reflects on the last time she saw her father, is tied to another moment at another time in her life. In reading the Greek tragedies, the familiar lament evokes the memory of this painful time of personal loss. We learn from Kofman that the personal is somehow always already related to the literary experience. In Rue Ordener, rue Labat, Kofman intricately weaves her philosophical writing, her place as a survivor, and her father’s traumatic experience during the Holocaust into one joint existence while continuing to remind the readers that one cannot stop there and that we must always return to the works she wrote between the moment of release, Paroles Suffoquées, and her final words.

³⁷ Rue Ordener, rue Labat, 13-14
Sarah Kofman’s statement that after *Paroles Suffoquées* she could no longer write philosophically and didactically does not imply that she didn’t to attempt to write in the language of philosophy. In fact, before her death in 1994, she wrote several texts that are considered by readers to be philosophical in nature, most notably *L’Imposture de la Beauté, Le Mépris des Juifs*, and another shorter work “Conjuring Death : Remarks on *The Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Nicolas Tulp* (1632)” which was published posthumously in its unfinished form in *La part de l’œil* by Alexandre Kyritsos, Kofman’s companion in her adult years. Kofman’s final texts vary in the subjects that they broach: *L’Imposture de la beauté* is an analysis of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, by Oscar Wilde; *Le Mépris des Juifs* addresses Friedrich Nietzsche’s anti-Semitism; and “Conjuring Death” is an analysis of *The Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Nicolas Tulp* by Rembrandt. If one includes *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, these four final texts do not have an obvious common thread outside of the fact that they have the same author. Kofman, in her final years, decided to write on four very diverse subjects: a painting, a work of fiction, a philosopher accused of anti-Semitism, and herself. This provokes several questions for readers of Kofman. Why did she choose to write about these specific topics in the final years of her life? Is there an underlying connection among these texts of which, perhaps, even Kofman herself was unaware? My hypothesis is that yes, there is a connection among these four texts that has not been previously explored by those who have read and analyzed Kofman, and that this connection, once established, will shed light on what Kofman was attempting to say through these texts in her final years.

*L’Imposture de la beauté et autres texts* was published posthumously in 1995 following Sarah Kofman’s suicide and was first presented as a paper in 1994 at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory at the University of Wales. In considering the timeline of this work and of *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, one can presume that their respective conceptions may not have just overlapped, but may have been concurrent. In reading Kofman, one has the sense that each text, particularly these last four, does not end, and that her goal is not finality or to put forth a

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conclusion to any of the problems she proposes. Each text is like a piece of a conversation that only retains its full meaning in relation to the other parts, those that came before and those that come after. Jean-Luc Nancy, friend and colleague to Sarah Kofman, has written that,

She did not stop with the work, with the definite and, as it were, definitive form of a book. She was keen to finish a book, but in order to publish it (to launch it into another course, another circulation) and immediately to beginning another (if it had not begun already). No doubt this rhythm and practice was not peculiar to her. But she brought to it a particular determination and an always awakened haste. As though, truly, the thing to do was to continue, not to punctuate, to activate the subject rather than to pose the object: in short, praxis rather than poiesis.40

Nancy indicates that it is the praxis, the process of putting her theory into practice that is important in Kofman’s writing, not the theory itself. Kofman focused on activating the subject-matter at hand. She was not trying to move away from one subject to the other, but to continue through each subject, to create fluidity from one text to another, from one thought to another, without the objective of conclusiveness.

There is a deliberate connectedness between her works. Deliberate not because she herself was conscious of what she was creating in this elaborate web of links that direct the reader from one text to the next, but because it was natural. She did not intend for there to be an end to her thoughts, and if one reads her texts together as one, there is indeed no end, only a continuous recommencing of new beginnings. Sarah’s aim was, “truth, not finality. Sarah did not write under the impetus of an end: neither goal nor achievement, but so fleeting, always one foot in the next book.”41 One work ends, for the purpose of publication, long after another has already begun. Therefore, in examining Kofman’s written work, I would argue that one must focus on the body of work in its entirety, from start to finish. One must read each individual, published work not just for itself, but in consideration with the other texts contemporary to it. Rue Ordener, rue Labat may be the defining work of Kofman’s writing for many of her readers. However, its true message can only be achieved if we read the other three texts that were conceived at that period in her life as well.


41 Nancy, xiii
Many of Sarah Kofman’s friends and colleagues, including Jean-Luc Nancy, echo the sentiments that at the end of her life, there was a definitive struggle with maintaining the level of philosophical discourse to which she had been accustomed for the majority of her life and even an aversion to the written word itself. Deutscher and Oliver write that, “at the end of her life, and after Rue Ordener, rue Labat, she felt herself disastrously unable to continue to read or write.” This repugnance with the written word seems to stem from her own efforts to continue to write philosophically while carrying the weight of her unexplored autobiography. Paroles Suffoquées seems to have opened a floodgate, and once the biographical waters began to flow, there was no containing them. Kofman, however, may very well have believed that she could contain them after her failed attempt to suffocate the récit in Paroles Suffoquées; perhaps, by avoiding her biography at all costs, she would be able to recapture a certain level of her philosophy. By avoiding the written word, she could also avoid what she herself had written and its connection with her own experience. After writing about her father’s deportation and death, she stated in the Die Philosophin interview that when she was asked to read a passage aloud about her personal history she “was unable to read more than two lines. She [Laure Adler] finished reading the passage in a totally expressionless voice which was cut off from any of the emotion that had prevented me from reading the text.” Kofman is coping with the drama of her personal life and with the comprehension of her history within the larger context of a history that forever changed the world. Her story has taken its form in the written word, something that has for so long been devoid of the personal, and at the forefront of her life, imposing a demand upon her. The written word used to be something to which Kofman could turn for comfort and solace, to be separated from her personal history. Writing has now been infected with what she wanted to avoid and it is now intolerable, as her story had once been. This struggle which first appeared in a tangible form in Paroles Suffoquées, continued until the end of her life in the words of these four last texts, published separately but created tangentially.

In L’Imposture de la Beauté, Kofman’s analysis is concerned more with the character of Dorian Gray than with Oscar Wilde’s writing. She outlines four stages that Dorian Gray symptomatically goes through in his transition from a young man and the subject of a painting, to the murderous and corrupt being he becomes in reaction to his own envious feelings towards his degrading image. In outlining these themes, Kofman not only sheds light on the demise of a

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42 Deutscher and Oliver, 7
43 “Schreiben ohne Macht”, 6
literary character, but also on the violence that erupts as a result of an individual attempting to live with a dangerous and horrifying secret.

BAD INFLUENCE

Kofman recognizes the importance of influence on the character of Dorian Gray as key in Wilde’s novel. Dorian Gray is only able to recognize himself in the portrait after Lord Henry judges the piece a wonderful work of art and a wonderful likeness of Dorian. “‘My dear fellow, I congratulate you most warmly,’ he said. ‘It is the finest portrait of modern times. Mr. Gray, come over and look at yourself.’”

It is Lord Henry’s influence that leads Dorian Gray to be able to recognize this likeness of himself, this version of himself that will remain youthful and beautiful, even while he is destined to grow old and die. Kofman’s reading of this text immediately takes a predictable, deconstructionist direction. “Cette mise en place privilégiée, en renversant la hiérarchie traditionnellement établie entre le modèle et sa copie, exhibe de façon étrangement inquiétante (unheimlich, et nous ne sortirons plus dans ce texte de l’*Unheimlichkeit*) la primauté et l’originalité du double qui absorbe le modèle et captive le lecteur.”

Kofman insists upon the privileged position of the copy over its original throughout this text, arguing that Basil Hallward recognized something in the visible beauty of Dorian that the painter believed could only be captured in his portrait. Dorian the man was nothing but a shadow or pattern of what Basil desired to capture. The three men discuss the original versus the copy in the text itself. “The painter bit his lip and walked over, cup in hand, to the picture. ‘I shall stay with the real Dorian,’ he said, sadly. ‘Is it the real Dorian?’ cried the original of the portrait, strolling across to him. ‘Am I really like that?’” Dorian is not his portrait, nor does he embody the beauty that the portrait does. He is just like that but is not that. Only in the creation of the portrait could Dorian’s beauty be seen in its entirety. The copy contains something that the original lacks, affirming the necessity of its formation. Basil Hallward believes that he captured what could not be seen by looking at Dorian the man, making the man inferior to his copy. In speaking about the

46 Wilde, 33
real Dorian, the painter is referring to his creation, not the man, privileging the copy over the original.

The influence in this book takes shape in two forms. First, there is the influence of Lord Henry over Dorian Gray, which leads to Dorian’s recognition of himself in the portrait. “De sa beauté à ravir l’âme, Dorian n’est pas conscient et ceci en dépit des éloges réitérés de Basil dont il se moque.” It is only after Lord Henry himself states that this painting of beauty is of an exact likeness to Dorian that he sees himself. The joy of the discovery of this beauty is short-lived, however, and Dorian’s mood turns sullen as he realizes that even as he grows old, his double will stay forever young.

‘How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young. It will never be older than this particular day of June…If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that – for that – I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!’

Dorian’s ignorance of his own beauty may very well have been a blissful ignorance, for now the deed has been done. Dorian cannot take back these words which set in motion the disastrous events of The Picture of Dorian Gray.

There is also Dorian’s influence over the painter who is, “totalement ‘absorbé’ par Dorian, au point de perdre la maîtrise et l’empire qu’il avait jusqu’alors sur lui-même…” Basil Hallward is seduced by Dorian, as though by some magical force, and desires to paint his likeness in order to capture his beauty for all eternity. After becoming aware of the events that take place in The Picture of Dorian Gray, the reader knows that Lord Henry’s influence over Dorian, and Dorian’s influence over Basil Hallward, do not produce the most positive of outcomes. Basil feels that something in Dorian’s beauty has forever changed him as a painter, but fears that Lord Henry’s influence will spoil all that he has accomplished.

‘Dorian Gray is my dearest friend,’ he said. ‘He has a simple and a beautiful nature. Your aunt was quite right in what she said of him. Don’t spoil him. Don’t try to influence him. Your influence would be bad. The world is wide, and has many marvelous people in it.

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47 L’imposture de la beauté, 16
48 Wilde, 30
49 L’Imposture de la beauté, 15
Don’t take away from me the one person who gives to my art whatever charm it possesses: my life as an artist depends on him.  

He makes his fears known to Lord Henry but is unsuccessful in protecting his muse. The old painter cannot prevent Lord Henry from exerting his influence over the young and naïve Dorian. “Basil sent vaciller l’assurance de ses limites narcissiques et celles de son identité : il [Dorian] est au bord d’une crise qui déchire l’unité de son être, dont il se trouve dépossédé, vidé au profit de son ‘double’ sur lequel il a projeté toute sa surestimation narcissique.” What Dorian esteems in his life are his youth and his beauty and Lord Henry’s influence makes him realize that these are two things that he cannot hold onto forever and that they will eventually fade. This influence causes Dorian to curse the painting, and leads Kofman to state that all influence is in and of itself, bad influence: “…et toute influence, reconnaît-il, est mauvaise dans la mesure où elle fabrique un être artificiel vivant d’une vie empruntée aux dépens de l’accomplissement de sa propre nature ‘ ne pensant plus ses propres pensées, ne brûlant plus de ses propres passions,’ réduite qui n’a pas été écrit pour elle.”

As Kofman works through this text, attempting to identify the stages through which Dorian Grays’ being is passing at each turn in the novel, it becomes more and more apparent that she is not just outlining something specific to this character in this book. If one is to speak of influence and Sarah Kofman in the same breath, one must also then speak of the influences in her life that were vital in her philosophical formation, and among them, Maurice Blanchot. As I highlighted in my first chapter, Blanchot’s influence is very apparent in Kofman’s thought and in the very problematic knot that I seek to untangle here. Kofman continues:

Mais une ‘influence’ ne peut jouer que parce qu’elle atteint et éveille une corde secrète que Dorian avait senti seulement vibrer auparavant dans son enfance sans véritablement le comprendre. Elle lui fait prendre conscience de ce qu’il était lui-même sans le savoir, de ce qu’il pourrait réellement devenir : un être plein de passions et de désirs qu’il n’avait pu jusqu’alors qu’accomplir en rêve et que les interdits moraux et religieux de la société puritaine avaient maintenus refoulés, châtrés.

Not only does this influence create an artificial being who, from the point of influence on, lives a borrowed life. He also must now contend with a cord struck deep within him. This influence over

50 Wilde, 18  
51 L’Imposture de la beauté, 15  
52 L’Imposture de la beauté, 17  
53 L’Imposture de la beauté, 17-18
another individual “is only effective when it touches on something from [Dorian’s] childhood that makes him susceptible.”54 I would add that once this subject from childhood is touched upon, the individual is all the more susceptible to bad influence and to becoming the artificial being who is destined to live a borrowed life.

Kofman does not state that it is only within The Picture of Dorian Gray that all influence is bad influence. She maintains that influence is bad in all its forms and shapes, in fiction and in reality. Her existence, which is not free from influence, is no exception to the rule. At the beginning of Paroles Suffoquées, Kofman cites Blanchot’s Le pas au delà and L’Écriture du désastre to commence her work. These quotes appear out of context, yet support her fundamental argument that one cannot develop a cohesive narrative after Auschwitz and that one must protect this experience from the inevitable incomprehension of others; one must speak without actually speaking about this event. This thought is entirely borrowed from Blanchot, as Kofman clearly demonstrates in the stark appearance of his words at the beginning of her work. She purposefully selects four quotes from Blanchot’s writing to convey his idea succinctly and separates these quotations from the body of her text, inevitably drawing attention to them. From Le pas au delà, Kofman selected the following exemplary encapsulation of Blanchot’s thought:

Que le fait concentrationnaire, l’extermination des juifs et les camps de la mort où la mort continue son œuvre, soient pour l’histoire un absolu qui a interrompu l’histoire, on doit le dire sans cependant pouvoir rien dire d’autre. Le discours ne peut pas se développer à partir de là (…). Tout savoir de ce qui partout est insupportable (tortures, oppressions, malheur, fain, les camps), égarerait aussitôt le savoir. Nous vivons donc entre l’égarement et un demi-sommeil. Savoir cela suffit déjà à égarer.55

As I previously discussed in Chapter 1, Kofman subscribed to Blanchot’s claim that Auschwitz is the absolute of history which interrupted history, that one must say this but not actually discuss the event in question any further, and that after this event, all linear, comprehensible récit is impossible. Under Blanchot’s tutelage, this became Kofman’s claim as well, demonstrating his influence over her in the development not only of her theory of post-Holocaust writing, but also in furthering her inability to face her own trauma. However, from this unusual position of attempting to read Kofman as Kofman while considering her entire oeuvre as one fluid, unending thought, the

54 Deutscher and Oliver, 9
55 Paroles Suffoquées, 11
reader can now draw the line from *Paroles Suffoquées*, published in 1987, to *L’Imposture de la Beauté*, written in 1994, with this one word: *influence.*

The influence that Blanchot’s writings and teachings had over Kofman take center stage in *Paroles Suffoquées*, yet seven years later she adamantly states that all influence is bad influence. Was it following the failure of her attempt to put Blanchot’s theory into practice by suffocating her own story that Kofman realized that Blanchot’s influence was bad? If we are reading in the manner in which she intended her readers to read, if we follow the counsel of those who knew her best in order to better understand her, if we follow the threads that she has apparently created for us to follow, then yes. By concentrating on the praxis, rather than the poeisis, of her philosophy, Kofman discovered that not only did Blanchot’s theory fail when put into practice, but that his influence over her had not been positive.

Reading Kofman makes one alert to the numerous *influences* in her life, notably in *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, which recounts Kofman’s virtual transformation from a young Jewish girl in hiding, to a Catholic French girl, free to live in the open in Paris during the Occupation. Mémé, Kofman’s protector and, eventually, second mother, began by altering Kofman’s nutritional regime. As kosher food became increasingly dangerous to attempt to find, Kofman’s mother was unable to continue to prepare the meals of her childhood, the food that she was accustomed to eating in order to subscribe to the laws of her religion. Mémé modified the entire life of young Sarah, from simple alterations of her hairstyle, to the drastic move of changing her name to *Suzanne.* “Peu à peu, mémé opéra en moi une véritable transformation.” The childhood recollections of these changes are recalled by the adult Kofman in intricate detail and shed light on the numerous *bad influences* in her life which stem from her traumatic experience during the Holocaust. Yet her autobiography does not strive to self-analyze her situation; rather she leaves room for her readers to interpret the events within the larger context of her written corpus. Kofman’s message, her voice, can only be heard if the reader is able to trace the thin and often transparent lines that exist between her works; one must make the connections that even she herself was unlikely to make and unravel the complex knot of philosophy and personal experience that she creates for herself at the end of her life.

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56 Rue Ordener, rue Labat, 49
For a philosopher who often read and analyzed the works of Freud, the inclusion of a *mirror stage* seems to be an appropriate, and again expected, move for Kofman. Lord Henry’s influence, according to Kofman, is what first allows Dorian Gray to recognize his enchanting beauty that is reflected in Basil Hallward’s portrait of him. “Il n’avait gardé sa beauté que parce que, tel l’enfant, ou Adam avant le péché, il était inconscient, n’était pas encore divisé lui-même, n’avait encore été ‘entamé’ par aucune duplicité.” Being unaware of his beauty was the only thing that allowed him to retain it. Once Dorian Gray was faced with the double of himself, he lost his naïveté and innocence and immediately finds a reason to detest this likeness of himself.

During her analysis of the mirror stage, Kofman points to two integral moments in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* that highlight Dorian’s jealousy and feelings of resentment towards his portrait. His initial response to his double shows that he regards it as the enemy that has stolen his youth and beauty, while he is certain to become old, ugly, and eventually die. “Yes, there would be a day when his face would be wrinkled and wizen, his eyes dim and colourless, the grace of his figure broken and deformed. The scarlet would pass away from his lips and the gold steal from his hair. The life that was to make his soul would mar his body. He would become dreadful, hideous, and uncouth.” As Dorian stood there, reflecting upon his own mortality, a pain, as if a knife had stabbed through his body, struck Dorian and made every fiber of his being tremble with terror. “He felt as if a hand of ice had been laid upon his heart.” Kofman argues that at this moment, Dorian is made a corpse, the knife thrust indicating a death of the original and the supremacy of the copy that is left behind. While Dorian is still living, the innocent version of him ceases to exist.

After the influence of Lord Henry and passing through the mirror stage, Dorian changes, which we see in the symbolic murder of the painting, the second integral moment Kofman discusses.

Dorian’s aversion to his double leads him to slash through the canvas of his portrait in an attempt to put an end to the madness.

When they [the servants] entered, they found hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was

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57 *L’Imposture de la beauté*, 19-20
58 Wilde, 29
59 Wilde, 29
withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was.  

For Kofman, the story plays out between these two knife thrusts, one representing the symbolic death of the pristine protagonist, the other the physical death and the mark of the end of the story. “Dans l’intervalle c’est l’histoire de la passion de l’impossible de Dorian Gray, celle d’une tentative désespérée pour se réapproprier son autosuffisance fantasmatique et sa sûreté narcissique entamée par le double.” What is impossible for Dorian is that he believes that he will be able to conquer his double with a wish that he should be able to retain his youth and beauty, while his portrait would show the signs of aging. While Dorian achieves this to some extent during the unfolding of the plot of the story, in the end all his actions are in vain. Throughout the novel, Dorian witnesses the decaying face of his double, however, at the conclusion, the painting remains for all eternity the symbol of Dorian’s youth, while Dorian’s face bears the signs of degradation and ruin. Wilde’s lesson, therefore, is that one cannot hide from the inevitable, and that eventually, no matter how horrifying the truth is, not facing it proves to be the more dangerous course of action.

Kofman, unintentionally I believe, also teaches her readers a lesson in her focus on the prayer that Dorian makes to God, his wish that he be the one to remain youthful while his portrait suffers the degradation of old age.

L’inquiétante étrangeté commence non pas lorsque Dorian Gray émet cette prière, mais croit en son efficace, c’est-à-dire croit, tel l’enfant au stade narcissique, à la toute-puissance de ses désirs et de ses pensées, et d’avoir pu, par de simples paroles, influencer magiquement la divinité. Au point d’admettre la possibilité, puis la réalité de l’accomplissement de ses vœux.

She states that it is not in the moment when Dorian prays to God that the strangeness begins, but in the moment when he actually believes that his words are powerful enough to influence God himself. The power of Dorian’s words is proven, at least for a short while, in the visible destruction of the face of the portrait; his authority is short lived, however. He slowly looses control over his own emotions and violently reacts to the sight of what his face could be. That words could be so powerful is not an uncommon theme in literature, and certainly Kofman herself

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60 Wilde, 243
61 L’Imposture de la beauté, 21
62 L’Imposture de la beauté, 22
regarded the written word as a force that could preserve and protect her own philosophy and ideology. Her words are her legacy, what she leaves behind by which the world will remember her. She was not immune to the thought that if one said something and with all one’s internal, intellectual strength one also believed in its validity, it would become reality. The impossibility of writing the coherent récit after Auschwitz was not the subject of just one article or book, rather it was a recurrent theme in Kofman’s writings; this was her desire and this was her thought. She believed in the efficacy of what she wrote and that she would have the power to influence la divinité.

The similarities between Dorian’s situation and Kofman’s are not immediately evident, however she herself stated that we are to look to her bibliography in order to gain a better understanding of her autobiography. As in Paroles Suffoquées, there is something that shows through this work and that relates directly to Kofman’s personal struggles during the last years of her life. Both she and Dorian Gray saw their respective desires become realities and then drastically fail before their very eyes. Dorian could not escape the face of his portrait or his imminent death anymore than Kofman could escape the existence of her traumatic past.

SCREEN

The portrait of Dorian Gray not only shows the signs of aging which Dorian is eager to avoid, the destruction of the double’s beautiful face increases with each malicious and evil act that Dorian commits throughout the novel. “Tandis que lui-même, réduit à sa pure apparence visible, se conserve intact, le portrait devient la projection de son âme, le miroir (ou la conscience) dans lequel vient se refléter tout ce dont il veut se préserver.” Looking at the portrait was, therefore, like looking at his own soul, with each vicious and murderous act represented by the destruction of his beautiful double. The portrait of Dorian Gray serves as the screen, protecting Dorian from aging and from his own sins.

Dorian, realizing what a toll his acts were taking on his portrait, believes that a return to the good would be enough to save the painting, and his soul, from further destruction.

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63 Schreiben ohne Macht, 6
64 L’Imposture de la beauté, 24
Puis, parce qu’il ne supporte plus le regard de ce visage, le regard de l’Autre sur lui-même, et qu’il veut en éliminer tous les signes de passion malfaisante, et qu’il croit qu’un simple changement de vie qui s’orienterait désormais vers le bien suffirait à effacer les traces terrifiantes et dégradantes du crime, décidé à se ‘convertir’, il retire pour la première fois sans terreur la tenture pourpre accrochée au portrait.  

The change of lifestyle proved to be futile, for the painting was even more hideous after Dorian’s vow to live for good rather than for evil. There is no escaping the blemishes that he has made upon his double, “celles de l’âge, de la méditation, des passions, des souffrances, et des plaisirs. Celles dues aux marques au fer chaud de l’infamie, et des vices qui rongent l’âme comme les vers le cadavre.” Beauty is the screen that protects us from the intolerable, from the ugly blemished soul. By wearing the mask of beauty, one is sheltered from the insupportable and painful truth of one’s true identity. It is, as Kofman states, the imposture of beauty, for it only appears to be a shield from the flaws and corruption. It does not totally protect from the imperfections of one’s soul and, in the end, it is beauty, “elle-même [qui] se trouve fatalement menacée.” The imposture of beauty carries with it the signs of that which had been previously believed to have been conquered.

What mask of beauty does Kofman herself wear in order to protect herself from the intolerable act of facing her traumatic experience? Like Dorian Gray, she has an untold secret, a version of her self best kept at bay and covered with a mask in order to face the world. “But the art of constructing screens and wearing masks is not for the weak of heart,” state Deutscher and Oliver. “Only those strong enough to wear masks because they know that they need them to acknowledge that the changing, decaying turmoil of reality- this Dionysian ‘truth’- is too powerful to bear.” This mask of beauty that Kofman must wear in order to protect herself is a philosophical mask. Philosophy is her mask of beauty, which Kofman constructs in order to be able to face the world. While wearing this mask, Kofman is not the Holocaust survivor, she is not the young girl struggling with the death of her father, betraying her religion and her mother. She is a philosopher who speaks in a language of purpose and thought. She does not carry with her the burden of coming to terms with her traumatic experience; in fact, since she is under the influence of Maurice Blanchot, she doesn’t have to.

65 *L’Imposture de la beauté*, 24
66 *L’Imposture de la beauté*, 25
67 *L’Imposture de la beauté*, 26
68 Deutscher and Oliver, 11
But, what is beauty for Kofman, if not the eventual recognition of something that was always already inside of her? If her beauty was found in her philosophy, what was its origin? The answer to these questions is found in the text of *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* in Kofman’s personal story as a child who must inhabit two roles, two distinct identities, in order to survive during the Occupation in France. She must be both the young Jewish child, daughter of a deportee, and also “play” the role of Mémé’s Christian daughter in order to be protected. She must live caught between two worlds with two mothers, her biological mother and the one who “saved” her. These two mothers represent two distinct lives, between which she must constantly alternate. Her life on Rue Ordener was highly regimented according to the Jewish tradition where French was not spoken. Her family was poor, reserved; her mother wasn’t well-read or educated. She was then thrust into a world where she couldn’t be openly Jewish. In the residence on Rue Labat (Labat or *la-bàs*, signifying *over-there*, a place separate and other from where she grew up), she ate non-kosher food, spoke French, and had regular lessons with Mémé in place of going to school. Mémé was emotional, giving, and generous with her money, the exact opposite of her biological mother. It was by Mémé that Kofman was first introduced to the world of higher education and learning and to the differences that existed between her Jewish culture and Mémé’s Gentile culture.

À son insu ou non, mémé avait réussi ce tour de force: en présence de ma mère, me détacher d’elle. Et aussi du judaïsme. Elle avait assuré notre salut mais n’était pas dépourvue de préjugés antisémites. Elle m’apprit que j’avais un nez juif en me faisant palper la petite bosse qui en était le signe. Elle disait aussi: ‘La nourriture juive est nocive pour la santé ; les Juifs ont crucifié Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ ; ils sont tous avares et n’aident que le pognon (sic) ; ils sont très intelligents, aucun autre peuple ne possède autant de génies en musique et en philosophie.’ Et elle me citait Spinoza, Bergson, Einstein, Marx. C’est dans sa bouche et dans ce contexte que j’entends pour la première fois ces noms qui me sont aujourd’hui si familiers.\(^69\)

Mémé recognized in young Sarah\(^70\) the education that was possible if only she were exposed to it. While her mother would shut off the electricity so that Sarah could not read at night, Mémé cultivated Sarah’s intellectual side opening up a world of knowledge. With the knowledge, however, also came a strong dose of Mémé’s ideology and all anti-Semitism. Sarah spent her entire childhood caught between two worlds that formed a binary opposition. As a child, she was

\(^{69}\) *RORL*, 57
\(^{70}\) I am referring to Sarah Kofman here as *Sarah* to indicate a difference between the young Kofman portrayed in her autobiography and the adult *Kofman*, philosopher. *Sarah* will always refer to the side of Kofman she allows the reader to see in *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*. 

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incapable of understanding what was going on as these two women fought for possession of her and control over her life. The acceptance of her life as the “daughter” of Mémé opens up a world of loving generosity; however, remaining loyal to her life as the Jewish girl from rue Ordener leaves her guilt ridden, shamed, and forces her to face the reality of betrayal and abandonment. More important, however, is the lesson learned that by wearing the mask of Suzanne, Sarah was safe from harm. She has no fear of herself being arrested or seen as a Jew, as different. I see the mask of Suzanne growing with Kofman to become the mask of philosophy that she wears in her adult life.

While the danger of being arrested and deported is no longer present in Kofman’s adult life, there is still a fear of being seen as different from her contemporaries. I will resist a feminist reading of what it might have been like to be a philosopher in France in the 1960s and 1970s, however I will simply note that she was a woman in a male-dominated arena. This was the first difference that she had to overcome. Under Mémé’s tutelage, Sarah was able to begin breaking down the barriers of difference during their lessons of culture, food, history, and literature. She incorporates Mémé, her philosophy and everything she’s taught her, and rejects her mother. While Mémé represents for Kofman the face of beauty, culture, education, and above all, being French, her biological mother is the symbol of distressing ignorance, and of being Jewish. “J’avais, semble-t-il, enterré tout le passé : je me mis à adorer les beefsteaks saignants au beurre et au persil. Je ne pensais plus du tout à mon père, je ne pouvais plus prononcer un seul mot en yiddish tout en continuant à comprendre parfaitement la langue de mon enfance. Je redoutais maintenant la fin de la guerre!”71 The loss of Yiddish, and the acquisition of French, the adoration of non-kosher food, and the virtual forgetting of her father all add to Sarah’s assimilation process which continued into her adulthood. It must be said that Kofman never renounced Judaism, quite the opposite. In several of her texts, she refers to herself as a Jewish intellectual woman. However, she never wrote in the language of her childhood and her Jewishness was never a subject of her analysis.

The definitive links between Rue Ordener, rue Labat and L’Imposture de la beauté are few and far between, but from a textual, analytical standpoint, it’s hard to ignore that there is something eerily similar about the core message. In returning to the subject of the screen, readers cannot forget that Kofman has stated that the screen of beauty is but an imposture, hiding the blemishes that cannot be repressed forever. Rue Ordener, rue Labat gives us another screen to

71 RORL, 67
consider in the chapter titled *Paravent* which details a specific event in Sarah’s continual assimilation. In this short chapter, Mémé takes Sarah on a visit to see several members of her family. Upon returning to the city, they realize it is too late to take the metro and too far to walk home. As Sarah is extremely tired, Mémé decides to get a hotel room for the night and return home in the morning once the metro begins operating again.

Nous dormîmes dans le même lit. Mémé s’était déshabillée derrière un grand paravent en bois acajou et du lit, curieuse, j’avais guetté son apparition. Rue Labat, à la grande stupéfaction et irritation de ma mère, elle avait l’habitude de se promener dans l’appartement en pyjama, poitrine découverte, et j’étais fascinée par ses seins nus. De cette nuit aux Gobelins, il ne me reste aucun souvenir, si ce n’est celui de cette scène de déshabillage derrière le paravent.  

The fascinating world that Mémé has opened up for Sarah provokes a certain curiosity even in the adult philosopher today, at least enough to include this anecdote about her guardian’s habit of walking around the apartment showing her bare breasts. Sarah desires to look at Mémé, stripped of clothing or adornment, and is fascinated by her beauty. Throughout her life, the adult Kofman incorporates the lessons learned by young Sarah; she wears the mask of beauty, of learning, culture, and philosophy which was created by Mémé in the form of her new persona, Suzanne. She wears the mask of Suzanne, a mask which protects her from the intolerable, being deported and possibly being killed. For the adult Kofman, the unbearable resides in the experience she is reliving in her autobiography, the narrative trauma that she attempted to suppress; now, she must wear the mask of philosophy to protect her from what is undesirable. However, on this night, away from the apartment, Mémé can only be seen behind the screen. Her naked body is shielded from full view, from being fully examined by the young Sarah. Symbolically, the world to which Sarah has been introduced through Mémé is obscured as well. Deutscher and Oliver highlight the multiple screens that Kofman discovers within *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. “We might be tempted to say that the appearance is on one side of the screen and the reality is on the other, if it weren’t for the multiplication of screens in Kofman’s reading. With *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the imposture of beauty- the idea that beauty is eternal- serves as a protective screen for the fragile, perishable nature of beauty.”

I would argue that if one reads this scene in *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* as Kofman reads *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a multiplication of screens emerges as well.

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72 RORL, 65-66
73 Deutscher and Oliver, 10
Mémé, who represents Kofman’s mask, is obscured from view by a literal screen in the hotel room. This screen shields Kofman from the reality that beauty is fragile and perishable, that wearing the philosophical mask that has its origins with Mémé is not a permanent fix and will not endure.

Yet Mémé does not remain behind this screen long and she and “Suzanne” continue their night as mother and daughter. They choose to ignore the reality of the situation, that Suzanne was still Sarah, a Jewish girl being hidden so that she would not be deported like her father, a truth that was not lost on her biological mother. “Le lendemain, nous prîmes le premier métro. Ma mère attendait, folle d’angoisse, persuadée que nous avions été arrêtées et elle n’avait pas pu, évidemment, se rendre au commissariat de police. Je l’avais complètement oubliée. J’étais tout simplement heureuse.” Sarah has completely forgotten about her father, the deportation, and her “former” life as a Jewish girl. Sarah was simply happy not to be thinking about her mother or her father, their situation of being in hiding, and to be wearing the mask of Suzanne.

Reading Rue Ordener, rue Labat in conjunction with L’Imposture de la beauté allows the reader to draw conclusions that Kofman herself could not. Using Kofman to analyze Kofman is the only way that the reader will ever be able to decipher the meaning of these texts. If Kofman’s mask of beauty is her philosophy and her degrading reality is her traumatic untold story, it is safe to assume that the trauma will not be suppressed for long. As the narrative of Dorian Gray moves from the initial disgust and repugnance for the painting, a sense of growing curiosity about the state of Dorian’s double emerges. He would return early from his long voyages just to be able to “venir furtivement et en secret, comme un voleur, jouir de ce contraste qui le fascine et le rend de plus en plus curieux de la corruption du portrait.” But, no matter how strong the desire to glance at the portrait might be, if Dorian had any hope of triumphing over his double, he would have to forget that it exists and conceal it from the sight of others. He takes drastic measures: he banishes the painting to a room in the attic, locking the door so that no one would happen upon it, covering it with a sheet of purple satin, and finally placing it behind a screen, hoping that this final act might keep his secret from being discovered. Kofman’s analysis tells us that it is necessary to hide this dangerous double from the prying eyes of the public, those that could pass judgment and exclude you from society. Kofman’s autobiography is her dangerous double and as she wears the mask of philosophical beauty in order to protect herself from facing it,

74 RORL, 66
75 L’Imposture de la beauté, 27
she also at the same time banishes her autobiography from public view, analysis and interpretation. Like Dorian Gray, Kofman occasionally sneaks into the attic to steal glances at her decaying portrait. We see these glances take form in the fragmentary biographical moments of Paroles Suffoquées, but it is better to recoil, to turn away, and to lock the door of access to them yet again.

Then, one evening, after Dorian had murdered the painter Basil Hallward, he forgets to put away the painting, to hide the fatal canvas. Upon returning to it the next day, its repugnance made Dorian withdraw in horror. I would equate this moment of forgetting to forget to the time of writing in Kofman’s life that produced Rue Ordener, rue Labat. I do not believe that she continued to believe that it was impossible to write her story; rather, I think that a necessity not to write it is emerging through her analysis. Kofman forgot that she must forget, that she should not write her personal récit. Yet, according L’Imposture de la beauté, one cannot remain separated forever from a moment this important, this central to one’s life.76 She faced her portrait, her dangerous double in the form of her written autobiography.

After this moment of release, it was necessary to take a step back and attempt to return to the language of philosophy. Many readers of Kofman may very well agree that she was able to accomplish this, however I am not one of them. I would argue that her “philosophical” texts at the end of her life are not of the same caliber as those from before Paroles Suffoquées. The subject matter, analysis, and writing style all point back to autobiography. She was never able to recapture her true philosophical voice, and L’Imposture de la Beauté is one clear example of this inability. It is an analysis that attempts to employ just about every philosophical maxim that Kofman had encountered during her life. It is erratic and difficult to follow. She throws at the reader every idea that seems to have occurred to her. She is attempting to reclaim her philosophical voice, and struggling through the process. It cannot be fully recovered since Kofman had proved her own philosophy wrong in the sheer writing of Rue Ordener, rue Labat. All of the measures taken to protect her double from society failed, and it was out and in the open. She could not regain possession of her philosophy no matter how hard she tried.

76 L’Imposture de la beauté, 33
THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF MOURNING A LOSS

In both Kofman’s reality and in the fictional life of Dorian Gray that Wilde has created, loss plays a significant role and takes a variety of shapes; both Dorian and Kofman deal with deaths of those close to them, with loss of personal ideals, and with self-inflicted loss as suicide. Kofman begins this last section of her text by discussing Dorian’s response to the death of the first woman he loves, an actress, and his incessant need to escape from all things unpleasant in his life.

Regarder le passé sous l’angle artistique, devenir le spectateur de sa propre vie est pour Dorian une ruse afin d’échapper aux souffrances. Il lui suffit de ne pas parler de sujets affreux pour supprimer leur réalité, comme il lui suffit de déchirer en morceaux le journal annonçant la mort de la comédienne pour l’annuler magiquement, elle qui lui est intolérable, parce que trop hideuse, trop atrocement réelle : ‘Comme tout cela était laid ! Et comme la laideur rendait les choses atrocement réelles.’

Kofman’s critique on Dorian’s coping mechanism could be read as either highly ignorant of the fact that she herself reacted in a similar manner with regard to the unpleasantness in her own life, or as her way of explaining to her readers, without actually coming out and plainly stating it, that she is aware of her own actions. I am inclined to give credence to the latter; it is more likely that she was aware of her reaction to her trauma even if she was not able to express it fully. If Dorian suffers because he did not speak of frightening subjects and because he denied death by ripping the death announcement into small pieces, then this would indicate that Kofman also suffered for her own actions. She too evaded her frightening subject, her experience during the Holocaust, in an act of self-preservation. She too ripped her experience, which stems from the loss of her father, into fragmented anecdotes in order to make it incomprehensible. There is something in this particular literary experience that has struck a cord within Kofman; through this fictional drama, she is able indirectly to analyze her own, very real, traumatic experience.

The loss that Kofman is referring to in the title of this section is not referring to a physical loss of a material object or being in Dorian’s life, but the loss of his youthful beauty that he is unable to mourn. “Dorian Gray échoue à faire le deuil de la beauté. De sa beauté, certes, mais derrière la sienne, ce qu’il ne parvient pas à tolérer, telle est mon hypothèse, est la perte de la beauté maternelle à laquelle il s’est identifié. Je ne crois pas pour autant faire du texte une lecture

77 L’Imposture de la beauté, 38
par trop psychanalytique, abusive et violente.”  

Dorian’s mother does not appear as an active character in this text; rather she is only referred to in the past and represents the part of Dorian Gray’s heritage that is tainted in scandal. He was the grandson of the wealthy Lord Kelso, whose daughter ran away with a penniless man. “The poor chap was killed in a duel at Spa a few months after the marriage. There was an ugly story about it. They say Kelso got some rascally adventurer, some Belgian brute, to insult his son-in-law in public- paid him, sir, to do it, paid him- and that the fellow spitted his man as if he had been a pigeon.”  

The daughter never spoke to her father again and died a short time after Dorian’s birth. Although he was raised without his mother, he did retain her good looks, or her beauty, which was often remarked upon by the other nobles in the town.

Dorian Gray’s life is marked by the struggle between the power of paternal law, represented by the grandfather, and maternal beauty. Dorian’s mother risked everything to be with his father, yet her happiness was destroyed by Lord Kelso. Dorian’s parents were taken from him due to his grandfather’s need to exercise his paternal control over his family.

Not only was Dorian’s grandfather a symbol of death for the young man, but the entirety of the law that his existence represents can be linked to the slow decay of his body. Here we find the final commonality between Dorian and Kofman- the clash of paternal law and maternal beauty. For Kofman, her father’s law, that of Judaism, created for her a life of restrictions and limitations. She witnessed her father’s power at work as he determined what they could eat and when, and how his blessing could make something unclean pure again. All the rituals of her childhood, those which follow exactly the laws of Judaism, are detailed in her autobiography. “Tous les vendredis soir, des femmes attendaient dans notre entrée, leurs filets emplis d’un ou deux poulets. Je jouais à la balle contre le mur et observais attentivement les allées et venues de mon père, des cabinets de mystère et m’emplissait de frayeur. J’associais le rasoir du shoroth au couteau d’Abraham et les

78 L’Imposture de la beauté, 41
79 The Picture of Dorian Gray, 37
80 L’Imposture de la beauté, 43
sons gutturaux de shoffar aux cris des poulets égorgés.”

More so than outlining what she could do, her father’s law constrained Kofman’s life and focused on what she could not do. During the occupation, not only was Kofman unable to live as she was accustomed before the war, she could no longer be herself. She was forced to become this alternate persona, Suzanne, in order to survive. She could not go out, could not be Jewish, and could not be Sarah Kofman.

Lord Kelso came to represent death for Dorian Gray, and similarly Jewish law became the symbol for death for Kofman. From what one can glean from her clear, albeit tainted, recollections of her father’s death, it is certain that Kofman attributes her father’s death to his clinging to Judaism. In her writing, she does not state that the fault lies with the evil of those in the camps, or with the governments of Germany and France. She simply states, “parce qu’il était juif, mon père est mort à Auschwitz…”

A double blow in the psyche of Kofman is revealed when one realizes that not only does she believe that he died because he was Jewish, but also that he was killed by the hand of another Jew. Kofman believes that because he was Jewish, her father was murdered in Auschwitz by a Jew. For Dorian and for Kofman, the fathers are killed by “the law”. Dorian’s grandfather, like the Jewish butcher who was allowed to return to his life in Paris after the war, made their fathers victims and came to represent death to the children left behind. For Kofman, the laws of Judaism are strict and lethal and are responsible for her father’s death.

Yet, it is not her claim that the paternal law, the loss of her father, or of Judaism is impossible to mourn. It is the loss of maternal beauty which is the focus of this analysis. Dorian Gray fights to keep his beauty, given to him by his deceased mother, untainted and unmarred by the disastrous effects of age. While his beauty has a direct familial connection with his birth mother, the beauty that has been bestowed upon Kofman, has no biological bond. Kofman’s beauty, her philosophical mask, came from Mémé, not her mother who, in Kofman’s life, came to represent paternal law. Her mother imposed the laws of the father upon Kofman after his deportation and death. Mémé’s influence of education, culture, and everything foreign to young Sarah contributed to her gradual distancing from Judaism. What Kofman fears losing, and eventually fails to mourn, is the beauty of her philosophy which was nurtured and cared for by Mémé.

The dual faces of Sarah Kofman, that of the philosopher who writes with control and purpose, and that of the survivor who must eventually face the story of her traumatic experience,

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81 RORL, 21
82 Paroles Suffoquées, 15
cannot exist in tandem anymore than a youthful and beautiful Dorian Gray is able to exist at the same time as an old, dying Dorian Gray. This is what is impossible in the paradigm that Kofman has established for herself. Once Dorian was faced with his beautiful double, which will not fade away, he is filled with such rage and hatred for it. He wants the portrait to suffer so that he can retain his beauty. He takes every measure to hide it away from the gaze of the other while he absorbs himself in life. Dorian Gray does everything to his portrait that Kofman herself does to her autobiography. In order to maintain her status as philosopher, to support her own claims of the impossibility of such an autobiography, Kofman attempts to suppress her story, to hide it away from the reading public, to suffocate it until it dies. She absorbs herself in life, in her public life as a writer, professor, lecturer, and philosopher. She, like Dorian, cannot avoid stealing glances at her “portrait,” occasionally referencing her father, Auschwitz, or her Jewishness in her writings, yet quickly covering it back up with philosophical references. Neither of them can forget the accusing face of the double which bears the signs of everything they fear. Hiding, covering, burying, stabbing the double will not make them forget. The double exists threatening the beautiful existence that both Dorian and Kofman have created for themselves.

Kofman had considered her autobiography a dangerous subject long before her analysis of *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* was written. Again, in 1991’s *Die Philosophin* interview, in response to a question about whether or not it was true that she was in the process of writing an autobiographical work, Kofman responds, “I might possibly write an autobiography one day. At the same time, I keep postponing the decision as though I would in this way postpone the date of my death.”

I do not think that this is reference to her eventual suicide. This supports her message in *L’Imposture de la Beauté* that writing her autobiography, or facing her aging portrait, would be the death of her beauty, the death of her philosophical self. As if Kofman was aware that the philosopher she was trained to be could not exist if the survivor Kofman’s story ever emerged; she regards her autobiography as something to be feared and avoided at all costs.

It seems only appropriate to end this chapter as it began, with a discussion of Kofman’s lack of concrete conclusions to her texts, as if she wanted nothing more than for us to continue reading, analyzing, and asking questions. Kofman decides at the end of this text that a double reading of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is possible, and this seems appropriate in a text where the double is of such vital importance. Her first reading is that of a fantastic and moral tale, criticizing

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83 “Schreiben ohne Macht,” 6
Dorian Gray’s malicious acts and criticizing his suicide, at the end, seen as retribution for all his misdeeds. This reading, Kofman states, is nothing more than a cover, a *paravent doré* created by Oscar Wilde himself, for another reading. Dorian’s fragile state of mind does not allow him to look at the truth for long. He must wear this mask of youth and beauty and live the life of an imposter.

The second reading of the text is even more vague than the first, but as I have learned from all of her colleagues that have written about her, Kofman liked to laugh and like to laugh through her texts. “Pour conclure…” she states, “L’imposture de la beauté, c’est aussi l’imposture de ‘l’auteur’ du texte qui se plaît à tromper le lecteur en lui jetant en pâture le portrait de Dorian pour mieux dissimuler l’autre portrait qui le hante secrètement.” The impostor is, therefore, really the author, who fools the reader into thinking there is something there that is not. The text is nothing more than a screen, protecting and hiding something beneath it that haunts the author still. This text is a mere distraction, designed by Kofman to draw attention away from *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* which was published just before she gave this text as a paper. It is the purple sheet of silk by which one covers up the blemished face of the truth. It is the golden screen employed to hide the hideous double. It is Kofman’s design and it is proof that there is far more between these texts than meets the eye.

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84 *L’Imposture de la beauté*, 47
85 For example, Derrida states in his untitled work in *Les Cahiers du Grif*, “Selon l’hypothèse que je m’en vais vous soumettre, Sarah aurait interprété le rire en artiste, elle aurait ri en artiste mais aussi ri de l’art, en artiste et au nom de la vie, non sans savoir qui ni l’art ni le rire ne sauvant de la souffrance, de l’angoisse, de la maladie et de la mort.”
86 *L’Imposture de la beauté*, 48
Chapter III

Nietzsche, Kofman, and the Jews

In an ongoing examination of the texts that mark the end of the life of Sarah Kofman, the one that is the most like the philosophical texts that came before *Paroles Suffoquées*, is often the least read by those concerned with her biography. *Le Mépris des Juifs* was published in 1994 alongside a much earlier and shorter article by Kofman from 1968 titled ‘l’Antéchrist’ de Nietzsche. The *contempt* that Kofman argues against in this article is that of Nietzsche for the Jews and she is eager to defend him to all who believe that he was an anti-Semite. What Kofman inevitably fails to point out is the personal connection to her heritage and her history that a discussion about Nietzsche’s anti-Semitism would have. It is not her Jewish connection that is the subject of this work, which one might expect after the appearance of *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* that same year. Kofman does not establish any sort of strong emotional or historical connection with the misreading and manipulation of Nietzsche’s texts by the Nazis and anti-Semites of the early twentieth century. She maintains an extremely calculated and distanced response to the matter at hand, analyzing and philosophizing her position with minimal personal details.

Kofman begins her defense of Nietzsche as if responding to the critique of someone, not specified, who has already questioned the necessity of such a work. “Non! La question juive n’est pas liquidée! Le différend qui a toujours séparé le peuple juif des autres peuples n’est pas en passe d’être réglé. Des Juifs, de leur ‘cas’, personne n’est encore venu à bout, et n’a pu trouver de solution à leur étrangeté énigmatique.”87 This forceful declaration to everyone, yet no one in particular, is reminiscent of her rhetorical yet *non-rhetorical* questions in *Paroles Suffoquées*, yet lacks any sort of connection with her Jewish heritage. In *Paroles Suffoquées*, Kofman draws from her past as a Jew, and as the daughter of a rabbi who was killed in Auschwitz, yet this text immediately establishes a distance between the writer and its subject, between the adult philosopher and the young Jewish girl she introduced to her readers in *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*. Rather than arousing an emotional and personal connection with Nietzsche, she separates herself from the *Jewish question* with reactionary statements meant to provoke discussion of an underrepresented topic in philosophy. She does not speak of our case or her people; she banishes from the discussion any connection that could be made between herself and the Jewish people.

While *Paroles Suffoquées* brought forth the long-suppressed topic of her father’s deportation and death, this work, at first glance, contains much less urgency and necessity than preceding texts to continue a discourse about her father and about her Jewish past.

Kofman’s goal in this work is to defy the trends of philosophy at the time, what she calls the *fashion* (la mode), which, in her opinion, is to support the claims that Nietzsche was anti-Semitic and the father of Nazism.\(^{88}\) She does not speak of any analysis of particular works with which she disagrees so fervently, and offers nothing more than generalities about the misreading of Nietzsche.

Sans doute, certains textes, coupés de leur contexte, isolés de l’ensemble du corpus et de toute référence, montés en épingle et, qui plus est falsifiés, quand ils tombent dans les mains d’hommes d’un certain type (leur perspective de grenouille les rend inaptes à bien voir et à bien entendre) peuvent, ont pu prêter à une mésinterprétation et à une réappropriation dangereuses, scandaleuses. C’est, Nietzsche le savait, le destin de bien des livres.\(^{89}\)

In fact, the blasé manner in which Kofman first approaches the misreading of Nietzsche’s works leads the reader to assume that this is just commonplace in philosophy and that both Nietzsche and Kofman were well aware that this misreading was a possibility. Kofman attributes the misrepresentation of Nietzsche’s thoughts and ideals to the fault of man, the reader, who is often too incompetent in the subject at hand to grasp the true meaning of the texts as a whole. Readers unwittingly separate the ideas of Nietzsche from the whole body of his work in order to be able to interpret the texts in a manner that suits their own ideological needs. These people *of a certain type* can not read or understand the texts well enough to master the content and thus misinterpret the true meaning in a way that can only be described as *dangerous* and *scandalous* by Kofman.

Whether she regards this practice of misreading as *natural* or simply an occupational *hazard* is not clear, yet after the close reading of many of Kofman’s own texts independently from the corpus as a whole, and also tangentially and dependant upon each other, one sees that Kofman herself is not immune to this practice that has infected literature (and will forever). *Paroles Suffoquées* is a text that, when one is analyzing Kofman, wears many hats. Besides being the container of the monumental moment where her father’s experience is showcased, and an ode to the work of Maurice Blanchot, it is also an extremely distorted analysis of the work of Robert

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\(^{88}\) *Le Mépris des Juifs*, 12

\(^{89}\) *Le Mépris des Juifs*, 12
L’Espèce humaine was published in 1947, not long after the Antelme’s miraculous return from Dachau, and details the horror of the camps. Kofman, citing Blanchot, notes the immense significance and importance of this work. It is a, “livre unique,” one that, “ne peut être lu et consommé comme d’autres livres, livre d’une signification exceptionnelle…”90 This text which contained a plethora of personal testimony, which does not hold back or keep the traumatic experience in reserve, must have seemed not only exceptional, it must have also been quite shocking to Kofman. She did not allow the fruition of her traumatic story for almost forty years after the initial experience, and had a very different coming to terms with trauma than did Antelme.

In 1987, Dionys Mascolo, close friend of Robert Antelme, and lover of his ex-wife Marguerite Duras, published a 1945 letter from Antelme who explains his recovery after his return from Buchenwald. Antelme expresses a need, an overwhelming desire to tell his story to a receptive, open listener. “Eh bien, dans ce que chez d’autres représentait pour moi l’enfer, tout dire, c’est là que j’ai vécu mon paradis; car il faut que tu saches bien D., que pendant les premiers jours où j’étais dans mon lit et où je vous ai parlé, à toi et à Marguerite surtout, je n’étais pas un homme de la terre. J’insiste sur ce fait qui me hante rétrospectivement.”91 Antelme found his paradise not in returning home from the camps and surviving, but from returning and finding that there were others there, waiting for him, which allowed him the sublime release of speaking about his experience. Antelme found these others in his friend, Mascolo, and his wife, Duras.

With this knowledge of Antelme’s strong advocacy of speaking as a necessary moment of beginning the recovery process, it is rather difficult to read Kofman’s analysis of L’Espèce Humaine without categorizing it as anything less than a gross misreading:

Très vite, en effet, ceux qui ne pouvaient s’arrêter de raconter, de mettre bout à bout toutes les histoires vraies, dans toute leur horreur, dont aucune n’était négligeable, très vite au moment même où il leur était enfin donné de parler, de renouer avec la véritable dimension d’Autrui et du langage, ils ont saisi qu’un fossé s’était creusé entre les détenus du camp, « en proie désormais à une sorte de connaissance infinie, intransmissible », et le libérateur, l’Américain, celui qui venait d’un autre monde, était propre, fort, avait mangé, et dont « l’ignorance est immense ». L’un et l’autre, comme s’ils appartaient chacun à une espèce différente, ne se comprennent plus, n’ont plus les mêmes mœurs, les repères.92

90 Paroles Suffoquées, 43-44
92 Paroles Suffoquées, 44
The necessity of speech, and of speech especially about trauma, the central argument in the work of Antelme, is not what Kofman denies importance. At the moment when one is able truly to speak and continually to recount what had happened, a gap opens up between the speaker and the other who really can never understand. It is impossible here to ignore the apparent philosophical influence of Blanchot, whose presence is felt throughout this text. Kofman most notably mentions the drastic step that Blanchot took, starting in 1947 with La Folie du jour, in removing the word récit or story from all of his texts because, after Auschwitz, and about Auschwitz, a récit, insofar as it tells a linear account of events which make sense, is impossible. Auschwitz marks the moment of rupture between the possibility of recounting a linear story and the need to relay one’s experience, and consequently the feeling of bonheur that comes from it.

To bridge this gap between the individual who wishes to recount and the other who is ignorant of the experience and therefore cannot fully understand is, according to Kofman, impossible. L’Espèce humaine therefore shows us the unattainable, and the necessity to reserve the experience inside of oneself. As Steve Edwin has written, “In Smothered Words Kofman suggests that survivors of trauma might need to renounce their desires for speech and truth-telling precisely so that they might be heard by those who are not themselves survivors.” A self-imposed restriction on speech is necessary, according to Kofman, so that the other can understand the magnitude of the traumatic experience. L’Espèce humaine is a book, she tells us, that is sublime and commands admiration and respect while attesting to the silence of “ceux qui n’ont pu parler, la ‘vrai parole…” This true speech, the récit of a trauma is forbidden (by whom we do not know), yet also preserved and withheld by the owner of the experience to ensure protection from all corruption (or manipulation) by those outside of the experience. “…[La parole] interdite mais aussi refusée, préservée, écartée de tout détournement, de toute corruption, de tout abus violent qui aurait pu faire peser sur elle le soupçon d’avoir fait le jeu de la violence démesurée, la discréditer à jamais et ‘compromettre définitivement l’avenir de la communication.’” She explicitly says that it is speech itself that would, in fact, discredit itself, as if the moment of true speech would then also be the moment where that speech would be lost, incomprehensible to the other. Although she argues for the necessity of a renunciation of speech, she does not say that the

93 Paroles Suffoquées, 21
95 Paroles Suffoquées, 48
96 Paroles Suffoquées, 48
experience is unspeakable, only forbidden; the repudiation of speech does not deny the desire to speak. Silence does not therefore indicate a denial of that overwhelming desire for the survivors to recount their traumatic experience.

Kofman is clearly recycling Blanchot’s thought in her analysis of Antelme’s book. As Blanchot states, there must be a reserve in which true speech is held back in order to be kept pure and uncorrupted, preserved and saved from any alteration. Kofman again manipulates the text of *L’Espèce Humaine* in order to support her own, similar ideology.

Quelques regards. Quelques serrements de main. L’objecteur de conscience allemand, l’évangéliste, et Robert Antelme ne pouvaient rien se dire : ils se comprenaient pourtant car il n’y avait rien à expliquer. Leurs figures en silence ne cessaient de parler, de vouloir dire, langage muet qui les empêchait de sentir le froid, la faim, le S.S., qui échappait à ceux qui promenaient leur tête de mort sur la prairie, parce qu’il n’est pas de l’ordre du pouvoir et leur donnait envie de crier de joie comme jamais.97

In this quote, Kofman suggests that silence speaks where words fail. The other understands in silence what, with the use of speech, would become tainted. This is a summary of one of Antelme’s experiences inside of the camp and does not describe an exchange between Antelme and an other. Kofman argues that communication would fail between a survivor and an other, but this is not the case in the event she chooses to support her claim. The silent conversation that Kofman garners from *L’Espèce humaine* is not between one and an other, but in reality, is between one and the same, two detainees suffering in the concentration camp. The magnitude of Kofman’s gross manipulation of Antelme’s text is striking. She is, in fact, arguing that life in the concentration camps was the same as life outside of the camps, in order to support her own claims for silence. “Point d’ailleurs n’était besoin de parler la langue francaise, ni même de parler pour qu’un véritable échange, un rapport sans rapport puisse se nouer.”98 Kofman states that a relation is formed with the other, who, in fact, is not other in the camps in the example she has given her readers, without a relation, through silence and the lack of language.

Although Kofman exploits Antelme’s text to support her own argument for silence, however, as we’ve seen previously, Antelme insists on the necessity of telling the experience since it is in that act that he found his paradise: “Nous vouions parler, être entendus enfin.”99 The self-

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97 Paroles Suffoquées, 62
98 Paroles Suffoquées, 61
99 L’Espèce Humaine, 9
imposed silence that Kofman employed for decades after the Holocaust does not indicate that she could not speak, or would not speak eventually, but that the fear was present that in the moment of true speech her experience would be lost, unprotected, and not fully understood. It is not that speech is impossible, but, as Antelme states adamantly, a willing, listening other is a requirement. Kofman, however, remains true to Blanchot: the act of speech itself would render the experience untransmissible. In her silence, her experience supposedly “speak[s]” volumes; speech would only damage it.

In the work of literature, no one is immune from the manipulation of texts by others. Once published, one’s text is used and misused in the vernacular of academia and rarely exhausted. Kofman knew that this has been a fact of the history of literature for centuries and used this, I would argue, to her advantage. The purpose of writing Paroles Suffoquées was not only to attempt the suffocation of her own traumatic events, thus proving the validity of Blanchot’s and her own theories. Kofman uses Antelme’s personal trauma to strengthen her argument as well. By manipulating Antelme’s words to suit her own ideology, she demonstrates that the experience, when uncovered and unprotected by the veil of silence, will be violated and discredited. Kofman advocates silence out of fear that her own traumatic story, if ever told, would be abused. To prove that this abuse is possible, Kofman corrupts Antelme’s message, manipulating it to better serve her own purpose.

In Le Mépris des Juifs, Kofman demonstrates that Nietzsche is not immune to this rampant manipulation, especially given the precarious position of his sister and her husband so close to the Nazis. Kofman recounts that not only were Nietzsche’s sister, Élisabeth Forster and her husband, Nazis, but also close friends of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. After spending his final years in Weimar in the care of Forster, she became the, “maîtresse des archives Nietzsche à Weimar et considérée comme le porte-parole et l’interprète autorisée de sa philosophie.” In fact, Hitler himself placed a laurel wreath on her coffin at her funeral. Both Nietzsche’s mother and sister were considered Nazi sympathizers which caused a certain disdain for his ancestry, as noted by Kofman. “De sa mère et de sa sœur, rangées du côté de la canaille, il déclare avoir une telle horreur qu’il préférerait encore renoncer à sa pensée la plus abysmale plutôt que d’envisager la possibilité de leur éternel retour.” Being read and understood by the German population was not what Nietzsche valued in his writing and, in fact, he tried very hard to be heard by non-Germans.

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100 Le Mépris des Juifs, 13
101 Le Mépris des Juifs, 15-16
“Vont de pair avec le reniement de la mère et de la souche germanique les tentatives de Nietzsche pour se faire entendre par d’autres oreilles que les allemandes, atteintes ‘d’otite, voire de métaotite’ et pour se faire lire dans une autre langue que la langue maternelle.” Nietzsche in his effort to be heard by those other than himself and other Germans, establishes an identity that is not based on race or religion, but on intellect and philosophy.

This division between the motherland, the maternal language of childhood and the language of choice is not something that one can attribute solely to Nietzsche. Sarah Kofman describes the childhood struggle between two identities in Rue Ordener, rue Labat, as previously discussed. It is under Mémé’s tutelage that the young Sarah is able to become Suzanne, her French alter ego. Taking control of her formal instruction, the strict French system of education is introduced: “Elle [Mémé] me faisait des dictées et apprendre par cœur Le Chat, la Belette, et le Petit Lapin. Elle s’énervait devant mes difficultés à effectuer les divisions à virgule; moi qui étais si intelligente, je devais le faire exprès!” It was not just her formal education that was being transformed, but her spiritual life as well. Soon, not only was Sarah eating a non-Kosher diet every day, but her mother language, Yiddish, had disappeared. “Je ne pensais plus à mon père, je ne pouvais plus prononcer un seul mot en yiddish tout en continuant à comprendre parfaitement la langue de mon enfance.” Throughout her schooling, her mother was a hindrance to what Mémé was striving to achieve; Sarah’s transformation into a girl who was truly French and truly intellectual could not occur unless her Jewish identity was overcome.

Kofman’s identity as Jewish is not consequential in her philosophical publications. She does not write nor speak Yiddish, her texts are not approached from the perspective of Jewish woman, and her vital history as a survivor is not addressed until the very end of her life. Like Nietzsche before her, Kofman desired to be read in French, as French, and to lose the stigma of the mother tongue. In being reborn Suzanne, Kofman was also reborn French. All of which casts an interesting light on her characterization of Nietzsche: “Son désir de se faire ‘renaître’ français ne signifie pas pourtant le reniement d’une nation en faveur d’une autre.” The anti-Semitic tendencies of his mother and sister were what delayed Nietzsche from becoming the whole intellectual being that he eventually would become much in the same way that Kofman

102 Le Mépris des Juifs, 16
103 Rue Ordener, rue Labat, 58
104 Rue Ordener, rue Labat, 67
105 Le Mépris des Juifs, 16
psychologically saw the title of Jew as an obstacle in her acceptance into French intellectual society.

The effects of Kofman’s intellectual formation were an apparent direct result of her time with Mémé during the war. More so than simply detaching young Sarah’s affections for her mother and assisting her in overcoming her separation anxiety, Mémé introduced a world of higher learning and thought to a girl who had been relatively sheltered within the boundaries of classic judaistic formation. Kofman did not renounce Judaism, per se, and considered herself Jewish, rediscovering her Jewish roots after the war. “Je réappris l’hébreu, faisais toutes les prières et respectais les trois jeûnes annuels: j’obéissais de nouveau à tous les interdits religieux de mon enfance.” Kofman could not detach herself fully from her Jewish roots anymore than Nietzsche could change his nationality. However, there was a definitive renunciation of a certain part of her life so that she could allow Mémé to cultivate her French, intellectual development.

Kofman’s mother did very little to assist her daughter in completing her studies after the war. While Mémé offered all of the support and assistance intellectually for young Sarah, her mother was less willing to allow any formal education of her daughter to continue. As Sarah grew older and entered university, the tension only mounted between the two of them. “Ma mère me coupait l’électricité tôt le soir; je me souviens d’avoir lu, sous les draps, à l’aide d’une lampe électrique, Les Chemins de la liberté de Sartre.” Even the Jewish thinkers that Kofman encounters during her training as a philosopher and that she continues to engage with as an adult were first introduced to her by Mémé. All of the seeds of her intellectual life, even the ones that could assist her in connecting with her Jewish heritage, were nurtured by Mémé. Therein lies the disconnect with her mother not only in her childhood, but in her adult years as well.

Both Nietzsche and Kofman dealt their entire lives with struggles to maintain a philosophical distance with their origins. In order to write in their French voices, they must be neither German, nor Jewish respectively insofar as it would alter the manner in which they wrote. In Nietzsche, Kofman found not only a philosopher of intriguing complexity, she found someone like her, striving to maintain a voice and a distance at the same time. Le Mépris des Juifs, in particular, allowed Kofman to recover, if not only for a moment, the control she once had over her philosophy. The personal, autobiographical voice is admittedly less apparent in this work; however it does not completely disappear. She detaches herself from les Juifs by treating them as

106 RORL, 94
107 RORL, 98
other than herself, a subject to be analyzed. The personal information that she herself is Jewish is not stated explicitly.

Le Mépris des Juifs shows that Kofman, near the end of her life, attempted to regain some of her philosophical power and the distance from personal experience that she had deemed so necessary during the majority of her life. Kofman was so focused on protecting her story that she was willing to risk suffocating her personal experience to accomplish her intellectual goals. To some extent, she accomplishes this, but the final pages of Le Mépris des Juifs are highly erratic and rushed, as if she was attempting to condense all her final thoughts on Nietzsche into a few short pages, very quickly. Both of Kofman’s final “philosophical” works (Le Mépris des Juifs and L’Imposture de la beauté) give the impression that she was rushed. Her writing is hurried and anxious, as though she was grappling, once again, with her philosophical voice. The “mistakes” that Nietzsche made as a young man are rapidly cited, as are excerpts from his personal correspondence with his mother and sister, overloading the readers with information, as if trying to distract us from the lack of concrete conclusions.

Kofman again ends without resolution, yet reminds us once more of her strong convictions that one is not to separate Nietzsche and glean what one will from his texts.

Les nombreux textes de Nietzsche sur les Juifs et sur leur religion sont peut-être ceux d’un historien ‘généalogiste’ se voulant ‘impartial’ et qui a su renifler de tout son flair ce qui est ou non une ‘spécialité’ juive. Ils sont néanmoins- et pourrait-il le nier ?- inséparables de la question personnelle qu’il avait à régler sinon avec la Loi et les tourments de la chair du moins avec Wagner, le maître vénéré.108

Reading Nietzsche, for Kofman, meant reading the entirety of his work from start to finish. It also meant that for this, her final text about a master that she spent many years of her life studying, that she had to unite his past with his philosophy, relate the literary to the personal, and argue for an unpopular position among her peers. I would argue that while this text is not freighted with the same overabundance of autobiographical information as her other final texts, Le Mépris des Juifs contains the striking fear that Kofman had of being misread herself and of not being fully understood. At this point in her life, she had already allowed her personal traumatic story to be told and had shown the world that it could be told. The anxiety that is found in her writing is not shocking; in fact, it is quite expected. After four decades, she was in unchartered waters and alone.

108 Le Mépris des Juifs, 84
She had broken with the popular 20th century philosophical position which advocated silence and she knew that she would be studied and read over and over again.

In his article concerning *Le Mépris des Juifs*, Alan D. Schrift not only works to unravel this, at times, erratic and complex text (and in so doing very much disagrees with the conclusions that Kofman draws from her own analysis), but he also adds a rather poignant and personal memory of an encounter with Kofman in the final months in her life. At a conference in Swansea, Wales, in 1994, the same conference that I have previously mentioned where *L’Imposture de la beauté* was first presented as a paper and not yet as a complete text, Kofman also presented a much shorter version of *Le Mépris des Juifs*.

While together in Swansea, she and I also talked about her autobiography, which had recently appeared to favorable reviews in Paris. Perhaps in part as a response to this strange textual confluence, she confided to my wife and me that I bore a resemblance to her father. I did not know what to say in response, and my silence was even more pronounced when, six months later, I visited her in Paris and she showed me a photograph of her father, a photograph in which, I had to confess, I saw no particular resemblance to myself.109

During both encounters with Kofman, Schrift was, remarkably, unaware of the fate of her father. Without having read either of Kofman’s revealing texts about his death (neither *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* nor *Paroles Suffoquées*), there would be no reason to read this remark in the haunting way that one might today. “Before I left Swansea, Sarah gave me a copy of her book on Nietzsche and the Jews.”110

One can hardly take this remark made by Sarah about her father lightly. Any utterance concerning her father and/or his death in the last years of her life should be examined with the utmost respect and necessity. She herself established a direct link between her father’s existence and this man, a relative stranger, whom she met only twice and only in the last few months of her life. By Schrift’s own admission, he bears no resemblance to Berek Kofman physically; however, there was something that Sarah felt linked him to her father.

I am reminded here of the beginning of *Paroles Suffoquées*, when it is her father’s name on a list with hundreds of others names of victims deported to Auschwitz, that fascinates and

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110 Schrift, 206
mesmerizes her. She states that it is the *neutral* voice that calls you to it obscurely. This memorial, with its absence of pathos and emotion, carries with it the names of those who no longer have a voice. Her father, Berek Kofman, Jew, Rabbi, born in Poland, died in Poland, is presented to us here as an amalgam of facts and free from any personal relation that he may have with the author. Schrift’s own name may very well be what ties his being to that of Berek Kofman’s in Sarah’s mind. Being of German origin, the name *Schrift* translates as *writing* or *handwriting*, and Sarah was well aware of this fact, as she spoke and wrote fluent German. Schrift (and I feel I must state the obvious here) was a writer, and while her father was not, it is the material element of the pen that ties them together.

Schrift might not concur with my analysis of his encounter with Kofman. “When someone who knows the texts of Freud as well as Sarah Kofman makes such a comment, one is tempted to bring the machinery of psychoanalytic decoding to bear on such a remark. I have chosen, however, to avoid this temptation.” The temptation may be to make overreaching connections and draw conclusions about the mind-set of Kofman during the final months of her life; however, I believe that everything Kofman wrote and said during this time-period of her life was done so with purpose. She may not have been aware of exactly why she was saying what she was saying or writing what she was writing, but it all had an intention. The connection between her father and his death in Auschwitz and her need to write runs deep and throughout her written *corpus*, specifically late in her life. This anecdote that Schrift then gives his readers is a rather poignant and distressing picture of Kofman’s mentality just before her suicide. Could it be that she was seeing her father in multiple situations where writing was the focus? We know that at this time she avoided the written word (newspapers, books, etc.) at all costs and that she felt disastrously unable to write. I would argue that, like her written texts, what Kofman had to *say* during this time in her life contained more than meets the eye and is worthy of an analytical glance and of drawing those faint, yet visible, lines that exist between her texts in an attempt to discern what needed to come to expression.

No other text in Kofman’s *corpus* contains more emotional substance than her final text, “Conjuring Death: Remarks on *The Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Nicolas Tulp* (1632)”. While this short, unfinished work only contains about a half dozen pages of text, one cannot help discern the haunting voice of suffering in the frantic, note like style that was not uncommon to her works-in-

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111 Schrift, 251 (Notes to the text)
112 Deutscher and Oliver, 7
progress. Yet this text contains a finality that all those which came before did not have, for this was the last message, before she committed suicide on October 15, 1994.\textsuperscript{113} Although, this text may have been the last written text we have from Kofman, it does not offer anymore of a conclusion than the others I have previously discussed. “Conjuring Death” was published posthumously by Kofman’s long-time partner Alexandre Kyritsos in the journal \textit{La part de l’oeil} in 1995 in its raw, incomplete form. “It is a lesson,” she begins referencing the totality of the scene in Rembrandt’s \textit{Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Nicolas Tulp}.\textsuperscript{114} Yet, from these first four words, one gets the sense that not only is the painting a lesson, but her comments as well, as if there is always something to learn, something to discover.

Kofman focuses on three key figures in the painting: the cadaver, stretched out almost entirely exposed, the professor who is instructing a group of seven other doctors, and the book, laid open at the feet of the cadaver.

Standing just behind it [the cadaver], the professor (though his mouth is closed, as indicated by the gesture of his left hand) is about to describe and explain what had until then eluded their gazes but is now beginning to be made visible by the dissection he is performing on one of the hands and forearms: by the opening he is making- for that is what the word \textit{anatomy} means- in the body, thereby bringing into the open what the skin had covered and concealed, and what would have best been not seen, so that its discovery seems to be the betrayal of a frightening secret.\textsuperscript{115}

The distinction in this painting between life and death is prominent. The cadaver, its naked form, is central in the scene while several live, thinking men analyze the still, and silent, form before them. The mortality of each individual in this painting is imminent, yet unexpressed on the faces of the doctors, who remain distanced, detached from the “object” of their studies. “Those around him seem to be unmoved by any feelings for him, for someone who, just a short time ago, was still full of life, had a name, was a man just like them.”\textsuperscript{116} Their gazes are vacant and exhibit a lack of fear or pity. In this emptiness, one sees a disconnect between the cadaver and the doctors, which is caused by death itself. “They do not see in it the image of what they themselves will one day be,

\textsuperscript{113} I do not feel that it is appropriate to attempt to analyze the details of her suicide in this work. I believe that it enough for her readers to know that the day she committed suicide would also have been Nietzsche’s 150\textsuperscript{th} birthday.
\textsuperscript{115} “Conjuring Death”, 237
\textsuperscript{116} “Conjuring Death”, 238
of what, unbeknownst to themselves, they are in the process of becoming.”

Kofman points out that the doctors do not see what we are all in danger of one day becoming. They only see an object, an instrument, from which they are to learn and uncover the secrets of life. “The dead man and the opening of his body are seen only insofar as they provide an opening onto life, whose secret they would hold.”

Kofman is describing here not so much a dead body as merely a cadaver, but as a container that holds the secrets that these men, professional, learned doctors of science, desire to behold for themselves. However, following the doctors’ gazes, one is drawn to the feet of the cadaver, where a book lay open for reference. This is what the doctors are looking at, not the cadaver. While they have the object in front of them, the doctors’ gazes are displaced; the fascination is for the open book, not the closed body. The book will instruct the dissection of the body, thus opening the sealed vessel which contains all of the secrets.

This opening of the book in all its light points back to the opening of the body. For the book alone allows the body to be deciphered and invites the passage from the exterior to the interior. It is this book (and the opening it provides onto the science of life and its mastery) that attracts the gazes, much more even than does the point of the scissors that has begun to peel away the skin from the body stretched out there.

That almost all of Kofman’s readers read this text after her suicide is critical to its reading, yet one must not forget that she was very much alive during its inception. Kofman deconstructs this painting, focusing on a few simple figures and on the relation between life and death. For Kofman, it is the book that is crucial in uncovering the secrets of a life. It is not a matter of peeling away the skin, but opening the books that she wrote in one’s attempt to find the secrets of her life.

In keeping with the note-like style of this text, Kofman lists other great masters in literature and art who believe that there are certain things that one ought not show. Raphael, Rembrandt, and Diderot similarly, according Kofman, agree that there are subjects that are better left unsaid and unshown in literature and art.

He [Rembrandt] is attempting to show what painting has always wished to mask and to reveal what must not be shown according to the laws of good taste, Diderot being here a prime example. (Diderot recommends that the Académie teach painters ‘the secret of
using their talent to redeem the distastefulness present in certain natural objects,’ and he asks it to ban the in-depth study of anatomy and flayed figures, and to remain on the surface of things, on the outside, denouncing any views of the inside of the body as indecent, perverse, and treacherous.) But Rembrandt does not, in truth, exhibit the entrails.\textsuperscript{120}

In this painting, the secrets of the living are concealed within the undissected cadaver, yet Rembrandt attempts to show that the mask can be lifted, and that all will be revealed by turning to the book. The \textit{laws of good taste} in which, one gets the sense, Kofman believes wholeheartedly do not allow for any revelation of secrets. Therefore, even a book, which Kofman considers a medium of art, cannot reveal explicitly the secrets held within it. In this work, as Derrida points out, it is Kofman’s \textit{préférence du livre} that allows the book to take the place of the cadaver as essential in discovering the “secrets.”\textsuperscript{121} So we must think that, after her death, Kofman would not have wanted us to linger on the subject of her death for long. It is necessary to refer back to the books, relating each one to each other, cognoscente that a single work will not contain all the secrets and that none of them will explicitly give us the message we are hoping to find.

As previously mentioned, this is not the first example of a covering up or masking of a secret, but here Kofman is directly stating that through literature, one can mask the underlying, true literary message, or the original purpose of writing. This is an idea she glosses, referring to Nietzsche, in \textit{L’Imposture de la beauté}.

\begin{quote}
L’art, le masque de la beauté et de la sérénité apolliniennes ont une fonction pharmaceutique : elles rendent le ‘réel’ dionysiaque tolérable et évitent d’avoir à mourir de la ‘vérité’. L’esthétisme du héros d’Oscar Wilde peut être compris à partir des catégories qu’il impose Nietzsche dans la \textit{Naissance de la tragédie} où il systématisé la leçon des Grecs qui savaient qu’il faut s’en tenir à la surface, être superficiel par profondeur, ne pas tenter de regarder ‘sous la peau’, qu’il faut camoufler au contraire ‘artistiquement’ tout ce qui suscite angoisse et risque de provoquer la nausée.\textsuperscript{122}
\end{quote}

One must camouflage \textit{artistically} everything that could incite pain and anguish or provoke nausea. One must not be tempted to \textit{look under the skin}, or under the purple veil at the portrait, or be tempted to misread traumatic truth that has been put out into the open.

Fittingly, Kofman ends this text with a long citation from Blanchot which conveys that it is only with \textit{distance} from the object of fascination that one can truly comprehend the message.

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\textsuperscript{120} “Conjuring Death”, 240
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\textsuperscript{121} Derrida, Untitled Work, 139
\end{flushright}

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\textsuperscript{122} \textit{L’Imposture de la beauté}, 39
\end{flushright}
Distance takes the place as silence in Kofman’s argument for not exploring the undesirable secrets of one’s past. “What happens when what you see, although at a distance, seems to touch you with a gripping contact…when seeing is contact at a distance?” Blanchot states that fascination is the thing that keeps us utterly separate from the object of fascination. The fascination is blinding so that we cannot help but not see.

‘Whoever is fascinated doesn’t see, properly speaking, what he sees. Rather, it touches him in an immediate proximity; it seizes and ceaselessly draws him close, even though it leaves him absolutely at a distance. Fascination is fundamentally linked to…the immense, faceless Someone. Fascination is the relation the gaze entertains- a relation which is itself neutral and impersonal- with sightless, shapeless depth, the absence one sees because it is blinding."

According to Blanchot, fascination prevents understanding much in the same way that the telling of a story ensures its incomprehensibility. It seems as though Kofman, no matter what the subject matter, can promote her argument for silence and relate the subject back to Blanchot. The only text that does not seem to fit this model is, of course, her autobiography Rue Ordener, rue Labat which broke the rules, exposed its true message and allowed itself to be read and analyzed.

One question that still remains to be uncovered is the purpose for selecting the subjects that she did at the end of her life to analyze and to support her claims. As I’ve shown with Le Mépris des Juifs, there are numerous commonalities and personal connections between Kofman and Nietzsche, and it would be fair to assume that there are similar consistencies with The Picture of Dorian Gray and The Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Nicolas Tulp. Besides the experience-based similarities that I previously discussed with Dorian Gray, there is another thematic connection that not only links these two personalities together, but links her with Robert Antelme as well. In Robert Antelme’s letter to Dionys Mascolo, he likens himself to living the portrait of Dorian Gray in reverse. “Tous mes amis m’accablent avec une satisfaction pleine de bonté, de ma ressemblance avec moi-même, et il me semble que je vis à l’envers le ‘Portrait de Dorian Gray’. Il m’est arrivé l’aventure extraordinaire de pouvoir me préférer autre.” Considering Kofman’s fascination with Antelme’s work, a fascination that, if we consider Blanchot’s definition of the phenomenon, blinds Kofman to the point of incomprehension, it is extremely probable that she was aware of this.

123 “Conjuring Death”, 240
124 “Conjuring Death”, 241
125 Mascolo, 17
statement. Unlike Dorian Gray and Kofman, Antelme prefers himself different, as the human being that has experience atrocities and survived, bearing the visible wounds of overcoming immense tragedy and suffering. He is living the Picture of Dorian Gray in reverse; his friends see a remarkable resemblance to himself, as he was *before* the war. Yet, Antelme does not want that image of himself; he longs to bear witness to what the passage of time has done. The beautiful, pure face that Kofman so longs to hold onto, Antelme desires to discard. After his experience in the camps, he is *autre* and prefers to be seen as such. By offering her own analysis of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Kofman establishes yet another connection with Antelme, whose works she regards as sublime while affirms that she is, once again, not in agreement with his principle argument.

*The Anatomy Lesson of Doctor Nicolas Tulp* is simply a lesson, as Kofman has told us, but a lesson in what and for whom? I would argue that it is a simple lesson of life and death, of which doctors attempt to defy the laws and patients desperately attempt to cope. Kofman herself had a complex relationship with illness and doctors during her life, most notably with her personal physician, Philippe Cros, to whom she dedicated *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*. Ann Smock, who translated Kofman’s autobiography into English in 1996, offered the information that it was to him that she was able to tell her story for the first time.¹²⁶ For Kofman to have shared a part of her life that had been kept secret for so long to this doctor she must have trusted him deeply and have developed, over the years of knowing him, a valuable connection. Smock added that near the end of her life, this connection with Philippe Cros was lost. Kofman had followed the advice of another doctor and hesitantly agreed to take psychiatric medications. Dr. Cros did not agree with this prescription and refused to continue talking with her while she was under the influences of this medication. This must have been a terrible blow to Kofman to have developed a close bond with a trusted doctor, only to have it broken due to her use of psychotropic drugs. Therefore her critique of doctors willingness to “dissect” a cadaver in search of answers instead of looking to the “books” for answers seems appropriate, as does her desire to analyze a medicine-related work of art this late in her life.

Wearing the mask of Kofman, one can see that there is a definite intertextuality between her works and her life and that the distinct path that lead her to *it* in *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, does indeed pass through the works that came before and continue to develop in what came after. Her

¹²⁶ This information was provided in personal correspondence between Smock and Dr. James Creech in 2009.
autobiography was not her final word; she continued to attempt to write in her philosophical language. However, it was all tainted by her one moment of release, the one work where she let herself be exposed for the world to see. No matter how much Kofman might have wanted to keep her personal and public lives separate, it was in vain, for writing for her was already, always inscribed with the personal. From the artifacts left by her father, to her rejection of her Jewish self in order to become French, the personal was always there even if not apparent at first glance. As Kofman would have read Kofman, her works deserve several readings, in tandem, and constant referencing back and forth. It is my conclusion (if such a thing exists) that these last four works were conceived relatively close together in time, if not at the same time. The similarities, consistencies, and overall message indicate that this is one thought, separated only for the necessity of expressing her message before her time ran out. Alternating between her multiple personas, between Sarah and Suzanne, Jewish and French, Rue Ordener, rue Labat and Le Mépris des Juifs, release and control, Kofman provokes the unanswerable questions concerning the binary opposition of silence versus speech.
Conclusion

One question still persists at the forefront of my research that I have not yet reconciled. *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* was not the sublime release that one would have thought after so many years of being closed off and hidden within Kofman. Why, then, did she decide to write her autobiography, write, as she called it, her *death*? The telling of her story, which for Antelme is where he found his *paradise*, only provoked a retreat to her philosophical past and an overwhelming desire to recapture the control that she had lost. Kofman’s story could have been exemplary, yet she did not overcome her trauma, she did not renounce Blanchot upon realizing that her story was “tellable” and she did not continue living her life in a positive, self-affirming manner.

Perhaps the connection that she had with Blanchot continued to trump all other relationships, all other bonds that she had in her life. This deep connection with Blanchot is what made her story such a deep, dark secret, and made it so dangerous. In the philosophical world that Kofman occupied, there was no place for her traumatic story, yet her story eventually became possible. She constructed her comprehensible récit, published it, and broke her decades-long silence. Her story was “tellable.” That is the *ça* that all of her works led up to. This is the deep, dark, unbearable secret that could not be tolerated. Her story in and of itself was not dangerous as long as it was hidden. In silence, her traumatic experience had an invaluable economy; once told, it was worthless. The dangerous secret was that *it can be told*.

Once *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* was published, Kofman had to move on, but was she truly able to? Did we, as readers of Kofman, underestimate how much value Kofman put on her philosophy in her life. The telling of her story could not be a sublime release, for it was a disastrous revelation that crumbled the foundation of her philosophical life. Then, what can we learn from Kofman’s suicide and can we ethically make the connection between these two events in her life? Read in this way, Kofman’s final act seems to affirm Blanchot in the most drastic sense. The telling was so unlivable, so horrifying that she could not move on happily. Tragedy consistent with Blanchot, here is the evidence of the impossibility of overcoming trauma through speech that both he and Kofman worked their entire lives to prove. “Mais ce serait là probablement une tout autre histoire.”

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127 *Le Mépris des Juifs*, 8
It is my sincere hope that I have provoked a continued discussion about Kofman’s life and works. This is where my research has led me and it is in no way complete; I doubt that it ever will be. However, I anticipate the next chapter, the next set of irresolvable questions, and the next secret to uncover through her literature. This is undoubtedly where the answers lie, behind screens and veils, smothered in its own writing, the thing that cannot be said, but was said and then quickly covered up again.
Bibliography


