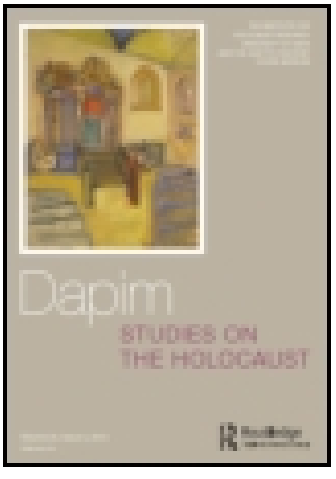

Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rdap20

Engaging Survivors: Assessing 'Testimony' and 'Trauma' as Foundational Concepts

Henry Greenspan[a], Sara R. Horowitz[b], Éva Kovács[c], Berel Lang[d], Dori Laub[e], Kenneth Waltzer[f] & Annette Wieviorka[g]

[a] University of Michigan, Residential College, College of Literature, Science and the Arts, Ann Arbor, MI 48105-1245, USA

[b] Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Studies, York University, Kaneff Tower, 7th Floor, 4700 Keele St., Toronto, Ontario, Canada M3J 1P3

[c] Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI)/Institute of Sociology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, A-1180 Wien, Höhnegasse 5/8, Hungary

[d] State University of New York at Albany, 3616 Henry Hudson Parkway, Apt 4CN Bronx, NY 10463, USA

[e] Yale University School of Medicine, 30 Ranch Road Woodbridge, CT 06525, USA

[f] James Madison College and Michigan State University, 5555 White Ash Lane, Haslett, MI 48840, USA

[g] CNRS UMR IRICE (Paris1 Pantheon Sorbonne), 130, rue du faubourg Poissonnière 75010 Paris, France

Published online: 22 Sep 2014.

To cite this article: Henry Greenspan, Sara R. Horowitz, Éva Kovács, Berel Lang, Dori Laub, Kenneth Waltzer & Annette Wieviorka (2014) Engaging Survivors: Assessing 'Testimony' and 'Trauma' as Foundational Concepts, Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust, 28:3, 190-226, DOI: 10.1080/23256249.2014.951909

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23256249.2014.951909

Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust, 2014
Vol. 28, No. 3, 190–226, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23256249.2014.951909

SCHOLAR'S FORUM

Engaging Survivors: Assessing 'Testimony' and 'Trauma' as Foundational Concepts

Henry Greenspan[a], Sara R. Horowitz[b], Éva Kovács[c], Berel Lang[d], Dori Laub, MD[e], Kenneth Waltzer[f] and Annette Wieviorka[g]

[a]*University of Michigan, Residential College, College of Literature, Science and the Arts, Ann Arbor, MI 48105-1245, USA;* [b]*Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Studies, York University, Kaneff Tower, 7th Floor, 4700 Keele St., Toronto, Ontario, Canada M3J 1P3;* [c]*Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI)/ Institute of Sociology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, A-1180 Wien, Höhnegasse 5/8, Hungary;* [d]*State University of New York at Albany, 3616 Henry Hudson Parkway, Apt 4CN Bronx, NY 10463, USA;* [e]*Yale University School of Medicine, 30 Ranch Road Woodbridge, CT 06525, USA;* [f]*James Madison College and Michigan State University, 5555 White Ash Lane, Haslett, MI 48840, USA;* [g]*CNRS UMR IRICE (Paris1 Pantheon Sorbonne), 130, rue du faubourg Poissonnière 75010 Paris, France*

(*Received January 2014; accepted April 2014*)

Introduction by Henry Greenspan

When I began interviewing Holocaust survivors in the 1970s, the prevailing model for gathering survivor testimony did not yet exist. This created the opportunity to 'make it up' as survivors and I went along, and the approach we developed – characterized by multiple interviews, revisiting earlier interviews in later ones to clarify understanding, and the evolving exploratory partnerships thus fostered – does not much resemble what became the conventional testimony interview format.

Regarding psychic trauma, there was a good deal of important work by the mid-1970s. During my training as a psychotherapist, I had the privilege of being supervised by Dr. Henry Krystal, a pioneer in trauma theory and himself an Auschwitz survivor. Krystal emphasized that trauma – important as it was – was only one aspect of what was then called 'concentration camp syndrome'. Trauma's extension to signify virtually every anguish that survivors endure – and, much more broadly, to stand for historical 'catastrophe' in general – would have been barely conceivable in those earlier days.

I mention these bits of personal history because they inform the origin of this forum. It is not surprising that I have wondered what we have gained and lost in the discourses and practices now associated with testimony and trauma. And, of course, I have wondered how colleagues assess the evolution of these concepts. In order to find out, the editors of *Dapim* and I drafted an invitation to participate in this forum, with these paragraphs as overview:

> The goal of this research forum is to interrogate concepts, their history, and related methodologies that have become virtually automatic in the ways we speak of, and relate to, Holocaust survivors. Although the bulk of our direct work with survivors is past, a hard look at guiding conventions remains relevant – both to understand our own history and

to be appropriately self-critical as these concepts are applied in work with survivors of other catastrophes.

And so we ask: What, precisely, do we mean by 'testimony'? Is testimony the most useful foundational term for every instance in which survivors invoke the destruction, or should it be considered one particular genre of remembering and retelling, with its particular benefits and limits? Likewise, what are the advantages, and limitations, of 'trauma' as it has come to represent virtually all the agonies survivors endure? What do 'testimony' and 'trauma' illuminate and what do they conceal or ignore? Why did these concepts become so popular and how does that development itself illuminate – or perhaps obscure – contemporary cultural and historical understanding?

Our goal was to take a fresh look at the utility of these concepts from the perspectives of an interdisciplinary and seasoned group of scholars. We were very fortunate to have gathered such a group: Sara Horowitz (literature), Éva Kovács (sociology), Berel Lang (philosophy), Dori Laub (psychoanalysis), Kenneth Waltzer (history), and Annette Wieviorka (history). I am also a participant.

Beyond writing in the light of the two paragraphs above, we asked each contributor to respond in 800 words or less to at least three of the following five questions:

(1) When does testimony become 'testimony'? (i.e. should everything survivors say in connection with the Holocaust – on and off the record, incidental and considered, reflection as much as remembrance – be considered part of their 'testimony'?) Another way of asking the question: Is 'testimony' best understood as one genre of survivors' retelling more generally, and, if so, what distinguishes it?
(2) Relatedly, what are the advantages and disadvantages – for survivors and for the rest of us – of engaging survivors primarily as 'bearers of testimony' or 'moral witnesses'?
(3) In what ways do accounts composed during the war by those who did not survive (e.g. diaries, ghetto chronicles, buried records, and so on) inform, or conceivably mislead, the ways we understand *survivor* 'testimony'?
(4) How have concepts of trauma helped – and hindered – our understanding of survivors and of their retelling? Is 'trauma' also best viewed as one 'genre' of a wider spectrum of individual and/or collective suffering – or not?
(5) How do you assess the impact of these concepts in contemporary discourse concerning survivors of catastrophe in general? Have these concepts illuminated, distorted, or some more complex combination our understanding of the current historical and cultural moment?

It should be emphasized that there was no actual 'forum'. The contributors never discussed the questions together – in actual or virtual space – and no participant was aware of what others had written before giving their own responses. There are advantages and disadvantages to this way of proceeding. On the downside, we did not have the chance to work together to sharpen our understanding of each question. We developed no shared language and, of course, had no chance to hone our views in response to each other (although that can happen in the future).

The advantage is that fully independent responses are most likely to include a variety, not only of views, but also of basic ways of framing, or reframing, each question. As all interviewers know, the relationship between question and answer is always unpredictable. But what results may be uniquely informing about how different people differently construct the issues, data, and

arguments they consider relevant. Unforeseen, even unforeseeable, 'angles' on a question are thus more likely to emerge.

And so they did. What is most striking about the contributions to follow is their sheer diversity. Clearly, much of that reflects the range of disciplines, intellectual styles, and professional careers represented. But it also tells us that there is very little approaching consensus about the meaning, utility, and reach of testimony and trauma, not only in the context of Holocaust and genocide studies, but more widely. We believe that this is itself an important finding about two of our most foundational concepts. Diversity of perspectives is, in general, a good thing; there is no inherent virtue in consensus. But we should at least know where things stand. At present, scholars who invoke testimony and trauma are not simply pursuing very different trails. They are working in very different forests.

Still, there are places where paths cross. Many contributors note the importance of the late 1970s/early 1980s in the development of contemporary understanding of testimony, most significantly represented in the large video-testimony projects initiated in those years. A number of contributors discuss the *construction* of testimony: whether in the immediate collaboration between survivors and interlocutors, in established protocols and procedures for testimonial occasions, or in sociocultural constructions of who *are* 'survivors' from whom testimony may 'normally' (and normatively) be expected. Many contributors note that we have moved beyond most of the earlier dismissal of testimony as a useful documentary source. But, having done so, other issues and questions arise. What are the consequences of engaging survivors primarily as documentary sources in the first place? In what ways might the documentary and juridical connotations of testimony impede our understanding of survivors' poetry, literature, painting, and a range of other non-narrative or non-discursive genres that may or may not concern either trauma or its memory? If the discourses on testimony and trauma (along with narrative and memory) reflect a contemporary preoccupation with subjectivity, how does that influence our engagement, or non-engagement, with institutional and political actualities – both past and present?

These are only a suggestion of the issues some contributors raise in response to the questions we posed. But they will provide a sense of how much there is to think through. Indeed, the only question that this forum may have settled is how little has been settled.

Finally, a note on format. Throughout, we use the same order of contributors under each question (among those who answered that question), listed alphabetically. This should facilitate locating responses from each participant, while providing the option of reading by question or 'cross-sectionally', by individual author. And, indeed, many authors do build on earlier contributions in later ones, so the responses of several participants lend themselves to being read straight through. Of course, we expect that readers will engage the forum in whatever ways their interests and inclinations dictate. Above all, we hope to stimulate wider discussion of these issues.

1. When does testimony become 'testimony'? (i.e. should everything survivors say in connection with the Holocaust – on and off the record, incidental and considered, reflection as much as remembrance – be considered part of their 'testimony'?) Another way of asking the question: Is 'testimony' best understood as one genre of survivors' retelling more generally, and, if so, what distinguishes it?

Henry Greenspan: Not long ago, an anonymous reviewer of a manuscript to which I had contributed commented that the volume demonstrated 'that the foundational terms "testimony" and "trauma" are blunt instruments that do not do justice to the complex ways in which people suffer during and after mass violence and in the aftermath'.[1]

The reviewer's comments summarize my own position well, but I would add one qualification. 'Testimony' and 'trauma' are both too blunt and too sharp to serve us well as foundational terms. On one side, they dilute important distinctions. On the other, their important *particular* meanings are also lost when they are used to represent so much. In my contributions to follow, I suggest that testimony is best understood as one *genre* of survivors' retelling. Similarly, I argue that trauma is best understood as one of several *kinds* of survivors' anguish.

I am a pragmatist, not a Platonist. Therefore, I assess terminology by utility – especially utility for practice; here, the practice of engaging survivors and their accounts – rather than by essence. Connotation is part of utility, sensitizing us to some possibilities and anesthetizing us to others, and connotation becomes legitimized in practice; i.e. what we mean is grounded in what we do. Thus, however ecumenically one chooses to define it, the reality is that 'giving testimony' as an action has become institutionalized in widely repeated, presumed, and promoted protocols and procedures. Since the late 1970s/early 1980s, when 'testimony' is invoked, it is this model that is envisioned – as much by survivors as by others. Indeed, the usual testimony procedures have become so routinized that survivors are often confused when they are invited to participate in a project that follows an alternative model (e.g. acquaintance sustained beyond a single interview, invitation to collaborate in the interpretive and archiving processes, and so on).[2] Sociologically, they are right to be confused. That is why I have argued that what we now call 'testimony' is best understood as one genre of survivors' retelling, of which there are other forms – again, in institutional, not simply ideational, space.

[1]The volume is *Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence*, edited by Steven High (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, forthcoming 2015).

[2]This happened repeatedly in a Montreal-based project in which I was a participant for over six years. Some survivors had to be convinced many times that those interviews would be different than what they had previously provided for conventional testimony projects, and some were not comfortable with any other model. Thus Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki reflected:

> We learned that no matter how much we had explained the ethos of the project, interviewees still expected us to want the factual, narrative recitation of their Holocaust experiences, which they had been asked to recount many times before … . This is what made them comfortable, and this was their understanding of what was supposed to happen in an interview.

Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, 'Only Human: A Reflection on the Methodological Challenges of Working with 'Difficult' Stories', *Oral History Review* 37:2 (2010), p. 200. In some instances, survivors were interested in moving into a different genre of recounting after beginning with the conventional testimony model; in others, they were not. Either way, while we may aspire to being 'pluralistic', the institutionalized world of testimony, as sponsored and as structured, is very far from facilitating plural ways of engaging survivors and their accounts.

What seems least disputable is that testimony is not everyday speech. Rather, occasions of testimony are special occasions, often suggesting important public announcement. 'This I believe', in religious contexts of testimonial witness. 'This I saw or endured', in juridical or documentary contexts. While a testimony may be proven inaccurate, it need at least be authentic (that is, believed true by the one who provides it). Even in narrow juridical contexts, too easily 'changing one's testimony' creates doubt, less directly about the facts, than about the credibility of the person who claims them.

Despite scholars' tendency to think about testimony almost exclusively as historical sources – however assessed – relatively few survivors aspire to be documentarians in any narrow sense, and many explicitly reject that task. Anyone who has directly interviewed survivors or watched recordings of such interviews knows that retelling particular experiences is almost always interwoven with wider reflection (even when an interviewer works hard to stay focused on 'the facts'): reflections about the possibility of retelling at all, about faith in humanity or Divinity, about psychology, politics, and more. Leon, a survivor whom I first interviewed in the 1970s, insisted that merely reciting 'names, dates, and places' violated the 'essence' of his memory of the Holocaust. 'It robs it of what is most important'. Rather, a meaningful account 'touches on *all* our philosophic questions, *all* questions of purpose, of right and wrong, of justice, of God'.[3]

Many survivors have 'messages' (not the same as 'lessons') that vary enormously in content but similarly reflect a drive to transmit. Testimony is 'for the record' or 'for posterity'. However difficult its articulation, conveying something essential and lasting is central to what makes testimony, testimony. Here again, our usual practices for collecting testimony – especially video-testimony – underscore the centrality of the messenger. Testimony is mediated by highly refined protocols and procedures. The survivor as messenger is literally at the center of the screen; the interviewer is almost always off-camera. Critical as the interviewer may be to facilitate retelling, testimony *as a genre* more closely resembles monologue, carefully elicited monologue, than dialogue. That is, the interpersonal center of gravity is almost always *represented* in the survivor; not in the relationship between survivor and interviewer (a convention which may itself *mis*represent, or at least obscure, the dialogic processes through which testimony is usually constructed).[4]

In sum, then, testimony as institutionalized and generally understood is more about knowing or learning *from* survivors than knowing or learning *with* them. Its gathering (particularly as recorded) is more likely to be concentrated in a single session than over the course of sustained conversation and acquaintance. It aspires to be as definitive as possible rather than evolving. As a genre, it is more like declaration – 'this I witnessed', 'this I believe' – than exploration.

In responses to follow, I will suggest that the second terms of each pairing – learning *with*, sustained acquaintance, evolution, and exploration – represent a genre of survivors' retelling different from conventional testimony and reflect a different way of engaging survivors themselves.

Sara Horowitz: The word 'testimony' and its expansion to include a burgeoning set of survivor narratives performed a kind of ethical work. It was a corrective in a conversation about the Holocaust that resisted incorporating survivors' memories. Until relatively recently, historians reconstructing this complex and difficult past were reluctant to incorporate first-hand accounts of Holocaust survivors, preferring instead to build historical knowledge from 'official' sources –

[3]Henry Greenspan, 'Beyond Testimony' *PastForward* (Autumn 2010), p. 11.

[4]'Usually' because it is rare that any survivor's testimony is constructed (or co-constructed) de novo. Survivors have established narrative repertoires just as all of us do, and very rarely create an account 'from scratch' in any interview.

in large measure, documents produced by perpetrators and abettors of the Nazi genocide. Survivor accounts – that is, the autobiographical memories of those with personal experience – were deemed too subjective, too fallible, and too limited to be useful for empirical research and, in juridical contexts, unreliable as evidence. Thinking about survivor accounts as testimony was an important intervention into the discourse about the Shoah, one that I welcomed and to which I contributed. But the ubiquity of 'testimony' today has made me rethink its use.

The radio play 'The Table' by the Polish-Israeli writer Ida Fink[5] was written in response to the frustration she felt while listening to war crimes trials broadcast on the radio – trials in which the eyewitness reports by survivors did not carry weight. The play focuses on four Jewish survivors at a war crimes trial and traces the unraveling of their testimony because the survivors cannot agree on minutiae that strike them as inconsequential to the larger issue of genocide. The juridical system is suspicious of human memory, and the prosecutor insists upon agreement on small details to validate the composite picture put forth by the witnesses.

In my description of Fink's play, I have just used the term 'testimony' in a narrow, juridical context, to connote a third-party account in a formal setting, intended to serve as evidence in establishing an objective truth – something very similar to the evidentiary demands of the historian. Fink's play captures the feelings of many survivors who felt frustrated, unheard, and undervalued in both legal procedures and empirical studies that marginalized their voices in reconstructing a past they experienced and remembered.

The ambitious testimony projects that developed in the 1970s and onward to record (especially on video) the accounts of those who lived through or witnessed the Shoah were a way to counter the earlier discounting of individual memory in historiography. Using the term 'testimonies' to describe these taped recollections – as do, for example, Yale University's Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies since the early 1980s, and the USC Shoah Foundation, founded more than a decade later – imports a term from one context into another. Like courtroom testimony, videotaped Holocaust testimonies comprise an oral genre, where not only verbal language but also body language and affect contribute to the confidence with which an account is received. But, the two situations are also different. For example, unlike in the juridical context, there is no interrogation, no testing of the veracity of the account; those bringing testimony are presumed to tell the truth to the best of their ability. Importing the word testimony from one context to another asserts that these modalities are, if not equivalent, equal in importance – that the accounts of survivors are as necessary to a full engagement with the past as the evidentiary categories long understood as central to an 'objective' (that is to say, accurate) reconstruction of the past.

Literary scholars and psychologists were among the first to take seriously these first-hand accounts and what they could contribute to our thinking about the Holocaust. So it is not surprising that the theoretical frameworks, insights, and methodologies of those disciplines shaped the readings of testimonies. Eventually, it became common to refer not only to these oral accounts but also to other forms of lifewriting as 'testimony', and to bring fiction, poetry, and the discourse of the imaginary into the compass of 'literary testimony'. Underlying this expansion of the umbrella of testimony is a call to broaden the conversation about the Holocaust: who may contribute, and in what form.

In invoking the term 'testimony', I have come to think that the wider discourse uses it as metaphor. Memoirs, oral accounts and other modes of telling, as well as poems, stories, and other forms of the imaginary, are 'like' juridical testimony in certain important ways, but they are not identical to juridical testimony. When we become accustomed to speech used as metaphor,

[5]Ida Fink, 'The Table: A Play for Four Voices and Basso Ostinato', *A Scrap of Time*, tr. Madeline Levine and Francine Prose (New York: Random House, 1987).

we forget, in fact, that it *is* metaphor, and treat it as identity. In other words, we neglect to account for the *different* ways in which various reflections on the past work. We blur the generic differences, losing the very nuance, richness, and insight we sought in invoking metaphor.

Testimony implies that this panoply of retrospection is marshaled as proof of what happened, as a means of establishing the facts. Some of what now falls into the expanded category of testimony can do this; indeed, historians aggregate some of these testimonies to reconstruct a shtetl, a ghetto, or an event. But even when the different modes of reflection do not add to 'the facts' – perhaps, especially then – they speak importantly to such things as ethics, inner life, and the large human questions. Flattening everything into one category diminishes these reflections and limits how we are called to approach them. In a sense, 'testimony' makes claims that are at once too far reaching and not far reaching enough. And by now, we are – at least, so I hope – past the point of needing to justify finding value in the recollections and aesthetic production of survivors.

Éva Kovács: As a sociologist, I see several important methodological problems raised by this question. The first is *intentionality*: If one conducts an interview with a 'survivor', then the interviewee is defined as someone who had suffered during the Shoah, survived it in one way or another, and is still living among us as someone who is able (and wants) to give testimony.

Over the past 70 years, many survivors of the Shoah have become accustomed to this public role. Witnesses' accounts were collected very early, by the end of World War II, as part of war crimes investigations and restitution procedures.[6] Since the 1980s, these accounts have been included in education programs, television series, exhibitions, and so on. Thousands of testimonies have been written, recorded, and archived worldwide.

Today, it is hard to contextualize the interviews if one disregards the framework of the testimonies because it was highly routinized in both the public and private spheres. To illustrate this problem, let me give an unusual example. In the early 2000s, I launched a research project on the memory of socialism in Hungary. One of my students conducted 10 interviews with homeless people, but in the end she analyzed only five of them.[7] When I read the other five interviews, I found among the respondents an elderly Roma man who was a survivor of the Roma genocide. However, our project viewed his interview in the context of homelessness under socialism, therefore his identity as a survivor or as a Roma was disregarded by my student. Was that a mistake? Or was it the intention of the interviewee himself? I think that it was neither. It was due to the logic of the framework and thematic focus of that specific oral history project or, in a wider sense, to the power of discourse. We researchers intentionally identified him as homeless. As a homeless Roma

[6]Here I only refer to the Hungarian case. See, for example, Attila Gidó, 'The Situation of the North Transylvanian Holocaust Survivors Reflected in the 1946 Survey of the World Jewish Congress', *Transylvanian Review* 1 (2011): pp. 85–94.; Rita Horváth and Zsuzsa Toronyi (eds), 'A Magyarországi Zsidó Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság (DEGOB) története,' *Makor* (*Magyar Zsidó Levéltári Füzetek*) 1 (1997); Rita Horváth, 'A Jewish Historical Commission in Budapest. The Place of the National Relief Committee for Deportees in Hungary [DEGOB] Among the Other Large-Scale Historical-Memorial Projects of She'erit Hapletah after the Holocaust (1945–1948)', in David Bankier and Dan Michman (eds.), *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergence, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements* (London: Berghahn, 2009).

[7]Éva Kovács, 'Mirror Splinters. On the Collective Memory of Socialism,' in Heinrich Best and Agnieszka Wenninger (eds.), *Landmark 1989. Central and Eastern European Societies Twenty Years after the System Change* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2010), pp. 37–44.

in Hungary, he lived under double subordinate, 'subaltern' conditions,[8] and in this position he could not 'speak' as a Holocaust survivor.

The second methodological concern that I would like to highlight is the problem of *periodicity*. The Shoah was traumatic for the interviewee and thus it fundamentally influences his or her entire life. However, it depends on individual cases as to whether interviewees retell their life histories from the perspective of surviving into the present, as many do, or if they narrate only to liberation. In the past 25 years, I have seen both types of narratives. I would like to give two examples. One of my interviewees considered her traumatic experiences in the Shoah as a second life-starting point. Her narration revolved around these experiences, presenting both the pre- and the post-Shoah period of her life. Whether she talked about her childhood or her life as a retiree, she referred to the Shoah in every sentence. Her narration revealed a traumatic repetition. Another interviewee came to an interview with an old suitcase in his hand, sat down and started giving a testimony concerning the concentration camp. At certain points of the story, he opened his bag, took a historical document from it (e.g. certificates about the liberation, medical reports, etc.), showed it to me, and closed the suitcase again. He finished his story with the liberation in 1945, took his suitcase, which had served as a symbolic repository of his Holocaust experience, said good-bye, and left. He wanted to testify only to what he witnessed during the Shoah. The compulsive closure of the conversation was also a kind of traumatic 'cutting' in which only the encapsulated traumatic experience of the Shoah appeared. He used the historical documents to prove that his narrative was correct, and tried to make a distinction between historical 'facts' and his memory.

The Shoah was a traumatic event in the life of survivors, and it was also a very complex and slow process for larger society to come to terms with the past. Therefore, the history of the Shoah did not end with liberation. It is hard to imagine, but one of the most well-known Hungarian historians, an expert of the history of the twentieth century, said in 2012 that he had no resolute opinion about the Shoah because he had not studied it yet.[9] It is no wonder that not only would survivors' mental and physical wounds heal very slowly, but also that their reintegration into society – if it occurred at all – would take a long time.

The problem is that of *facticity*. Why do we collect testimonies to understand a certain historical or social phenomenon if they are so personal, so emotional, and so 'unreliable' as compared to historical 'facts'? This kind of criticism was always present in debates on oral history but has been particularly central in Holocaust historiography. Most historians have used testimonies and other personal accounts to illustrate the historical narrative that they developed from the 'historical facts', produced by various – mostly Nazi – institutions and administrative agencies. The mainstreaming of oral history sources in historical research projects started in the 1990s. Today, many authors ranging from Saul Friedländer to Christopher Browning *testify* that testimonies can be instrumental in writing the history of the Shoah, and there are a wide variety of models of how to use them.

Berel Lang: The term 'testimony' has formal standing especially when given under oath in legal or religious contexts. But the term's connotation, whatever the context, suggests authenticity, accuracy, precision. A speaker's or writer's testimony, in contrast to our usual, more casual descriptions or narratives, comes as close as the speaker or writer can to portraying an event or

[8]See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?,' in Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988).
[9]On the Hungarian debate, see Máté Rigó, 'A Hungarian version of the Historikerstreit? A Summary of the Romsics-Gerő debate among Hungarian Historians' (2012), *Forum Geschichtskulturen*, Hungary, Version: 1.0, June, 25 2013, http://www.imre-kertesz-kolleg.uni-jena.de/index.php?id=415&l=0.

occasion as it *really* occurred. Viewed through the lens of this stringent requirement, however, *Holocaust* testimony does not essentially differ from other testimony. The extreme conditions suffered during the Holocaust undoubtedly intensify the speaker's urgency in speaking, but that could be expected also in testimony about other extreme situations, ranging from the threat of imminent death for a group to that for an individual.

It is crucial to bear in mind in relation to Holocaust testimony, furthermore, that few of its victims *or* its survivors were aware at the time that it was indeed *The Holocaust* that beset them. They were conscious, obviously, of the immediate pain and threat of death – for themselves, their families and for others around them. But they did not know 'the Holocaust' as it has since come to be understood (by survivors as well as by others). Exactly how such retrospective consciousness has affected even the most conscientious testimony about past events remains a constant and difficult issue. Its possible consequences must be taken into account in assessing Holocaust survivor testimony, even when no other testimony or independent evidence suggests inconsistency.

Moreover, the qualities of authenticity and accuracy, often assumed in what is recognized as testimony, narrow the force of that concept in ways that are misleading. When a poet writes a poem in the first person – whether about a tragic or a pleasurable event – the authenticity of experience conveyed is important, even crucial, and this holds whether the reader interprets the poetic 'I' as reporting the poet's actual experience or, in Emily Dickinson's words, in his or her role only as a 'representative of the verse'. Confessions, whether privately or publicly conveyed, have the force of testimony, although they are not usually understood in that light. The connotation of guilt that is typically part of confession contrasts with the focus of testimony, which may or may not (and more often not) include an expression of guilt.

Is *everything* said by survivors to count as testimony? If, as is sometimes assumed, the experience of those who lived through the Holocaust affects whatever happens in their lives afterwards, then anything they say, however trivial, should indeed have the standing of testimony. But this stipulation casts too large a shadow to be useful in understanding all the events or even patterns of their post-Holocaust lives. 'Formal' testimony, whether under oath or in reporting for archival preservation, would obviously count as testimony, but even 'informal' narratives in casual discourse may also carry the weight of the survivors' voice in such involuntary expressions of emotion as anger, sorrow, and pleasure. The question persists, then, of how *much* that weight affects the expression and, still more pointedly, of how or whether it ensures the accuracy of what is asserted.

Are there different 'genres' of testimony? Obviously, yes; some written (again, in various subgenres), some oral, some painted – with substantial differences among these. The mediating role of the speaker's interpretation varies among the genres, as, for example, between written discourse and painting, although both may be 'saying' something. Insofar as testimony is the issue, the more precisely articulated the testimony, the more cogent it is – with this implication favoring discursive narratives, and even among these recognizing certain distinctions. So, for example, diaries regarded as testimony convey an immediacy that memoirs do not. This would suggest that certain genres or sub-genres of testimony should be privileged over others, a claim that itself requires further analysis. (Poetry, for example, is typically syntactically denser but also more generalized than prose, and in that sense less likely to be historically precise. 'Historical poetry', written on or about a particular historical event, has hardly left a mark in the history of poetry).

In what way is Holocaust testimony distinctive in comparison with other testimony? It obviously is, insofar as only those who were 'in' the Holocaust can convey it. But does this difference suffice to make it distinctive qua testimony? Here the issue, as already suggested, becomes more complex. Extreme suffering and danger, whether by natural forces or by human contrivance, have not been consequences only of the Holocaust. (The difference between these two quite different sources of suffering – that is, in nature or through human action – is itself an important issue but largely ignored in accounts of suffering and trauma.) In any event, until a *distinctive*

syndrome of Holocaust experience is defined, descriptions or analyses of that experience must rely on the broader and more inclusive category of atrocity or suffering as such.

Dori Laub: What distinguishes testimony in the first place are the very discrete and indispensable conditions under which it comes into existence. A protected space has to be provided, involving not only the physical place and the necessary time but also a totally present, committed, and attuned listener who is willing to accompany the witness on the journey on which she is about to embark. What has not been fully explored and articulated is the role of the camera in this endeavor, although experts in media studies have started to do so.[10]

What is needed to complement these external conditions is a readiness in the witness to confront what is inside her, to face the '*real*' event of her life. This can be surviving the Holocaust, an experience, even if it covers a lifetime, which is known to be there although previously not consciously formulated. Throughout her life the witness could not avoid its presence, consciously aware of only isolated fragments of the whole and feeling relentlessly drawn to it while recoiling in terror when nearing it.

The witness, therefore, possesses information that has yet to be recorded and brought to an addressee or party interested in receiving it. Testimony is thereby a transmission of information, for which there is an internal, unrelenting pressure to convey as well as an external readiness and eagerness to receive it.

It is in such setting that testimony can assume a life of its own and witnesses' memories exponentially increase. Many of the Holocaust survivors I interviewed over the years stated at the end of their testimony that they were amazed about the extent to which they *did* remember, and about how much they could actually put into words. In essence, the giving of testimony was a process of creating new information. They had always pushed their knowledge to the side and considered it information that would be too upsetting and too frightening to themselves and too burdensome to others. In that sense, the experience of giving testimony was new and left them surprised by their own story. In spite of the terror and the sadness that they encountered during an interview, they experienced a powerful urge to continue and to bring their narrative to completion.

In order to tell their stories, Holocaust survivors have to partially relive them. It is due to the nature of extreme trauma that memories of the atrocities cannot always be related as past events, but break through the coordinates of time and place with which we commonly organize experience. That is why survivor testimony often has a quality of immediacy, as though what happened is happening all over again, in the here and now. Massive trauma is fundamentally ahistorical and testimony is an attempt to create a narrative in a sequential framework with a before and an after that allows events to be arranged along a timeline. In this respect, testimony provides a level of historicization.

Therefore, testimony's conception as a 'whole', in the intimacy of a dialogue with a totally present and attuned listener, sets it apart from other instances during which survivors speak of or allude to their persecution experiences. Just as important are its goal of providing relief from a threatening, oppressive burden and the function of transmission to a receptive audience.

Kenneth Waltzer: During this 'era of the witness', as Annette Wieviorka has labeled our moment,[11] a vogue of testimony-giving, testimony-using, even testimony-distributing has developed via new

[10] Amit Pinchewski, 'The Audio Visual Unconscious in the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies', *Critical Inquiry*, 39: 1 (Autumn 2012), pp. 142–166.
[11] Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

technologies of digital communication. While earlier most Holocaust survivors remained silent about their experiences in ghettos and camps, there came a point for many later in their lives when telling and retelling became terribly important for a range of reasons. Now some of these testimonies can be accessed by all, unedited on the internet, and more will be forthcoming. Although many historians previously were suspicious about the subjectivity of such retellings, especially those done late in life and long after the events, some have changed their views and now believe – and some have shown – that survivor accounts provide unique insight into human experience within extremity and can also be bases for doing discrete histories, if approached critically.

By testimony, we often mean retellings as in judicial proceedings, in formal video archives, and in oral histories. We use the term 'testimony' elastically, I think, because it implies a general affirmation of truth, as in court proceedings or religious attestations. The term connotes truth value or sincerity of belief about truth, even if testimonies in reality may be only rough approximations of truth, as they are often selective, imprecise, off in chronology or sequence, influenced by extrinsic cultural representations, and sometimes reflecting narrow comprehension of their own context. But they are premised on a personal compact about truth, by survivors' commitments to provide accounts that are as accurate as they can.

Testimonies also have in common that they are dialogic encounters, given in interaction in real-time between individuals. They are shaped by interviewer questions, agendas, and formats, as well as by survivor choices about what to share, how to share it, and how much to say. In my mind, they are less intentional and processed than other kinds of autobiography, such as memoir. They also intend to describe a reality that is beyond an individual's personal experience. They speak broadly about the Holocaust and other examples of genocide and include statements explicitly or implicitly about what happened in places and times, how these were perceived and understood, how humans responded to loss and terror and adjusted to brutality, and how survivors understand later and live with having lived through the mass murder of people and the destruction of cultural worlds.

How widely should we think about testimony and what to call it? Where does testimony begin and where does it end? Does testimony appear only in formal interviews caught on video- and audio-tape or in transcripts housed in repositories, or is survivor memory accessed and shared as truth in wider and more informal ways? In the course of my work on the social history of children and youths in Nazi concentration camps (particularly males under the age of 16 in Buchenwald, Auschwitz I, Birkenau, Buna, and several satellite camps), I have reviewed Shoah Foundation and other videotaped testimonies and conducted follow-up interviews with survivors, by phone or in person, and have later had further discussions prompted by the revitalized memories stimulated by the initial interview encounter – is that testimony, too? Is it something else? If email and phone traffic back and forth commences after formal interview encounters, as it often has, does that count? And if these conversations continue for months and often years, is that also testimony?

I believe such additional encounters are all forms of testimony. They partake of the qualities of the original testimony and subsequent formal interview. They often are extensions, further attestations, in ongoing conversations providing additional information and perspective on events, memories, persons, relations, and ideas about what is important. Sometimes they are direct extensions of the initial interview, providing new information only after further consideration or the viewing of one's own story in new light, compelling new sharing. Or sometimes sharing at a distance is safer and more secure than in person. Consider the survivor who initially expressed deep hatred for a block officer in Buchenwald named Gustav but, in further exchanges, came to comprehend that Gustav was one of his rescuers? Consider another elderly gentleman who, I found after several attempts, simply cannot be interviewed. Instead, he sends information in small amounts by email, sometimes taking the initiative himself, and is always responsive to answering follow-up questions from the safety of hiding behind his computer.

Memoirs, on the other hand, are different from testimonies – they are something else, more formal and polished. They are not dialogic, but are more plotted and edited. They are also often shaped into narrative form in accordance with conventions more removed from the real time immediacy implied by testimony. In my experience, I have often turned to unguarded testimony offered in dialogic form to assess the truth of what appears in memoir form. That was indeed the reality in the case of a Holocaust memoir fraud connected with the fabricated memoir to be published in 2009, to be called 'Angel at the Fence'. The testimony had truth-value; the memoir did not, and was a story that had been made to sell.[12]

Some memoirs – such as those of Jean Amery, Primo Levi, and Filip Müller – seem to share qualities of testimony, as if they had been retold orally or even, in Müller's case, as testified before a court before the final writing. But I prefer to think of memoir in a different category, something more intentional and polished, more purposefully honed and completely presented.

Annette Wieviorka: The concept of testimony is ancient. Human history is made up of a plethora of eyewitness accounts. The person who saw relates what he or she saw. The person who acted relates what he or she did. The person who suffered relates what he or she suffered. For some historians, the concept of testimony has grown to include all traces of the past and is not reduced to an eyewitness testimony account.

In fact, it is with the Shoah that testimony (and the witness) acquires its current status, which distinguishes between different categorical perspectives of the past. The tripartite division of eyewitness testimonies, established by two great scholars of the Holocaust – Raul Hilberg and Saul Friedlander – differentiates between *perpetrators*, *victims,* and *bystanders,* and emphasizes that the study of victims' experiences, feelings, and perceptions cannot be based on the administrative archives of the Nazi 'machinery of destruction' (Hilberg's term). Jews who lived in Hitler's Europe already understood this and, as a result, the eyewitness testimony process (which I define as '*The Era of the Witness*;' *see below*) is rooted at the heart of the event.

From the beginning, the impossibility of researching Nazi camps and Shoah history without taking into account the essential and valuable contribution of eyewitness testimonies was clear. In '*Deportation and Genocide*' (Déportation et Génocide),[13] I analyzed the first eyewitness testimonies of death camp survivors. In '*The Era of the Witness*' (L'Ere du témoin),[14] I focused on an analysis of the figure of the witness and the evolution of testimonies from World War II to the present, and demonstrated that testimony reflects society's discourse on the events experienced by the witness. An eyewitness did not testify immediately after the war, as one would nowadays. One does not relate the same things and one's expectations are different. Finally, '*The Era of the Witness*' began in the 1980s, a time at which the Holocaust survivor-witness became a familiar character in society.

This position given to the Shoah eyewitness in both the public and academic realms has had a retroactive as well as a contemporary impact. Henceforth, testimony as a source has been applied to all eras (e.g. in France, it dates back to the Napoleonic Wars and World War I and continues through to more recent massacres and genocides, such as the genocide perpetrated by the Hutus on the Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994). The place given to the eyewitness reveals much about our time and emphasizes non-objective discourse. On this subject, François Hartog uses

[12]Gabriel Sherman, 'The Greatest Love Story Ever Sold', *New Republic*, December 25, 2008; also 'Wartime Lies', *New Republic*, December 26, 2008. See also Wyatt Mason, 'A False Story: Six Questions for Ken Waltzer', *Harpers Magazine*, December 31, 2008.
[13]Annette Wieviorka, *Déportation et génocide: entre la mémoire et l'oubli* (Paris: Plon, 1992).
[14]Annette Wieviorka, *l'Ere du témoin* (Paris: Plon, 1998).

presentism theory to explain how our society gives priority to memory (traces left in the present by successive pasts) over history (reconstruction of those pasts).[15] Likewise, Olivier Rolin in *Tigre en Papier* explains that in his youth,

> the society in which you lived, was transfigured by a power which linked each event or individual to an ancient chain of events or individuals more tragic, [but] today there's only the present, even the instantaneous time, the present became this colossal welter, a prodigious innervation, a permanent big bang.

In this 'big bang', political analysis is considered less important than its effect on human lives.

[15]François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expérience du temps* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2003).

2. Relatedly, what are the advantages and disadvantages – for survivors and for the rest of us – of engaging survivors primarily as 'bearers of testimony' or 'moral witnesses'?

Henry Greenspan: Eyewitness accounts were created and collected in the midst of the destruction and by the historical commissions that followed liberation. But the *role* of 'witness' or 'bearer of testimony' as generally understood is a more recent phenomenon. Beyond well-known survivors like Elie Wiesel, who assumed that title early on, it was not until the late 1970s – coinciding with the surge of interest in the Holocaust more generally – that the survivor-witness, as a cultural type, emerged.[16]

It is impossible to know how many survivors identify with that role. Some obviously embrace it; others flee it. Based on the survivors I have interviewed over 40 years, there is every permutation between.

Many survivors who have participated in video-testimonies or spoken in other public contexts have clearly gained much. Difficult as retelling can be, the opportunity to remember the lost, to have their experience acknowledged, to hope that some good will come of it (even while survivors often wonder, off-camera, whether anything does) can mean a great deal. Likewise, the very fact that conventional testimony *is* a 'special occasion' provides many survivors a sense of containment – a *place* for the lost and for memories – and its predictable structure is precisely part of the comfort it provides.

For listeners, the sheer human immediacy (however mediated) of most testimonies needs no further justification. But serious engagement with these accounts has the potential to contribute to every kind of knowledge – 'all our questions', as Leon said – even as survivors' accounts challenge much of what passes for knowledge. Regarding my own discipline, there is no question that psychology, including all the work on 'trauma', still has much more to learn from careful listening to survivors than the other way around.

So the question becomes the advantages and disadvantages of different *ways* of listening and engaging survivors (again, the question of genre), for different purposes, and for different participants. Like all conventions, the highly structured format of video-testimony selects in and selects out. Especially in North America and Australia, the least financially 'successful' survivors are less likely to go before the camera. What is comforting for some is disturbing for others. Kenneth Waltzer describes a survivor for whom any direct interview was intolerable. Instead, this survivor initiated a series of emails in which he communicated at a pace, and in a medium, that he could control. The result was scores of exchanges, all useful to Waltzer, but outside of any archive.[17]

Other survivors find the format of conventional testimony *too* controlling. Thus Ruth Kluger said about listeners in general, including interviewers: 'If they did listen, it was in a certain pose, an attitude assumed for this special occasion; it was not as partners in a conversation'.[18] Confronting the protocol of one video-testimony project, Agi Rubin described it as 'a form' for which she provided what she called her 'usual spiel': the 'default' version of her retelling honed over years

[16]Some date that emergence earlier, noting especially the 1961 Eichmann trial in Israel. See Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*.

[17]Waltzer is a close colleague whose superlative work is characterized by many creative and innovative strategies unusual in conventional testimony procedures. Waltzer (in disagreement with me) believes that these diverse ways of engaging survivors are rightfully included under 'testimony' as the umbrella term. As long as the differences between this sort of work and conventional testimony practices are recognized, I have no quarrel.

[18]Ruth Kluger, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (New York: Feminist Press of the City University of New York, 2002), p. 94.

of recounting. By contrast, in the interviews she most valued, unpredictability and discovery mattered most: 'One thought sparks another, and then another, that I may not have even known I had. That is the part that is so gratifying. Whatever I imagine I'm teaching, I'm learning at the same moment. We're learning together'.[19]

Here, then, the difference noted earlier between declaration and exploration ('learning together'). Collaborative engagement may, indeed, include confiding on and off the record (including shifts from one to the other), and almost always evolves through multiple interviews rather than single meetings.[20] Such an approach does not facilitate consistent 'production value' and large archives. But it is also not simply a question of depth versus breadth. In collaborative inquiry, we learn different things than in single testimonies and we learn them in different ways. The fuller significance of specific episodes, survivors' revising earlier explanations of their choices both during and after the war, previously unshared memories, overall message, reflections about their listeners – all of this and more may change profoundly over the course of sustained conversation.

My own work and that of others include many examples of the different yields of different approaches. Here, it must suffice to emphasize that 'learning together' means precisely that – knowledge that neither participant could have predicted beforehand or arrived at alone. Agreement is not presumed. Indeed, it is precisely sustained and attentive engagement that makes *dis*agreement possible, useful, and recognizable as such. While one may be able, in essence, to guess what issues are elided in an archived testimony, that is a world away from what one learns by attempting, in multiple ways and over multiple conversations, to ask about them.

Collaborative approaches are challenging (like all sustained human relationships) and not always practical or desirable. Anthropologists and oral historians have been discussing their advantages and limits for three decades. The relative absence of that discussion within Holocaust studies is, in my view, both noteworthy and unfortunate.

Sara Horowitz: The term 'moral witness' as used to describe survivors floats back and forth between academic and public conversations about the Holocaust, autobiographical accounts, and the contemporary role of survivors. The term implies that memory has an ethical function, not merely an evidentiary or psychological or memorializing one. Its use confers (or confirms) stature on survivors and on the accounts they offer, all of which are understood as serving a function beyond a simple accounting of the past. With a few exceptions, the term is invoked uncritically and without precise definition. But in different contexts, it connotes different things.

The concept (however multifarious) emerges, I think, from two tropes of survivor memoirs: the first, a remembered moment when the victim, unsure of her own future, vows to 'tell the world what happened', should she survive; the second, a fantasy or recollected instance of a post-war moment in which the survivor fulfills that vow, relates the past, but is disregarded or not believed. Out of these two recurring moments in survivor accounts comes the concept of the survivor as moral witness. Moral, because the survivor is fulfilling a moral obligation to the dead, who cannot speak for themselves and whose suffering and murder would be suppressed without the survivor relating it; moral, also because in recounting the brutality deliberately inflicted upon the victims, the survivor is forcing those who refused to become engaged (one thinks of Charlotte

[19]Agi Rubin and Henry Greenspan, *Reflections: Auschwitz, Memory, and a Life Recreated* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2006), p. 170.

[20]This approach and its fruits are most fully discussed in my *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2010). See also the excellent collection edited by Jürgen Matthäus, *Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor: Holocaust Testimony and its Transformations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Delbo's refrain, 'O you who know') and those who come later to contend with something that challenges their comfort in the world.

This genealogy reconfigures the sense of witness from a third-party account from outside Nazi atrocity to a voice speaking from within it. As one who shared the suffering and, in some sense, the death of the victims, the 'moral witness' keeps the human toll in the center of the frame, recalibrating a shared morality that had become inverted by a system that dehumanized and brutalized. Whether implicit or explicit, moral witnessing contains a call to ethics for the listener.

I am sympathetic to thinking about survivor accounts in this way. But I am also wary, and not simply because what comes under the call to ethics can encompass a large and contentious set of things. One of the disturbing paradoxes of attaching to survivors the descriptor 'moral witness' is that it can diminish what I see as the most powerful ethical call of their accounts – a confrontation with radical dehumanization, evil, and suffering that cannot be easily absorbed or explained. Calling survivors 'moral witnesses' eases our discomfort with the Holocaust, and gives us false – and I would say, sentimental or heroic – closure to the individual stories of the past.

Although some analyses of the concept of moral witness insist on the secularity of the term, I think it carries with it traces of religious origins – certainly in the popular discourse, but often in the scholarly one, as well. It invokes both the Christian witness of God's presence through faith and suffering, and the trace of the prophets of the TaNaKh, who do not so much predict the future as lay out the evils of the present and their human consequences (which the prophets also experience). 'Moral witness' implies, then, that survivors have gained wisdom and moral stature from their suffering. This makes their suffering worthwhile, purposeful, and ennobling, rather than random, outrageous, and meaningless. This, in turn, makes the past easier for the rest of us to bear – it gives us, in other words, a survivor we can live with. It is a kind of idealization of the victim and the survivor that allows us to forget that suffering breaks people, that it is not a crucible that purifies one's ethical character.

In a related way, the term 'bearers of testimony' diminishes survivors while seeming to confer upon them elevated statute. Thinking about survivors as 'bearers of testimony' invokes a quasi-religious aura – that is, testimony not in the juridical sense, but the religious one, testifying to God's presence and conferring an easy because uncontested meaning on suffering. It also instrumentalizes survivors and their accounts. I am reminded of the diatribe of Rosa in Cynthia Ozick's eponymous novella, railing against researchers who dehumanize survivors by reducing them to objects of study: '*survivor* … As long as they didn't have to say *human being*'.[21]

Terming survivors 'bearers of testimony' emphasizes what survivors can tell us about the past. But it fixes the past as a snapshot, suggesting that memory, now transmuted into 'testimony', is rigid and unchanging, rather than fluid and dynamic. It discourages us from regarding them as full human beings, who make their own sense of the past but who also live beyond it, who forge relationships, who think about ethics, theology, relations, politics, and human meaning. It is to limit those who were victimized and bereaved by the Shoah to the role of human documents.

Éva Kovács: To become a witness from a societal (not juridical) perspective is not easy. Experiencing violence is paradoxically not enough for a testimony to be considered authentic. On the one hand, society has to recognize the violence as morally unacceptable. We have seen in the past 70 years how controversial it was – for perpetrators, bystanders, eyewitnesses, and their children and grandchildren – to reckon with the past. On the other hand, many survivors also had enormous problems retelling their painful, traumatic experiences because they often

[21]Cynthia Ozick, 'Rosa', in *The Shawl* (New York: Knopf, 1989), p. 36.

had guilt feelings related to family members or friends who did not survive. They sometimes asked themselves how the un-representable should be represented. How can someone testify about the gas chambers if no one survived them?[22] Moreover, with regard to the physical and mental torture (e.g. sterilization) that affected their bodies, survivors could hardly ever speak openly because of shame related to these painful experiences. However, once a survivor gives testimony, we all know the strong and often cathartic emotions he or she can evoke in the audience: 'Yes, I believe it must have happened this way!'[23]

Berel Lang: Assessment of the importance or value of survivor testimony divides sharply in two directions. The first concerns its evidentiary value. That is, in reconstructing the historical record of what *happened*, reconciling individual survivors' testimony with accounts by others (including not only survivors but also perpetrators and bystanders), and with other sources of evidence: documentary and archeological. Here the question of the reliability of eyewitness evidence becomes salient, and a mass of evidence in legal and court cases in diverse cultural contexts points to the fallibility of eyewitness accounts (and so the Russian saying, 'He lies like an eyewitness.'). Events recounted even shortly afterwards differ sharply, not only about incidental details but also on their most significant parts. This does not mean that such accounts should simply be ignored – only the historical reconstruction on the basis of individual testimony, like the use made of any other evidence, has a critical obligation to view individual accounts (testimony) in the light of other types and items of evidence. In this sense, testimony is a *means* of evidence, and in this, no more privileged formally than other means.

The second direction from which testimony can be assessed is in the moral force it conveys – for registering the impact of particular events on the person(s) involved and then also on those who hear or read the details recounted. This mode of understanding is apart from any assessment of historical accuracy; *this*, we recognize, is how the survivor saw or at least now sees what occurred. And the survivor, reporting on his or her direct contact with the events related, brings us into contact, at one remove, with that immediate experience of the event itself. That the experience recounted is personal and thus subjective raises the issues I have already cited about its evidentiary status, but the weight of what has occurred in the life of the person recounting is evident. (This assumes, of course, that the person speaking is not fictionalizing or making up the narrative, as has been found to be the case in some 'testimonies'.)

Why should we regard this indirect contact as having *moral* weight? Because the person speaking conveys to others, from the inside-out, an experience of extreme but also direct reference, demanding an act of the moral imagination for comprehension on the reader's or listener's part. This is a more difficult and severe, yet personal, demand than that which commonplace experience imposes, even if that too, as it often does, has moral implications.

How can moral 'weight' be measured (that is, weighed)? There is no common register or set of scales by which to do this, and estimates of moral weight obviously vary, even if altogether arbitrarily or randomly. The moral weight of taking a life differs in most accounts from the

[22]However, the first Hungarian testimony on the gas chambers, for instance, was published soon after the war but was immediately forgotten. See Miklós Nyiszli, *Dr. Mengele boncolóorvosavoltam* (Nagyvárad/Oradea: Grafica, 1946). The first German translation was published 60 years later [*Ich war Doktor Mengeles Assistant*, Oświęcim 2004]. In analyzing biographical narratives of traumatic experiences, I was often confronted with the paradox that images are in a 'lacunary relation to the truth to which they bear witness'. See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout* (Paris: éd. de Minuit, 2003).

[23]See, for example, the personal memory of Reinhart Koselleck on the Shoah. Reinhart Koselleck, 'Die Diskontinuität der Erinnerung', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 47: 2 (1999), pp. 213–222.

moral weight of lying, and so on. But basic to all such accounts is the fact of the weight itself, first, in the act and then in the re-telling or testimony. It matters primarily to the person immediately affected, but also to those who hear or read the account. To be sure, differences in distance or time matter. The live testimony of a survivor differs in impact from recorded testimony, even when the words spoken are identical. The issue also seems a more general one; the importance of having been oneself part of the event becomes part of the more general question of the proportionate significance of the Holocaust itself, in Jewish history and life but also in cultural history and memory more generally.

Unfortunately the moral importance justifiably associated with survivor testimony and with survivors themselves is often confused with evidentiary or historical importance. One example of the latter confusion is the continuing taboo in Israel about the playing or broadcasting of Wagner's music as offensive to survivors. The implication of this is that once the last survivor has died, that music will be permitted. Even putting aside the question of whether the music is indeed 'offensive' to survivors, the example itself is so clearly arbitrary as to undermine the objection. Consider by comparison the writings of other anti-Semitic figures, including Hitler himself (*Mein Kampf* has been translated into Hebrew), or even more simply the presence and acceptance of Volkswagen cars, so directly and symbolically associated in their origin with the Hitler regime.

Dori Laub: The Nazis' intent during the Holocaust was not only to physically eliminate the Jewish people but also to erase them from history and from memory. The genocidal act itself was also to become nonexistent. All that was to remain of world Jewry was a collection of relics of the 'vanished race', which were to be exhibited in a special museum in the city of Prague. An array of euphemisms – for example, 'cleansing', 'relocation', and 'special treatment' – were used to disguise the true nature of the killings. The Jews of occupied Europe were quite cognizant of this attempt at elimination and did whatever they could to counteract it. They frantically documented what was happening to them and attempted to create archives that would outlast them to serve as evidence of their destruction. French historian Annette Wieviorka writes that those 'writings from beyond the grave were a protest against death, and a refusal of it, through the creation of memories that would outlive them'.[24]

A similar attempt at erasure is also directed at survivors giving their testimonies now. To not engage with their testimonies would be to acquiesce to the German genocidal act. It would entail complicity in the murder of their experience and of their memory. It would carry out the destruction that the Germans failed to complete.

Knowledge of genocide cannot come from documents alone. Names, dates, and numbers do not suffice. We need to absorb the human experience in order to really know what transpired. Without it, our knowledge, both of history and of the present, remains truncated. We have no inner compass to guide us and may not recognize and be alert to history repeating itself. Without such knowledge we forfeit reality itself and become more vulnerable to succumb and fall prey to *defensive* replacements that can be readily found in ideology, fanaticism, cults, hedonic consumerism, and the universe of the virtual.

Moreover there are vast areas of the genocide for which no documents exist. About 600,000 Jews were deported to the death camp Belzec and only two were able to escape. To this day we know very little about what took place there. Hardly any documentation exists of the death marches and of the uprisings in Auschwitz and in Treblinka; almost all that we know about

[24]Wieviorka, *The Era of Witness*, 19.

those events comes from survivor testimony. For the Holocaust to be a real, informative event there has to be the voice of the 'I' who experienced it.

I do not consider survivors to be moral witnesses; rather, for me they are reality monuments. Our engagement with their testimonies is in no way reflective of a fascination with atrocities. Instead, it is a struggle through which we have to go to come to terms with realities that are almost unimaginable.

For survivors, our engagement with their testimonies helps them to alleviate a doubt that they have always had as to whether what they experienced and remembered really happened or was a product of their imagination. One can detect here the effect of the German intent at erasure. Our willingness to listen and our interest serves as a confirmation of their inner reality. Survivors always wanted to speak and be heard, and not only the 'writings from beyond the grave' attest to that. About 20,000 testimonies, mostly in writing, were given between 1945 and 1950. The flood of testimonies dried up, though, once survivors realized that no one was interested in them. When the interest came back, testimonies were given again.

It is possible that in giving testimony survivors can be re-traumatized, especially when listening conditions are not optimal. Remaining silent, however, carries a greater risk than speaking up.

Kenneth Waltzer: I am committed to studying and writing about social experience in Nazi ghettos and camps, and this can be done only through the various recountings by survivors – in memoirs, testimony, and what I shall call additional testimony forms, including interviews, school appearances, public speeches, follow-up phone and email conversations, and stories told to and related by their children. I want to go inside survivors' accounts, in whatever form, and listen to their voices to comprehend more fully what was done, how it was experienced, and how people lived then and live now with the memory and burden of what happened. I have learned in my work that there is indeed a concentrationary universe to be recovered, reconstituted, and explored, and to which survivor testimony provides access better than other sources.

I have also learned that, when possible, survivor testimony must be corroborated with evidence in camp documents (such as the records found in the International Tracing Service Archive) in order to be more precise and accurate. Testimonies themselves must be read in aggregate and comparatively, the researcher seeking a core of commonly remembered reality across multiple recountings. Christopher Browning has shown how testimony-based scholarship can meet the standards of superb history when researchers seek a 'core memory' that emerges from probing a sufficient number of accounts permitting them to be tested against one another.[25] Even then, the historian's intuition that develops from prolonged immersion in the materials is an important ingredient. Remarkably, the combination of testimonies and documents together now enables us to enter the history more deeply, to watch prisoners as they are moved around in that universe, to assess their barrack and work assignments, and to hear their views about experiences and responses, as well as what they think in retrospect.

Finally, I should add that it is all a bit tricky. There are sharp differences among survivors as to how reflective, comprehending, or organized their retellings are, how knowing or savvy their understandings had been at the time, or how egocentric or expansive they are in insisting that their view of things today is the correct and only perspective. There are differences among survivors in how much they know about the broader context and concurrent events decades later. One

[25]Christopher Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2010), pp. 9–10. Even then, Browning writes, there are layers of repressed memory never recovered.

need only examine survivors' home libraries to see the variety of engagement and knowledge represented in these survivor recountings. Memoirs and testimonies both put the 'I' into the story – I did this, I avoided that, I was alone, I was with others, I did this first causing that result after – apparently giving more agency and prescience to individuals under camp conditions than one might initially have thought possible. Those of us who work with survivor testimonies learn to differentiate among those that are helpful and reflective and should be guiding in our work, those that are confirming and reinforcing, validating others, and those that are not helpful or useful at all. As Browning observes, while reading many testimonies one develops a growing sense of which inform most fully and accurately and which do not.

In my work on the rescue of children and youths at Buchenwald, most youths understood that they had been rescued, and some had a fairly sophisticated sense of how rescue inside a concentration camp had been possible and who were the rescuers. Many had photographs, in their dens or on living room walls, of hundreds of youths being led out of Buchenwald after liberation by key members of the underground conspiracy. Others had little clue as to how they had survived to be liberated in April 1945 by General Patton's Third Army. A very few (all of whom were separated from others after liberation) actually insisted that there had been no rescue, no conspiracy, no children's barracks where youths had been clustered and mentored – they had not seen such barracks, so they could not have existed.

Interestingly, Elie Wiesel's *Night*, which he later characterized as 'a deposition' and expression of 'unvarnished truth',[26] is mute on the subject of the rescue of youths at Buchenwald. It mentions a children's barrack where there were hundreds of children and to which Wiesel moved after his father died. It also mentions Gustav, a menacing figure wielding a truncheon. But *Night* was written and translated in France in the 1950s in an existential mode about a boy losing his God, losing his father, and becoming radically alone in the camps. The story of a collective conspiracy inside Buchenwald to rescue hundreds of children and youths did not fit the narrative Wiesel sought to compose, while in other later memoirs he indeed described the rescue of youths in *Kinderblock 66,* where Gustav was the deputy block elder. Wiesel has also personally acknowledged the role of the Czech Communist block elder Antonin Kalina, who in 2012 was declared a Righteous Among the Nations. Wiesel told me that, after Vaclav Havel came to power in a free Czechoslovakia in 1991, he visited Havel in Prague and looked for Kalina, who had been a post-war official, in order to honor him. Sadly, Kalina had died the year before.

Annette Wieviorka: The consequences of the emphasis on eyewitness testimonies in the making of history are considerable. It is making a written history that is, as the French say, 'on a par with man'. It is being able to document aspects of history for which there is no archival material, as in the case of my work in 'Deportation and Genocide'. The main effect of the emphasis of eyewitness testimony in history is that the priority accorded to the anthropological vision erases the political aspect of history. Because the Shoah is not only the accounts of *victims*, *perpetrators,* and *bystanders*, the results of political mechanisms require additional analysis.

[26]Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), pp. 79, 336.

3. In what ways do accounts composed during the war by those who did not survive (e.g. diaries, ghetto chronicles, buried records, and so on) inform, or conceivably mislead, the ways we understand survivor 'testimony'?

Henry Greenspan: Perhaps the most important thing to note about accounts created during the destruction is that they were immersed in a sea of talk. Like the ocean in which one swims, the point is so obvious that it may escape notice. And, of course, there were those who wrote in relative isolation. But, as in any group under siege, what ended up in small and large chronicles, archives, diaries, and other bits of memoir represents a tiny fraction of *spoken* telling and retelling – in the modes of description, rumor, speculation, warning, reflection, grief, terror, or despair.

Different as they are, diaries and the largest ghetto archives – the Chronicle in Lodz and Ringelblum's Oyneg Shabes archive in Warsaw – make constant reference to this talk: 'someone said', 'there is a rumor that', 'a woman claimed', and so on. Again, it could not be otherwise. Especially for Oyneg Shabes, the goal was to collect – and sometimes interpret – as much information as possible about the immediate situation. Ringelblum aimed to be extensive and inclusive, regarding both accounts and artifacts. Among the latter, Samuel Kassow summarizes the contents of one retrieved cache: 'drawings, candy wrappers, tram tickets, ration cards, theater posters, invitations to concerts and lectures'.[27] Among the former, Kassow notes that Ringelblum 'used different words: arbetn, materialn, forschungen, bashraybungen, tezn, monografiyes, evidentz' [works, materials, studies, descriptions, theses, monographs, evidence]'.[28]

As Alexandra Garbarini has described in her work on contemporaneous diaries, the purposes of recording in the midst of the destruction changed over time, place, and circumstance – particularly as the extent and momentum of the destruction became more certain. For collective projects like Ringelblum's, the gathering of materials mainly for internal purposes – community organizing through participation in the project; documentation of Warsaw Jewry's complex political and cultural life; attempts to distinguish fact from rumor – turned toward gathering premised on the death of Warsaw Jewry: materials relevant to anticipated war crimes tribunals and whatever future historians, and the future more generally, might need to know. On the individual level, the devolution of hope followed a similar trajectory – encouraging or at least neutral speculation and observation yielding to questioning, lamentation, and sometimes despairing silence.[29]

Sara Horowitz has suggested that, at least until the last phase, writers from within the destruction generally maintained the faith that, once known, their accounts would be heard and, in essence, understood. Not knowing what 'the world knew' or how the world would respond made that much faith possible.[30] The record is obviously multi-vocal. In 1943 in Majdanek, Isaac Schipper is famously reported to have said that 'everything depends' on who writes the history of the destruction. But even if it was the surviving victims, 'Who will *want* to believe us, because our disaster is the disaster of the entire civilized world … .

[27]Samuel Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), p. 213.
[28]Kassow, personal communication, March 11, 2012. The translation of the Yiddish is mine.
[29]Alexandra Garbarini, *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).
[30]Sara Horowitz, 'Voices from the Killing Ground', in Geoffrey Hartman, (ed.), *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), p. 51.

We'll have the thankless task of proving to a reluctant world that we are Abel, the murdered brother'.[31]

Schipper's reflection reminds us of what Garbarini has emphasized. Different as are their perspectives, knowledge, and fate, those who wrote during the Holocaust engaged the same essential questions that have haunted us since: about precedents and uniqueness, implications for faith in Divinity or humanity, what could and could not ever be conveyed.[32] These writers are best understood as colleagues and, if only in imagination, also partners in a conversation.

Their communal conversations – the myriad forms of pre-war European Jewish life – have mostly disappeared. Of course, remnants of the worlds of talk continued among those who lived on. Whatever wider silence or indifference (a topic of continuing controversy), there was never silence among survivors themselves. In formal and informal gatherings, the early historical commissions and memorial projects, and over the decades since, many survivors describe the compulsion to talk about the war and the life that was – recounting not for posterity, but for themselves.

I believe the video-testimony archives of recent decades ought to be understood against the background of these communal conversations – once so thriving, multi-faceted, and vibrant; then reduced to remnants but still communally situated, wide-ranging, and persistent. In those contexts – and notwithstanding how large, how well organized, and how vital are the testimony archives and many of the survivors represented – we get a glimpse of how little, how dislocated, and how selective is what actually remains.

Éva Kovács: Diaries, ghetto chronicles, buried records, postcards, as well as poems and drawings done by victims are dead and 'sacred' sources. They are dead because they have lost their inner evidence, that is, the current perspective of understanding and self-reflection that all testimonies have. Today, these sources need help from historians: they need re-presentation. They are sacred sources as well because they are the last memories and statements of the victims. Thus, it is not easy to compare them with survivors' testimonies. A survivor may also wonder about his or her diary while reading it 60–70 years later. A comparison between a diary written by a survivor and an interview given a half-century later could be very useful, but also inherently complicated. In general, I believe, both kinds of personal accounts – the last traces of the victims and the current narratives of the survivors – can be understood as different genres of testimonies on the Shoah. I would hesitate to assert that one is more valuable than the other, that the last words of the victims are more powerful evidence than the interviews of survivors.

Berel Lang: An emphasis on 'testimony', with its connotation of a response to questions or to a formal setting of inquiry, tends to diminish the significance of records contemporary to the Holocaust. This is unfortunate, as the latter 'testimony' is arguably of greater importance historically than survivor testimony that has been filtered through memory, especially in cases of testimony recorded long after the fact. So, for one example, the difference between a diary and a memoir is radical (assuming that the diary has not been revised subsequently). As a genre, the immediacy of a diary is lacking in a memoir. A diary also provides points of contact between the present and the past that a memoir, however valuable on other grounds, cannot. This does not mean that regarded as evidence, the contents of a diary or a chronicle (individually or collectively written) cannot be disputed in its judgments; but even then, what subsequent readers know is that the judgments

[31]Cited in Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History?* p. 210.
[32]See Garbarini, *Numbered Days*, especially, pp. 162–167.

were held at the time, in the midst of what was happening. In this sense, it has both moral and historical weight that testimony, given after the fact, cannot have. An enterprise like the *Oyneg Shabbes* archive assembled by Emanuel Ringelblum and his colleagues in the Warsaw Ghetto is of a greater order of importance historically than an individual diary would be, and that importance even adds weight to the latter through the sense of immediacy conveyed. Of course, individual diarists differ intellectually and emotionally as well as in quality of writing, but those differences will be apparent in the diaries themselves.

Dori Laub: Accounts written during the war by Jews who did not survive include the Oyneg Shabbos archive documenting life in the Warsaw Ghetto, collected and assembled by historian Emanuel Ringelblum and his colleagues, as well as Ringelblum's diary*;* the *Chronicles of the Lodz Ghetto from February 1941 to July 1944;* and the book *Am I a Murderer?* by Calel Perechodnik, a member of the Jewish Police in Warsaw. All are examples of what Annette Wieviorka calls, 'writings from beyond the grave'.[33] These accounts fulfill a number of functions. First and foremost, they serve as evidence that what survivors remember really happened. Survivors find comfort in this because of a gnawing doubt that their experiences were real. The found documents anchor survivors' testimony in reality. Even Holocaust historians like Raul Hilberg and Lucy Davidowicz, who did not consider Holocaust testimonies to be reliable historiographic documents due to problems of memory, treated these writings as an invaluable source of information because of their contemporaneous nature. The urgency and the immediacy of these writings indeed projected those voices into the present day, like a cry for help before it was too late. Those voices sound confident that they will be heard, that these documents will be found and read. It is hard to understand from where such confidence came. Most of the authors knew that they would not survive. Could they have envisioned that 70 years later the message they left would be alive and riveting? It is as though the testimonial process, an act of Jewish resistance against the Nazi attempt at erasure, never stopped. It lay dormant for long stretches of time, during which no willing listeners could be found, but promptly awakened when such listeners returned.

In addition to being a historical source, these writings prepared the interviewer to be a better listener to the testimony. For researchers, they serve as the benchmark against which memories related in survivors' testimonies could be examined. I am not aware of such a study, but survivors have commented that their own memories correspond quite closely to what was found in those writings. I have observed a similar correspondence in survivors' repeated testimonies taken 25 years apart. The story that is retold is essentially the same, but no better integrated and contextualized. The take-home lesson is, perhaps, that certain memories are indelible and remain so for life.

Annette Wieviorka: 'Everyone was writing', remarked Emmanuel Ringelblum in the so-called Ringelblum Archive[34] of the Warsaw Ghetto. This diary-writing epidemic is not quite the same as the phenomenon of Viktor Klemperer, an inveterate diarist who kept a journal throughout his life and whose diaries included the period of the Third Reich. His private journals have since become standard sources, especially regarding the time just after the rise of the Nazi regime in 1933, and even more so after 1935. In 1935, Klemperer had been stripped of his academic title because he was Jewish, according to the Nuremberg Laws, and was forced to work in a factory. There, he

[33]Wieviorka, *The Era of Witness*, pp. 5–24.
[34]The 'Ringelblum Archive' contains about 6000 documents (about 30,000 individual pieces of paper), and is kept at the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw.

began to use his diary as a means of venting his personal frustrations and misery. Historians such as Saul Friedländer, Michael Burleigh, and Richard J. Evans have extensively quoted his testimony. His book, *LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii: Notizbuch eines Philologen* (1947), was written in the form of personal notes from his diary and examines the ways that Nazi propaganda distorted the German language to inculcate people with National Socialist ideas.

Historian Emmanuel Ringelblum embarked on his chronicle when the war started and with the intuition that a period hitherto unseen was unfolding in Jewish history. Others shared this inkling and a group lead by Ringelblum established the *Oyneg Shabbos* ('Joy of Shabbat'), an archive dedicated to chronicling life in the Warsaw Ghetto. It included contributions by historians, writers, rabbis, and social workers who worked as a team to collect documents and soliciting testimonies and reports from dozens of volunteers of all ages. The materials submitted included essays, diaries, drawings, posters, and other modes of description of life in the Ghetto. Their work spanned from September 1939 to January 1943, and the portion of the collection that has been found – most was lost – is now referred to as the 'Ringelblum Archive'. In the 1950s, Michel Borwicz was the first person to study these written testimonies, and he explains the loss of materials with the fact that after each deportation, and especially after the violence of the *Großaktion Warschau* (the mass extermination operation of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto),[35]

> the Ghetto pavement was filled with the silence of blood, houses were permeated by the void created by the thousands of people torn from their homes, and German special units 'confiscated' furniture and other items that had been 'abandoned.' Scattered on the pavement were fragments of the looted inventory. Among them were pages covered in writing. Stuffed here and there and thrown into drawers by the Nazis and judged worthless, the papers were doomed to annihilation. This is probably how numerous writings that we know about, including books whose titles and themes were once familiar, disappeared and can no longer be found in any collection.[36]

This is also true for testimonies written in other ghettos and places where Jews felt the urge to write, as in Riga where Simon Dubnow exhorted ghetto inhabitants, '*Yidn, shraybt un farshraybt*' ('Jews, write and record'). His injunction dates from December 1941, when the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units) had already shot hundreds of thousands of Jews in the Baltic countries. This pressing need to testify was born in the awareness of the huge scale of destruction and its radical characteristics. Thus, even if not really formalized, many victims were already engaged in the act of writing. For Borwicz, the large wave of ghetto writings dates from 1942, as does the change in their content. Until then, people believed that Germany would be defeated and that people can still be saved. After large-scale deportations from the ghettos to the death camps, this transmuted into a certainty that the last Jewish survivors would be killed, even if the belief in Nazi defeat remained intact. To testify then became necessary for leaving a trace of the Jews who were being eradicated, so as to prevent their disappearance from 'world memory'. Ignacy Shiper, a historian murdered in Majdanek, would have declared, 'We will have the thankless work of proving to the world that refuses to listen that we are Abel, the brother who was killed'.[37]

People used all types of literary form, including diaries, poetry, and novels. Some of those diaries, as Saul Friedländer shows, stop in the middle of a sentence or a word, indicating the

[35]The Großaktion lasted from July 22 to September 21, 1942, during which time 300,000 Jews of Warsaw were deported to Treblinka and immediately killed.
[36]Michel Borwicz, *Ecrits des condamnés à mort sous l'Occupation allemande (1939–1945): étude sociologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 49. While it is unclear whether the materials of the Oyneg Shabbos archive were actually dispersed on the street or disappeared in some other way, Borwicz's depiction strongly illustrates the sense of loss and destruction of the writings and culture of Polish Jews.
[37]Wieviorka, *l'Ere du témoin*, p. 20.

moment at which the Nazis arrested the author for deportation or took him or her to be murdered. Most of these writings were hidden, mainly buried, like the 'The Scrolls of Auschwitz', eight caches of documents written by members of the *Sonderkommando* and discovered between 1945 and 1980 on the grounds of Crematoria II and III in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Those kinds of testimony – from the very heart of the mechanism of extermination – are generally not read, although 'The Scrolls of Auschwitz', (translated as *Des voix sous la cendre – Voices under the Ashes*) printed on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of the camps, was a bestseller for a short time.[38] Most importantly, they never entered the genre of works like the much-admired *If This Is a Man* by Primo Levi. The most appreciated testimony is that of Anne Frank, widely translated and adapted into films and theater plays. *The Journal of Helene Berr* is also quite successful, though more modest in scope.[39] Writing style plays a role in their success (Anne Frank edited her diary to make it read like a book), but looking beyond matters of style, those texts tend not to be desperate. They were not written in the middle of the annihilation, but rather from the sidelines: the coming-of-age diaries or journals of a young woman, real characters open to life and love, and whose lives are dramatically stopped in their tracks by persecution. The reader is swept up into the narrative of those lives, made more intense by the threat of death. In fact, none of the ghetto writings had as much success as those works, though some have real literary value and, despite what historian Christopher Browning suggests, unrivalled documentary significance.

[38]Georges Bensoussan, *Des voix sous la cendre: manuscrits des Sonderkommandos d'Auschwitz-Birkenau* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2005).
[39]David Bellos, *The journal of Hélène Berr* (New York: Weinstein Books, 2008).

4. How have concepts of trauma helped – and hindered – our understanding of survivors and of their retelling? Is 'trauma' also best viewed as one 'genre' of a wider spectrum of individual and/or collective suffering – or not?

Henry Greenspan: The hyperinflation of 'trauma' has been discussed for a long time. In 1967, Anna Freud worried that, in psychoanalytic theory, the construct had become so 'carelessly used' that the 'blurring of meaning' could lead to 'abandonment and loss of a valuable concept'.[40] In 1978, Henry Krystal, a survivor and pioneer theorist of trauma, said flatly, 'The present psychoanalytic use of the term has become so loose that it has become virtually useless'.[41] Ghislaine Boulanger, whose work builds on Krystal's, writes that the invocation of trauma 'has been stretched so thin … as to have become almost meaningless'.[42]

As is clear, I share these concerns. Invoked with precision, trauma is an enormously important and useful concept. Used as a synonym for all psychological aftereffects, catastrophe, atrocity, and even genocide, we lose track of trauma's particular horror as well as its relationships with other, different agonies. It is equivalent to using 'Auschwitz' as a synonym for Holocaust history as a whole. It works rhetorically, as many examples show, but is severely limited empirically.

What is trauma's particular horror? As Krystal and others emphasize, the core of trauma as experienced is unqualified *helplessness* in the face of imminent annihilation (whether or not accurately perceived). Although he did not use the word 'trauma', Amery's phenomenology of torture turns on the same core: murderous assault, 'against which there can be no resistance' nor any imaginable help.[43] The closest analogy from normal experience is a classic nightmare (not the same as a bad dream), the defining horror of which is not the threat, however monstrous, but rather paralysis in its face – the 'stuck in molasses' feeling; quintessentially, the paralyzed scream.

While we often describe 'waking up screaming' from a nightmare, it is more accurate to say that we scream ourselves awake. Charlotte Delbo screamed herself awake from a Birkenau nightmare in which she experienced herself dying. Elsewhere, she wrote, 'I died in Auschwitz but no one knows it'.[44] Delbo is not using metaphor. As Krystal emphasizes, the terminus of trauma is, in fact, *physical* death. If one somehow survives, one may still have entered into a *dying process*, thus knowing death – again physical death – 'from the inside'. 'Torture overcomes the contradiction of death', Amery wrote.[45] 'Death may invade a creature although life has yet not departed', wrote Wiesel.[46] The biggest mistake we can make is not to take such claims literally, even though that requires revising concepts as foundational as the usual distinction between being alive and being dead.

Trauma is obviously horrific enough. But, thus understood, there are other, different agonies with which it is often associated, particularly in the context of genocide. They include sustained degradation, humiliation, and brutalization, including arbitrary beatings and sexual enslavement. They include loneliness, abandonment, and an all-encompassing homelessness. They include the

[40]Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham, 'Comments on psychic trauma' in *The Writings of Anna Freud, Volume 5* (New York: International Universities Press, 1967), p. 238.
[41]Henry Krystal, 'Trauma and Affects', *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 33 (1978), p. 81.
[42]Ghislaine Boulanger, *Wounded by Reality: Understanding and Treating Adult Onset Trauma* (New York, Psychology Press, 2007), p. 10.
[43]Jean Amery, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1009), pp. 27–29.
[44]Cited in Ernst Van Alphen, *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 167.
[45]Amery, *At the Mind's Limits*, p. 35.
[46]Elie Wiesel, *The Town Beyond the Wall* (New York, Schocken, 1982), p. 91.

helplessness to help others, often oversimplified in popular conceptions of 'survivor guilt'. They include, above all, grief and loss, which most essentially constitute 'survival': still being here, while the others, and the world once shared, are gone.

These agonies and others are not all 'symptoms of trauma' or 'different aspects of the same thing' (unless the 'same thing' is genocide itself). Of course, one can generalize as one chooses. The test, again, is a pragmatic one. My view is that a more precise use of trauma, in conjunction with recognizing (by careful analysis) other relevant kinds of torment, does the most justice to the distinctiveness of each, to the *constellations* of agonies that victims articulate, and to the range and variety of those patterns. Of course, these phenomena are 'related', as all such phenomena are related. But there is no way of engaging the actuality and complexity of that 'relatedness' – and no way of listening attentively to victims–without differentiation first.

No one was more attentive to that complexity and variety than Israeli psychiatrist Shamai Davidson. Davidson's concept of trauma was broader than what I suggest, but he was also more attuned to a vast range of contextual factors that made a difference in understanding how, and whether, trauma itself 'made a difference'. In the end, he concluded that 'one-dimensional concepts of psychopathology and clinical psychiatry' were inadequate. And that 'the only satisfactory approach' to understanding trauma and its multiple meanings and aftermaths would be through detailed 'longitudinal studies' of the lives of individual survivors.[47]

For the most part, such studies never happened and, with Holocaust survivors, never will. I believe we are conceptually much the poorer as a result.

Berel Lang: Trauma as an interpretive element in analyzing Holocaust testimony does not seem to me to be very illuminating, mainly because the distinction between *Holocaust* trauma and its other sources has not been made clear and very likely cannot be. Is there a way of distinguishing the trauma suffered (and then relived) between the victim of an automobile accident who survives and the victim of Nazi atrocity who survives? It is also relevant that traumatic events need not be momentous or horrific in 'ordinary' terms in order to leave their mark. The sexual abuse of a young child by an adult may have as lasting and damaging an effect on the victim as more dramatic or extreme causes in the violence of war. One can reasonably assume the presence of trauma in *all* Holocaust survivors, but unless specific correlations can be shown between such trauma and the survivors' subsequent lives – and testimony – its alleged causal role can have little explanatory power. Even the most obvious questions about behavioral patterns seem indeterminate or at least underdetermined. So, for example, are survivors more or less likely to marry and have children? Are they more or less likely than others of their age group and culture to die by suicide? And so on. This reservation seems to apply to trauma as a general phenomenon (as posed in Question 5) – but thus also, and more specifically, to Holocaust trauma. The study of trauma as such, in establishing connections between types of events and subsequent conduct or experience, remains in such a rudimentary state as to make the concept of *Holocaust* trauma seem gratuitous.

Dori Laub: Experiencing extreme trauma impacts its reception, its recording, its remembrance, and its transmission. Knowing the specifics of such impact provides us with the grammar necessary to understand Holocaust testimony. At its core, traumatic experience is ahistorical. It does away with place and time; it happens in the here and now. Survivors may even speak in the

[47]Shamai Davidson, *Holding on to Humanity-The Message of Holocaust Survivors: The Shamai Davidson Papers*, ed. Israel Charney (New York: New York University Press, 1992), pp. 77–78.

present tense. Accompanying affects are immediate and intense. The survivor may be at loss for words as she feels incapable of reimagining and conveying an experience. The narrative flow may be interrupted and a gap may result. When re-experienced emotions are too intense, the testimony may break into discrete fragments, and the supportive intervention of the interviewer becomes crucial at such moments to help rebalance the narrative so that it can resume its flow. With survivors who were psychiatrically hospitalized in Israel for most of their lives, the interviewer had to be much more present and active in order to facilitate testimony. On their own, survivors were unable to initiate or sustain the narrative flow.

Trauma theory helps to both generate and decode the testimony. It informs the interviewer as to how to listen and respond, and identifies the moments in which what one has endured exceeds the capacity to symbolize or form a transmittable memory. The interviewer can offer his own symbolizing capacity, to provide the words the witness cannot find. *The viewer* becomes herself the witness to this dialogic process and can thereby grasp the full dimension of the experience. She can capture it in the text or in the testimony she views.

It is evident by now that I do not consider spoken testimony to be a monologue – one person telling her story. It is rather the product of a dialogic interaction. The witness/survivor has experienced a real event 'out there' and is under strong internal pressure to transmit it to someone who wants to know it. The interviewer has the willingness to be totally present to the survivor and to receive as well as experience what she wants to transmit. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the interviewer experiences strong countertransference feelings during the testimonial process. Such feelings and enactments are an invaluable source of information about the traumatic experience to which the survivor has testified. These enactments sometimes take the form of sweeping countertransference parapraxes, such as: the analyst not knowing after more than a year and a half of analytic work that her patient's family had the same Holocaust background as her own family; an interviewer not noticing a mother and daughter's differing versions of their witness of the murder of a baby by the camp Commandant, even when both delivered such testimony in one another's presence; and an interviewer misrepresenting a survivor's age when the latter discovers that his father had died in the bunk next to him (describing him as a boy of seven and not 14, his actual age at the time) and the survivor not correcting him.

These are a few examples of the 'memory parapraxes' one encounters in the testimony of trauma survivors and their interlocutors. Trauma theory informs us as to what questions to ask, so as to turn them into rich sources of information.

Kenneth Waltzer: I have found the literature on trauma, especially on the psychological concept of trauma, to be helpful in my work. It has aided me to conceptualize some of the impacts on the youths, it has helped me comprehend some of the complexity of what later testimony is and includes, and it has allowed me to become more knowing about aspects of the youths' post-camp challenges and subsequent lives. By 'trauma', I refer to the fact that many of the experiences that these youths endured in ghettos and camps were dramatic ruptures in previously normal lives. They were uprooted from known worlds and networks of loved ones and were forcibly inducted either alone or with remnants of family into terror-filled, degrading, coercive environments where death coexisted with life. I also understand that many of the experiences were unfinished and left unresolved, and that these made the achievement of integrated lives difficult, sometimes impossible. Wartime experiences remained separated from survivors' new lives, and some were radically repressed. Some were serious burdens – too intense to be forgotten, they nonetheless resisted representation, and could not be retold as parts of the survivors' new lives. There was also often the desire not to tell, lest one hurt others near and dear, or oneself.

Yet it is clear that such stories demanded sharing. When finally survivors turned late to retelling, these events were often exercises in the commitment to exploring truth described earlier, and of great value and interest to the historian. They were also, though, often therapeutic acts with their own dynamics, acts of reasserting control, reestablishing human dignity, and, in the process, reintegrating lives. Telling provides a window into the past, a source of information about what happened. Retelling also consists of a confrontation with the repressed and with pain, representing a return to the dark past, and often serves purposes beyond documentation.

I am acutely aware that many of the survivors with whom I have worked have addressed the impact of the traumatic in their lives. All were torn from their homes, separated from parents and siblings, and made witnesses to widespread death and destruction. They were inducted into the camps and faced daily cruelty, terror, abandonment, hunger, and the risk of obliteration. Nearly all these youths became orphans, without people to go to or places to return to after the war. They faced innumerable challenges – to come to grips with the cyclone that had blown away existence itself, but also to figure out what to do, where to go, who they were, and what the future would be. Professionals who encountered these youths in group homes and collective settings to which they were taken first had to overcome impressions that they were '*enfants terrible*', defiantly claiming the world pay them compensation, and refusing to bow to any authority. But soon after, they were overwhelmingly struck by the youths' deep depression and widespread affective anomie. It was not clear that caregivers could connect with or help them or that they wanted help. Yet, in time, those who worked with them in the subsequent stages of their early return to life were struck by the youths' steady but recognizable resumption of human form and the return of human emotions and affections. The friendships among some boys, the portrait photos they had taken and traded among themselves, signing their names on the backs and asking to be remembered, all spoke to the continued force trauma had and would have for them.

Very few then could address their experiences coherently, although some tried in short essays and stories at the time; others drew pictures that were often quite telling.[48] They did these to help others understand who whey were and what they had gone through, as well as to make it real for themselves. Then, however, after a few short months or a few years, they were gone, sent away from these temporary group havens to distant locations and lives in new languages and settings. In the course of creating new lives in new places all over the globe, they were usually too preoccupied to address the past or too concerned about the negative impact that doing so would have on their new families, especially their children. The past continued to recur in upsetting ways, including nightmares, sleeplessness, screams, sweats, and occasional phobias. The past was never absent. A survivor could sit at a railroad crossing with signals warning of oncoming trains and suddenly find himself back again in the concentrationary universe. The furtive glances potential in-laws gave as they considered the youths as prospective mates for their daughters. The numbers on their arms, which they joked were phone numbers of girls they had befriended while in France or Switzerland after the war. The cumulative deficits in education and experience during these years that made it harder to start again and to succeed, or to trust or rely on others, or which pushed them along occupational paths hearkening back to work they did in the Nazi ghettos and camps. What an enormously complex accounting is involved here, one that I am only beginning to comprehend.

Only years later, as they aged – with retirement, the maturity of the third generation seeking answers the second generation lacked, sometimes with health difficulties, and accompanying the

[48]See Nicholas Stargardt, 'Drawing the Holocaust in 1945', *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 11:2 (2005), pp. 25–37; see also *Witnesses of War: Children's Lives under the Nazis* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

general influence of a global social movement of memory among the survivors, all contributing to stir remarkable new institutions of memory and memory projects everywhere – did these 'youths' begin to speak, to open up, and to retell their experiences. They did it for multiple reasons: to combat Holocaust denial, to confront their own demons, to honor those who did not survive, and to make their stories and the wider history known. Some confronted their traumatic experiences for personal and therapeutic reasons, often to make peace with absent fathers whom they still dreamed of impressing or whom they worried they had failed or abandoned, while others sought to educate, bear witness, and tell the story for the others. Most did a combination of these things, making such testimonies complex indeed. It is for historians who believe in the power and promise of testimony to sort these things out – the varied therapeutic, memorializing, documentary, and other strands – while carefully using and evaluating testimony critically to go where only the survivors and their words and voices can lead us.

Annette Wieviorka: If testimonies are a delicate matter for historians' work, the 'trauma' inherent in the event related is that much harder. Testimony is sometimes seen as a way to liberate oneself from trauma, as in the collection of testimonies at Yale University's Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, on which I collaborated. I personally do not deal with the issue of testimony as a catharsis, but am nonetheless interested in the concept.

I am not really in the position to discuss the question of liberation from trauma through testimony, but it seems to me that witnesses are affected by the fact of testifying in a trial. In the documentary film 'Memory of the Eichmann Trial' (made in 1979 and recently rediscovered), David Perlov filmed Rivka Yosselevska as she listened to her own testimony at the Eichmann trial. One can see an unfathomable sadness on her face. How did she cope with her story becoming public? Israel is a small country, a village. Everyone knows her story and she can probably see this knowledge in the gazes from the audience. But, she tells Perlov, a lot of people have a story similar to hers. After Papon's trial, I also wondered what happened to Esther Fogiel, the main witness, after she reported the violence that she suffered as a child. Those testimonies during the trial were neither anonymous nor closed, as the testimony about medical experimentations at the Eichmann trial had been. In fact, not only were they public, but the media also amplified them. Those public testimonies certainly modify relationships, in particular between parents and their children, but we know nothing about these modifications. What we do know, for example, is that Rivka Yosselevska came to testify at the Eichmann trial despite a heart attack caused by the moral obligation she felt to talk about the dead of her city and specifically those members of her family, whom she lists one by one. The prosecutor, apparently to console her, concludes the testimony by saying, 'You live in Israel, you are married and have two children', as if the State of Israel, her marriage, and her children allow for a rebirth and for her redemption. Nowadays, our knowledge of trauma and its generational transmission demonstrates the naiveté of this statement.

A lot of people yearned to talk as soon as they were liberated from the camps. As Primo Levi noted, 'To be interviewed was a unique and memorable opportunity: the event we had been waiting for since the day of our liberation and which made sense of things'. Because, as Henri Borlant writes in his book *Merci d'avoir survécu* (Grateful to have Survived), 'In every deportee is a humiliated person'.[49] When the deportee knows that he or she is, if not understood, at least being heard, then his or her testimony returns to them a dignity in the very part of an identity that was humiliated.

[49]Henri Borlant, *Merci d'avoir survécu: récit* (Paris: le Seuil, 2011).

5. How do you assess the impact of these concepts in contemporary discourse concerning survivors of catastrophe in general? Have these concepts illuminated, distorted, or some more complex combination our understanding of the current historical and cultural moment?

Henry Greenspan: Testimony emerges from a sea of talk as one particular genre of recounting, structured by conventions and expectations. As noted, testimony selects in and selects out content, participants, and the way survivors and interlocutors engage each other. 'This I believe' or 'This I witnessed' obviously has different implications than 'Let us see what we can learn, or do, together'.

Trauma emerges from a sea of pain, especially in the context of mass violence (although the violence may be individual, as are most rapes and other assaults). I have argued that trauma is also most usefully understood as one specific agony, neither foundational nor all-inclusive. In that sense, it is also selective. 'I died within the terror' is not the same as 'from a family of fifty, I am the only one left alive'. Survivors often retell both and more.

While different commentators differently chronicle the emergence of testimony and trauma in cultural discourse, many agree that the late 1970s and early 1980s was a pivotal time. It coincided with the 'narrative turn' more generally in the humanities and social sciences, and with the establishment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a psychiatric diagnosis. Of course, one can, and many have, looked backward and seen testimony and trauma much earlier. The point here is the emergence of the two terms in discourse widely adopted in academic and popular commentary. Today, news articles about PTSD appear daily (on the day I am writing, there were three such articles in the *New York Times* alone).

I believe that the cultural centrality that testimony and trauma have achieved reflects a wider sense of helplessness in the face of seemingly capricious social and political forces. 'These days anything can happen', and one hopes 'to survive'. Similarly, I believe the preoccupation with testimony reflects a wider sense that personal experience is usually unrecognized and unheard – a more pervasive loneliness. While helplessness and aloneness are, indeed, characteristic of extremity, I am suggesting that the preoccupation with trauma and testimony refracts (and reduces) more pervasive societal trends. On one side, those who provide and consume 'trauma and testimony' find authentic affinities between the dislocations – and injustices – of their own lives within the imagery and actuality of extremity. On the other, the tendency to view so much of life *as* extremity distracts us from contexts in which protest and resistance remain possible. Years ago, Christopher Lasch described our preoccupation with 'survivors' and 'survival' as one expression of 'an age of diminishing expectations'.[50] Survival becomes our goal when we no longer believe in the possibility of doing more – perhaps of doing anything – that could change our fate.

Discourse of testimony and trauma and the invocation of extremity can thus both inform and distract. As Michael Rothberg has described, W.E.B. DuBois found in the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto new insight into the history that preoccupied *him* – the 'color line' and the viciousness

[50]See both Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1979) and *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (New York: Norton, 1984). In *Minimal Self*, Lasch specifically reflects on the emergence of interest in the Holocaust and the figure of 'the survivor'.

and destructiveness that helped sustain it. He did not become a 'survivalist' or develop an interest in the traumatic.[51]

Overgeneralizing testimony and trauma selects and distracts in a range of other ways. Trauma specifically connotes an experience of *survivors* – those who *live on* and try to witness, to heal, or to forget. When used as the overarching term for mass violence, even for genocide, it has the effect, certainly unintended, of making the dead people go away. That is natural. If we are not survivors, few of us have direct memory of the lost. But the 'traumatized survivor' is immediately before us.

As I have suggested, framing all retelling as 'testimony' is similarly selective. Indeed, I have argued that gathering testimony – as formalized in conventional practice – represents a *minimalist* way of engaging survivors: what one does when one does not (or survivors do not) have the inclination, possibility, or interest in doing more. There is, indeed, always much more potentially to do. In highly politicized, 'post conflict' circumstances – as in South Africa, Rwanda, or Indonesia – it is often what people say 'off the record' and only after sustained acquaintance that provides a more authentic (in their own view) representation of their experiences and perceptions. Public testimony often serves other interests, including a way of *not* saying certain things. Outside of politics, I have described how differently survivors may retell, interpret, and situate their memories when recounting evolves within sustained acquaintance rather than within a single video-testimony. Stacey Zembrzycki, Anna Sheftel, Caroline Ellis, Jürgen Matthäus, and a number of others have made similar observations.[52]

Nevertheless, the notion that 'indelible' traumatic memories yield essentially unchanging testimonies does not easily give ground. It has become a regular part of the stories we tell, and retell, about survivors. Perhaps finding this much that is immutable within the chaos of atrocity is part of our own way of 'surviving'.

Sara Horowitz: Ideas about intense suffering and loss, and terms such as 'survivors', 'trauma', and 'testimony', have influenced a broader discourse about victimization and its implications. Developed in the context of the Shoah, these concepts have shaped and inflected discussions in other contexts, from the deeply personal (such as childhood abuse and sexual assault) to the collective, political, and historical. And ideas flow from other contexts into discussions about the Shoah. At best, shared conversations bring the kind of careful and inspired cross-fertilization that deepens our understanding of a range of phenomenon, and of the complexity of the human experience even – or especially – in extremis. One notable example of this is sharing research by scholars of Holocaust studies and African studies under the aegis of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The conversation about survival and trauma inevitably picks up concepts from contemporary culture constructs of suffering and victimization. Some of these – tropes, gestures, modes, cultural patterns – have come to influence the popular and even the scholarly discourse about the Holocaust and those who experienced it, imposing an invisible layer of interpretation on lived and remembered experience. For example, in the therapeutic mode: the word trauma, drawn from psychoanalysis, helps to understand the depth and complexity of the internal experiences of survivors. In the popular discourse, however, it suggests that one can be – should be – 'cured' of memory and made whole again.

[51]Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in an Age of Decolonization* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 111–134.

[52]All the issues raised in this paragraph are discussed in Steven High, ed., *Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, due February 2015).

I just described this popularized trope as emerging from the therapeutic mode, but it is actually an unacknowledged marriage between cultural ideas about therapy and the Christian trope of forgiveness. The contemporary popular discourse in Western culture about forgiveness reflects Christian ideas of forgiveness as a sacred and life-changing act, modeled on divine grace. Popular psychology draws on this, transforming it into a secular-sacred imperative. To 'move on' from some damaging or traumatic event, one needs to 'forgive' those responsible. If not, you remain stuck in your anger, in your trauma, in your wounding. You cannot forgive others until you forgive yourself; you cannot forgive yourself until you forgive others.

But is that necessarily so? Is it not possible to 'move on' without forgiving – or to both 'move on' (in the sense of building a fruitful life) and also not 'move on' (in the sense of bearing the repercussions of one's past, or calling evil by name)?

This amalgamated trope of forgiveness and healing strikes me as displaced when projected onto Holocaust survivors and their narratives. It is not simply the irony of imposing a Christian rubric onto the life-story arc of victims of a genocide that targeted Jews as Jews. (And I do not want to suggest in any way the false opposition of the 'vengeful' Old Testament God to the 'merciful' New Testament one. The concepts of forgiveness and mercy, both human and divine, are not exclusive to Christianity, of course, but they have different dynamics in Judaism.) Appealing to the psychological and the spiritual, it suggests an ethics of response that places the burden of a 'proper' response on survivors, while leaving our own interpretive structures unchallenged by the radical events of the Holocaust.

Even in post-genocide or post-oppression cultures built on the model of reconciliation, the popularized trope of forgiveness and healing can obscure the actual difficulties of forging a shared culture of former perpetrators and victims, or former enemies and opponents. When we listen closely, the complexity of people's lives and, even more so, of their inner lives overwhelm the structures imposed upon them, and open our eyes to the human experience.

Éva Kovács: For me, the psychological concept of trauma was eminently important in understanding the life histories of survivors and in the analysis of their narrative identity. The first handbook on multigenerational effects of trauma in various victim and survivor groups suggests that multigenerational transmission of trauma became an integral part of the history of the twentieth century.[53] Since the 1980s, many theoretical works and case studies suggest that trauma persists through generations, and it works as an unconscious organizing principle passed on by the first generation of survivors and internalized by their descendants.

Still, I am not quite sure how to think about 'cultural trauma'. This sociological term became popular among research projects dealing with the Holocaust in the past decade.[54] Even though several authors warned that the use of biological and pathological terminology developed to deal with the individual psyche is not appropriate to describe (the imagined) communities of several millions, this did not hinder the spread of the term, nor did it prevent it from becoming a cliché.

In historical analysis, the metaphor of trauma compresses painful individual experiences that cannot be or are not dealt with, and which then have a significant and measurable impact on

[53]See Yael Danieli ed., *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma* (New York/London: Plenum Press, 1998).

[54]See, for example, Piotr Sztompka, 'Cultural Trauma: The Other Face of Social Change', *European Journal of Social Theory* 3 (2000), pp. 449–466; Jeffrey C. Alexander, et al., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

action. Let me give a Hungarian example. A current historical debate in my country focuses on the comparison of three national traumas of the twentieth century: Trianon, the Holocaust, and the communist dictatorship.[55] I shall only discuss the functioning of the Trianon 'trauma' because the other two are well known in eastern European literature. The historical metaphor of Trianon (the peace treaty of 1920 and the collapse of the Hungarian Kingdom) revolved around the experience of unclaimed loss and defeat. The speaker can evade naming the concrete object of loss by employing this kind of metaphorical speech. Almost anything can be meant, ranging from territory, population through the power status of the country, to economic and social resources. Emotional, at times violent, and incendiary rhetoric can be found in the 'scholarly' studies on the topic: the country has been 'amputated', its territory 'stolen', its inhabitants 'kidnapped'. As we observe in the Hungarian politics of memory, the constant discursive and performative recall of Trianon as a cultural trauma of Hungary (which has recently been made obligatory in schools on the day of the Trianon commemoration) is, to use the language of psychology, nothing but 'neurotic repetition' of the propaganda patterns of the interwar period instead of reckoning with the past.

Berel Lang: As with many other terms related to the Holocaust, the meaning of the word 'survivor' itself is contestable. If it applies at all, it would obviously hold for anyone held in a concentration or death camp once the so-called Final Solution had been set in motion. But then there are so many other settings in which the term might or might not be (and have been) applied. Is a hidden child, sustained by non-Jewish rescuers for the duration of the war, a survivor? Is someone who fought and survived as a partisan a survivor? Are Jews who succeeded in fleeing beyond the reach of the Nazis, giving up homes, professions, and remaining family members survivors? The concept of testimony may well be more useful here than that of 'survivor' just because the narratives of all of these very different histories could count as testimony quite apart from the question of whether the speakers should be regarded as survivors.

The most pressing formulation of Question 5, then, is how important testimony is in any of the senses discussed. My view about this will be apparent in my responses to the earlier questions. In relation to the crucial – the most basic – question of determining *what happened* during the Holocaust, testimony serves as one source among others and is not necessarily or always as determinant or decisive. The question, which at one time was a matter of debate, as to how many crematoria there were at Auschwitz cannot, because it need not, be settled by individual testimony – just as the question of how many Jews were murdered at Auschwitz (something that individual testimony would rarely even attempt to answer) can only be answered, so far as it can be at all, by external (documentary) evidence. I have argued for the moral significance of testimony although even in that respect certain limitations have to be recognized. Instances of Holocaust testimony, given by survivors and recorded and held in archives and museums around the world, number by now in the hundreds of thousands. There is a serious question of who will listen to, let alone analyze, these testimonies and whether they will have an audience at all or will remain, more simply, as a distinctive form of memorial. It seems impossible to predict what the future of

[55]On the current debate, see Éva Kovács, 'Jeder Nachkrieg ist ein Vorkrieg. Trianon traumatikus emlékezetéről', *Életés Irodalom*, 44:39 (October 1, 2010), http://www.es.hu/?view=doc;26907 [Translation from the Hungarian (Translator: Ferenc Laczó): 'Jeder Nachkrieg ist ein Vorkrieg. On the Traumatic Memory of Trianon', *Forum Geschichtskulturen*, Hungary, May 20, 2011, http://www.imre-kertesz-kolleg.uni-jena.de/index.php?id=517&l=1] On the evolution of the 'cultural trauma', see Éva Kovács, '"Trianonisierung." Vom Diskurs über die Staatsgrenze zum Diskurs über Trianon', in Amália Kerekes, Béla Rásky, et al. (eds), *Leitha und Lethe. Symbolische Räume und Zeiten in der Kultur Österreich-Ungarns* (Tübingen/Basel: A Francke, 2004): 241–262.

these testimonies will be, but then there is also a question of how the collective memory of the Holocaust as a whole will endure or what shape that memory will have.

Dori Laub: The concepts of testimony, bearing witness, trauma, and trauma narrative – its transmission and its reception – have created a meaningful vocabulary that captures the event and the experience of social catastrophe. We have become aware of the processes involved in knowing, presenting, and relating extreme social traumatization and have come to know that the rational does not prevail and that the irrational usually has the upper hand. We are acquainted with the psychological mechanisms used to shape the representation of the extremely traumatic experience of social catastrophe. If we use self-discipline and rigor while observing these phenomena, we become capable of discerning markers of the mechanisms being employed. By reversing them, we come closer to the truth of the event and the experience.

Contemporary society's discourse concerning survivors of catastrophe has, therefore, potentially gained a great deal from having a vocabulary capable of incorporating it. The same holds true for society's grasp of the current historical cultural moment. We know when denial, erasure, rationalization, reaction formation, and parapraxes are at work and, therefore, we have the option to neutralize their effects.

All this holds true if we actively and persistently make use of what we have learned and what we know. We must pay attention to our own countertransference responses when coming face-to-face with massive psychic trauma. These responses are not to know, to deny, and to feel helpless. It is in this light that we can understand the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, when a person was murdered every 10 seconds (a rate more rapid than in the Holocaust). The Western nations had ample resources, in Rwanda and on different continents, to put an end this carnage very early on. Yet despite the real-time, detailed information, nothing was done.

Annette Wieviorka: The memory of the Shoah – the Holocaust, as it is termed in the USA – is a kind of success story such that we can almost forget that it was built on the deaths of millions of men, women, and children, along with the near-extinction of Jewish civilization in Eastern Europe. From comics to novels, from history to fiction, the works that take it as a main theme are innumerable. The social sciences and humanities have been enriched by the results of wide-ranging and in-depth research. Paradoxically, the Holocaust, which is often defined as a unique phenomenon, has become the frame of reference for all past, present, and future tragedies. It provided juridical characteristics (crimes against humanity, genocide), historical analyses, and the obligation of memory. For example, in France at the recent twentieth anniversary commemoration of the genocide perpetrated against Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda, the emphasis was placed on testimonies and not on the political situation. People say that the suffering of survivors and families must not be forgotten, that one has to be empathetic toward them. But what end will this empathy serve in the making of our history?

Notes on Contributors

Henry (Hank) Greenspan is a psychologist and playwright at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, who has been interviewing, teaching, and writing about Holocaust survivors for forty years. He is the author of *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony*, now in its second and expanded edition; and, with Agi Rubin, *Reflections: Auschwitz, Memory, and a Life Recreated*. In 2012, he was the Fulbright Visiting Research Chair at the Centre for Oral History at Concordia University in Montreal, where he had been a consultant for many years with a large project on refugees from genocide and other forms of political violence. Email: hgreensp@umich.edu

Sara R. Horowitz (MA, Ph.D.) is Acting Director of the Israel and Golda Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Studies and Professor in the Department of Humanities at York University in Toronto, and former President of the Association for Jewish Studies. She is the author of *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction*, which received the Choice Award for Outstanding Academic Book, and served as the senior editor of the Azrieli Series of Holocaust Memoirs – Canada (Series 1 and 2). She is the editor of *Lessons and Legacies of the Holocaust Volume X: Back to the Sources* (2012), and co-editor (together with Amira Dan and Julia Creet) of the forthcoming *Hans Günther Adler: Life, Literature, Legacy* (forthcoming, Northwestern University Press), of *Encounter with Appelfeld,* and of *Jewish American Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical and Critical Sourcebook* which was awarded the Association of Jewish Libraries Award for the Outstanding Judaica Reference Book. In addition, she is founding co-editor of the journal *KEREM: A Journal of Creative Explorations in Judaism*. She served as the editor for *Literature for The Cambridge Dictionary of Judaism and Jewish Culture* (ed. Judith Baskin). She publishes extensively on contemporary Holocaust literature, women survivors, and Jewish North American fiction, and writes a monthly column for the Canadian Jewish News. She sits on the Academic Advisory Committee of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. Currently, she is completing a book called *Gender, Genocide, and Jewish Memory*, for which she received a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Email: srh@yorku.ca

Éva Kovács, Univ.-Doz. Dr, sociologist. Born 1964, studied sociology and economics at the Universities of Economics in Pécs and Budapest, Ph.D. 1994, Habilitation 2009. Éva Kovács Research Program Director at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) and Head of Department of Methodology and History of Sociology in the Institute of Sociology at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Her research fields are the history of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, research on memory and remembrance, Jewish identity in Hungary and Slovakia. She authored five monographs, edited eight volumes and published numerous articles in peer-reviewed journals. She co-founded the audiovisual archive *Voices of the Twentieth Century*. Email: Eva.kovacs@vwi.ac.at

Since 2005, **Berel Lang** has been Visiting Professor of Philosophy and Letters at Wesleyan University. He was previously Professor of Philosophy at the University of Colorado and the State University of New York at Albany (and Director of the Center for the Humanities). Dr Lang received his B.A. from Yale University in 1954, and his Ph.D. in philosophy from Columbia University in 1961. Dr Lang has received fellowships from the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Endowment for the Humanities, American Philosophical Association, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the Hebrew University. He is the author of many books, including *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), *The Anatomy of Philosophical Style* (Basil Blackwell, 1990), *Holocaust Representation: Art within the Limits of History and Ethics* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) and *Philosophical Witnessing: The Holocaust as Presence* (University Press of New England, 2009). Email: Blang01@wesleyan.edu

Dr. Dori Laub was born in Cernauti, Romania on 8 June 1937. He is currently a practicing psychoanalyst in New Haven, Connecticut, who works primarily with victims of massive psychic trauma and with their children. He is a Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the Yale University School of Medicine and Co-Founder of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies. He obtained his M.D. at the Hadassah Medical School at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel and his M.A. in Clinical Psychology at Bar Ilan University in Ramat Gan, Israel. He was Acting Director of the Genocide Studies Program at Yale for the year 2000 and again in 2003. Since 2001, he is also Deputy Director for Trauma Studies. Dr Laub has published on the topic of psychic trauma, its knowing and representation in a variety of psychoanalytic journals and has co-authored a book entitled *Testimony-Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* with Professor Shoshana Felman. Email: Laub37@hotmail.com

Kenneth Waltzer is Professor of History at James Madison College and Michigan State University, where he is also the director of the Jewish Studies Program. He is completing a book on The Rescue of Children and Youths at Buchenwald, and served as historical consultant in the making of the feature documentary film, *Kinderblock 66: Return to Buchenwald*. As a result of his work, Yad Vashem has honored two rescuers – Fyodor Michealitschenko and Antonin Kalina – and a Holocaust memoir fraud, *Angel at the Fence*, has been stopped from publication. Email: waltzer@msu.edu

Annette Wieviorka Annette Wieviorka is the Emeritus Research Director at CNRS. She has published numerous books on the memory of the genocide of the Jews and the history of communism, particularly *Déportation et génocide* (1992), *L'Ere du témoin / The Era of the Witness* (1997/2006), *A l'intérieur du camp de Drancy* (with Michel Laffitte) (2011), and *Maurice et Jeannette. Biographie du couple Thorez* (2010). She has recently completed a book of interviews with Séverine Nikel: *L'heure d'exactitude. Mémoire, histoire, Témoignages* (2011). Email: annette.wieviorka@wanadoo.fr