Witnessing Witnessing

On the Reception of Holocaust Survivor Testimony

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I am inclined to think that no one undertakes the study of trauma unless compelled to do so for personal reasons. At least, I find this a much more plausible motive than mere career advancement, despite the memory of a well-meaning scholar who once remarked to me that I had selected "a good topic." But really, why would you choose to spend years of your life listening and reading and thinking and talking and writing about something so emotionally and psychologically difficult, so fraught with social, political, and moral conflict, so draining and dispiriting to live with—unless you could not do otherwise?

My own apprenticeship in listening to survivors of trauma began more than twenty years ago, when I was suddenly summoned to an ambulance and found, so badly beaten she was unrecognizable, my wife, Susan Brison. Only later did I learn that she had been sexually assaulted and left for dead at the bottom of a ravine. In the ambulance, there was not much Susan could say, since her trachea had been fractured when the assaillant had tried to strangle her and she was now breathing through an oxygen mask. Still, she managed to whisper "I'll be okay," offering a reprieve to my pounding heart and the glimmer of a hope that she might not die. Besides, you can also listen to a gaze or the squeeze of a hand.

During the many hours and days, the weeks and months and years that followed, my education inevitably expanded to include listening to Susan's other listeners: medical personnel, police officers, lawyers, crisis counselors, couples therapists, family members, friends and acquaintances, colleagues, a judge and jury; people of different races and nationalities, of both sexes and all ages. At the same time, I learned that I could not study or write about
trauma, even of my own, vicarious variety, while still in the thick of its aftermath, which may feel worse than a nightmare because you cannot dispel it by waking up and there's no telling in advance how long you'll remain in its grip. What's more, since trauma is intrinsically silencing and Susan's assault was so clearly gender based, even as time passed I was not about to preempt her by telling the story in public before she herself had had the chance to do so.

Only in recent years, well after the publication of her book, Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self, have I begun to find a voice of my own in which to narrate what happened to her and to me and to us. But in the meantime, I still had a profession, which I could not afford to abandon but which I knew could only be salvaged in my own eyes if I managed somehow to wed it to the experience that otherwise made it seem, like so much else, insufferably trivial. Well, you cannot study and teach twentieth-century French or European literature and philosophy without being at least marginally aware of the Holocaust, and if you start reading about trauma, sooner or later the Holocaust will move from the margins to the middle. For me, there was no turning back after reading the testimony of Charlotte Delbo, even if this suggested a certain lack of professional wisdom on my part, confirmed since then by the fact that the book you hold in your hands required what was surely one of the lengthiest gestations in the annals of academic publishing.

Comparisons of the Holocaust with other traumas tend to raise objections, especially where important differences between them are elided, along with the very difference between comparing and equating. So I feel bound to assure you, while expressing my distaste for anything like competition in suffering, that I am well aware of the differences between the Holocaust and the horror inflicted on Susan.

Nevertheless, it is in all the listening mentioned just a moment ago that I now find the seeds of this volume, which I dedicate to Susan and to our son, Gabriel, who brought us new life.

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I have also benefited in the most tangible ways from exchanges with colleagues at other institutions, including Micke Bal, Karyn Ball, Omer Bartov,
ABBREVIATIONS


I have at times modified published translations when a different wording would better reflect features of the original text that are relevant for my discussion.
Introduction

As the last Holocaust survivors age and pass away, the awareness that all living memory of the events themselves will soon be extinguished has fostered in regard to survivor testimony what one could call an anxiety of historical transmission. This anxiety accounts in large part for the accelerated production of testimony in the past two or three decades, most notably through the establishment of extensive video archives but also through the publication of written memoirs. It doubtless helps to explain as well the republication or translation of many important texts. Yet transmission has as much to do with reception as with production, and anxiety is a feeling that pertains to the uncertainty of the future—in this instance, a future in which the fate of Holocaust survivor testimony will depend entirely on its reception by those who “were not there.” It is thus no accident that, during these same decades, the wealth of testimony made available to the reading or viewing public has been matched if not exceeded by a proliferation of articles and books, as well as educational initiatives extending from elementary
One of the more noteworthy contributions to our understanding of the reception of Holocaust survivor testimony has been made by Dori Laub, a psychiatrist and cofounder of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. In two influential essays, “Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening” and “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival,” Laub, who is also a survivor and has served as an interviewer for the Archive, draws attention to the relational nature of testimony by insisting that the listener, as witness to the witness, plays a crucial role in the elaboration of testimonial narrative. Specifically, he makes it clear that listeners enable witnesses to listen to themselves and hence to become survivors in more than the biological sense of the term by speaking of themselves as formerly silenced victims, to create for themselves a present and a future through the distancing act of narrating their past. At the same time, Laub points out that the ability of listeners to play this role depends to some extent on whether they, too, can listen to themselves. That is, even as they focus on what witnesses say (or do not say) and on how it is said (or not), listeners should be alert to the character as well as to the possible causes and effects of their own responses. They must bear witness at once to witnesses and to themselves. Finally, Laub’s work suggests that the reception of Holocaust survivor testimony requires not only attending to the voices of witnesses while remaining aware of one’s own but also attending, with equal self-awareness, to the voices of other listeners. Witnessing witnessing assumes a community of respondents no less than of testifying survivors.2

Of course, not everyone has the opportunity to listen in person to Holocaust survivors, much less to record interviews with them and thus to collaborate in both the production and the reception of testimony. But none of what I have just conveyed from Laub’s work loses any of its pertinence when transposed to the reception of testimony already recorded in one form or another: whether survivors’ voices continue to be heard will still depend on whether we enable their testimony to speak, and this in turn will still depend in some measure on how well we listen to ourselves and to other listeners. To be convinced of this, one need look no further than Laub’s own account, in “Bearing Witness,” of the videotaped testimony of an Auschwitz survivor and of the debate provoked by its viewing at an interdisciplinary conference on education and the Holocaust. This portion of his essay has become familiar to many for its anecdotal illustration of an interpretive conflict between history and psychoanalysis. Yet the very succinctness and simplicity that lend it the aura of a fable may also have discouraged any sustained consideration of Laub’s account as a case study in the impairment of listening, not only to other listeners but to oneself and to survivors.3 If I propose such a consideration here, it is certainly in part because, just as psychoanalysis has always learned more from pathology than from health, so perhaps shortcomings in the reception of Holocaust survivor testimony will prove more instructive than successes. But it is also because only close examination of Laub’s text and of the videotaped testimony to which it refers can afford an idea of the extent to which and the ways in which the reception of testimony is a question of framing. The analysis that follows will therefore focus primarily on frames of reception, in the expectation that studying a single but noteworthy instance of witnessing witnessing will warrant, in the last section of the chapter, certain general inferences in the name of a reception at once more attentive and more inclusive.
I turn, then, to "Bearing Witness," where the author recounts how "a woman in her late sixties was narrating her Auschwitz experience to interviewers from the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale." Laub notes that the woman was "slight, self-effacing, almost talking in whispers, mostly to herself. Her presence was indeed barely noteworthy in spite of the overwhelming magnitude of the catastrophe she was addressing. She tread lightly, leaving hardly a trace" (BW, 59). This only heightens, by contrast, the subsequent drama of Laub’s account:

She was relating her memories as an eyewitness of the Auschwitz uprising; a sudden intensity, passion and color were infused into the narrative. She was fully there. "All of a sudden," she said, "we saw four chimneys going up in flames, exploding. The flames shot into the sky, people were running. It was unbelievable." There was a silence in the room, a fixed silence against which the woman’s words reverberated loudly, as though carrying along an echo of the jubilant sounds exploding from behind barbed wires, a stampede of people breaking loose, screams, shots, battle cries, explosions,” emphasizing that “a dazzling, brilliant moment from the past swept through the frozen stillness of the muted, grave-like landscape with dashing meteoric speed, exploding it into a shower of sights and sounds.” At first glance, of course, the transition from quoting to commenting may appear so smooth as to suggest that this passage merely prolongs the “reverberation” of the woman’s words. But if the phrase “as though” does not already send a sufficient signal, then the rather inflated and overly insistent prose it introduces should certainly alert us to the fact that the witness’s silence has here been superseded by Laub’s own highly imaginative and appropriative response to her testimony. To put it simply, what we witness in this case is the witnessing of Dori Laub and not of the woman in question. Taking note of Laub’s response is also important, finally, because Laub himself does not explicitly acknowledge it as his own. That is, the generalizing third-person grammar in which he formulates it leaves no room to ask how the other interviewer reacted, even as it imparts to the response itself the function of a prompt to Laub’s readers—as though anyone in his position would have responded in precisely the same way.

I will eventually return to Laub’s description of the Auschwitz uprising in order to evaluate it in historical terms. My point now is that the perspective from which he will present the controversy concerning this woman’s testimony has already been heavily inflected by his own reception of it. And it is especially important that his readers remain aware of this inflection since, as will gradually become clear, the witness to whom he refers as a single individual is arguably a composite figure based on the videotaped testimonies of at least three different women, certain of whose features are exaggerated, transformed, or largely invented.
With all of that in mind, let us consider his summary of the debate, which reads as follows:

Many months later, a conference of historians, psychoanalysts, and artists, gathered to reflect on the relation of education to the Holocaust, watched the videotaped testimony of the woman, in an attempt to better understand the era. A lively debate ensued. The testimony was not accurate, historians claimed. The number of chimneys was misrepresented. Historically, only one chimney was blown up, not all four. Since the memory of the testifying woman turned out to be, in this way, fallible, one could not accept—nor give credence to—her whole account of the events. It was utterly important to remain accurate, lest the revisionists in history discredit everything.

A psychoanalyst who had been one of the interviewers of this woman, profoundly disagreed. "The woman was testifying," he insisted, "not to the number of the chimneys blown up, but to something else, more radical, more crucial: the reality of an unimaginable occurrence. One chimney blown up in Auschwitz was as incredible as four. The number mattered less than the fact of the occurrence. The event itself was almost inconceivable. The woman testified to an event that broke the all compelling frame of Auschwitz, where Jewish armed revolts just did not happen, and had no place. She testified to the breakage of a framework. That was historical truth." (BW, 59–60)

From the perspective discussed just a moment ago, whose dramatic quality will inevitably affect the perception of even the most critical reader, the historians as Laub portrays them are bound to appear insensitive, if not obtuse, and their concerns quite trivial. Ignoring all that matters to the psychoanalyst (subsequently identified as Laub himself), they focus exclusively on the number of chimneys destroyed, as though one's first response to an earthquake victim should be to ask what this quake measured on the Richter scale. Moreover, Laub compounds the poor impression they make by having them speak, like the positivistic or objectivistic historiography they are alleged to advocate, in a single voice, or rather, in no real voice at all. For unlike the psychoanalyst, whose speech is quoted, theirs is only reported, as would befit a group none of whose members is capable of thinking independently of the others. To make matters worse, they claim, according to Laub, that the fallibility of the woman's memory concerning the number of chimneys destroyed during the Auschwitz uprising justifies dismissing her testimony as a whole, and thus they appear to abuse the historical method in a way that is typical of the revisionists or Holocaust deniers themselves. In light of all this, one cannot help but suspect that these anonymous historians collectively constitute, for Laub, little more than a convenient straw man. And since nothing in his essay so much as suggests that they might not be representative of historians in general, it is just as difficult to avoid the suspicion that their portrayal is mainly informed by Laub's own questionable assumptions about history as a discipline.

It is worth remarking as well that, in his rebuttal, the psychoanalyst makes a mistake quite similar to that of his adversaries, despite the attempt to distinguish his argument from theirs by speaking in his own voice and as a solitary defender of the otherwise defenseless woman and by emphasizing another, supposedly more fundamental consideration in terms of which her testimony, regardless of its factual inaccuracy, becomes historically intelligible. Just as the historians find in its single flaw sufficient reason to reject her testimony as a whole, so the psychoanalyst finds in the preoccupation with factual accuracy sufficient reason to reject in its entirety their response to that testimony—and this in the name of an interpretive conclusion of which he states, in a fashion no less dogmatic than their own: "That was historical truth." Thus, we need to recognize not only that Laub introduces this debate in a manner deeply colored by his own response to the woman's testimony but that he conveys the competing claims prompted by her testimony through a rather exaggerated rhetoric of persuasion, a rhetoric that must be taken into account if these claims are to be reliably adjudicated.

At this point, though, I would like to enter into the real substance of the debate, beginning with what I take to be the three main components of Laub's position. My presentation of this position is meant to emphasize its strengths, or at least its critical implications, more fully than I believe is done by the essay itself. The same will hold when I present the position of the historians.

In the first place, then, by insisting that the woman testified to "an event that broke the all compelling frame of Auschwitz," that she testified to "the breakage of a framework," Laub clearly highlights the failure or refusal of the historians to take note of this breakage. And by claiming that "one chimney blown up in Auschwitz was as incredible as four," he no less clearly relates this failure or refusal to their own insistence on factual accuracy.
Yet whether they do so knowingly or not, the historians also rely on a rhetoric of persuasion, and in particular on a stratagem that consists essentially in conflating a factual issue with an issue of interpretation. Thus, they begin by rejecting the woman’s testimony because of a factual error in her account of the Auschwitz uprising: she alleges that four chimneys were blown up, when in fact only one was destroyed. Moreover, it appears also to be a matter of “the facts” when one of them, having asserted that her account is “hopelessly misleading in its incompleteness” and even that “she had no idea what was going on,” notes that “the revolt [was] put down and all the inmates [were] executed,” that “they flung themselves into their death, alone and in desperation” (BW, 61)—as though the witness had not already observed that “of course these men knew that this would probably be the end for them” and that the SS “killed out every man.” It is apparently still a question of “the facts,” and of an account “hopelessly misleading in its incompleteness” due to the witness’s having “no idea what was going on,” when the same speaker points out that “the Jewish underground was... betrayed by the Polish resistance” (BW, 61)—as though the witness had not already demonstrated an awareness of this in her reference to possible but unfORTHCOMING assistance from “the outside, the others.” The factual basis on which the historians reject the woman’s testimony thus proves to be rather precarious, both because she actually knows much of what they claim she does not and because, in the case of the chimneys, she makes a mistake not only unexceptional in the annals of eyewitness testimony but against which the discipline of history has at its disposal well-known and reasonably adequate methodological or procedural safeguards (such as the comparison of testimonies, the consideration of the personal history of witnesses, and the evaluation of testimony in the light of other forms of evidence).

We might feel justified, therefore, in suspecting that the objections raised by the historians do not primarily concern “the facts,” indeed, that, again in the case of the chimneys, the wholesale rejection of the woman’s testimony seems almost comically dogmatic precisely because at this point a lone fact has been asked to bear the full weight of an unstated interpretive prejudice. Our suspicion is scarcely allayed, moreover, when from the midst of these objections emerges a statement whose predicate is of a clearly interpretive tenor, namely: “She ascribes importance to an attempt that, historically, made no difference” (BW, 61, my emphasis). Granted, to describe the rebellion in this way is, on the face of it, simply to express a view according to which it did not, in the end, seriously disable the machinery of extermination at Auschwitz and hence did not alter the course of genocide. In other words, we do not really know enough about the historians to determine whether this view reflects a particular position regarding, for instance, the Jewish response to persecution in general. What we can say for sure, however, by considering their assessment of this particular event, is that for the historians only a general point of view, that is, a position external and posterior to the Holocaust and encompassing the Holocaust in its “completeness,” can insure a correct judgment of what, “historically,” is “important,” and in so doing provide a foundation for the Right Story. As such, the very framework assumed by the historians, in which an act of resistance to genocide is judged “an attempt that, historically, made no difference,” can only beg the question: For whom, for whose history, did it make no difference? And if we now recall that what Laub here considers to be the real point of the woman’s testimony, what he refers to as “the breakage of a framework,” is precisely this resistance, this act whereby participants in the uprising violated the norms of Auschwitz, it almost seems as though the historians, having left unexamined their own most basic assumption, could not help but miss or dismiss the point. At the same time, the peremptory dismissiveness exhibited by these self-appointed arbiters of what counts in the grand sweep of history can help us to understand why, as a survivor, Laub so “profoundly disagreed” with them, why, indeed, he may have felt bound to marshal his own resistance by staking a claim to historical truth for those courageous inmates who knew only too well that the odds were against both the success of their rebellion and the possibility of their story ever being told or appreciated.

But this leads directly to a second point, or rather to something like a consideration of the first point from a second perspective. For Laub’s disagreement with the historians does not revolve exclusively around the significance of the Auschwitz uprising. What he calls “the breakage of a framework” has to do, in his eyes, not only with the act of resistance to which the woman testifies but at least as much with the testifying itself as just such an act. As he puts it, the woman “is breaking the frame of the concentration camp by and through her very testimony: she is breaking out of Auschwitz even by her very talking” (BW, 62). The analogy so drawn
between the two types of resistance implies an alternative framework for the reception of testimony that appears, in Laub’s account, to have escaped the attention of the historians.

Thus, on the one hand, emphasizing the performative dimension of testimony gives us to understand testimony as an event in its own right. It reminds us that history, especially when it is traumatic, is not just the past, any more than the past is “history,” that the very act of representing the past not only reflects but also affects—concretely, empirically—concerns of the present and future. What matters in the woman’s witnessing to the revolt at Auschwitz is therefore not merely what she says but what happens, according to Laub, as she says it. The sudden transformation of her demeanor, the strengthening of her voice, the “intensity, passion and color . . . infused into the narrative”—these, too, are signs to be read, visual and auditory clues to the recovery of speech as an agency whereby the silenced victim becomes a storytelling survivor.13

On the other hand, envisioning testimony as a recovery of agency inflects our understanding of the knowledge it conveys. “Knowledge in the testimony,” notes Laub, is “not simply a factual given that is reproduced and replicated by the testifier, but a genuine advent” (BW, 62). That is, the knowledge conveyed by testimony may certainly turn out to be of a factual order and hence be useful for documentary or historiographical purposes. Yet even knowledge of this kind emerges solely within a narrative framework on which the significance and the very selection or omission of any “factual given” will depend, and in Laub’s view, as I suggested at the outset, this framework requires the reconstruction, in witnessing, of the dialogical relation whose disruption is indissociable from victimization itself, a relation in which she who could once be but an object of cognition becomes its subject as well and in which the advent of this subject changes what is or can be known about the object. The point here, indeed, is that the knowledge to which this transformation affords access constitutes, in a sense, a discovery no less for the witness than for the listener. This is so not only because, given the overwhelming nature of trauma, the survivor tends to take cognizance of her own experience in variably delayed stages,14 but also because the knowledge to which Laub refers only “happens” when the witness has, herself, a witness. In other words, “knowledge in the testimony” is not embodied in a story that would somehow precede its own narration. It is rather a “genuine advent” insofar as it is produced by the act of telling.15

Granted, the apparent obliviousness of the historians to this dimension of the woman’s testimony may come as no surprise. But we should ask why this is so, and whether Laub’s claims concerning testimony as performance might not indirectly call historical objectivism itself into question. Indeed, one can surely make due allowance for the generic differences between testimonial and historical narrative, including, most notably, the difference between the first- and the third-person voice and all that it entails, while recognizing nonetheless that both kinds of narrative require an agent whose function is to impart meaning to “the facts” by integrating them into a story.16 And it is clearly no less true for the historian than for the witness that knowledge or, more precisely, understanding of the past proves worthy of the name only by going beyond the reproduction of isolated facts to encompass the narrative interrelations through which facts are made to signify. Yet in order to resolve these demands in a manner consistent with historical objectivism, its practitioners typically resort to a subterfuge that consists in imputing their own work to history itself. In other words, they deny or at least disguise their role as subjects of knowledge or understanding and agents of narrative interpretation by promoting the notion that the story of the past is found and not made, that the truth of history lies already embedded in the facts themselves, where it simply awaits re-presentation by the historian.17 Of this we have just seen an example in the assumption, with respect to the Auschwitz uprising and by extension the Holocaust in its entirety, that there can be or rather is one and only one Right Story. Whether we are tipped off by the conspicuous dogmatism of such a story or by the observation that the Holocaust has in fact given rise to multiple and conflicting stories, detecting the cognitive subterfuge of objectivism should suffice to make us realize that the subject of historical knowledge is inevitably implicated in the representation of its object, that those who frame history can always be found reflected within the very frames they impose. By the same token, it suggests that the historians in Laub’s account not only pay no heed to the performative dimension of the woman’s testimony but fail to suspect how their view of the Holocaust might itself be motivated because they have not been trained to attend, or have been trained not to attend, to their own narrative “performance.”18

That the teller of a tale is implicated in what is told or how it is told brings us to a third and final point concerning Laub’s position vis-à-vis the
historians. The point pertains to the interactive nature of witnessing and specifically to the role played by the listener in the shaping of a survivor’s story. What Laub has to say about another portion of the woman’s testimony is especially instructive in this respect:

I figured from the woman’s testimony that in Auschwitz she had been a member of what is known as “the Canada commando,” a group of inmates chosen to sort out the belongings of those who had been gassed, so that those belongings could be recuperated by the Nazis and sent back to Germany. The testifying woman spoke indeed at length of her work in a commando that would leave each morning, separately from the others, and return every night with various items of clothes and shoes in excellent condition. She emphasized with pride the way in which, upon returning, she would supply these items to her fellow inmates, thus saving the lives of some of them who literally had no shoes to walk in and no clothes to protect them from the frost. She was perking up again as she described these almost breathtaking exploits of rescue. I asked her if she knew of the name of the commando she was serving on. She did not. Does the term “Canada commando” mean anything to her? I followed up. “No,” she said, taken aback, as though startled by my question. I asked nothing more about her work. I had probed the limits of her knowledge and decided to back off; respect, that is, the silence out of which this testimony spoke. We did not talk of the sorting out of the belongings of the dead. She did not think of them as the remainders of the thousands who were gassed. She did not ask herself where they had come from. The presents she brought back to her fellow inmates, the better, newer clothes and shoes, had for her no origin. (BW, 60)²⁰

From a historian’s perspective, what is startling here is not the question Laub asks of the woman but rather her putative ignorance of the term “Canada commando.” This ignorance is arguably even more damning than the error she commits in her account of the uprising, for while it would understandably have been difficult to take in all that happened during such a sudden, surprising, and indeed unprecedented disruption of “life” in Auschwitz, it seems quite implausible that an inmate working for any length of time in the Efektenlager would not have learned that, in camp slang, this place was called “Canada,” and that the items to be sorted there belonged to victims of mass murder.²⁰ Then again, as we have seen, a preoccupation with factual accuracy or an indulgence of interpretive preconceptions can quickly skew the reception of testimony. In this instance, it is Laub himself who apparently clings to an agenda and who, in his subsequent commentary, emphasizes what can happen when one overlays the historical card. Not only, it seems, does his query concerning the Canada commando momentarily silence the witness and distract attention from the life-saving assistance she provided to fellow inmates, from acts of resistance he characterizes as “almost breathtaking exploits of rescue” (and this, presumably, because he knows that the theft of property claimed by the Third Reich was subject to severe punishment, even death). Just as important, his alleged change of tactics appears to be motivated by the realization that the query about the Canada commando focuses on what the woman’s testimony has in common with others at the expense of what distinguishes it from them, what makes it this woman’s testimony.

The general lesson Laub draws from his intervention is that the listener actively contributes, for better or for worse, to the construction of testimonial narrative, that the receiving is analogous to the giving of testimony precisely insofar as it involves a process of selection and omission, attention and inattention, highlighting and overshadowing, for which the listener remains responsible. At the same time, there is no mistaking the particular inflection he imparts to this lesson, whereby the listener is preferred is a listening inclined to favor the experience of the individual survivor over the collective context of that experience. Of course, it is also one thing to interview a Holocaust survivor and quite another to watch videotaped witnessing or to read written testimony, since the interviewer obviously participates in the telling of a story as it is told. But this does not really detract from the point Laub wishes to make, for in the case of videotaped or printed testimony, reception manifests itself elsewhere, that is, in the spoken or written response offered to other viewers or readers. Provided this response does not consist in merely quoting a given testimony, it will unavoidably entail interpretation, and thus reflect as much on those who receive and rephrase it as on the witness. Of the interactive nature of witnessing in its very implication of respondents, the debate between Laub and the historians is itself a telling illustration.

At this juncture, however, I would suggest that a more discerning consideration must be granted to the historians, at least insofar as this is possible on the basis of a text that tells us so little about them and that tends to
question by the remarks of the historian. I would like to turn here to the analysis of this contestation as it pertains to Laub's three main arguments, starting with the one discussed most recently.

To begin with, then, it is clear that the historian in question is aware of the interpretive role he or she plays in the reception of testimony. Were this not the case, there would simply have been no debate. But more to the point, the debate took place, as I have indicated, at a conference devoted to Holocaust education, where the whole thrust of his or her intervention had arguably to do with the proper contextualization of the woman's testimony for those still learning to contextualize, with the communication of Holocaust history to other as yet less informed listeners. In this connection, we should also note that the tone in which the historian's remarks were delivered is characterized by Laub as one of "passionate exclamation." Since when do the proponents of a cold, hard, impersonal truth of history indulge in passionate exclamation? Might not this passion suggest that something is at stake here beyond mere disciplinary territoriality? Does it not force us to consider whether the objective ideal of traditional historiography might be a matter not only of cognition but of ethics as well? And if so, where precisely does its ethical motive manifest itself?

I believe we can base a reliable answer to this question on the pedagogical issue just mentioned no less than on the debate devoted to it. Although it is admittedly one thing to speak with fellow educators and another to speak with students, in both cases one bears responsibility toward a multiplicity of listeners. To be sure, this situation of address by no means precludes exchange between just two interlocutors; yet such exchange is always mediated by a "third party," be it in the form of another person witnessing the exchange or, in the absence of any witness, in the form of institutional standards or simply the most basic rules of social conduct. Thus, from the perspective afforded at once by relations between teachers and students and among educators themselves, responsibility must be assumed not only toward "the other" but toward all others, that is, toward the community. And I think it is safe to say that the passionate and exclamatory tone characterizing the response of the historian to the woman's testimony and perhaps especially to Laub's own reception of it derives in turn from the adoption of this perspective not only in regard to colleagues and students as other listeners but also in regard to victims and surviving witnesses other than...
the testifying woman. Indeed, while suspending the framework of community may be justified to some degree in an interview, for educational or more broadly social purposes any such suspension is dubious at best, since it ensures no hearing to those whose experience and memory differ from the interviewee's and whose stories are probably of equal and possibly of greater collective significance. In contrast, for instance, to the testimony cited by Laub, or more precisely to Laub's embellishment of the woman's silence, other accounts of the Auschwitz uprising, including the one by Filip Müller, a member of the Sonderkommando itself, can hardly be said to describe its atmosphere as "jubilant," "dazzling," or "brilliant." One can legitimately ask therefore whether Laub has not so thoroughly conflated the position of the educator and author with that of the interviewer (or rather, as we shall see, the psychoanalyst) as to ascribe an imagined "jubilation" to resisters who, by other accounts, "flung themselves into their death, alone and in desperation"—and whether, in stressing the story of the individual survivor to the detriment of the collective history in which it is embedded, he does not convincingly if inadvertently demonstrate that the successes and failures of listening amount to a good deal more than mere "vicissitudes."

No doubt, the gathering opacity of a text that appears at first glance to be relatively transparent is due in large part to the multiple roles played by Laub, or rather, as I have just suggested, to his failure to distinguish adequately between them at certain moments. The resulting confusion comes into play once again where the performative function of testimony and its relation to knowledge are concerned. Alluding to his own ignorance of the betrayal of the Jewish underground by the Polish resistance, Laub states of the interviewer: "Of course, it is by no means ignorance that I espouse. The listener must be quite well informed if he is to be able to hear—to be able to pick up the clues. Yet knowledge should not hinder or obstruct the listening with foregone conclusions and preconceived dismissals, should not be an obstacle or a foreclosure to new, diverging, unexpected information" (BW, 61). On the face of it, there is nothing here that we have not already encountered or that would have elicited persuasive objections from Laub's adversaries in the debate. But he then goes on to say that "in the process of the testimony to a trauma, as in psychoanalytic practice, in effect, you often do not want to know anything except what the patient tells you, because what is important is the situation of discovery of knowledge—its evolution, and its very happening" (BW, 62). Whether it is deliberate or not, the very vagueness of the phrase "the process of the testimony to a trauma" clearly neglects to stipulate the framework of that process, thus facilitating an implicit conflation of the witness with the "patient" and hence of the listener with the psychoanalyst. However, if we assume—as the very framework of Laub's essay would entitle us and the framework of the debate itself would have entitled the historians to do—that "the process of the testimony to a trauma" means the interviewing of a Holocaust survivor for a videotape archive, then the comparison of this process with psychoanalytic practice in terms of the advent of knowledge they supposedly have in common serves in fact to highlight their radical dissimilarity as contexts for this advent. It is not only that psychoanalytic practice typically involves a single listener and is bound by rules of confidentiality or privacy, whereas the interview may well include, as in the testimony cited by Laub, more than one listener and is in any case made accessible to the public. What is more, their structural dissimilarity is evidently determined by a fundamental difference of purpose, a difference reflected in turn by the incommensurable values they respectively ascribe to narrative in relation to knowledge.

Thus, in the psychoanalytic "talking cure," the priority granted to knowledge as an event is of a piece with the priority granted to the performative function of storytelling: that is, the process of cognition coincides with a process of narration that literally changes or alters the patient. The therapeutic efficacy of this narrative "working-through" can in fact be gauged by the degree to which it tempers the behavioral enactment or "acting-out" of trauma, by the degree to which it moves the patient to sheds a role scripted by others in order to assume authorship of her or his own story. And this "breakage of a framework," wherein one comes to know oneself as a silenced victim only through one's transformation into a storytelling survivor—this is the event or advent, the "happening" of knowledge. Such knowledge remains, however, essentially intransitive. Indeed, if in psychoanalytic practice the objective truth or falsehood of what is discovered through storytelling can be relegated to a secondary status or even bracketed altogether, if as a practitioner "you often do not want to know anything except what the patient tells you," it is because this practice seeks first and foremost to reestablish and reinforce within the patient the very distinction
between subject and object on whose basis a cognitive relation to objects other than the self, including other subjects, becomes possible. And it is, furthermore (and among other reasons), because this distinction is for the patient both precarious and evolving that the practice of psychoanalysis or psychotherapy must be shielded from public scrutiny.

The testimonial interview, on the other hand, can be said to “break the framework” of psychoanalysis to the extent that, in keeping at once with its public character and with its documentary and educational purpose, it must presuppose on the part of the narrating witness a relatively unimpaired capacity for objective cognition. This is not to say that, in the interviewing of a Holocaust survivor, the performative should or does simply give way to the constative function of storytelling, or that the haste with which Laub’s interlocutors overlook the performative force of the woman’s testimony is, after all, excusable (although, as before, we must take into account the tendentious manner in which Laub conveys their reaction). It is rather a question of countering Laub’s own inclination to tip the scales in favor of performance, to stress the performative at the expense of the constative, to promote a psychoanalytic to the detriment of a historical framework for the reception of testimony—when it is otherwise clear from the debate in which he is engaged that the generic hybridity of testimony requires for its reception that the very tension between such frameworks be maintained.

Here again, I will revert to the example of the Canada commando. Simply put: Why would a (competent) psychoanalyst ask his patient for the name of the commando on which she served in Auschwitz? What properly therapeutic purpose could such an inquiry serve, especially when it might, and in this case, according to Laub, actually does entail startling and momentarily silencing the woman just as she is “perking up again”? That Laub nevertheless makes this inquiry attests, as I see it (and as I suspect the historians would have seen it), to his doing so from a position irreducible to that of the psychoanalyst, from the position of a listener who understands that the role of an interviewer for a video archive is to represent other listeners, to listen not only for himself but for those who, like him, want to know and for whom the woman’s memory of the Canada commando contributes to a sense of who she was and is relative to the events she recounts. At the same time, I would suggest that, instead of being construed as a sign of disrespect if not a violation of the unspoken taboo against testing the word of a Holocaust survivor, holding the witness accountable to certain objective standards in order to fulfill the responsibility of listening for others might well be considered a way of welcoming the witness herself into the community of these listeners.

Finally, let me return to the issue of historical truth. As we have seen, Laub describes the Sonderkommando rebellion that took place at Auschwitz-Birkenau on October 7, 1944, as “an event that broke the all compelling frame of Auschwitz, where Jewish armed revolts just did not happen, and had no place.” He then summarizes his response to the historians, who so hastily impugn the credibility of the woman witnessing to this event, by saying: “She testified to the breakage of a framework. That was historical truth.” In thus relating the breakage of a framework to historical truth, Laub clearly ascribes such truth both to the rebellion itself in its historical reality and to its witnessing by this woman, whom he portrays, again, as “breaking the frame of the concentration camp by and through her very testimony.” There is, moreover, another framework at stake here, which Laub’s assertion on behalf of the insurgents and their witness threatens in turn to “break.” For as we have also seen, the historians appear to hold a view of the Holocaust that not only leads them to devalue or dismiss this account of resistance but would presumably lead them as well to credit survivor testimony in general primarily if not exclusively insofar as it serves to document a story of collective persecution. What Laub is perhaps too kind or discreet to state explicitly, and which I will thus take it upon myself to point out, is that, by defining the individual overwhelmingly in terms of his or her membership in and conformity to a group, this view can prove to be (re)victimizing in its own right, and most noticeably so when it seeks to silence particular voices that cannot be easily accommodated within its universalizing framework. And what he is doubtless too modest to claim is that to this framework, in which the Auschwitz uprising is characterized as “an attempt that, historically, made no difference,” he enacts, as I earlier suggested, his own resistance, posing in effect the simple question: For whom, for whose history, did it make no difference? To put this otherwise, one could say that, like the woman from the Canada commando, Laub is engaged in a rescue operation, contesting a depersonalizing historiography in order to restore the historical truth of what a fellow survivor, Aharon Appelfeld, calls “the individual, with his own face and proper name.”
Aside from the question whether Laub has fairly represented the position of the historians, however, one can ask on their behalf (but not only on theirs) if he has met the demands of his own project. As I have already observed, the witness to whom he refers as a single individual may well be a composite figure, whose features are based on the videotaped testimonies of at least three different women. And as I have also remarked, certain of these features are exaggerated, transformed, or invented. In short, despite Laub's promoting an approach to the reception of Holocaust testimony so deeply concerned with the individual survivor, an approach of which one would expect at the very least an attentiveness to the facts pertaining to this or that particular witness and distinguishing witnesses from each other, his "testifying woman" appears to have come into being through a process quite similar to the way in which writers of fiction construct the characters populating their novels or short stories. True, the three interviews just mentioned were all conducted on the same day (November 7, 1982), and similarities between the witnesses, together with the strain placed on the interviewers themselves in such lengthy and psychologically taxing interactions, could help to explain the creative misremembering that contributes to Laub's portrayal of the "testifying woman." Yet presumably nothing prevented Laub from reviewing the tapes of these interviews prior to drafting and especially to publishing his essay. The inescapable impression one receives, namely, that he failed to do so, seems therefore to suggest a fundamental neglect of the very individuals whose voices he seeks to champion. What is more, although the act of publishing here implies an invitation to collaborative listening and, by extension, to critical dialogue, Laub's readers are deprived of the means required to offer an informed response, that is, of any notational reference identifying the videotape(s) in question (not to mention the conference where the debate took place and, of course, the historians supposedly involved in it). As a result, either these readers are misled or else they discover, through a good deal of detective work, that the evidentiary basis on which a community of respondents must rely to ascertain the truth of the individual survivor has been undermined by what one might call Laub's own mythmaking.

I would point out as well, to conclude my analysis of the debate, that this mythmaking is not entirely unmotivated. In fact, it is by recalling the relational model with which I credited Laub at the very outset that we can begin to ascertain how, in his personal practice of witnessing witnessing, relationality itself is sacrificed to something on the order of what in psychoanalysis would be termed "identification" or "transference." As we have just seen, the failure to grant due consideration to other listeners is of a piece with the failure to respect the identity of the three witnesses, that is, their otherness in regard both to one another and to the image that their immediate addressee is inclined to form of them. Indeed, if it is felt that no verifiable account of "the testimony to a trauma" need be or, as in psychoanalysis, even should be offered to a community of potential respondents, there is obviously no constraint capable of assuring witnesses that the integrity of their testimony will be preserved in whatever account of it is actually offered. Whether we then speak, in the case at hand, of transference or identification, fairly free rein is therefore given to a tendency on the part of the listener to reduce or even surmount the very difference between self and other.

This tendency is at work, for example, when Laub recalls the segment of Serena N.'s testimony pertaining to the Auschwitz uprising. Not only is the witness's statement misquoted and overdramatized, not only is a barely detectable change in her demeanor described as a striking transformation, but a "fixed silence," unattested by the videotape itself, becomes the locus in which Laub imagines a "jubilant" rebellion against the SS—as though it were possible to achieve with the survivor a kind of "communion" in the memory of heroic resistance. The same tendency manifests itself in Laub's recollection of testimony concerning the Canada commando. Whereas the witness (be it Irene W. or Rose A.), referring to the smuggling of goods from the Effektenlager for the sake of some of the less fortunate fellow inmates, shows no change in her tone of voice or her demeanor and no sign that she considered her actions especially noteworthy, Laub states that "she was perking up again as she described these almost breathtaking exploits of rescue." More serious still, whereas Irene W. or Rose A. (no less than Serena N.) knew perfectly well that the clothes, food, and other items from which surviving deportees were benefiting belonged to victims of mass murder, Laub claims that she was completely unaware of their provenance. He thus invents another silence, whose function, it seems, is not so much to salvage human agency from a universe of overwhelming victimization as to rescue innocence itself from a world in which even the victims were made to feel
permanently compromised by the atrocities committed in their midst. Such innocence, far more “unimaginable,” “incredible,” or “inconceivable” (BW, 60) than the uprising itself, suggests a wish that certain values or beliefs might survive the Holocaust intact and hence, like the faith in human goodness expressed by Anne Frank only days before her arrest and deportation, could perhaps provide some degree of reassurance when the real testimony of Irene W. or Rose A., in its brittle sobriety and occasional despair, offers none. But the price to be paid is clear, since, in the image of the “testifying woman” to which this fiction contributes, none of the three individuals mentioned here, “with her own face and proper name,” none of these witnesses to whom, in their otherness, one is enjoined to listen (as to other listeners and, indeed, to oneself) remains entirely recognizable.

As I have tried to show, all of the major issues dividing Laub and the historians derive from a fundamental disagreement about the frame or frames within which testimony is or should be received. What counts as historically significant or truthful; the value attributed respectively to the constative and performative dimensions of testimonial narrative in its relation to knowledge; the precise role assigned to the listener or reader in the interactive process of witnessing—and much else besides, including the competing claims of the community and the individual as well as the relative pressure of the past and the present and future—all of these depend on the conventions, at least as often implicit as explicit, according to which the context of reception is delimited.

I also hope to have shown, however, that what we witness here is not just a disagreement but a deeply polarized polemic, a debate in which both parties practice a listening so highly selective as to yield consequences at once unintended and undesirable, such as the silencing of survivors. No doubt, it is tempting to think that the partisan thrust of this debate reflects the anxiety of historical transmission mentioned in the introduction, to think that, as the last survivors pass from the scene, those concerned with the future reception of their testimony seek a certainty of hearing if only in listening of a certain kind (when they have not already chosen a certain kind as the avenue to all such certainty), and in so doing promote divisive views about the community not only of witnesses but of listeners as well. But be this as it may, the least we can do is to ask what general conclusions might be drawn from the listening impairments just diagnosed, especially insofar as these conclusions bear on the issue of education, whether understood, as it presumably was at the conference where the debate took place, in the formal, institutional sense, or more broadly as the process whereby any listener or reader learns, and relearns, to receive testimony.

To begin with, there is the matter of “objectivity”—and so, inevitably, of “subjectivity”—concepts that, given the ideological polarization so palpable in the debate, might be most easily elucidated through their respective differentiation from the extremes of objectivism and subjectivism. As I suggested a moment ago, it would be a mistake to dismiss Laub’s work as a whole, especially his relational model of witnessing, simply on account of shortcomings in his own reception of testimony. This is so, however, not only because the model can serve as a diagnostic tool but also because it presupposes a notion of the self or subject that can facilitate the differentiation just mentioned. Thus, although Laub himself does not make use of the following terminology, it is clear that, in his as in any such model worthy of the name, the subject is understood not as an existent constituted independently of any relations with others of its kind but rather as one whose constitution depends on these relations in the first place. Whether, for further examples, we look to philosophy, where, in Levinas’s work, the very singularity of the self emerges from the encounter with and response to an other; to Freudian psychoanalysis, where the ego is born of the id through contact with the external world and above all with parents; or to linguistics, where Benveniste, among others, defines the “I” as inextricable from the “you” (and, since these pronouns are universally available, from third persons as well)—we find that the identity of the self derives from alterity, its sameness from difference, its inferiority from an “outside” without which no relation to itself—in this instance, no listening to itself or, in keeping with the holism of the model, to others as others—would even prove conceivable. According to this view, in short, the subject, bearing the indelible stamp of that from which it becomes separate, remains in its very separation a fundamentally relational being.

It follows from this that relationality provides the basis of a capacity for “putting oneself in the place of another.” The identificatory tendency impelling creation of the “testifying woman” would thus hardly be peculiar to Dori Laub, except in the extent to which it detracts from relationality itself.
Yet everything depends, indeed, on this extent. Where identification means putting oneself in the place of another without leaving one's own, where it fosters an empathy tempered by the awareness of an irreducible difference, where it sustains the relation between listener and witness, identification remains in the service of reception, since it is in this relation that, putting themselves in the place of listeners, silenced victims become storytelling survivors (without ceasing to have been silenced victims), and in this relation, therefore, that memory finds the space or “extent” of its articulation. And yet—whether motivated by a desire to rescue survivors from their traumatic past, to reduce tensions aroused in oneself by the witnessing of witnessing, or to make sense of one’s own experience by appropriating another’s—where identification leads the listener to usurp the place of the witness, to lose sight of what distinguishes them, this space is severely constricted or abolished altogether, and an approach to testimony determined to emphasize the “other” historical truth, the truth of memory, becomes so subjectivistic as to betray that truth no less thoroughly than does historical objectivism itself.

As for objectivism, it should not be difficult to characterize within the limited scope of this discussion, given how familiar we have become with the position often assumed, in the debate with Laub, by the historians. Thus, if in this case subjectivism consists in assimilating the other to the self through an unrestrained identification of the listener with the witness, objectivism, for its part, proceeds, through a radical disidentification of the listener with the witness, to deny any sameness of self and other. Either way, of course—by fusion, by exclusion—it is relationality that suffers eclipse. To be more precise, one would have to say that through its denial of relationality—that is, through its opposition of the purely “objective” historian and the merely “subjective” witness—objectivism purports to renounce all subjectivity as such for the sake of its “view from nowhere” or its “God’s eye view” of history, since only if the historian is divested of his or her particular selfhood can the objectivity of history as a discipline be absolved of its own historicity.

While this position has predictably produced any number of futile arguments between objectivists and their critics, its more serious effect has been to obscure the very basis on which a credible objectivity can be sought, which is, again, the capacity for “putting oneself in the place of another,” or as the historian Thomas Haskell has phrased it, the capacity “to achieve some distance from one’s own spontaneous perceptions and convictions, to imagine how the world appears in another’s eyes, to experimentally adopt perspectives that do not come naturally.” Of this capacity, we should note especially that the distance it affords does not involve the self-renunciation behind whose pretense, as in the Right Story of the Holocaust, objectivism gives rein to the indulgence of “one’s own spontaneous perceptions and convictions.” For “to imagine how the world appears in another’s eyes” is to acknowledge the position from which one does so, to acknowledge, in other words, one’s self in relation to that other. It is therefore also to recognize, in light of this relation to another or to others, that historical inquiry begins not with an absolute or dehistoricized and hence delusional “detachment” but from a position informed by the this-worldly standards of an evolving community, and that claims to historical knowledge or truth are inevitably constrained by the context in which they are advanced. Rather than deny, like objectivism, its own historicity, and instead of turning a blind eye as well to the intrinsic fallibility of human cognition, the objectivity in question strives to take these into account, founded as it is on a relationality in which awareness of the other and self-awareness are entirely of a piece.

In regard to the “testifying woman,” then, or more precisely, to Serena N.’s account of the Sonderkommando rebellion at Auschwitz, this objectivity would require us to consider how it was possible and even highly likely, in such chaos and confusion, not to know fully what was happening, and to ask in turn how this not knowing might contribute, precisely in conjunction with the historiographical record since established, to a greater understanding of Auschwitz and perhaps more broadly of the Holocaust than any we could derive from mere fact checking. At the same time, it would entail observance of the most elementary methodological precept, namely, that all eyewitness testimony must be evaluated on a comparative basis, and that, just as no historical narrative can rely on the account of a single eyewitness, so no single error committed by an otherwise reliable eyewitness justifies dismissing that witness’s testimony in its entirety. And finally, an objectivity cognizant of its debt to the relational subject would force us to consider what is socially, politically, historically, or otherwise at stake in the context of reception, and what our personal investment in a particular mode of reception might be, so that, unlike Laub’s historians at their most objectivistic, we
might at least avoid the silencing of others entailed by the forgetting of ourselves.

A second point to be made in light of the listening impairments detected in the debate between Laub and the historians has to do with the question of genre, to which I earlier referred in claiming that, as a generic hybrid, testimony requires for its reception a plurality of interpretive frameworks. Strictly speaking, to be sure, all genres are hybrid, since each depends for its generic cohesion on an implicit differentiation from other, especially neighboring, genres. If emphasizing hybridity in this sense does not yet teach us anything about testimony in particular, however, it is worth noting that the interpretation of testimonial discourse, as of any other type, is bound to suffer if it cannot rely on an understanding of the difference constitutive of genre per se. This understanding proves all the more crucial as the conventions associated with a given genre not only govern its production but serve to shape its reception, to establish the very expectations it strives to meet.

For all the talk of “frames” in Laub’s essay, it is thus quite remarkable how little attention is actually paid to the framing of videotaped testimony as a genre. The historians (to the extent, once more, that we can rely on Laub’s portrayal of them) appear to approach such testimony in complete disregard of its generic specificity, as though it were just another source of historical documentation. And yet, faced with documentation of any kind—be it articles, books, speeches, letters, memoirs, orders, tickets, blueprints, films, photographs, confessions, memoirs, or eyewitness testimony (oral or written)—no self-respecting historian, even or perhaps especially among those of the most objectivist stripe, would enlist it in support of a narrative reconstruction without first considering its form, its provenance, its intended use, the conditions under which it was produced, and its significance in relation to other available evidence. At the very least, then, through their wholesale rejection of testimony in which it is mistakenly alleged that four chimneys were destroyed during the Auschwitz uprising, the historians miss the opportunity to open a discussion about educating others in the use of eyewitness accounts for the narrative reconstruction of historical events—a discussion in which, moreover, the fallibility of such accounts could give rise to instructive questions regarding the fallibility of historiography itself.

As for Laub, we have seen how strong is his tendency to look at videotaped testimony through the lens of clinical psychotherapy, as though at stake were primarily if not exclusively a “private” relation between the witness and an individual respondent. In addition to the shortcomings I have already emphasized in this approach, it seems fairly obvious that Laub is unable or unwilling to consider the ways in which both testimony and its reception are inflected by the very act of videotaping, by the protocol that governs it, and by the consignment of witnessing so recorded to a publicly accessible archive.

This said, the major features accounting for both the specificity and the hybridity of videotaped testimony as a genre are plain to see. Although the audiovisual recording of thousands of survivors and the creation of a permanent archive to house their testimony attest in themselves to a sense of historical mission, the very sense of history operative in this mission is inextricably bound to a certain understanding of memory. If the Archive serves to “document” the Holocaust, it is not primarily by corroborating and extending what is or can be known from other sources about the collective cataclysm of 1933–45. Nor does its principal documentary value derive solely from preserving the stories of individual lives as they were lived during this cataclysm. Memory here surpasses the mere recollection of events circumscribed by the commonly dated period of the Shoah. For at stake in the stories told by survivors is not only what happened but how it is remembered, and the “how” of memory in turn not only has itself a history but suggests accordingly that, as an event, a traumatic historical event whose repercussions have far from diminished with time, the Holocaust must be understood to include its own aftermath.

In this respect, it is worth noting that the creation of what is now called the Fortunoff Video Archive dates from the same era as the release of Claude Lanzmann’s film Shoah, which “documents” the Holocaust exclusively through testimony (albeit that of perpetrators and bystanders no less than of survivors), as well as the publication of Henry Rousso’s The Vichy Syndrome, which examines the “history of memory” pertaining to France’s “dark years” (1940–44) and is one of the first historical works to emphasize at any length the crucial role played by filmed testimony in representing the war and the Holocaust. As in Lanzmann’s film and Rousso’s book, so in the Archive memory appears as the mode in which history most tangibly
lives on, outlives or survives itself. And for this history, objective historiography is at once necessary, since only against its universalizing background can the particularization of memory be made to stand out, and insufficient, since this particularization can be explained only by factors that do not fall exclusively or even primarily within the purview of such historiography, be they social, psychological, political, cultural, or of still another order. In brief, the "field" in which the Archive is situated requires that its holdings be approached from a consciously interdisciplinary perspective.

Equally important, however, are formal features that, in keeping with the differential nature of genre in general, emerge from a closer comparison of videotaped testimony with what is arguably its nearest neighbor, namely, filmed testimony as it appears, indeed, in Shoah. On the one hand, neither the kind of witnessing to be found in the Archive nor the kind presented by Lanzmann can be assured of even a remotely adequate reception if this reception does not demonstrate an awareness of the formal characteristics they share. Thus, in both cases the visual and verbal media constitute a hybrid "text" whose differing modes of signification demand a reading not only in their own right but especially in relation to each other. At the same time, the narration of a first person whose voice is audible (with its accent, its inflections, its rhythm and volume) and whose face and body are visible imparts to such testimony an aura of indexicality—conveys, that is, a tangible remnant of history itself—to which no written testimony can aspire. And, finally, the audible and occasionally visible presence of the interviewer(s) lends to the dialogical relation of witnessing a concreteness far removed from what may seem, in written testimony, to be only a disembodied interaction of pronouns.

On the other hand, although, due to the relatively recent development of filmed and videotaped testimony, the distinction between them may remain less pronounced than between other genres, in this case one can point to at least two fundamental differences. First, there is an obvious difference in scope. By this, I mean not so much a difference in length (the viewing time of Lanzmann’s film exceeds nine hours, while that of tapes from the Archive is typically ninety minutes) as a difference in breadth: whereas videotaped testimony focuses on the story of an individual survivor, the witnessing of Shoah comes from a large number and wide variety of individuals (including, as I have noted, perpetrators and bystanders as well as survivors) and is excerpted and configured in such a way as to create a vast testimonial tableau of the Final Solution. This editorial intervention points in turn to a second fundamental difference, having to do with the staging of testimony. What some might call the "amateurish" quality of tapes from the Archive is the result of an explicit policy: the bareness of the rooms in which such testimony is recorded, the minimal changes in camera angle or framing, the anonymity and discretion of the interviewers, the "open-ended, free-flowing interview process" itself—all of this is designed to leave the initiative to the witness and to concentrate attention on the telling and the tale of victimization and survival. In Shoah, by contrast, Lanzmann’s directorial control is unmistakable, most notably in the pursuit of a certain reenacting distinct from retelling (be it at an emotional cost to survivors); in the filming, for this purpose, of interviews at sites of atrocity or, failing this, at locations resembling such sites, or even on constructed sets, whose effect on the viewer is reinforced by camera work of some sophistication; and last, in the sustained presence of Lanzmann’s familiar voice as well as the frequency with which he enters the visual frame.

To be sure, the dual role of director and interviewer and its decisive impact on the work itself, just like the use of historically significant sites to frame the act of witnessing, are not peculiar to Lanzmann but can be found, for example, in Marcel Ophuls’s earlier The Sorrow and the Pity. Nevertheless, a feature that strikingly distinguishes Lanzmann’s film, both from Ophuls’s work and especially from the kind of videotaped testimony discussed here, is the drive to elicit from interviewees a reenactment—whether it is Simon Srebnik intoning a ballad he sang in exchange for his life or, in another scene, surrounded by villagers who offer a victim-blaming explanation for the killing of the Jews; the barber Abraham Bomba, asked to imitate cutting the hair of friends about to be gassed; or Henrik Gawkowski, driving a locomotive in Treblinka—a reenactment designed, it seems, to afford immediate access to the experience of atrocity, to enable those who “were not there” to participate in, and hence in some measure to appropriate, the traumatization of those who were. Concerning the reception of Holocaust survivor testimony, few contrasts are more instructive than that between an approach respectful of the distance separating witnesses from their listeners and an approach intent on abolishing that very distance.
Much more undoubtedly remains to be said about the issue of genre in relation to Holocaust survivor testimony. Here I will add only that such testimony should not itself be confused or conflated with a genre. This is not to deny the historical precedence of testimony in its legal acceptance, nor to overlook the role that testimony of this kind has played in the post-war trials of perpetrators, nor to underestimate the contribution that this or similar types of witnessing have made to the factual documentation of the Holocaust. However, if the meaning of a term is really its usage, then we should be prepared to ask why “Holocaust testimony” today not only refers to statements elicited from survivors by courts of law or simply for the historical record, as well as to the chronicles, diaries, journals, and reports produced during the war and the written memoirs and oral history produced after it, but also frequently encompasses other modes of expression to which survivors have had recourse, such as the short story, the novel, and lyric poetry. As though in response to this question, Geoffrey Hartman wisely remarks that “to ‘transmit the dreadful experience’ we need all our memory-institutions: history-writing as well as testimony, testimony as well as art.” But it may be that the lines between historiography, testimony, and art are no longer so clearly drawn—and especially that not even all our memory institutions, nor even all the genres in which testimony might be housed, have proven or are likely to prove adequate to “transmit the dreadful experience,” since the experience itself pertained to the destruction of community and hence could only leave testimony to seek a temporary home in its cultural ruins, to haunt the remnants of genre, just as more generally the Holocaust continues to haunt its own historical aftermath. It is in this vein, indeed, that Ross Chambers, in a chapter of his *Un timely Interventions* devoted to Holocaust testimony, speaks so eloquently of “orphaned memory.” In short, no general consideration of genre should remain uninformed by the awareness that testimony exceeds any and all of the shapes it has assumed, because this excess is itself meaningful or significant, because it sheds light on the nature of “that which happened.”

The last point I wish to convey differs somewhat in nature from those already discussed but nevertheless has everything to do with the spirit in which we approach them and, for that matter, any of the major issues raised by the debate. It has to do specifically with certainty—or uncertainty. Let me recall that, in an apparent attempt to justify their wholesale rejection of testimony in which it is mistakenly alleged that four chimneys were destroyed during the Auschwitz uprising, the historians conjure up the specter of Holocaust denial, claiming, according to Laub, that “it was utterly important to remain accurate, lest the revisionists in history discredit everything.” In order properly to contextualize this remark, I would also recall that, in the years immediately preceding the debate, the so-called “revisionists” or Holocaust deniers began to achieve an unusual degree of public exposure, having shifted their agenda from the disreputable fringes toward the mainstream of political exchange precisely by appropriating the respectable discourse of academic historiography. To be fair to the historians, then, we should recognize how severely the already prevalent anxiety of historical transmission may have been exacerbated by this development, by this resurgence of a denial that, insofar as it seeks to obliterate the very memory of “that which happened,” I would not hesitate to characterize as the pursuit of genocide by other means.

However, what the historians fail to recognize in their dogmatism is how easily they themselves fall prey to the deniers. For one of the tactics most frequently employed by Holocaust deniers consists in appealing or feigning to appeal to the assumptions of their adversaries—in this instance, the objectivistic assumption whereby history is found and not made, whereby historical truth simply inheres in facts that “speak for themselves,” and whereby, therefore, doubts concerning certain facts or relations between facts can suffice to bring the whole edifice of the Right Story tumbling down. On the basis of such doubts, especially in their effort to reach a public whose members are too young or lack the opportunity or the inclination to familiarize themselves with the complexities of historiography and for whom the notion of the Right Story may seem to make so much common sense, it is mere child’s play for deniers to convert the issue of what, to the best of our knowledge, can be said to have happened (not to mention how or why it happened) into the issue of whether it happened. And this unfortunately is not all, since, as the debate suggests, the tactic in question can function within a strategy whose larger purpose is to sow division among those who have every reason to practice solidarity with one another (and which in some measure is reminiscent of the strategy implemented by the Nazis through *Judenrat*, or Jewish Councils): not only do the historians “silence” Serena N., as would their adversaries, but
they lead Laub to exhibit in her defense a dismissiveness of factual accuracy that plays no less than their own dogmatism into the hands of Holocaust deniers.

My concern here, though, is not primarily with Holocaust denial or the kind(s) of response that must be made to it but with the cognitive constriction it produces or reinforces in this debate. For the historians focus overwhelmingly on what happened, with the all too obvious ambition of “being right.” And in pursuing such a narrowly circumscribed certainty, they can easily fail to acknowledge that although “the reconstruction of the most detailed sequences of events related to the extermination of the Jews is progressing apace,” as Saul Friedlander puts it, “for some historians at least, an opaqueness remains at the very core of the historical understanding and interpretation of what happened.”

In other words, the historians in Laub’s account can easily avoid the difficult task of considering how or why what happened happened, and with it a fundamental uncertainty of historical understanding or what Friedlander calls “the unease in historical interpretation,” an unease that “cannot but stem from the noncongruence between intellectual probing and the blocking of intuitive comprehension.”

To be sure, the debate between Laub and the historians is itself of rather limited scope. But to assume on this basis that it cannot be expected to occasion the “noncongruence” to which Friedlander refers is a mistake, since often enough this noncongruence surfaces precisely in details the mere knowledge of which does little or nothing to meet their challenge to the understanding. Friedlander himself cites a letter in which Walter Benjamin observes that the Viennese gas company had suspended service to its most important customers, the Jews, because these customers, using gas mostly to commit suicide, were not paying their bills.

Yet as I have just suggested, such food for thought can be found as well in the debate discussed in these pages, if we are willing to look for it. Consider, then, one last time, the situation of Serena N. (not to mention the thousands of other inmates assigned to the “privileged” Canada commando): to put it simply, her survival depended on how effectively she could contribute to an industrialized process whose goal was her own destruction. These are things we have come to know, perhaps, too well, or at least to the point where we are no longer sufficiently surprised and disturbed by them; so that, in conjunction with the emotional and psychological tension, with the “empathic unsettlement” to

which Holocaust survivor testimony can give rise, we may wish to foster or renew, in the reception of such testimony, something like a cognitive unease. Of course, this is by no means the only task facing humanistic education about the Holocaust. But I would venture to say that it is one of the most important.
That we end up here after so many detours should come by now as no surprise: to paraphrase a proverb cited by Levinas, we could say that this survivor "writes straight with crooked lines." And that to hear him or, for that matter, any survivor of the Holocaust requires us to listen—not "absolutely," but certainly in some measure—otherwise.

Conclusion

The perspective of this book as a whole is informed by the notion that at stake in the interaction we call "witnessing" is a fundamental and indispensible tension between its participants. Even though in most cases there is no face-to-face encounter with survivors but rather one that is mediated by a recording of some kind, so that we can at best, and largely unbeknownst to survivors themselves, act as the trustees of their testimony by ensuring its continued reception, we are presumably always concerned, whether as listeners, readers, or viewers, with their reconstruction of a sense of self and community. Thus, whatever specific social, political, historical or other purposes this trusteeship may serve, receiving testimony is first of all an ethical exigency that tests our ability to empathize. At the same time, this exigency entails a constraint, at least insofar as it contraindicates the confusion of empathy with an identification that would blur the distinction between survivors and ourselves. Indeed, although it is generally assumed that what witnesses have had most to fear is public indifference or hostility, I
would stress that, however it may be motivated, the overidentification with survivors or the appropriation of their experience as our own can prove just as silencing, perhaps even more so if we consider that it can leave them, or others who witness such a response, with the impression of having initially been deceived by outward signs of solicitude and solidarity. As we have already seen more than once in this volume, the witnesses of witnessing are required to maintain a balance of empathy and reserve, to tolerate a tension between identification and estrangement, to recognize and respect the irreducible otherness of survivors while, in effect, welcoming them back into the larger community.

To be sure, we may wonder whether this exigency should not be reframed as the moment approaches when the last Holocaust survivors will have disappeared and it will no longer be possible for the exercise of a tempered empathy to do them any good. But there is more than one way to answer this question.

The first thing that may come to mind, at least for those familiar with the development of Holocaust studies over the past thirty years, is the advent not so much of a shift in emphasis as of a new focus of attention, that is, the children of survivors, to whom the transmission of their parents' experience has been nothing if not problematic and whose own witnessing requires from us an adaptive transposition of what we learn from the reception of survivor testimony itself.

At a broader level, we may draw on an apprenticeship in witnessing the witnessing of Holocaust survivors in order to listen better to survivors of subsequent genocides, not to mention survivors of other, especially man-made traumatic events, from military combat to sexual assault, from terrorist attack to torture—notwithstanding the predictable outcry, from certain quarters, protesting comparison of the Holocaust with anything else before or since. In this respect, I will not belabor the obvious, namely, that incomparability can only be established through comparison and that, furthermore, it rings a bit hollow as a prize for competitive suffering. Nor, however, would I deny for a moment that comparison has frequently been abused with a view to the very misappropriation against which I have argued in these pages. The point is that attunement to the difference between ourselves and survivors of the Holocaust should encompass the difference between one Holocaust survivor and another and as such can facilitate, in principle, efforts to understand the survivors of other traumas. Needless to say, this facilitation does not promise facility. It demands instead a serious work of translation in which the difference between survivors, as well as the tension that informs our witnessing of their witnessing, must be navigated anew, and of which the only thing we can state with certainty is that it will change the translators themselves.

Yet listening to Holocaust survivors or, more precisely, responding to them in colloquy with other listeners also amounts to a practice of community, all the more noteworthy as at issue in it is the future of what the Holocaust itself proved to be so destructible. Precisely here, however, we should first recall that the relationality constitutive of community is no less constitutive of the individuals it comprises: the tension I have underscored between interlocutors is inseparable from a tension within them. Much, indeed, depends on this tension. Concerning the interaction of intellect and affect, for example, we have repeatedly observed what happens when a theory of trauma or its representation pursues its own conceptual elaboration at the expense of the imaginative effort required to put oneself in the place of a survivor and feel what it might be like to hear the theorist say, in essence: "I know all about what you went through. But you yourself cannot speak of it." Of course, the silencing effect of the theory such a statement reflects may seem, by now, perfectly obvious. Less obvious but equally significant is its failure to appeal, for the understanding of trauma or the reception of testimony, to imagination and affect as fundamental modes of cognition.

That these alone, unconstrained by an objectifying intellect, can lead in turn to as thorough a usurpation and silencing of the survivor as does the intellect in isolation, and that in so doing they inevitably forfeit their own cognitive value, merely reinforces the importance of the interaction itself. In this instance, then, what I have called a "tension" within the individual suggests that the reception of Holocaust survivor testimony entails an education of both the heart and the mind.

Presumably, the distance that this tension allows us to take from ourselves could give us pause before making a claim to the effect that the Holocaust, or trauma of any kind, is "unspeakable." We could stop to consider how, in a concrete situation of address, it might be heard by a Holocaust survivor and whether, among other translations, by no means the least plausible might sound like this: "I don't want to listen." At the same time, we
could ask about the implications, regarding other respondents to a survivor’s testimony, of the claim so translated, which can boast of no plausibility whatsoever as an invitation for those respondents to speak. This is why I raised just a moment ago the issue I will reformulate here by pointing out that the way in which we receive the testimony of Holocaust survivors is inseparable from the way in which we practice, with one another, a present and future community. Of this point we admittedly have, in the case at hand, where the claim that trauma is unspeakable tends to silence both testifying survivors and their witnesses, what could at best be called a demonstration by default. But if the point itself is valid, then we are clearly not relieved of the responsibility to listen even to those whose dogmatism discourages its fulfillment. On the contrary: the widespread and virtually canonical affirmation of unspeakability is itself a reaction to trauma, which must be sounded as attentively as any other if our listening is to be worth anything at all. This, as the preceding remarks suggest and as those with the patience to read this volume well know, has not precluded my responding to it with feeling.

What these readers also know, however, is not to expect from me, in reference to the reception of Holocaust survivor testimony, the last word. For it is against the last word that I have argued throughout this book, not least of all by emphasizing time and again the situation of address on whose openness a pluralistic community must rely. With any luck, the book may simply help to invigorate and sustain the discussion from which it has already benefited so much.

NOTES

1. Frames of Reception


2. See BW, esp. 57–59, 69, and 70–72, and “An Event Without a Witness,” esp. 75–76 and 85, where Laub discusses the witness, the listener, and their interaction. In these pages, at least, the concern for other listeners is, as I say, suggested rather than explicitly addressed as a general issue in the reception of testimony. In other words, it can be inferred from Laub’s participation in the activities of the Archive (including the conference at which the debate discussed in this chapter took place), from the decision to publish his reflections, and from his interactive or relational model of witnessing.

It should be noted that to the earlier version of this chapter, entitled “Between History and Psychoanalysis: A Case Study in the Reception of Holocaust Survivor Testimony,” published in History & Memory 20, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2008): 7–47, Laub responded in “On Holocaust Testimony and Its Reception’ Within Its Own Frame, as a Process in Its Own Right,” History & Memory 21, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2009): 127–50. There, Laub considers it misleading to infer, as he puts it, “that I advocate a concern for a community of listeners . . . a notion which I do not entertain anywhere in my writings but can be found in Geoffrey Hartman’s work” (ibid., 149n.18; for Hartman, see The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996], esp. 136, 144, 151–56). Not only do I find the inference to be sound, however, but elsewhere Laub does indeed explicitly voice this concern: see, e.g., with Marjorie Allard, “History, Memory, and Truth,” in The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1998), 811–12; and “From Speechlessness to Narrative: The Cases of

3. In his response to "Between History and Psychoanalysis," Laub disputes my use of the term case study because, he says, it "would imply that my report of the debate is about specific people or a specific historical situation (which it is not)" ("On Holocaust Testimony," 129). This claim—that his report is not about specific people or a specific historical situation—is not only untenable but somewhat puzzling, given that he himself goes to considerable lengths to prove that it is about specific people and a specific situation (see, for the witness(es), 128–33 and 144–45 nn. 3 and 4, and for the historians, 134–35 and 146–47 n. 9). I will return to these specificities. For now, let me just add that the term case study does double duty here, referring both to Laub's text on reception and to my own study of that text—and that, contrary to his assertion that I disregard his own reflections on witnessing (137), these not only serve as a touchstone of my critique but are explicitly evoked on pp. 8 and 28–29 (herein pp. 8–9 and 29).


5. See http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/catalog/index.html, where the other interviewer is identified as Eva Kantor.

6. I am indebted to the staff of the Archive for identifying the "core" testimony in question as T-179, Serena N., Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library. Of all the interviews with female survivors conducted by Laub prior to the latest of the conferences cited below (n. 10), this is indeed the only one in which the four chimneys and their alleged destruction are mentioned. In reference to the uprising, it runs as follows (beginning at 55:52):

sn: All of a sudden we saw the gates open and . . .

SL: You saw . . .
from his anecdotal remarks (concerning a moment “many months later,” that is, later than November 7, 1982, when Serena N.’s testimony was recorded, and “a conference . . . on the relation of education to the Holocaust”) as well as from information available on the Archive’s website (http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/publications/conferences.html), the conference in question probably took place on November 5–6, 1983, and was entitled “The Educational and Research Uses of the Yale Video Archive” (although there are two other possibilities, “Education and the Holocaust: New Responsibilities and Cooperative Ventures,” October 28–29, 1984, and “Challenges to Education,” November 17–18, 1985). Despite numerous queries and close examination of the conference programs, I have been unable to determine, in any of the three cases, who exactly Laub’s “historians” might have been.

I would further note that in “Bearing Witness” Laub debates more than one historian, whereas in his response he refers to “the debate with the historian” (“On Holocaust Testimony,” 134). This he must presumably do because, having consulted the program for the conference of November 5–6, 1983, while drafting his response, he discovered that only one of the participants could qualify as a historian, namely, Raul Hilberg (who was, and insisted on being identified as, a political scientist). To Laub’s question, “Why did Terezis not raise the question whether Hilberg, whose skepticism regarding testimony is well known, could have been the historian referred to in my essay when seeing his name on the conference schedule?”—to say nothing of his careless insinuation that “it seems Terezis did not look very hard” (147n.9)—there are two answers. First, Laub repeatedly refers, again, to the “historians” (plural), even though Hilberg was the lone de facto historian whose name appeared on the program. And second, in a letter dated July 3, 2006, I asked Hilberg if he would share his recollections of the conference with me. In his reply of July 7, 2006, which his wife has kindly granted me permission to paraphrase, he said that he did indeed attend the conference but had no memory of a debate about the witness to whom Laub refers. Thus, not only does the question concerning the identity of these historians remain open, but one cannot help but wonder how it is that no one save Dori Laub seems to have any memory of the debate itself (see, again, 147n.9: “It is interesting to note that of the thirteen conference participants I was able to contact, not a single one could remember that specific conference or panel”).

That said, I focus on the debate precisely because, as Laub himself says, “it cast such a bright light on two diametrically opposed ways of listening to survivors” (134). Moreover, in the thirteen additional chapters or articles of his own that Laub cites (147n.10, 148 nn. 14 and 15, 149n.24), I see little or nothing, as far as historiography is concerned, that would indicate a fundamental change of attitude. This includes the text cited above (n. 3), “From Speechlessness to Narrative,” where the traditional historiography to which he refers (254) does not obviously differ from what one would imagine to be the practice of his opponents in the debate. (A portion of this text [254–55] was previously published in “Kann die Psychoanalyse dazu beitragen, den Völkermond historisch besser zu verstehen?” Psycho: Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und ihre Anwendungen 57, no. 9/10 [2003]: 945–47. Here, Laub also refers in briefer but otherwise identical fashion to the historians he debated [948]).

11. See testimony cited in n. 6, above. Given their fixation on the number of chimneys destroyed, one may also wonder why none of the historians points out that three rather than two members of the SS perished during the rebellion.

12. It is unfortunate—and puzzling—that Laub believes I was attacking him when “using my identity as a survivor as an explanation for the stance I took in the debate with the historians” (“On Holocaust Testimony,” 149n.18). In referring to his status as a survivor, I am actually making a point about cognition, namely, that experience, to the extent that it enables one to put oneself in the place of another, entails an objectivity that objectivism itself cannot grasp. For this point, I am indebted in some measure to Laub’s own reflections on the relational self. That said, the qualification “as a survivor” is not meant to imply that he did not also respond to the historians as a psychoanalyst.

13. I am indebted to Susan Brison’s analysis of this transformation in Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), esp. 56–57, 68, 71–73 (Brison refers to Laub’s insightful statement that survivors “did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive” [Laub, “An Event Without a Witness,” 78, Brison, Aftermath, 68]). Of course, it must be asked how seriously we are to take Laub’s claim concerning the performative dimension of testimony when, as I have observed (n. 6, above), his account of what happens when Serena N. speaks of the revolt seems so exaggerated. The matter is hardly resolved when he modifies his account, relocating the supposed transformation of her demeanor to a moment some two minutes later, where she mentions the positive effect of the rebellion on prisoner morale (but where, unlike Laub, I still see no sign that “something has radically changed in her emotional experience of her testimony” [“On Holocaust Testimony,” 129]). Whether or not any such transformation takes place at this point, however, the problem is that, in “Bearing Witness,” Laub ascribes the performative force of Serena’s testimony to the coincidence of analogous rebellions: it is, according to him, precisely as she narrates the uprising of the Auschwitz Sonderkommando that Serena enacts one of her own, “breaking out of Auschwitz even by her very talking” (BW, 62). Now that the alleged transformation has been displaced, one cannot help but wonder how the rigorous relation between narration and enactment, between the constative and performative dimensions of testimony, is supposed to remain intact. That said, it may be that this particular
testimony does not provide the strongest support for his claim, which in its generality is often enough borne out by the study of trauma and testimony to deserve consideration in any analysis of reception, and perhaps especially where performativity is at risk of being ignored altogether.

14. This notion of delay has been associated with post-traumatic psychology at least since Freud. Although, beginning with the Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895), Freud already conceived of Nachträglichkeit (deferred action) as an important feature of mental functioning, it looms even larger when, in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), he focuses on the partial disabling, in traumatic experience and its aftermath, of binding, the process whereby stimuli are organized for expenditure through their investment in representations. Trauma exposes the organism to stimuli so far exceeding its organizational capacity as to impose a staggered "dosage" of expenditure, thus rendering deferral or delay much more conspicuous. See Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, in SE, vol. 18 (1955), 7–64, "Jenseits des Lustprinzips," in GW; vol. 13 (1940), 60. This and related issues are discussed at greater length in Chapter 2.

15. Laub clearly does himself a disservice, however, when, just a few pages earlier, he claims that "the trauma survivor who is bearing witness has no prior knowledge, no comprehension and no memory of what happened" (BW, 58). This is a statement bound to elicit questions reflecting the naivety of the statement itself, questions such as: On what basis, then, does the survivor bear witness? To what—if not to whatever is known, comprehended, or remembered—does the survivor testify? How does the witness having "no prior knowledge, no comprehension and no memory of what happened" ever know that he or she is a survivor? Underlying this claim (as well as the characterization of the Holocaust as "an event without a witness") is undoubtedly the idea, which Laub shares to one degree or another with Jean-François Lyotard, Cathy Caruth, and Giorgio Agamben, that trauma is an absolute to whose experience victims themselves have no access. To enumerate and discuss here the reasons for which this idea is untenable would take us too far afield (but see Chapters 2 and 4 of this volume). Suffice it to say that Laub's hyperbole might prove less objectionable were it accompanied by an analytical account of specific psychic mechanisms triggered by trauma ("From Speechlessness to Narrative" takes a modest step in this direction, qualifying the hyperbole to some extent and referring to certain dissociative phenomena [257]).

Still, it is important to clarify here the sense in which I understand Laub's claim that "knowledge in the testimony" is a "genuine advent." To make this claim is not, I would argue, to say that prior to this advent, prior to the advent of this knowledge, the survivor knows (or comprehends, or remembers) nothing, but rather that "in the testimony," in the externalizing or expressive relation to a listener, the survivor "discovers" herself (including what she knows, comprehends, and remembers), comes to know herself as though for the first time precisely by becoming another, indeed, that this ongoing transformation may even explain the "recovery" of apparently misunderstood or forgotten experience. See, in this connection, Laub, "On Holocaust Testimony," 140–41.

16. I do not mean to suggest that the ambition of all testimonial narrative is or should be a seamless story. Not only would this appear suspect—as though the means with which we make sense of experience had been left entirely intact by an unprecedented historical trauma—but it is rather clearly the case, in witnessing to this trauma, that narrative "failure" of one kind or another can be and often is itself significant. However, in videotaped testimony (as opposed, for example, to written memoirs), a quite pronounced narrative linearity is required if the witness, the interview(s), and the viewers are not to become disorientated.


18. Thus, to extend an earlier remark (n. 7), the objectivistic historian would be positioned outside of history in both senses of the term, that is, in the sense of event and of narrative, or, according to the distinction used by Hegel and familiar to philosophers of history, of the res gestae and the historia rerum gestarum (G. W. F. Hegel, The Philosophy of History, trans. J. Sibree [New York: Dover, 1956; Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2004], 60). Beyond the questions already raised by Laub's "inflection" of Serena N.'s testimony concerning the uprising (n. 6), the identity of the "testifying woman" becomes even more problematic here. To begin with, Serena refers to goods smuggled for rather than by her, and in doing so shows no change of demeanor. More important, she is not startled by Laub's question, but momentarily hesitates before going on to explain the meaning of "Canada." Most important of all, she knows—and knew—perfectly well that everything to be sorted in Canada came from the victims of mass murder (see T-179, 4260–5000). In my own puzzlement, I returned to the only testimonies that, as far as I could determine, might be confused with hers, namely, those of Irene W., her sister (T-65, FVA), and of Rose A., their aunt, already mentioned (n. 6), both of whom served with Serena in the Canada commando. Both Irene and Rose recall having smuggled goods from Canada for the sake of fellow inmates, but in neither case do I detect, accompanying this recollection, any change of demeanor. When asked the name of the commando, Irene does not hesitate to provide it, and as for Rose, after a moment of confusion due to her having misunderstood Laub to be inquiring about the Sonderkommando (composed exclusively of men), and after Laub then repeats the word "Canada" (contrary to the claim that he "decided to back off"), she not only recognizes it but begins to explain its usage. Finally, like Serena, both Irene and Rose know—and
knew—that what they were assigned to sort belonged to murder victims (for Irene W., see T-65, 1:27:00–1:31:00; for Rose A., T-183, 1:02:00–1:05:30 and 1:27:00ff.).

These considerations strike me as unavoidable if we are to grasp the extent to which and the possible reasons for which Laub misrepresents the witnesses to whom he claims to listen so carefully (a misrepresentation to which I will return). Even more than in the case of Serena N.'s testimony about the uprising, what Laub attributes to the “testifying woman” in connection with the Canada commando tends to undermine his approach to reception by suggesting that the very guideline he is in the process of establishing, and according to which one ought not to listen only for what one wants or expects to hear, may be selectively observed. In his response, he acknowledges “(mis)remembering” but is not deterred, on the one hand, from continuing to speak of “Serena's silence about her experience inside the Kanada commando” and, on the other, from turning his inaccuracy to account by claiming that it “in essence consists of replacing the manifest text with its latent meaning” (“On Holocaust Testimony,” 132–33).

20. The possibility that such an inmate might not have learned both the name and the function of the commando was in fact extremely remote, for a number of reasons, not the least of which were the communication between inmates and the physical proximity of Canada (in Auschwitz-Birkenau) to Crematorium IV (which lay in plain view just the other side of a barbed wire fence and which, incidentally, due to unforeseen developments at variance with the insurrectionist plan, was where the rebellion actually started).

21. See Filip Müller, Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers, trans. Susanne Platauer (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), esp. 153–60. Some accounts do suggest such an atmosphere, e.g., the testimony of Zofia Kasakiewicz (who, like Serena N., was working in Canada), quoted by Mark, The Scrolls of Auschwitz, 145. Much, no doubt, depends on the situation of the eyewitness at the moment of the rebellion as well as on whether the mood of remembrance derives strictly from that moment or is colored by its horrific aftermath. In any case, Laub's imported exuberance oversimplifies the ambiance of the uprising.


23. “[T]he survivor whose story is filmed is not seeking personal help; he is called upon to bear witness. By being interviewed, he is entering history. He is doing his share in remembering. That such interviews are conducted because of the subject's involvement with the Holocaust gives the interview the character less of a personal and more of a social and historical event” (Martin S. Bergmann, “Reflections on the Psychological and Social Function of Remembering the Holocaust,” in Generations of the Holocaust, ed. Martin S. Bergmann and Milton E. Jucovy [New York: Columbia University Press, 1990], 320).


25. It may appear incongruous to ascribe truth to the woman’s “performance” since, strictly speaking, the function of performative language is to do rather than to tell (the truth, for example). But the truth in question is actually being claimed for the assertion that this testimony does have performative force or efficacy.


27. Information concerning this date, the relationship among the three witnesses, and the identity of the interviewers can be obtained from three sources combined: the videocassettes themselves, the time-coded finding aids that accompany them (both being available only at the Archive, at least until 2013), and the website (http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies).

28. Laub says: “It is more than likely that when writing my essay I disguised the identity of all protagonists involved and changed minor details not relevant to the point I was trying to make in order to protect the privacy of everybody involved, as is customary in psychoanalytic reporting of clinical vignettes,” adding that “I refuse to be the judge in this ethical dilemma between confidentiality and transparency” (“On Holocaust Testimony,” 132 and 145n.5). Aside from the fact that this practice confuses psychoanalysis with the videotaped interviewing of a Holocaust survivor, there is no such “ethical dilemma” here, since among the rules of the publicly accessible archive that Laub himself co-founded and to which witnesses give their informed consent is the requirement that any citation include the full first and abbreviated last name of the witness in question.

A related issue arises through the ambiguity of the verb to refer as Laub uses it when stating that “my essay refers exclusively to the testimony of Serena N.” and that “I never referred to the testimonies of Rose A. and Irene W. in my essay” (128). On the one hand, I would qualify this statement by noting that he never refers to any of them by name. On the other hand, Laub is clearly concerned here (128–33) to contest my assertion that the “testifying woman” is a composite figure. And he is right to point out (128) that I initially characterized this as a “fact” (“Between History and Psychoanalysis,” 11) when it should more modestly and accurately be called a hypothesis. Yet this hypothesis is not, as he protests, “a figment of Trezise's own imagination” (128) but rather a carefully considered explanation of the multiple discrepancies between this woman and those on whose videotaped testimonies her character appears to be based. To propose such a hypothesis does not require a lot of imagination—a good deal less, in any case, than would be needed to believe that Laub created the “testifying woman” out of whole cloth. In the end, of course, our disagreement...
on this matter and even on the general demeanor of the three witnesses in question is such that only third parties having viewed the videotaped testimonies could decide which of us offers the stronger argument. My point, however, is this: nowhere in “Between History and Psychoanalysis” or in these pages do I claim that the author of “Bearing Witness” deliberately distorted or falsified the testimony of Holocaust survivors. Indeed, Laub would be the first to recognize, I take it, that (counter)transference is largely unconscious, and that listening to oneself can only facilitate listening to another insofar as it brings (counter)transference to light. It is thus all the more puzzling why he apparently did not avail himself of the opportunity to visit the archive before publishing his essay, since the inescapable discrepancies between the videotapes and his memory of them could have yielded a groundbreaking and highly instructive exemplification of transference as it is unwittingly practiced in the reception of Holocaust survivor testimony.


30. On empathy, see LaCapra, Writing History, 39–42. As LaCapra notes, empathy as he understands it can be compared to what Kaja Silverman, in The Threshold of the Visible World (New York: Routledge, 1996), calls “heteropathic identification,” in which “emotional response comes with respect for the other and the realization that the experience of the other is not one’s own” (LaCapra, Writing History, 40).


32. Among these critics are, of course, the so-called constructivists, for whom, in their most extreme (Nietzschean) inspiration, there are no facts, only interpretations. Thus, e.g., Hayden White has asserted: “One must face the fact that when it comes to apprehending the historical record, there are no grounds to be found in the historical record itself for preferring one way of construing its meaning over another” (“The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and De-Sublimation,” in The Content of the Form [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987], 75; first published in Critical Inquiry 9, no. 1 [1982]). (Worth noting here is that White’s own interpretation is called a “fact,” which one supposedly “must face.”) It thus comes as somewhat of a surprise to see him concede, ten years later, that “in the case of an employment of the events of the Third Reich in a ‘comic’ or ‘pastoral’ mode, we would be eminently justified in appealing to ‘the facts’ in order to dismiss it from the lists of ‘competing narratives’” (“Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth,” in Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the ‘Final Solution,’ ed. Saul Friedlander [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992], 40). To be sure, those inclined to view this statement as a genuine departure from White’s constructivism might wish to consider whether the quotation marks framing “the facts” do not suggest that he is hedging his bets. But be that as it may, he then goes on to suggest that comedy or pastoral could themselves be “set forth in a pointedly ironic way” and so make “a metacritical comment, not so much on the facts as on versions of the facts emploted in a comic or pastoral way” (40). Perhaps, indeed, ironic pastoral would prove to be an effective mode in which to convey both the delusional and the morally repellent nature of something like “Aryan paradise.” However, as White concedes to Saul Friedlander, such representations risk its aestheticization of genocidal ideology that is itself morally repellent. And from the cognitive point of view, it is not enough to assert that “surely it would be beside the point to dismiss this kind of narrative from the competition on the basis of its infidelity to the facts” (40). What must be added is that “infidelity to the facts” can only be “beside the point” once the facts have been established and communicated. The kind of narrative White has in mind yields at most a second-order cognition: a comic or pastoral misrepresentation of the Third Reich can be “pointedly ironic” only for those who already know—and this becomes more rather than less problematic as the Holocaust recedes in memory.

33. Haskell, “Objectivity Is Not Neutrality,” 301. As the very title of Haskell’s essay suggests, this is not a capacity to be neutrally or indiscriminately employed. In the context of the Holocaust, it raises the crucial question—whose discussion far exceeds the framework of this chapter—whether or to what extent one should, if only as a thought experiment in the name of historical


35. In fact, it seems obvious that the value of Serena N.’s testimony as eyewitnessing might have become genuinely suspect had she demonstrated a full knowledge of those very things concerning the Polish resistance, for example, for ignorance of which the historians reproach her.

36. Harking back to the phraseology of his title (“On Holocaust Testimony and Its ‘Reception’ Within Its Own Frame, as a Process in Its Own Right”), Laub states in conclusion that “testimony has its own frame within which its analysis can proceed” (142). No effort is made to explain the constitution of this boundary separating an inside from an outside, one’s own from another’s, although the word “analysis” might suggest that for Laub it replicates the frame of psychotherapy. Be that as it may, the statement reflects a reaction to my having promoted an understanding of testimony as a generic hybrid, an understanding that, according to Laub, “perpetuates the very fragmentation inherent in the Holocaust experience itself and undermines the struggle to contain the massive destructiveness at the core of this experience” (142). What I actually say here (and in “Between History and Psychoanalysis,” 31) is that “as a generic hybrid, testimony requires for its reception a plurality of interpretive frameworks.” In other words, my claim that testimony has no preestablished framework supports as inclusive and integrated a hearing as possible for survivors and their testimony. Laub himself insists: “It is our task to engage the multitude of interpretive voices already existing and . . . to integrate them in a joint endeavor to understand the Holocaust” (142).


38. Marianne Hirsch’s notion of “postmemory” has played a crucial role in the articulation of this aftermath. See Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

39. The eminent Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg also plays an important role in *Sbouq*. I place “documents” in quotation marks for the same reason here as in the previous paragraph. See, in this connection, Claude Lanzmann, “The Obscenity of Understanding: An Evening with Claude Lanzmann,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 211.


41. The features of the witness’s body, face, and voice function as signs insofar as they point to the person she once was and, by extension, to the time, place, and circumstances of her victimization. Yet these features are also percepts, or qualities apprehended by the senses, which, as such, render the witness “present.” That she should be both present and absent, that she should embody a certain contiguity to that which is not and, in this case, cannot be directly shown—this no doubt helps to explain the ambiguity or ghostliness of survival itself. And to speak, as I do here, of an “aura” is to qualify but to emphasize indelicacy, a mode of communication at once less tangible than showing and more so than telling. Indelicacy figures prominently in Ross Chambers’s seminal work on testimony, *Untimely Interventions: AIDS Writing, Testimonial, and the Rhetoric of Haunting* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

42. Quoted from the website, http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/about/concept.html.

43. One of the most noteworthy instances of “siting” in *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1960) is the interview (conducted by one of the producers, André Harris) with Christian de la Mazière, a former member of the SS Division Charlemagne, at Sigmaringen, which Rousseau aptly terms “the Mecca of collaborators in exile” (*The Vichy Syndrome*, 101). Of course, this is not a site of atrocity, and there is nothing to suggest the kind of reenactment pursued by Lanzmann (who, incidentally, is interviewed in Ophuls’s later film, *Hotel Terminus* [1988]).

Holocaust Criticism,” *Representations* 79 (Summer 2002): 1–27, esp. 10–12. For Lyotard, see *The Differend*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), esp. 66–58, as well as Karyn Ball, “Ex/propriating Survivor Experience, or Auschwitz ‘after’ Lyotard,” in *Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma*, ed. Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler (New York: Routledge, 2003), 249–73; Sven-Erik Rose, “Auschwitz as Hermeneutic Rupture, Differend, and Image malgré tout: Jameson, Lyotard, Didi-Huberman,” in *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, ed. David Barthrick, Brad Prager, and Michael D. Richardson (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2008), 114–37; and Trezise, “Unspeakable,” 52–55. Concerning Laub, see *Testimony*, e.g., 80–81, where the disjunction between trauma and representation informs the problematic notion of the Holocaust as “an event without a witness.” In Felman’s contributions to *Testimony*, this disjunction comes into play in discussions of the same notion (e.g., 194, 211) as well as of the missing of experience (e.g., 169, 195, 268) and the impossibility of witnessing or historical narrative (e.g., 160, 193, 200–201). On Felman, see LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, 116–25, and Sanyal, “A Soccer Match in Auschwitz,” 12–20.


5. SE, 1304/Aus den Anfängen der Psychoanalyse, 388–89.

6. SE, 18:24/GW, 1323; but see also 25–32/24–32.
