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Stephen G. Nichols, Gerald Prince, and Wendy Steiner,
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Dominick LaCapra

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3 Holocaust Testimonies

Attending to the Victim's Voice

The interest in testimonies has been on the rise in the course of the last twenty years or so. Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* of 1985 was not only a significant film; it also heralded the turn to survivor videos, a turn that helps to place Lanzmann's film in a broader context and enables a more informed and critical response to it, notably with reference to problems of interviewing and representation.[1]

The interviewer in survivor testimonies is in a position comparable to that of the oral historian, and one important role for testimonies is to serve as a supplement to more standard documentary sources in history. But they may at times be of limited value when used narrowly to derive facts about events in the past. Historians who see testimonies as sources of facts or information about the past are justifiably concerned about their reliability. Less justifiably, they are at times prone to dismiss an interest in them. The importance of testimonies becomes more apparent when they are related to the way they provide something other than purely documentary knowledge. Testimonies are significant in the attempt to understand experience and its aftermath,

1. On this problem, see my *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), chap. 4.

including the role of memory and its lapses, in coming to terms with—or denying and repressing—the past. Moreover, the interviewer in an exchange with the survivor or witness generally does not seek purely documentary knowledge of the past. His or her manifest implication in an affectively charged relationship to the survivor or witness and the special, stressful demands this relationship places on inquiry may have more general implications for historical research, especially with respect to highly sensitive, emotionally laden, and evaluatively significant issues—issues quite prominent in (but of course not confined to) Holocaust studies. One issue that is raised in accentuated form by the study of survivor videos is how to represent and, more generally, come to terms with affect in those who have been victimized and traumatized by their experiences, a problem that involves the tense relation between procedures of objective reconstruction of the past and empathic response, especially in the case of victims and survivors.

The psychoanalyst and interviewer for the Yale Fortunoff collection of survivor videos, Dori Laub, tells the following story:

> A woman in her late sixties was narrating her Auschwitz experience to interviewers from the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale. . . . 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.[2]

Laub continues:

> Many months later, a conference of historians, psychoanalysts, and artists, gathered to reflect on the relation of education to the Holo-

2. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, M.D., *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 59.

> caust, 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 events. It was utterly important to remain accurate, lest the revisionists in history discredit everything. (59–60)

Referring to himself, Laub comments that

> 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 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." (60)

Lest one leap immediately to the conclusion that there was a confusion of tongues in this interchange between "the historians" and "a psychoanalyst" or even a différend based on two utterly incompatible visions of the truth, one may offer a different interpretation. The woman testified to and, to some extent, relived her experience of events. At a certain intense point in her narrative, as Laub puts it, "she was there"—or so it seems. In one important sense, her testimony is not open to criticism as evidence of her experience as she now recalls and relives it. How that testimony relates to an accurate empirical reconstruction of events involved in her account, such as the number of chimneys exploded or set aflame at Auschwitz, is a distinguishable question. What she relives of the past, as if it were happening now in the present, may, to a greater or lesser extent, be (or not be) an accurate enactment, reconstruction, or representation of what actually occurred in the past. It may involve distortion, disguise, and other per-

mutations relating to processes of imaginative transformation and narrative shaping, as well as perhaps repression, denial, dissociation, and foreclosure. But these issues have a bearing only on certain aspects of her account and could not invalidate it in its entirety. Moreover, one may well argue that the woman testifies not only to her personal experience but to something larger having social significance: the breaking of what Laub terms an "all compelling frame." The ability to break this compelling frame, if only retrospectively by talking about it in a certain way, is an indication that the woman is not simply reliving or compulsively acting out the past but to some extent working it over and possibly working it through. The performativity of her narration is complex insofar as it extends over analytically distinguishable but existentially intertwined processes of acting out, working over, and working through—processes that of course have many subtle intermediaries and combined or hybridized forms.

The response of the woman in Laub's story prompts one to raise the question of traumatic memory and its relation to memory both in the ordinary sense of the word and in its more critical sense insofar as it is tested and, within limits, controlled by historical research. In traumatic memory the event somehow registers and may actually be relived in the present, at times in a compulsively repetitive manner. It may not be subject to controlled, conscious recall. But it returns in nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety attacks, and other forms of intrusively repetitive behavior characteristic of an all-compelling frame. Traumatic memory (at least in Freud's account) may involve belated temporality and a period of latency between a real or fantasized early event and a later one that somehow recalls it and triggers renewed repression or foreclosure and intrusive behavior. But when the past is uncontrollably relived, it is as if there were no difference between it and the present. Whether or not the past is reenacted or repeated in its precise literality, one feels as if one were back there reliving the event, and distance between here and there, then and now, collapses. To use Heidegger's term, one might perhaps refer to traumatic *Dasein* as experientially being back there, anxiously reliving in its immediacy something that was a shattering experience for which one was not

prepared—for which one did not have, in Freud's term, *Angstbereitschaft* (the readiness to feel anxiety). Traumatic *Dasein* haunts or possesses the self, is acted out or compulsively repeated, and may not be adequately symbolized or accessible in language, at least in any critically mediated, controlled, self-reflexive manner. Words may be uttered but seem to repeat what was said then and function as speech acts wherein speech itself is possessed or haunted by the past and acts as a reenactment or an acting out. When the past becomes accessible to recall in memory, and when language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical distance, and perspective, one has begun the arduous process of working over and through the trauma in a fashion that may never bring full transcendence of acting out (or being haunted by revenants and reliving the past in its shattering intensity) but which may enable processes of judgment and at least limited liability and ethically responsible agency. These processes are crucial for laying ghosts to rest, distancing oneself from haunting revenants, renewing an interest in life, and being able to engage memory in more critically tested senses.

In memory as an aspect of working through the past, one is both back there and here at the same time, and one is able to distinguish between (not dichotomize) the two. In other words, one remembers—perhaps to some extent still compulsively reliving or being possessed by—what happened then without losing a sense of existing and acting now. This duality (or double inscription) of being is essential for memory as a component of working over and through problems. At least in one operative dimension of the self, one can say to oneself or to others: "I remember what it was like back then, but I am here now, and there is a difference between the two." This is not moralistically to blame someone tragically possessed by the past and reliving its suffering to such an extent that present life and the assumption of its responsibilities become impossible. Nor is it to assert the possibility of total mastery or full dialectical overcoming of the past in a redemptive narrative or a speculative *Aufhebung* and *Versöhnung*—a stereotypically Hegelian overcoming and reconciliation—wherein all wounds are healed without leaving scars and full ego identity is achieved. Indeed,

severely traumatized people may have different dimensions of the self engaged in acting out, working over, and working through which may not, to a greater or lesser extent, effectively communicate with one another. The process of working over and through the past is itself repeated and subject to remission, but it counteracts the compulsively repetitive, full reliving of the traumatizing past and the feeling that one is simply back there in which "there" involves an experiential identity between here and there, now and then. It also enables ethically responsible behavior, including consideration for others, which may not be available to someone insofar as he or she is in an impossible situation (as were certain inmates of concentration and death camps) or compulsively reliving a traumatic past. Moreover, it is conceivable that in working through problems, memory may assimilate the results of critical testing and integrate accurate information as a validated component of the way the past is recalled, especially as memory is disseminated in the public sphere. Indeed, one of the ways history is not merely professional or a matter of research is that it undertakes to create a critically tested, accurate memory as its contribution to a cognitively and ethically responsible public sphere. Memory of this sort is important for an attempt to acknowledge and relate to the past in a manner that helps to make possible a legitimate democratic polity in the present and future.

I have broached the perplexing question of how to represent and relate to limit events. Traumatic limit events pose challenges to both reconstruction or representation and dialogic exchange. Jean-François Lyotard and others (Saul Friedlander, for example) have theorized this problem in terms of the unrepresentable excess of extreme events that call for discursive and affective responses that are never adequate to them.[3] This is, I think, an important point even if one would want to signal its dangers and qualify it in certain ways. In videos one has the embodied voices of witnesses and survivors who typically have been overwhelmed by the excess of traumatizing events and the experience

3. See Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. George Van Den Abbeele (1983; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), and Saul Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

of them. Those interviewed are both living archives and more or other than living archives. Viewing these videos has effects on people. The sound of the voices, the often agonized looks on the faces have a powerful, at times an overwhelming, effect, and the impression may remain with the viewer long after the actual event. Different people are able to view these videos for variable but limited periods before they shut down and are unable to take more. (In using videos in teaching, I have found that about one hour is a general limit for students.) There is, moreover, the ethically induced feeling that one may not be responding with sufficient empathy, a reaction that increases the anxiety one feels both because of the evident, often overwhelming pain of the survivor recalling and even returning to the position of helpless victim and because of one's own helplessness in doing anything about what is being recounted or relived.[4]

Despite its significance, the notion that traumatic limit events involve and convey an unrepresentable, anxiety-producing excess may have two questionable consequences, even if one does not go to the hyperbolic point of identifying that excess with the "real" or with the idea that, in traumatic memory, the event is repeated in its incomprehensible, unreadable literality. First, an exclusive emphasis or fixation on unrepresentable excess may divert attention from what may indeed be represented or reconstructed with respect to traumatizing limit events, and should be, as accurately as possible. The latter includes the daily life of victims, a problem to which Saul Friedlander's *Nazi Germany and the Jews* is dedicated. As Friedlander says in his introduction:

> At each stage in the description of the evolving Nazi policies and the attitudes of German and European societies as they impinge on the evolution of those policies, the fate, the attitudes, and sometimes the initiatives of the victims are given major importance. Indeed, their voices are essential if we are to attain an understanding of this past. For it is their voices that reveal what was known and what *could* be known; theirs were the only voices that conveyed both the clarity of insight and the total blindness of human beings confronted with an entirely new and utterly horrifying reality. The constant presence of the victims in this book, while historically essential in itself, is also meant to put the Nazis' actions into full perspective.[5]

A second dubious consequence of the notion of an unrepresentable excess in traumatic limit events is that it may lead to a construction of these events in terms of an insufficiently differentiated, rashly generalized, hyperbolic aesthetic of the sublime or even a (positive or negative) sacralization of the event which may prompt a foreclosure, denigration, or inadequate account not only of representation but of the difficult issue of ethically responsible agency both then and now. One may perhaps detect such a hyperbolic appeal to the sublime and the unrepresentable in Lyotard himself.[6] I have speculated that the sublime may itself be construed as a secular displacement of the sacred in the form of a radically transcendent, inaccessible, unrepresentable other (including the alterity of radical evil). The typical response it evokes is silent awe. I have also argued that one important tendency in modern thought and practice has been the attempt to link the traumatic to—or even convert it into—the sublime by transvaluing it and making it the basis for an elevating, supraethical, even elated or quasi-transcendental test of the self or the group. Such an attempt took a particular form in certain Nazis themselves, involving the ability to perpetrate and endure scenes of unheard-of devastation and horror. Here one may briefly recall Himmler's 1943 Posen speech to upper-level SS officers—in important ways a proof text of Nazi ideology and of an important dimension of modern thought more generally, par-

4. It is important to note that the person being interviewed was not *simply* a victim in the past but that victimage may well have been an especially difficult, disempowering, and incapacitating aspect of the past which may at times be relived or acted out in the present. Testifying itself, in its dialogic relation to attentive, empathic listeners, is a way of effecting, at least in part, a passage from the position of victim compulsively reliving the past to that of survivor and agent in the present.

5. Saul Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 1, *The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 2.

6. See his *Differend: Phrases in Dispute* and *Heidegger and "the jews,"* trans. Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts, foreword by David Carroll (1988; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990). One may also find a hyperbolic appeal to a "thematic" of the traumatic and the sublime, in different ways, in Shoshana Felman, Lawrence Langer, Claude Lanzmann, Hayden White, and Elie Wiesel.

ticularly with respect to the fascination with excess and unheard-of transgression. In that speech, Himmler asserted that Nazis remained decent in the face of a geometically increasing expanse of corpses and that their ability to combine these antinomic features—decency (in Kantian terms, the morally beautiful and uncontaminated), on the one hand, and an obscene, seeming mathematical sublime, on the other—is what made them hard.

Moreover, I have suggested that the notion of a negative sublime, one in which the negativity perhaps always involved in sublimity becomes particularly accentuated, is applicable to dimensions of the Shoah, notably to the Nazi quest for redemption or regeneration through an extremely violent, distorted sacrificial process involving quasi-ritual anxiety about contamination and the quest for purification of the *Volksgemeinschaft* from putatively contaminating presences.[7] The possible role of a Nazi sublime should be understood as one factor (not a total explanation) of Nazi ideology and practice, especially with respect to fanatically committed Nazis such as Hitler, Himmler, and Goebbels as well as many upper-level SS officers who were prime movers of the Holocaust. (It probably did not apply, at least typically, to middle- and lower-level functionaries or to such groups as police battalions of "ordinary" men motivated by "ordinary" forces such as obedience to orders, peer pressure, and the desire to conform.) Its possible role nonetheless attests to the importance of distinguishing between the different modalities of the sublime and of being as careful as possible about its invocation, especially with respect to a dubiously homogenizing and possibly evasive use of it in one's own voice to apply to the Holocaust as an undifferentiated scene of excess and unimaginable horror.

Despite its clear and present dangers, the value of the notion of an unrepresentable excess is to foreground the problem of the possibilities and limits of both representation and dialogic exchange in responding to, or coming to terms with, events of the Shoah (as well as

7. See my *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), esp. 100–110. See also *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, 27–30.

other limit events in history). And it simultaneously raises the question of the relations between research, memory, and what limits them.

A goal of historical understanding is, as I have intimated, to develop not only a professionally validated public record of past events but also a critically tested, empirically accurate, accessible memory of significant events which becomes part of the public sphere. A related, problematic, even impossible goal is to assist in the effort to restore to victims (at least symbolically or even posthumously) the dignity perpetrators took from them—a restorative effort in which historical discourse is itself engaged to some extent in processes of mourning and attempts at proper burial (important forms of working through the past). This process of memory-work is related to, but not identical with, research, and it is bound up with the problem of trauma and the challenges it poses to memory in the sense of critically tested recall or recollection. Research is, of course, crucial, and, in an important sense, it is broader than memory; it involves elements that are not committed to memory either by the collectivity or by the individual, including the historian. But one may contend that the past is significant in its bearing on the present and future to the extent that it makes contact with problems of memory. It is what is allowed or made to enter into publicly accessible memory—not historical research in general—which enables the past to be available for both uses and abuses, and the precise manner in which it becomes available (or is suppressed, distorted, or blocked) is of the utmost importance.[8] Accurate memory of the past may or may not be necessary for an individual "cure" (if one can indeed provide an acceptable definition of this medicalized notion which it may be best to avoid, at least in historical and critical-theoretical work). But one may argue that such memory, including memory that confronts the traumatic dimensions of history, is ethically desirable in coming to terms with the past both for the individual and for the collectivity. It is bound up with one's self-understanding and with the nature of a public sphere, including the

8. How one remembers the Shoah is of obvious importance in Israel, Germany, and the United States, as well as elsewhere, and memory will, of course, have different personal, collective, cultural, and political functions in its different modes and sites.

way a collectivity comes to represent its past in its relation to its present and future. One may also argue that accurate memory concerning events that play a crucial part in a collective past is an important component of a legitimate polity.[9] Moreover, accurate, critically tested memory work is related to the kind of active forgetting of the past, or letting bygones be bygones, which (to the extent it is possible) is both earned through collective effort and desirable in group relations—not simply a matter of political expediency. (In this sense, active forgetting is, of course, a complement of, not an alternative to, remembering and memory work.) In this context, an extremely difficult problem is how to respond to, and give an account of, traumatic limit events and their effects in peoples' lives in different genres and areas of study.

Any answer to this question is problematic and contains—in the dual sense of "includes" and "holds or hems in"—paradoxes because trauma invites distortion, disrupts genres or bounded areas, and threatens to collapse distinctions. The problem here is how one tries to inscribe and bind trauma and attendant anxiety in different genres or disciplinary areas in spite of the fact that no genre or discipline "owns" trauma as a problem or can provide definitive boundaries for it. I think

9. This is the kind of point Habermas made concerning Germany during the 1986 *Historikerstreit.* One may ask whether the point is slighted in Habermas's defense, ten years later, of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996). On this question, see Chapter 4. The problem of a collectivity's relation to its past is also at issue in contemporary Israel in the debate over post-Zionist historiography in the work of Benny Morris and others. For Habermas's contributions to the Historians' Debate, see his *New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians' Debate,* ed. and trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, intro. Richard Wolin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). For a comparison of the German Historians' Debate and the debate in Israel over post-Zionist historiography, see José Brunner, "Pride and Memory: Nationalism, Narcissism, and the Historians' Debates in Germany and Israel," *History and Memory* 9 (1997): 256–300. Brunner does not note that the stage that may well follow the post-Zionist debate in Israel may bring out elements shared by (but concealed by the heated debate over) so-called Zionist and post-Zionist historiography, notably a focus (if not a fixation) on Israel, a very restricted interest in comparative history, a limitation of research on the Holocaust largely to Israeli responses, and the absence of any rereading or reinterpreting of the Diaspora (which tended to be presented negatively in Zionist historiography and is marginalized in post-Zionist historiography, which focuses, understandably enough, on Israeli-Arab relations).

the anxiety attendant on trauma and related to a questioning of clear-cut definitions of genres or disciplines should in important ways remain active and not be denied or repressed. It is, for example, what motivates a certain hesitancy (what in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* is expressed in terms of the narrator's or writer's trembling hand) in putting forth a general method or even a limited interpretation of a problem, and it also inhibits unqualified rejection or avoidance of analyses or interpretations with which one does not agree. But all distinctions, while being subjected to pressure and recognized as more or less problematic in their relation to phenomena, should not be conflated with binary oppositions and blurred or collapsed. Nor should the notion of trauma be rashly generalized or the difference between trauma victim and historian or secondary witness—or, for that matter, between traumatization and victimhood—be elided.[10]

In testimonies the survivor as witness often relives traumatic events and is possessed by the past. These are the most difficult parts of testimony for the survivor, the interviewer, and the viewer of testimonies. Response is a pressing issue, and one may feel inadequate or be confused about how to respond and how to put that response into

10. One may also contest the idea that one of the roles played by the historian is that of secondary witness. One may argue that the historian is limited to objective modes of understanding involving only empirical inquiry, observation, analysis, and commentary. It is probably less contestable to argue that the interviewer is a secondary witness in bearing witness both to the witness and to the object of testimony conveyed by the witness. This status implies an affective bond with the witness which Dori Laub desribes as follows: "Bearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener. For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an *other*—in the position of one who hears" (*Testimony,* 70). This statement is dubious even for the interviewer, indeed for the interviewer-cum-therapist, whose presence, however intimate, is never total and who may not undergo secondary traumatization. In any event, it is implausible for the historian or other commentator. At most one may argue that the historian is a secondary witness through empathy that nonetheless respects the otherness of the other and does not pretend to full and intimate presence of either self or other, much less to bonding (mis)understood as fusion or identification. To the extent that one denies the role of transference and rejects an affective component in understanding, notably in the form of empathy (or what I term empathic unsettlement), one will also resist the notion that one role played by the historian is that of secondary witness, even when that witnessing is situated at a respectful distance from the experience of the victim, not necessarily tantamount to secondary traumatization, and correlated with knowledge (analogous to that of the expert witness in court).

words. One question is whether one can and should develop what might be called an ethics of response for secondary witnesses—interviewers, oral historians, and commentators. Such an ethics would at least become a force or consideration in a larger force field. Here it is important to recognize that a historian or other academic, however attentive and empathetic a listener he or she may be, may not assume the voice of the victim. In addition, the academic (as academic) is not—and is not entitled simply to identify with—a therapist working in intimate contact with survivors or other traumatized people. Reading texts, working on archival material, or viewing videos is not tantamount to such contact. Moreover, with respect to the interviewer or oral historian, one may argue that it is dubious to try to induce the survivor to relive trauma and in a sense be revictimized before the camera even if one's motive is to empathize or even to identify fully with the victim and transmit the experience to the viewer. (Such an attempt to take the survivor back—figuratively and at times even literally—to the scene of victimization and traumatization is evident in Claude Lanzmann as interviewer in *Shoah,* and at times it leads to intrusive questioning.) More generally, one may question the desire to identify fully with, and relive the experience of, the victim in however vicarious a fashion. The force of this desire may both occlude the problem of agency in one's own life and desensitize one to the problem and process of attempting to move, however incompletely, from victim to survivor and agent in survivors themselves. This arduous process, which bears on the afterlife of victims as survivors, warrants extensive study. It is not a concern in Lanzmann's *Shoah* or even in Lawrence Langer's *Holocaust Testimonies,* both of which are concerned with victims as victims, not as survivors or agents.[11] Also dubious is a response to which Lanzmann and Langer are decidedly (I think justifiably) opposed—one that circumvents, denies, or represses the trauma that called it into existence, for example, through unqualified objectification, formal analysis, or harmonizing, indeed redemptive

11. Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah: The Complete Text of the Acclaimed Holocaust Film* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995); Lawrence Langer: *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

narrative through which one derives from the suffering of others something career-enhancing, "spiritually" uplifting, or identity-forming for oneself or one's group.[12]

Unqualified objectification and narrative harmonization as well as unmediated identification are particularly questionable when they occur in areas of political and social life, including the classroom. Without positing a simple binary opposition, I would suggest that excessive objectification, purely formal analysis, and narrative harmonization (including what Eric Santner has termed *narrative fetishism*) may be more likely when one uses printed sources or does archival research.[13] In partial contrast, videos may present in an especially powerful form the temptation of extreme identification.[14]

Objectivity is a goal of professional historiography related to the attempt to represent the past as accurately as possible. One may reformulate and defend this goal in postpositivistic terms by both questioning the idea of a fully transparent, unproblematic representation of the way things in the past "really were" and recognizing the need to come to terms with one's transferential implication in the object of study by critically mediating projective inclinations, undertaking meticulous research, and being open to the way one's findings may bring into question or even contradict one's initial hypotheses or assumptions. One may also distinguish objectivity from excessive objectification that restricts historiography to narrowly empirical and analytic techniques and denies or downplays the significance of the problems of subject position and voice in coming to terms with the implication

12. This is a temptation both in professional historiography and in the media, for example, in a film such as *Schindler's List.* It may, of course, also be a feature of political uses of the Holocaust as symbolic capital or in identity-building group formation and nationalism.

13. For Santner's incisive analysis of narrative fetishism, see his "History beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma," in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution,"* ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 143–54.

14. Of course, the opposite tendencies are also possible, for example, simply shutting down emotionally when viewing testimonies. But I think the dangers I stress occur in some important, influential works, for example, Lawrence Langer's *Holocaust Testimonies,* Lanzmann's *Shoah,* and Shoshana Felman's and Dori Laub's *Testimony.* Moreover, shutting down may be a defense against the threat of identification.

and response of the historian with respect to the object of study (including the voices of others). Simultaneously, one may recognize the need for objectification within limits both for research and for the protection of the researcher, especially in areas in which traumatic suffering is marked and the tendency to identify fully with the victim may be compelling.

Pronounced, if not excessive, objectification is at times present in even so unquestionably important and groundbreaking a work as Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*, and it is exacerbated by the fact that Hilberg, in his painstaking analysis of the Nazi "machinery of destruction," tended not to employ the testimony of victims and based his study largely on documents left by perpetrators. In Hilberg an objectifying methodology induces (or at least is conjoined with) what may be an insensitivity to the plight of members of Jewish Councils, whom Hilberg discusses in a distanced and harshly critical way, largely oblivious to the double binds or impossible situations in which Nazi policy placed these councils.[15] In marked contrast, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, while relying on printed sources, has instantiated the possibility of extreme identification with Jewish victims (as Goldhagen understands—or rather imagines—them in their relation to perpetrators) accompanied by an inability to employ evidence to test rather than simply illustrate extremely questionable hypotheses and assumptions. (One such assumption is the idea that "the long-incubating, pervasive, virulent, racist, eliminationist antisemitism of German culture," indeed "the ubiquity of eliminationist antisemitism" in Germany, was the sole significant motivational factor for perpetrators in the Holocaust.)[16]

15. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985). On Jewish Councils and the double binds in which Nazi policy placed their members, see Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation*, intro. by Jacob Robinson; new intro. by Steven T. Katz (1972; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

16. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, 419, 435. See the responses in *Unwilling Germans?: The Goldhagen Debate*, ed. Robert R. Shandley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), and Norman G. Finkelstein and Ruth Bettina Birn, *A Nation on Trial: The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1998). See

Still, even when one resists going to Goldhagen's extreme, videos may present in an especially forceful manner the temptation of a primarily participatory, identificatory response. In the first of her chapters in *Testimony*, Shoshana Felman recounts how her class at Yale faced radical disorientation and the threat of breakdown, both socially and as individuals, after viewing Holocaust videos. She tells of how she became "a witness to the shock communicated by the subject-matter; the narrative of how the subject-matter was unwittingly *enacted*, set in motion in the class, and how testimony turned out to be at once more critically surprising and more critically important than anyone could have foreseen" (7). Coupled with reading literary texts, the viewing of testimonies "carried the class beyond a limit that [she] could foresee"—something that took her "completely by surprise. The class itself broke out into a crisis" (47). After consulting with Dori Laub, they "concluded that what was called for was for [her] to reassume authority as the teacher of the class, and bring the students back into significance" (48). One may question whether taking up an authoritative role that brings students "back into significance" is tantamount to working through problems. As I have intimated, one may also raise doubts about an academic's tendency to identify with a

also my comments in *History and Memory after Auschwitz*. Finkelstein provides an often convincing, detailed refutation of Goldhagen. But one of Finkelstein's own more dubious tendencies is to postulate a tendentious "disciplinary division between holocaust scholarship—primarily a branch of European history—and Holocaust literature—primarily a branch of Jewish studies"—a division that presumably was "mutually respected" before the publication of Goldhagen's book (which represents the extreme of a "Holocaust literature" or "Jewish studies" approach for Finkelstein). Finkelstein tends to associate objectivity with Holocaust scholarship (the epitome of which is Raul Hilberg's *Destruction of the European Jews*) and sentimentalizing empathy with Holocaust literature, a category that includes not only Elie Wiesel but (along with Lucy Dawidowicz) Yehuda Bauer and Dan Diner (88 n). Finkelstein also ironically states: "Arno Mayer's main blasphemy was emphasizing the salience of anti-Bolshevism alongside anti-Semitism in Nazi ideology" (90 n). By contrast Mayer subordinated anti-Semitism to anti-Bolshevism in Nazi ideology and practice, even going to the extreme of terming "the war against the Jews . . . a graft or parasite upon the eastern campaign, which always remained its host, even or especially when it became mired in Russia." See *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?: The "Final Solution" in History* (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 270, and my discussion of this book in *Representing the Holocaust*, chap. 2.

therapist in intimate contact with traumatized people as well as about the identification of a class with trauma victims and survivors—tendencies that may induce the reader's identification with one or the other subject position. In any case, the extreme traumatization of a class through a process of unchecked identification with victims would obviously not be a criterion of success in the use of survivor videos. And it would be preferable to avoid or at least counteract such traumatization—or its histrionic simulacrum—rather than to seek means of assuaging it once it had been set in motion.

The broader question is the role of empathy in understanding, including historical understanding, and its complex relations to objectification and dialogic exchange. Empathy is an affective component of understanding, and it is difficult to control. Certain professional identifications or research strategies may attempt to marginalize or even eliminate (perhaps blind one to) its role along with affective response in general. But empathy is bound up with a transferential relation to the past, and it is arguably an affective aspect of understanding which both limits objectification and exposes the self to involvement or implication in the past, its actors, and victims. As I have already tried to argue, desirable empathy involves not full identification but what might be termed empathic unsettlement in the face of traumatic limit events, their perpetrators, and their victims. Empathic unsettlement may, of course, take different forms, and it may at times result in secondary or muted trauma as well as objectionable self-dramatization in someone responding to the experience of victims. It is plausible to think secondary trauma is likely in the case of those who treat traumatized victims or even in the case of interviewers who work closely with victims and survivors. But it may be hyperbolic to argue that all those who come into contact with certain material, such as Holocaust videos, undergo at some level secondary or muted trauma. And one may justifiably be wary of the overextension of the concept of trauma, even though any idea of strictly mastering its use and defining its range may be self-defeating. But it is blatantly obvious that there is a major difference between the experience of camp inmates or Holocaust survivors and that of the viewer of testimony

videos. Still, even the viewing of videos may have different subjective effects on different people, including recurrent nightmares, and the possibility of secondary trauma cannot be discounted.

Without implying a rash generalization of trauma, empathic unsettlement should, in my judgment, affect the mode of representation in different, nonlegislated ways, but still in a fashion that inhibits or prevents extreme objectification and harmonizing narratives. Indeed, it is related to the performative dimension of an account, and, despite the ways performativity may lend itself to abuse, the problem of performative engagement with unsettling phenomena is important in an exchange with the past. One's own unsettled response to another's unsettlement can never be entirely under control, but it may be affected by one's active awareness of, and need to come to terms with, certain problems related to one's implication in, or transferential relation to, charged, value-related events and those involved in them. In addition, the attempt to give an account of traumatic limit events should have nonformulaic effects on one's mode of representation even independent of all considerations concerning one's actual experience or degree of empathy. In other words, one may maintain that there is something inappropriate about modes of representation which in their very style or manner of address tend to overly objectify, smooth over, or obliterate the nature and impact of the events they treat.[17] Still, one need not go to the extreme of dissociating affect or empathy from intellectual, cognitive, and stylistic or rhetorical con-

17. The so-called normalization of the Holocaust would presumably entail stylistic normalization in its representation as well. While one may argue that historiography of the Holocaust requires the use of professional techniques in authenticating documents, providing footnotes, validating empirical assertions, and so forth, one may still object to the full normalization of Holocaust historiography if it involves a simple reliance on conventional style and standard operating procedures. But, as I have intimated, it would also be questionable to use an undifferentiated "experimental" style (often associated with the sublime) for all aspects of the Shoah. For pertinent discussions of problems of representation, see Ernst van Alphen, *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Michael Roth, *The Ironist's Cage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); and James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

cerns, and one may ask whether empathy is on some level necessary for understanding (however limited or self-questioning that understanding may be). With respect to perpetrators, one may justifiably resist empathy in the sense of feeling or understanding that may serve to validate or excuse certain acts. In fact, one may feel antipathy or hatred. But one may nonetheless argue that one should recognize and imaginatively apprehend that certain forms of behavior (that of the *Einsatzgruppen* or of camp guards, for example) may be possible for oneself in certain circumstances, however much the events in question beggar the imagination. One may even suggest that recognition is necessary for being better able to resist even reduced analogues of such behavior as they present themselves as possibilities in one's own life.[18]

The foregoing argument does not mean that one can provide a how-to book that stipulates formulaically the manner in which historians or others should respond with "proper" empathy and enable that response to affect their writing or mode of representation. In fact, a primary commitment to objectification and empirical-analytic methods in historiography may confront anyone trying to create a problematic space for empathic response (a space that in no sense excludes careful research and critical, contextual analysis) with a double bind or dilemma. On the one hand, one may be asked for concrete procedures, analogous to those employed in empirical-analytic research, which could be taught and followed as rules of historical method. But how could one, with respect to empathy, provide anything analogous to procedures for footnoting references or authenticating sources? On the other hand, any such procedures or rules—more plausibly, any

18. These points are, of course, contestable and difficult to demonstrate with any degree of adequacy. The minimal desirable function they serve is to inhibit demonization of the other and facile self-certainty or self-righteousness. Moreover, the idea that one should recognize and imaginatively apprehend that certain extreme forms of behavior may be possible for oneself in certain circumstances does not mean that one is prone to, or even capable of, such behavior, although one can never tell how one would respond in a certain situation until one is indeed in that situation. Still, speculations about what one can or cannot imaginatively apprehend do not imply the desirability of trying to run various scenarios of atrocity by one's mind, and such speculations may be particularly pointless in view of the way limit events, such as those of the Holocaust, may disempower the imagination or exceed its ability to conjure up situations.

suggestions one put forward—might bring the charge that they could readily be mechanized and abused. The double bind is a reason why it is difficult to acknowledge affective response within a disciplinary framework that, in any case, may be constitutively informed by an attempt to exclude or marginalize affectivity and attendant anxiety. It may also be taken to indicate that one cannot—and should not even attempt to—provide procedures or rules concerning the proper use or correct "dosage" of affect or empathy. Rather, the problem is how an attentiveness to certain issues may lead to better self-understanding and to a sensitivity or openness to responses that generate necessary tensions in one's account. This attentiveness creates, in Nietzsche's term, a *Schwergewicht,* or stressful weight in inquiry, and it indicates how history in its own way poses problems of writing or signification which cannot be reduced to writing up the results of research.

In literature and art (of course including film), one may observe the role of a practice that has perhaps been especially pronounced since the Shoah but may also be found earlier, notably in testimonial art: experimental, gripping, and risky symbolic emulation of trauma in what might be called traumatized or post-traumatic writing ("writing" in the broad sense that extends to all signification or inscription). This markedly performative kind of writing may be risky—at least insofar as it is not automatized and assimilated in mimetic fashion as an all-purpose methodology that predictably privileges excess, incalculability, the transgression of limits, (self-)shattering, unbound or associative play, and so forth. But, even in its riskier and less predictable forms, it is a *relatively* safe haven compared with actual traumatization. It may even be a means of bearing witness to, enacting, and, to some extent, working over and through trauma whether personally experienced, transmitted from intimates, or sensed in one's larger social and cultural setting. Indeed, such writing, with significant variations, has been prevalent since the end of the nineteenth century in figures as different as Nietzsche, Mallarmé, Flaubert, Woolf, Blanchot, Kafka, Celan, Beckett, Foucault, and Derrida. One crucial form it takes—notably in figures such as Blanchot, Kafka, Celan, and Beckett—is what might perhaps be seen as a writing of terrorized disempowerment

as close as possible to the experience of traumatized victims without presuming to be identical to it.

It is debatable whether such writing has a place in literary criticism and the kind of philosophy which is close to it and to literature itself.[19] I would defend its role in criticism that emulates its object, but I would not see it as the only or even the preferred path for literary criticism or for its interaction with philosophy and literature. It is an extremely demanding and easily mishandled limit form of the attempt to bring criticism into close proximity or dialogue with art and prevent it from aspiring to the status of a masterful metalanguage, but the active attempt to distance oneself from this pretension to full mastery may take other forms that include a role for historical analysis and the elucidation, not only the emulation, of experimental literary texts or other artworks. Emulative writing becomes especially open to question when it takes an unmodulated orphic, cryptic, indirect, allusive form that may render or transmit the disorientation of trauma but provide too little a basis for attempts to work it through even in symbolic terms. Still, some of the most powerful and thought-provoking recent criticism is that which opens itself to the reinscription or emulation of disorienting, disruptive, post-traumatic movements in the most powerful and engaging literary texts or works of art. One may at times sense such movements in Cathy Caruth's writing. One remarkable use of the term *precisely,* along with *paradoxically,* in her writing comes precisely when the thought is least precise and most perplexing, perhaps at times disoriented—but in thought-provoking ways that give a "feel" for traumatic experience. In this sense, *precisely* may be invoked more or less unconsciously as a compellingly repeated marker or trace of post-traumatic effects that may not be sufficiently worked through. Shoshana Felman uses the terms *paradoxically* and *paradoxically enough* so repeatedly that their meaning and force are almost

19. Jürgen Habermas, in his hostile reaction to Derrida's way of effecting an interaction between philosophy and literature, does not address this problem in writing, although it would seem germane to his concerns. See *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* trans. Frederick Lawrence (1985; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 161–210.

evacuated—or perhaps they come to function as apotropaic devices that both conjure up and conjure away the unsettling effects of paradox. Still, her last chapter in *Testimony,* in which she discusses Lanzmann's *Shoah,* is quite different from her first chapter, in which she somewhat self-dramatizingly is anxious about the effects of trauma in a class. In her discussion of *Shoah* she writes in a fragmented, lyrical, participatory style that helps to evoke the movement and almost compulsive power of the film, although her approach may entail certain sacrifices in the critical analysis of Lanzmann's masterpiece.[20]

20. Bessell A. van der Kolk's neurophysiological theory of trauma has been especially important for Cathy Caruth. Van der Kolk argues that there is a registration of the traumatic event in its literality as a neural pathway—what in his later work becomes an imprint, engraving, icon, or image in the amygdala of the right side of the brain which is not accessible to symbolization or verbalization. Hence the traumatic event as experience would be inscribed as a literal pathway or image that is in itself incomprehensible or unreadable—one that is read belatedly (*nachträglich*) not because of repression or disavowal but because of literal dissociation from language centers in the left side of the brain. This view is not limited to neuroscientific claims, however. Quoting van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, Caruth asks whether "the possibility of integration into memory and the consciousness of history thus raises the question 'whether it is not a sacrilege of the traumatic experience to play with the reality of the past'" (Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995], 154). For van der Kolk, the initially inaccessible traumatic imprint may in time be addressed or represented in language as the "translation" between the right and left sides of the brain is achieved. The verbalization of the traumatic imprint and the perhaps "sacrilegious" variations played on it may be necessary for a traumatized person's recovery or "cure." (One example van der Kolk gives of variation or flexibility is imagining "a flower growing in the assignment place in Auschwitz" [Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* 178]. Roberto Benigni's film *Life Is Beautiful* might be seen as a dubious analogue of this idea in that it is an event in the public sphere which both presents a questionable image of concentration camps and, especially in its "magical realist" or even fairy-tale treatment of camp life, may well prove offensive to survivors.)

Caruth builds on and extends van der Kolk's argument, often combining it with Freudian views. Indeed, her version of trauma theory, as well as Shoshana Felman's, may itself be interpreted as an intricate displacement and disguise of the de Manian variant of deconstruction. (See also Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996].) In this view (close to Lacan's), the real or the literal is traumatic, inaccessible, and inherently incomprehensible or unrepresentable; it can only be represented or addressed indirectly in figurative or allegorical terms that necessarily distort and betray it. I would speculate that the further displacement (as well as distortion and disguise) involved here may be with respect to a variant of religion in which the Hidden God is radically transcendent, inscrutable (or unreadable), and, in a

In historiography the attempt at, or effect of, bearing witness to, or even "emulating," trauma (if that is the right term) in an extremely exposed and experimental style would be questionable to the extent that it overwhelmed the demands of accurate reconstruction and critical analysis instead of tensely interacting with and, to some extent,

secular context, dead, unavailable, lost, or barred. All representations of such an absolute are sacrilegious or prohibited. In this context, trauma may itself be sacralized as a catastrophic revelation or, in more secular terms, be transvalued as the radical other or the sublime. This compelling frame of reference is also at play in other figures, including Claude Lanzmann in his commentaries on, and role in, *Shoah.* The difficulty is that this frame of reference may either foreclose any attempt to work through problems or immediately conflate the latter with a necessarily Pollyanna or redemptive dialectical *Aufhebung.* By contrast, one may conceive of working through as a limited *process* of integration or introjection of the past which may never fully transcend the acting-out of trauma or achieve full integration and closure.

Van der Kolk himself seems at times to allow for a very optimistic idea of "complete recovery" through full integration of traumatic memory in a "life history" and the "whole" of a personality (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* 176), a view perhaps facilitated by his resistance to the notion of a dynamic unconscious that exerts pressure and creates conflict in the self. Van der Kolk also tends to believe that "traumatic memories cannot be both dissociated and repressed" (169). He associates dissociation (which he accepts) with "a horizontally layered model of mind" in which the dissociated forms "an alternate stream of consciousness," while he links repression (which he rejects in cases of trauma) to "a vertically layered model of the mind" in which "what is repressed is pushed downward, into the unconscious" (168). Van der Kolk nonetheless refers to the dissociated as subconscious and as not accessible to consciousness but maintains that it is not repressed or subject to conflictual forces related to forbidden wishes or desires. One might, of course, object that a dissociated "memory" may indeed be associated with or attached to repressed and forbidden desires (for example, the desire for the death of a parent), and such an association would make even more traumatic and conflict-ridden an actual occurrence (for example, the death of the mother in a case van der Kolk discusses—that of Janet's patient Irène, in which the mother's death was associated with abusive behavior toward Irène on the part of her father).

Van der Kolk might himself be seen as transferentially repeating or acting out the processes he studies in that he splits or dissociates repression from dissociation and resists any notion of their connection. Moreover, his notion of the lodging of the traumatic memory in one half of the brain which is inaccessible to the other half could be seen as a questionable yet convenient literalization of the lateral model of dissociation which "explains" why there is dissociation without repression or other unconscious forces. Distortion would arise not from repression but by the very attempt to "translate" what is literally incomprehensible (or unreadable) into language. In any case, it should be evident that what is experienced as the exact repetition of the traumatic "memory" (or scene) does not entail that the repetition is the exact or literal replication of the empirical event itself. Moreover, it should be stressed that van der Kolk's notion of the exact literality of the imprint or icon of trauma is related to his rejection of unconscious processes such as repression with the

raising questions for those demands. One important text in which such a style at times seems to undercut the historical nature of the analysis is Foucault's *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique.*[21] In it Foucault does not quote or even summarize the voices of radical disorientation or unreason but rather allows them to—or is open to the manner in which they—agitate or infiltrate his own tortured, evocative discourse, a discourse that may exhilarate the reader or threaten to make him or her mad (in both senses of the word).[22] I would in general argue that in history there is a crucial role for empathic unsettlement as an aspect of understanding which stylistically upsets the narrative voice and counteracts harmonizing narration or unqualified objectification yet allows for a tense interplay between critical, necessarily objectifying reconstruction and affective response to the voices of victims. I would even entertain the possibility of carefully framed movements in which the historian attempts more risk-laden, experimental overtures in an attempt to come to terms with limit events.

A larger question here is the complex relation of acting out, reliving, or emulatively enacting (or exposing oneself to) trauma and working it over as well as possibly working it through in a manner that never fully transcends or masters it but allows for survival, a measure

distortion and disguises it brings about. Whatever one makes of his neuroscientific claims (that may rely on an overly functionally specific model of the brain in which the amygdala becomes something like a neurophysiological analogue of the Kantian noumenal sphere), one may find many of van der Kolk's observations concerning trauma and memory to be insightful, and both Caruth and Felman are amenable to a sympathetic, if still partly symptomatic, reading wherein one may try to bring out how, despite—perhaps at times because of—their critical shortfalls, they each, in their affectively charged modes of writing, convey something of the "feel" and pathos of the experience of trauma.

21. Michel Foucault, *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1961). See my analysis in *History and Reading.*

22. Another way of making this point is to say that, at his most disorienting, Foucault in *Folie et déraison* does not so much speak about (or even for) the mad as to—and at times with—the voices of unreason in something close to a free indirect style. I would further note that the operationalized adaptation of Foucault in historiography that provides genealogies of concepts or an objectifying account of disciplines, as in the important work of Jan Goldstein or Ruth Leys, tends to downplay severely, eliminate, or deny this dimension of Foucault's writing.

of agency, and ethical responsibility—a question that bears in significantly different ways on people occupying significantly different and internally differentiated subject positions, such as victim, witness, therapist, "imaginative" writer or artist, and secondary witness or historian. In an attempt to address this extremely complex and difficult question, there may be limited justifications for various responses short of full identification and unqualified objectification. The problem that clearly deserves further reflection is the nature of actual and desirable responses in different genres, practices, and disciplines, including the status of mixed or hybridized genres and the possibility of playing different roles or exploring different approaches in a given text or "performance."

Survivor testimony, including the interviewing process, is in certain ways a new, necessarily problematic genre-in-the-making with implications for oral history, particularly in especially sensitive areas of research. Historians have not yet worked out altogether acceptable ways of "using" testimonies, and their task is further complicated by the at times marked differences between the conditions and experiences of victims as well as their responses to them. As one limited but significant instance of the diversity of responses to limit events within the group of Jewish victims and survivors alone, one may briefly mention the cases of Helen K. and Leon S. in the Yale Fortunoff collection.[23]

23. Fortunoff Video Archive Tape A-35 and Fortunoff Video Archive Tape A-25. Any further discussion of survivor videos would have to include an analysis of problems in interviewing and filming, including the role of seemingly insensitive or dubious questions and the reliance on techniques such as zoom shots or close-ups apparently to intensify emotion that is already overwhelming—hence in a manner that is unnecessary at best and offensively intrusive at worst. Still, the power of testimonies is that they often transcend such stumbling blocks or inadequacies.

The differences in experiences and responses multiply when one adds other groups of victims such as political prisoners, Jehovah's Witnesses, Slavs, homosexuals, and "Gypsies." A related point is that it can be misleading to study victims in isolation from other—at times intricately related or even partially overlapping—subject positions and groups such as perpetrators, collaborators, bystanders, and resisters. In my judgment, the historian should not simply identify with any single participant subject position or group but try to work out varying modes of proximity and distance in the effort to understand each one as well as the

Helen K. seems to see the world in secular terms. She stresses the role of resistance and the manner in which her desire to defeat Hitler in his will to kill her was a force in her survival. Discussing her father's disappearance in the Warsaw ghetto, she speculates on the basis of little evidence that he was picked up by a German patrol. She never allows herself to entertain the possibility that he abandoned the family: this disturbing thought—which can only be suggested by the viewer—is not allowed to enter her mind. Her mother was captured (first thought killed) during the Warsaw ghetto uprising when Germans invaded the house in which they were hiding (a house that also contained the bunker of Resistance leader Mordechai Anielewicz). She later is surprised to find her mother in Majdanek and spends six or eight impossible weeks with the weak and debilitated woman until the mother is "selected" for death. In the tightly packed cattle car in which Helen K. and her thirteen-year-old brother are deported after the fall of the Warsaw ghetto, the brother, suffering from lack of oxygen, dies in her arms. At this point, she tells us, she said to herself: "I'm going to live. I must be the only one survivor from my family. I'm going to live. I made up my mind I'm going to defy Hitler. I'm not going to give in. Because he wants me to die, I'm going to live. I was going to just be very, very strong." She recounts other difficult experiences in Majdanek and Auschwitz and concludes by saying: "I don't know. I don't know if it was worth it. I don't know if it was worth it—because, you know, when I was in concentration camp and even after I said: 'You know, after the war people will learn, they will know. They will . . . they will see. We, we'll learn.' But did we really learn anything? I don't know."

In contrast to Helen K., Leon S. is a gaunt, spectral presence and often speaks in an excruciating, halting manner in which each word, like a fragile monument, is separated by a gap from the following word. He saw his grandmother, upon asking for help from a German, shot before his eyes. His closest friend, who helped him through the

relations among them. The historian might even attempt to work out ways of getting beyond the grid that locks participant positions or groups together in theory and practice.

camp experience, later committed suicide. Leon S. becomes religious after his harrowing experiences and says of his belief: "There is God. Despite the terrible things that happened to us, I couldn't deny the existence. I would never." Of his behavior and attitude toward Germans, he observes: "I could say I didn't raise my hand. I didn't hit a single German. And this may come as a surprise to you. I don't hate them." He adds: "You cannot blame the whole people for something that was done by a group of people." Helen K. and Leon S. may share certain sentiments and both undergo moments of breakdown or extreme disempowerment in which they seem to relive in anguish the past that haunts and at times possesses them. But they are very different people with different ways of coming to terms with that past.

Even when one comes to question the inclination of some historians to exclude or marginalize survivor testimonies as unreliable sources of history, one may still be at sea with respect to the proper use of testimonies.[24] The questions I have raised do not settle this issue. At most they explore options and possibilities, especially with respect to the relation between objectifying reconstruction or representation and what escapes it or is not encompassed by it, including the historian's own implication in, or transferential relation to, the past, having strongly affective and evaluative dimensions, and his or her conscious and unconscious exchange with that past and those living through it. The attempt to come to terms with survivor videos poses an important challenge to history in that it forces a question to which we may at best provide essentially contested answers: how to represent trauma and to give a place in historiography to the voices of victims and survivors.

24. I noted Raul Hilberg's tendency not to employ survivor testimonies. Although he continues to emphasize, at times excessively, the role of a machinery of destruction in all aspects of the Shoah, Hilberg's later approach to testimonies and, more generally, to the problem of interpreting the behavior of victims (notably that of members of Jewish Councils) is somewhat more nuanced than in *The Destruction of the European Jews.* See especially his *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945* (New York: Harper, Collins, 1992); his contributions to *Writing and the Holocaust,* ed. Berel Lang (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), esp. 274; and his "The Ghetto as a Form of Government: An Analysis of Isaiah Trunk's *Judenrat,*" in *The Holocaust as Historical Experience,* ed. Yehuda Bauer and Nathan Rotenstreich (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981), 155–71. See also the important discussion and the comments of Isaiah Trunk at the end of the last book. Trunk asserts: "I agree with most of what [Hilberg] said about the Jewish Councils; I disagree only with his characterization of the ghettos and the Councils as a 'self-destructive machinery.' Here he comes close to Hannah Arendt's absurd supposition that without the Councils annihilation would not have been so total" (268).

Despite her proximity to the perspective of victims (as she understands it), Lucy Dawidowicz stresses the importance of corroborating eyewitness accounts through other documentary sources and gives survivor testimonies a rather limited supplementary importance "to fill out, augment, and enrich the substantive sources for the history of the Holocaust" (*The Holocaust and the Historians* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981], 128). Yehuda Bauer quotes and integrates into his narrative, without comment, limited selections from survivor written narratives and testimonies, both restricting their role and lending them a distinctive authority (*A History of the Holocaust* [New York: Franklin Watts, 1982], chap. 9). Lawrence Langer (not a professional historian) goes to the opposite, comparably questionable extreme from the early Hilberg in explicitly and emphatically privileging survivor oral testimonies as a locus of authenticity while downplaying the significance of survivor writings (*Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991]). "Beyond dispute in oral testimony is that every word spoken falls direct from the lips of the witness" (210 n). Indeed, for Langer "oral testimony is distinguished by the absence of literary mediation" (57). Langer, however, also makes this thought-provoking comment: "Though we have the option of rejecting such testimony as a form of history, we also face the challenge of enlarging our notion of what history may be, what the Holocaust has made of it, and how it urges us to reconsider the relation of past to present (in a less hopeful way, to be sure), and of both to the tentative future" (109). (Langer returns to these and related questions in his *Preempting the Holocaust* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998].)

See also the insightful analysis of Marianne Hirsch (a literary critic), who extends the investigation of testimonies and witnessing into the study of photographs and their relation to narrative (*Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997]). She proposes the notion of postmemory for the memory of later generations not directly implicated in events: "Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated. I have developed this notion in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, but I believe it may usefully describe other second generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences" (22).