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The Language of Suffering: Writing and Reading the Holocaust

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The Language of Suffering: Writing and Reading the Holocaust

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Abstract

The Language of Suffering: Writing and Reading the Holocaust

By Dan Leshem

The tremendous rupture the Holocaust forced on contemporary consciousness has helped it become one of the most thoroughly researched and documented periods of history. In recent years, the concentration camps, their victims and their executioners have become fertile ground for minds trained in a wide variety of disciplines. Competing claims about the contemporary *usefulness* of the Event – using the victims to understand subjectivity, biology, psychology, etc. – obscure the victims' suffering. In many ways, the cacophony of voices addressing the ever-evolving complexity of Holocaust scholarship and memory has allowed contemporary subjects an alibi that protects them from hearing the voices of the victims.

These critical appropriations of Holocaust experience abound in the interpretation of Holocaust testimonies. This dissertation argues that testimony forms a genre unto itself, typified by traumatic silences, lacunae and constant shifts in tense, person and space. Without distinguishing testimony from parallel genres such as memoir or historical narrative, these interruptions in narrative continuity and literary expectations cannot be *read*. Therefore, this text argues in favor of a novel hermeneutics of testimony that can attend to these traces of the survivors' battles with language, memory and trauma. Drawing from Emmanuel Levinas's notion of ethical subjectivity – through discussions of works by Primo Levi, Aron Appelfeld, Jean Améry and Levinas himself – these chapters argue that only such a hermeneutics can respond to testimony's ethical demand.

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Abbreviations

These abbreviations refer to commonly used texts cited throughout this dissertation.

Works by Jean Améry

BGA *At the Mind's Limits*

OA *On Aging*

LH *On Suicide*

Works by Aron Appelfeld

B *Badenheim 1939*

BD *Beyond Despair: Three Lectures and a Conversation with Philip Roth*

TSL *The Story of a Life*

Works by Cathy Caruth

TEM *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*

UE *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*

Works by Primo Levi

ADI *Ad Ora Incerta*

DAS *The Drowned and the Saved*

TR *The Reawakening*

CP *Shema: Collected Poems of Primo Levi*

SA *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity*

VM *The Voice of Memory: Interviews 1961-1987*

Works by Emmanuel Levinas

DF *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*

EE *Existence and Existents*

OTB *Otherwise Than Being, or, Beyond Essence*

OE *On Escape*

TI *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*

Works by Jill Robbins

AR *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature*

PS *Prodigal Son/Elder Brother*

Introduction

Gravity of the Abyss: The Holocaust in Translation

> The Post-Holocaust itself faces a continuing identity crisis: what exactly are its – that is, our – obligations to the event at its center; where do we, as observers, scholars, persons, station ourselves? (Lang xii)

While the tremendous rupture the Holocaust forced on contemporary consciousness has helped it become one of the most thoroughly researched and documented periods of history, it remains perhaps one of the least understood. The post-Holocaust world remains trapped in the orbit of the Event. The unresolved catastrophes continue to puncture the present through the gravitational force they exert on the contemporary imagination. Never again can occupants of the world consider the intersection of technology and industrialization without the intrusion of mechanized mass murder. Even the terms "identity," "society" and "humanity" remain tainted by the event after more than 60 years. The persistent interest of critical readers in the texts of testimony, like the public interest in the stories of survivors, no less than the ravings of Holocaust deniers, that proliferate in every kind of media, testify to these after-effects of the Event. In recent years, the concentration camps, their victims and their executioners have become fertile ground for contemporary imaginations trained in a wide variety of disciplines. Their competing claims about the contemporary *usefulness* of the Event – using the victims to understand subjectivity, biology, psychology, etc. – obscure the suffering of the victims. Remaining deaf to the voice of the victim, much contemporary criticism lies along a continuum of denial, which features full-blown Holocaust denial at its extreme. Both denial and a certain strain of appropriative criticism attempt to master in the present what was unmasterable in the past. Their difference lies in the extent to

which they are willing to suppress the voice of the victim. Both reject the obligation that the useless suffering of the other imposes on ethical subjectivity. In many ways, the cacophony of voices addressing the ever-evolving complexity of the Holocaust have allowed contemporary subjects an alibi that protects them from addressing the victim's suffering.

Yet, within the canon of "data" produced by the Event the voice of the Holocaust victims retains a unique power to shatter a reader's comfortable self-identity. Through period diaries, letters and literary archives, such as the "*Oyneg Shabbos*" documents from the Warsaw Ghetto, victims speak of the present horrors surrounding them and the ultimate atrocity that eventually overtakes them. Alongside this contemporaneous speech echoes the silence of millions of Jews who were brutally murdered between 1933 and 1945 and the voices of all of their potential descendents. Their silence bears a crucial relationship to the speech of Holocaust "survivors," who perhaps did not survive so much as persist in being into the Post-Holocaust world. At the heart of these apparently distinct genres speak the testimonial voices of the survivor/victim. These voices transmitted as testimony – whether philosophical, autobiographical or fictionalized – occupy the proceeding work.

As traumatic events, by definition, cannot be registered as they occur, testimony must translate the experience of the testifier into a linguistic framework from which the original event escaped. The Event itself, however, remains inaccessible to language: it cannot be phrased in spite of the pressing of Holocaust survivors and other victims of traumatic violence to testify. Despite this insufficiency of language, victims put their experiences into words constantly, many of them repeatedly. This fact, that victims of excruciating trauma turn to language, and through language expose their experiences of radical shame, humiliation and dehumanization to *others* – knowing that language

communicates only via a betrayal of the experience itself – does not surprise critical readers nearly enough. I argue that as a result of critical blindness to the complexity of testimonial utterance, testimony is continually betrayed not only by the limitations of language but also by the subjectivity of its hearers who reduce testimony to what it *says*, ignoring *how* it communicates.

Trauma arrests subjectivity through foregrounding lack and absence over presence and plenitude. It tends to overwhelm the subject's ability to understand the world around him, thereby severing the continuous stream of incoming information. Unable to assimilate new experiences the subject ceases to exist, as such. The subjective identity that had existed up until the traumatic event is dissociated from the continuing stream of overwhelming data that cannot be absorbed into subjective self-awareness and is therefore stored in the mind without undergoing the assimilative processes of normal memory. The de-subjectified subject confronts the most basic deprivation imaginable – of protection from the violence of the other, the ability to respond to essential bodily needs, etc. Reduced by this radical lack, the subject loses time's continuity without which subjectivity is no longer possible. Time no longer "flows"; instead, the implicit guarantee of past and future is replaced by an unceasing and inescapable present. Liberation from trauma, which Primo Levi describes as the entry into a new suffering rather than an uncomplicated freedom, forces the survivor to reconcile these disparate parts in an effort to reacquire subjectivity.

Instead of *writing* testimony, therefore the survivor endeavors to *translate* it out of the unintelligible and ineffable imprint of the experience into a linguistic correspondent. This task can be best understood through reference to Walter Benjamin's notion of translation articulated first in the 1923 essay "The Task of the Translator." There, Benjamin demonstrates that true translation is closer to the act of creation than to

any passive attempt at transmission. It bears little resemblance to traditional approaches in which the translator attempts to recreate the original text in the target language so that nothing of the foreignness of the original nor the marks of his translation remains. He does not smooth over odd turns-of-phrase and idiomatic expressions, replacing them with "equivalent" idioms in the host language. Most importantly, the true translator does not bring the text to the reader, making it as palatable and digestible as possible. Instead, as Benjamin articulates the new role, the translation *bears* all the foreignness of the original text. This alterity of an*other* place – transmitted via the web of connotative and denotative associations specific to a given language or genre – represents the very possibility of the testimony's project.

Testimony, though translated from the radically wordless depths of trauma, assaults language, which is then forced to carry it both in its content and through its failure. Critical interpretation of testimony must attend to the infinite variability of testimonial utterance. At best, therefore, the two parts of a traumatized psyche communicate through translation. The subject's "I," her continuous narrative identity, slowly translates bits of inassimilable experience, bringing them into a self that is now five days after liberation, now five years. In this way the psyche strives to regain its self-identity. Yet, since the survivor translates her experience, rather than assimilating it, trauma destabilizes her subjectivity. This is so especially when she gives testimony. While testimony strives to transmit some element of historical experience, extended trauma complicates the transmission of an event that shattered the subject's ability to speak, remember, or even constitute itself. Therefore, contemporary survivors speak about that traumatic historical occurrence through a complicated series of negotiations, metaphors and translations. Their texts, compressed and fractured by the necessarily

partial translation that animates them, do not speak directly to a reader. The traumatic past, unmastered in the testifier, remains volatile in the testimonial text.

For this reason, it is not poor history, melodramatic autobiography, cryptic literature or even legal speech as its name seems to imply. Each testimony recreates the experience of trauma in language, transmitting not only its content but also the traces of its journey. The ethical reader, through attending to these traces, becomes a witness to the survivor's struggle with the past rather than a passive receiver of data. Without an ethical reading, the victim's subjectivity suffers suppression once more. For this reason I argue that testimony demands not only a *reading* but also a *translation*. The critical-ethical demand of the text is that one read not only the words of testimony but the marks of translation as well. This potential response takes the form of responsibility to and for the other, which is, in this case the testimony, the testifier and the trauma.

The ethical reader of Holocaust testimony must translate the survivors' movements not only from silence to speech but also movements out of home countries, home languages and all notions of language as home. Although Jean Améry was born in Austria to a German-speaking family, after the camps were closed and the war ended he resided in Belgium. There, his intellectual and cultural homeland was in France and French, yet his mature Holocaust testimony was written to be read on the radio to a German audience in absentia. Although Aharon Appelfeld grew up in Czernowitz, Romania speaking German before the war and his nanny's Ruthenian while in hiding during the war, after settling in Israel he began writing only in a sparse yet heavy Hebrew. Emmanuel Levinas, the French ethical philosopher and thinker of Jewish ethics, strives to write a philosophy in French that can account for the cultural and history of the Judaic tradition starting with the Torah. Not only is French an adopted language for the Lithuanian native, but he forces the Greco-Latinate languages of French and philosophy

to confront the explosive transcendence of the Hebraic tradition. The work of Primo Levi provides a striking and complex extension of these "translational" issues. After writing books of testimony he felt that the languages of humanistic exploration were incapable of transmitting the depths of Holocaust suffering he carried. He attests to needing a new language that he calls harsh, shrill and even inhuman in which to testify to these hidden emotional depths.

This dissertation reads in each instance the gap between testimony and the language in which it appears. I argue, along with Benjamin, that testimony's power derives from the difference that it transmits, the interruption it forces on language, culture and identity. This realization compels the reader and the critic to avoid speaking about testimony as a literal representation of the testifier's experience and to interpret and respond to the traces of translation, the marks of loss, and the silencing suffering. These traces are not errors of telling; they represent the power of testimony to attend to meanings that have no language, no voice, and no narrative.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, "Unmastered Narratives: Ethics and Testimonial Speech" I introduce the philosophico-ethical demand testimony places on the contemporary reader. Through examining Freud's understanding of subjectivity and trauma, I question the possibility of self-identical subjectivity in general and in the wake of trauma more specifically. Following Emmanuel Levinas's conceptualization of being as essentially self-serving and self-preserving, I demonstrate the contradictions inherent in the position of both testifier and the witness to testimony. Through synthesizing these perspectives, I further argue for a new hermeneutical approach to testimonial narrative that attends to the gaps, lacunae, silences and contradictions that punctuate testimony. I assert that these elements constitute the psychic excess of testimonial narrative demanding a response to that which cannot yet be phrased. In Jean-François Lyotard's

term, traumatic testimony necessitates the creation of new linguistic idioms, exceeding all possible linguistic representations. Not only does the testifier need new words to describe his experiences, he also needs new rules for the joining of phrases, which could create a linguistic register for his suffering. Hence the burden remains on the reader to hear the silenced phrases through those that fill testimony's pages.

With the second chapter, "'Water Fierce Dream': Primo Levi's Poetic Fugue," I examine Primo Levi's poetry as counterpoint to the widespread critical interpretations of Levi's work as humanistic and redemptive. Although some of his testimonial narratives highlight the priority of rationality of emotionality and adaptation over resentment, I argue that these readings are superficial and simplistic. Beneath his apparent craving for meaning, his writing consistently succumbs, in his own words, to the illogical. In fact, after writing the first two testimonial books, Levi felt that he had "completely burned myself out as a witness, narrator and interpreter of a certain reality…But I still thought I had a few things left to say, things I could only say in another language." A language he calls "in-human [*disumano*]" (TVM 88). I believe that critics avoid responding to this poetry precisely because it presents such a clear break with another, well-loved Primo Levi who can serve as a stand-in for the survivor who made it out through the power of his rational abilities. In Levi's "in-human" poetry, one confronts very different language, landscapes and textures, often obsessed with the absence of life, the pollution of existence and a traumatic rupture with time and identity.

In the third chapter, "More Than Memory: Aharon Appelfeld's Literary Survival" I read Appelfeld's fictionalized testimony and consider his insistence that it not be thought of as testimony but as literature proper. He bases this distinction on his belief that testimony aims at redemption: Appelfeld writes that testimony is "first of all a search for relief; and as with any burden, the one who bears it seeks also to rid himself of it as

hastily as possible" (BD 29-30). He furthermore insists that testimony "embodies too many inner constraints to become literature as that concept has taken shape over the generations" (BD 29-30). Through detaching his writing from a strictly conceived reality Appelfeld believes that his writing has been freed from these constraints and is limited by any reading of it as testimony. However, I argue in this chapter that Appelfeld's writing is still testimonial in the sense I give the term "trauma testimony" throughout this dissertation. That is, Appelfeld's writing references and speaks from the depths of a traumatic experience that the author actively tries to understand while relating it through a language too impoverished to give the experience a voice. Through closely reading his reasons for separating his writing from testimony laid out in his interviews and public talks, examining the striking similarity between his autobiographical writing and his fictionalized novels, I argue that Appelfeld's distinction between literature and testimony can best be understood as a distinction between the *subgenres* of adult and childhood trauma testimony.

In the fourth chapter, "The Body in Testimony: Jean Améry and the Problematic Duality of a Tortured Body," I read Améry's mature testimonial texts *Beyond Guild and Atonement*, *On Aging* and *To Lay Hands on Oneself* as performative negations of an unmasterable past. The torture that Améry underwent at the hands of the Gestapo inducted him not only into extended unfolding trauma under Nazi domination, but also into a world without subjectivity, agency and the other freedoms confirmed by subjective "trust in the world" (BGA 28) He insists that with "the very first blow" delivered by one's torturer, the tortured person loses "all those things one may…call his soul, or his mind, or his consciousness" (BGA 40). In spite of this overwhelming loss, Améry's testimonial texts speak from the position of the intellectual – a removed and detached narrative *eye* that attempts to transmit experience without the encumbrance of those very

things whose loss he mourns: soul, mind, consciousness. I argue that this "objective" narrative is consistently punctured by the reality of traumatic suffering whose trace is largely evident not in the explicit content of his texts but through what I call their psychic excess. In *Beyond Guilt and Atonement* this excess successfully displaces the narrative continuity with a single image: Améry's tortured (twisted) body, hanging backwards via luxated shoulders – pure objectivity and destroyed being. His successive texts, each trying to advocate a particular moral position, continue Améry's struggle to overcome his destruction via sheer intellectual effort. Their tragedy arises from the hopelessness of this endeavor.

With the final chapter, "Surviving in Hebrew, Thinking in Greek: Emmanuel Levinas's Testimonial Philosophy," I examine Levinas's philosophy in general, and *Otherwise than Being* in particular, against the "presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror," that he explains serves as an implicit background to his philosophical work (DF 291). Although the text of Levinas's argument in *Otherwise* does not mention the Holocaust explicitly, the book begins between two dedications that, in very different registers and languages, tie the text insolubly to that Event in which his father, mother, brothers and in-laws perished. While his philosophical writing struggles to escape from the generic limitations that constrain not only reader expectations but what the text can say, the Hebrew dedication that begins *Otherwise* speaks in a traditional language of Jewish memorialization and prayer of the souls of perished family members. Meanwhile his philosophical conceptualization of ethics as an ever-increasing responsibility in me for the Other – a commitment that is, at its core, unfulfillable – seems bound up with an event that no historical ethics prevented, or perhaps could have prevented.

This dissertation concludes with an appendix containing an original translation and transcription of the Holocaust testimony of Frida Ephrati (née Rosner), born in

Przemysl, Poland in 1926. When the German bombardment of Lwow began in late June 1941, Ephrati fled with classmates eastward into the Soviet Union. Separated from family, she traveled through the country for months, eventually settling in Kokand, Uzbekistan for the remainder of the war. Upon returning in Poland in 1946, she gave birth to her first child and found her mother who had spent the war in Auschwitz satellite camps. There was no one else left: her father and little sister, along with almost every other member of her family, had been murdered in the camps. Ephrati recorded her testimony over a period of several months in the summer of 1990. The five microcassettes were filled in recordings sessions lasting between one to thirty minutes. At times her intimacy with the listener is reinforced by her whispering voice speaking against a background of the blaring evening news. As her audience was her eighteen-year-old granddaughter, her tone varies from the language of nursery rhymes to a moral lesson delivered to a young adult. Often a stark distance separates her tone from the experiences she describes creating a vibrant, near tragic dissonance. The task that faces the translator/transcriber is therefore to transmit the multiple simultaneous levels of translation – not only from her languages (including Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian and Ukrainian), her trauma, her distance from the events, her adult transmissions of events occurring to a child but also from her context (including the television in the background, her brief recording sessions, her unfamiliarity with the recording technology, etc.). In spite of the importance of this transmissive role, the primary task of the translator/transcriber remains to listen without assuming he can hear and to accept a responsibility he can neither defer nor redeem.

Chapter 1

Unmastered Narratives: Ethics and Testimonial Speech

> Qualities of feeling are as incomparable as they are indescribable. They mark the limit of the capacity of language to communicate. If someone wanted to impart his physical pain, he would be forced to inflict it and thereby become a torturer himself. –Jean Améry (BGA 130)
>
> If the Lagers had lasted longer a new, harsh language would have been born; and only this language could express what it means to toil the whole day in the wind, with the temperature below freezing, wearing only a shirt, underpants, cloth jacket and trousers, and in one's body nothing but weakness, hunger and knowledge of the end drawing nearer. –Primo Levi (SA 123)

Trauma alters the very subjectivity of its victim. As Jean Améry, a holocaust survivor originally from Austria, writes in the same chapter quoted above, "Whoever was tortured stays tortured. Torture is ineradicably burned into him" (BGA 34)[1]. Understood as an event that overwhelms the subject's ability to process what he is undergoing, trauma robs subjectivity of its very foundation, what Améry calls his "trust in the world" (28). It is only his "trust in the world" that allows the subject to imagine himself as whole and as the master of his own being. Trauma destroys this "irrational and logically unjustifiable belief" (28). In trauma, "the other is on me, and thereby destroys me" (28). This disrupts even memory formation since normal memory is constantly assimilated into the subject's self-identity: an idealized version of everything that the subject encounters becomes the very core of who the subject believes itself to be. The subject's ego, whose mission is its own perpetuation through any adversity, is thus overwhelmed by the unmasterable experience of trauma, which leaves a void in subjectivity's perpetual

[1] *"Wer gefoltert wurde, bleibt gefoltert. Unauslöschlich ist die Folter in ihn eingebrannt," (64).*

narrative. Remaining intact and separate from the subject's normal processes, traumatic events – which are not memories in the usual sense – pose a persistent threat to the ego's efforts at identity formation. They constantly reemerge into consciousness, retraumatizing the subject.

The testimony of trauma chronicles the subject's attempt to bridge his ordinary memory and the traumatic "memory." This speech is inherently tenuous since the connection is not totalizing: the event contained in traumatic memory is never completely assimilated into ordinary memory. The subject's turn towards the traumatic event will, at best, attempt to translate the overwhelming experience into words. However this translation of amorphous and overwhelming events into lexical choices limits the possibility of communication. Words can communicate only within a framework of collective understanding. Communities of speakers establish the definitions of words based on daily needs. Liminal experiences fall outside of normal linguistic paradigms. In testimony, survivors communicate these excesses through infusing meaning into silences, generic ruptures and a variety of other means. Whereas in a therapeutic session, a survivor might engage in an effort to reconcile the traumatic memory with his ordinary memory in order, via assimilation, to weaken trauma's disruptive force, testimony aims to teach or transmit rather than to heal. This endeavor demands a doubled opening on the part of the testifier: he must turn both towards the trauma and towards the other. In other words, testimony testifies not only to the original traumatic event but also to the current reopening of the unhealed wound. Accordingly, testimony is both the description and the performance of its telling: the testifier turns toward the other in the moment of his greatest vulnerability, thereby reliving the trauma he is relating.

This mode of telling that relies heavily on suggestive absence, silence and the shattering of grammatical rules disturbs reader expectations and poses distinct risks for the testifier and victim. Given the latent threat testimony poses to its readers, what is unsaid remains easily ignored: Testimony risks being silenced through being made mundane. Elie Wiesel, in his essay "A Plea for the Dead," discusses the incongruity of using everyday words, contexts and interests to describe the experiences of Holocaust victims. According to the parlor conversations he witnessed as far back as the 1960s, people felt that understanding the victim:

> Is as simple as saying hello. As hunger, thirst, and hate. One need only understand history, sociology, politics, psychology, economics; one need know only how to add. And to accept the axiom that everywhere A + B = C. If the dead are dead, if so many dead are dead, that is because they desired their own death [*ils désiraient leur propre mort*], they were lured, driven by their own instincts" (Wiesel 140)[2].

The chattering masses find testimony applicable to the popular sciences of the day and easily related to common knowledge of math and psychology. It seems like simple logic: The only way that millions of Jews could be killed by mere thousands of SS officers would be if they (the Jews) wanted to die; otherwise, they would have fought back. The apparent mathematical innocence of this belief hides its violent usurpation of the victim's experience. This trivialization of trauma, which reduces what testimony *says* to what is "commonly known," leads Wiesel to long for a certain silence: "One is sometimes reduced to regretting the good old days when this subject, still in the domain of sacred

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[2] *C'est simple comme bonjour. Comme la faim, la soif et la haine. Il suffit de comprendre l'histoire, la sociologie, la politique, la psychologie, l'économie (faite votre choix, mesdames et messieurs); il suffit de savoir compter. Et d'admettre cette vérité première qu'en tout lieu A + B = C. Si les morts sont morts, si tant de morts sont morts, c'est qu'ils désiraient leur propre mort, c'est qu'ils étaient attires, poussés par leurs propres instincts* (*Chant 196*).

memory, was considered taboo, reserved for the initiates, who spoke of it only with hesitation and fear, always lowering their eyes, and always trembling with humility, knowing themselves unworthy and recognizing the limits of their language, spoken and unspoken" (140)[3]. For Wiesel, talking about the Holocaust is too easy precisely because language has lost its relationship to the sacred and forgotten the risks of the profane.

The mode of listening that Emmanuel Levinas describes as the role of ethical subjectivity resists this reduction of the alterity of the other. It rejects "approaches" to the other that come from an angle and therefore betray the straightforwardness of the face-to-face relationship that grounds ethical subjectivity. Instead he discusses the possibility of an ethical subject who is overwhelmed by the demand of the other and is thereby initiated into a realm of passivity, powerlessness, and responsibility. Just as the survivor in choosing to speak becomes responsible to the self that was silenced in the traumatic event, the listener becomes responsible to both and above all to the contemporary testifier whose turn toward me is an act of generosity. The chiasmatic movement of testimony turns the testifier both outward and inward. The reader grasps onto the outward movement, which is represented more successfully in language, at the expense of both the severed subject and his inward movement.

Since people use the words "hunger", "thirst", and "hate" daily to describe various shades of discomfort, how can these words also relate the intense abjection of subjectivity caused by prolonged starvation, abuse and mass murder? Language's inability to transmit the reality of trauma provokes the survivor to excessive speech.

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[3] *On en arrive à regretter le bon vieux temps où ce sujet, encore du domaine du souvenir sacré, était considéré comme tabou, réservé aux initiés qui, eux, n'en parlaient qu'avec pudeur et crainte, et toujours en baissant le regard, et toujours en tremblant d'humilité, se sachant pauvres et reconnaissant les limites de leur langage parlé et tu* (*Chant 195).*

Witnesses like Wiesel, Améry and Primo Levi return to the scene of their trauma repeatedly in multiple texts, reframing and rephrasing the event. Each individual's telling is also excessive within its own unfolding. These narratives loop back upon themselves and leap without connection to distant topics; they speak from multiple narrator positions – first, second and third person singular and plural; they relate the original trauma and the one occasioned by the current retelling. At times, all of these jumps will happen within one paragraph. Testifiers occupy all of these positions relative to their trauma in the act of telling. The inherent complexity of traumatic testimony produces, on the whole, readings that impose order along one of these multiple axes.

Due not only to the complexity of testimonial utterance, but also to the investments subjectivity has in persisting in being, the subject is confronted in testimony by the other's radical alterity that exceeds, in Levinas's terms, "the idea of the other in me" (TI 50). Testimony interrupts and disrupts the subjectivity of the listener. In his essay "Torture," quoted above, Améry describes his experience at the hands of the Gestapo. In it, he asserts his conviction that a complete relating of his experience of pain would require its infliction on his listeners. Since language is limited to things that are comparable and describable it seems the victim is silenced. Primo Levi offers a similar vision of language's insufficiency. For him, it seems, the impossibility of describing his experience arises from the "premature" end of the Holocaust. While the perpetuation of the concentration camp system would have extended and exacerbated the victim's trauma, it would have occasioned the birth of a "new, harsh language" with the necessary descriptive potential to impart the victim's experience. A careful reading, I argue, can hear a trace of the harsh and torturous language communicated in spite of language's

failure. Améry and Levi's claims must be read not as declarations of failure – thereby allowing listeners a pass – but as pointers towards the possibility of a more adequate reading. The greatest challenge these texts pose for their readers is that they not silence the silences nor cover up the excesses present in testimony.[4] However, approaching testimony straightforwardly, rather than from an angle, opens the subject to the traumatic trace it transmits. This essay, therefore, begins with the presumption that the interruption of the subject opens the possibility of the ethical. The ethical responsibility testimony demands is precisely to be heard.

This hearing is not reducible to understanding or sympathy. In the words of Levinas interpreter Jill Robbins, the "humanistic" modes of relating to the other are more violent than "any invocation – even of a violent sort, in the mode of refusal or domination" (10). Humanistic views of the other appropriate the victim's experience into a discourse – of self-understanding, critical interpretation, philosophical theorizing – in which the specificity of the testimonial act is lost. As Levinas says, the normal state of subjectivity is that of the appropriating ego that endeavors through memory and identity formation to reduce every encounter with alterity to an aspect of the I. Every other becomes an aspect of *me*. In this way, every encounter with alterity is totalized through assimilation. This distinctly unethical mode of being silences the voice of the other by reducing every encounter to its totalizable elements while ignoring the excessive elements of *inter*action. These excesses include the act of speech itself, which turns to the other in openness and any distinctive use of language – especially the rending of voice, chronology and genre.

[4] I am indebted to Tanya Randle, Ph.D. for this useful construction.

Thus, traumatic testimony remains generically distinct from autobiographical, memoiristic and historical modes of telling. Trauma cannot be told in a series of anecdotes whose morals converge on a singular subjectivity conveyed by the text; instead, testimony gives voice to an unstable state of the subject. By opening oneself to traumatic memory and attempting to match words to an experience that language has no hope of relating, the testifier yields his own subjectivity to what I call, after Levinas, a passivity. This disruption of subjectivity occurs when the ego's work of perpetuating the subject through a radical self-centeredness, blind to the existence of the other, is arrested. The survivor, in engaging traumatic memory, passes beyond language's ability to return alterity back into the norm. This conversation is held between the subject and something that is radically other. Thus, testimony unfolds through a continual upending of the ego's movement towards stability and conquest. The testifier produces an unmastered, uncontrolled, and unknowable text. Since the act of testifying attempts to bring a kernel of the past into the present, traumatic testimony is arrested by the impossibility of transporting the ungraspable content of the event. The victim turns towards the traumatic experience each time confronting his trauma as if for the first time.

This *initial* act bridges the subject to the traumatic memory while transcending the limits of subjectivity. Testimony therefore speaks not only to the original, historical trauma but also to the current and ongoing one. Whereas the original trauma retraumatizes the subject in the act of retelling, this new overwhelming is not complete since the testifier is able to speak. What we encounter in testimony is an idiosyncratic utterance marked by an irreconcilable gap between assimilated and traumatic memory. On the one hand there is a subject who has continued living beyond the instant of trauma,

and on the other there is no subject, just the imprint of horror. In this encounter, the subject does not come to know himself; instead, he disappears into an other that can neither be known nor forgotten, assimilated into nor severed from the subject. The victim's speech does not close the distance between normal and "deep" or traumatic memory; rather, the fractured and incomplete text the encounter produces testifies to the impossibility of reconciliation.

Accordingly, an adequate reading of testimony – which I believe could be called ethical in Levinasian terms – must account for precisely these non-totalizable, excessive elements that mark the generic distinction of the testimony of trauma. Such a reading will be attuned to the traces of testimony's double telling, which conveys the original and the current trauma, the silent and speaking subject. It will also account for the significant marks that trace testimony's overcoming of the silence imposed not only by internal memory structures and their effect on subjectivity but also those imposed by language, logic and the inflexible subjectivity of its listeners. Since language is designed to relate variations on everyday, shared experiences, it lacks the words to describe the extremes of human experience. Therefore, testimony is marked by rapid and unmarked shifts in narrator, time awareness, genre, style and tone. An ethical reading will not approach testimony along an angle, the way a diamond-cutter breaks the whole into smaller *useful* fragments. Instead, it allows itself to be shattered by the overwhelming alterity of the other.

Ordinary v. Traumatized Subjectivity

In order to *read* testimony one needs to appreciate the silencing pressures testifiers face in the aftermath of overwhelming historical events. Trauma obliterates the subject's defenses and thereby permanently disables identity formation. Therefore, trauma theory's speculations on the radical challenges that overwhelming events impose on subjectivity will prove especially useful in this endeavor. Significantly, although trauma will provide an understanding of the intense pressures towards silence and repression that survivors face, it offers no *a priori* understanding of the subject nor her specific acts of overcoming. These reflections do not predict nor anticipate any concrete experience or narrative that the testifier undergoes or relates. To paraphrase the words of Jean Améry – applying them here to theories of trauma rather than to those of suicide – what trauma theory says is true except that for the survivor it is meaningless[5]. To the extent that Holocaust testimony responds to the traumatic events of the Holocaust, however, an understanding of the phenomenology of trauma both as a mental wound and as a set of typical symptoms occurring in the aftermath of the event will prove invaluable to our *critical encounter* with testimonial texts.

For "normal" (i.e. non-traumatic) subjectivity, perception works to observe and record the subject's surroundings. Within this receptive role, perception has a very active responsibility: it filters the totality of experience down to its barest parts. For the subject to maintain its self-identity in a complex and threatening world Freud argues that, "*protection against* stimuli is an almost more important function [of perception]…than [the] *reception of* stimuli" (Freud 21). This distillation process allows the subject to incorporate her surroundings through assimilating only those elements of reality that

[5] Speaking in *To Lay Hands on Oneself* of the value of "suicidology" to the suicide, Améry insists, "suicidology is right. Except that for suicides…what it says is empty." (8)

assist her development of an ongoing inner-subjective narrative of self-identity. In order to enable the subject to remain "self-identical" in the midst of rapidly changing external realities, perception limits the amount of incoming information to *what is necessary for the preservation of the subject.* "The main purpose of the *reception* of stimuli," Freud continues, "is to discover [only] the direction and nature of the external stimuli; and for that it is enough to take small specimens of the external world, to sample it in small quantities" (21). Therefore perception receives, edits and translates the subject's encounters with the outside according to the subject's preexisting self-understanding; since, any perception that failed to limit the impact of the outside would expose subjective continuity to a violent rupture. Through recourse to this narrative, the subject comes to "understand" her past and imagine her *self* into the future.

Traumatic events, however, are "powerful enough to break through the [organism's] protective shield. … There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded" (Freud 23). According to Dori Laub, himself a child survivor of the Holocaust and a psychiatrist who works extensively with other survivors, "Massive trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction" (Felman 57). Trauma therefore interrupts the typical "economy" of subjectivity; by "precluding its registration," trauma paralyzes or "knocks out" the typical processes of incorporation. Since subjectivity derives its self-understanding from its continuous narrative, the traumatic event, which resists translation into this ongoing language, ruptures subjective identity. Since it cannot be assimilated into the normal processes of memory, trauma is instead retained as a permanent imprint of the victim. For this reason, the reemergence of

consciousness in the aftermath of trauma resumes the subject's identity-narrative by cleaving the current moment onto the last one that preceded the trauma. The time of the trauma, however, remains as an absence in subjective identity: The trauma never belonged to this narrative and remains separate from it.

These two "memories" cannot simply exist side-by-side. Instead, the traumatic event constantly threatens the continuity of the subjective identity. Dreams provide the ultimate example of the subjective disruption trauma represents, because they perform a crucial stabilizing role for normal subjectivity and a surprisingly disruptive one for the traumatized subject. Trauma emerges in dreams, hyper-vigilance, anxiety, all of which weaken the totalizing inclination of the subject whose feelings of safety are bound up in feeling "at home" within itself. According to Freud, these "disturbances" astonish people "far too little" (Freud 7). For non-traumatized or "normal" subjectivity, dreams provide a crucial reinforcing function for the subject: they fulfill various repressed wishes. In this manner, they cement subjective identity by using compression and displacement to simultaneously expose and protect the subject from her desires. This process allows the subject some relief from the repressed desires while allowing him to avoid a full confrontation with them. Therefore a dream that takes one back to the moment of trauma and, without the linguistic sleight-of-hand of ordinary dreams, places the victim of trauma back in the traumatizing context "from which he wakes up in another fright," cannot be said to fulfill any wish (Freud 7). Surely, it is impossible to imagine a subject wishing for its own repeated destruction; rather, it would be more "in harmony with their nature" if dreams were to show "the patient pictures from his healthy past or of the cure

for which he hopes" (Freud 7). Trauma disempowers the subject, taking from him every possibility of exercising mastery over himself.

Because the recollection of the traumatic event often retraumatizes the subject, subjectivity is primarily concerned with "*not* thinking about it" (Freud 7). However, in testimony, the trauma victim turns towards the very rupture trauma has left behind. In this sense, the first act of testimony is the performative turn to a listener in order to speak about something that remains foreign, terrifying and absolutely overwhelming. The narrative bears witness to "massive trauma" rather than simply narrating an historical event through performing the very overcoming it wants to describe. For this reason, Laub argues that the "victim's narrative – the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma – does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of its occurrence" (Felman 57). Since the traumatic event was not registered at the time of its occurrence and therefore has not been assimilated into subjective memory, testimony begins in the absence cast by "an event that has not yet come into existence" (Felman 57). Instead of discovering any new ability or power through testifying, the subject becomes absolutely vulnerable to the repetition of the overwhelming event.

Meanwhile, the reader of Holocaust testimony remains entirely aloof. What testimony says barely affects her since, after all, the narrator has survived. However sad the outcomes were for her family, friends and co-religionists, the narrator herself not only survived but also was able to write about her experiences. The tragedy of testimony becomes an edifying adventure that reinforces a predetermined morality; it allows the subject always to remain removed from the tumult being described. The very logic

according to which we use language protects us from the threat of alterity since one can only prove that which language allows to be expressed. In an interview conducted shortly before his death, Primo Levi describes the radical distinction between what societal language will bear and the consequences that attend other modes of speech. Referring to his turn to poetry after writing two books of survivor testimony Levi says, "I had completely burned myself out as a witness, narrator and interpreter of a certain reality…But I still thought I had a few things left to say, things I could only say in another language." He calls this other language "in-human [*disumano*]" (VM 88). The trace of this in-human speech can indeed be found in his book *Ad Ora Incerta* that include poems from this period [See Chapter 3]. The structure of traumatic memory provides a complex framework through which to understand something more shocking than it first appears: that so many people who carry their traumatic past chose to speak at all.[6] The silencing thrust of language-logic-society also works to marginalize and silence the voice of the survivor.

In his book *The Differend*, Jean-François Lyotard explores the impossible situation of the victim of a wrong who seeks to have his suffering adjudicated. He begins with the Holocaust survivor who suffers a further victimization at the hands of Holocaust deniers who would demand proof of the offences to which the victim attests. These

[6] Ironically, one of the main groups to appreciate the explosive potential of traumatic testimony has been Holocaust deniers. They pervert the significance of the testifier's turn towards the other claiming that since so many survivors remain, let alone write about their experiences, the Nazis never tried to murder all Jews. Each testifier's claim that the Nazis were trying to murder him is exposed, according to this logic. Therefore every testimony lies while proving only that there is at least one more survivor. Holocaust deniers engage in the extreme unethical position of reading testimony not only attack a person in their utmost vulnerability but also for the purposes of furthering an ideological position. This is the ultimate appropriative reading in that it reduces the alterity of the other to a logical game. Forcing the complex and assuredly ineffable experience of the Jewish victim to conform to a logical construct that can take no account of that complexity and reduces it thereby to comical and oafish lie forms the central barbarism of violent interpretation.

"proofs" are complicated given that any survivor's testimony "bears only upon a minute part of this situation [the Holocaust]" (3). That is, the survivor who claims that his family members were murdered in gas chambers and incinerated at Auschwitz would certainly not be able to give first-hand evidence of their passage through these stages of victimization. In which case the deniers claim that either the victim is lying or testifying only to things she heard second-hand and therefore the testimony is not to be trusted. In fact, Lyotard points out, the deniers go one step further and claim that since no one can verifiably attest to the functioning of a gas chamber at the moment it was being used as a gas chamber – the only eyewitness to this process would be a dead victim – there were no gas chambers. "You are informed," Lyotard's text begins, "that human beings endowed with language were placed in a situation such that none of them is now able to tell about it. … How can you know that the situation itself existed? That it is not the fruit of your informant's imagination?" (3). The complex and sincere difficulty of attesting to the existence of the gas chambers is not a linguistic paradox specific to the vile insincerity of the deniers; rather, their argument is difficult to contradict precisely because it follows the dictates of logic.

Since what can be phrased and verified forms the baseline of acceptable evidence, the suffering of the victim cannot even be heard, according to Lyotard. Hence, we arrive at what he calls the *differend*, a "case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim" (9). He goes on to argue that "a case of the differend between two parties takes place when the 'regulation' of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom" (9). In the case of the survivor testimony, the denier

positions himself within the discursive logic of a trial judge who must be blind to any evidence that cannot be proven. The Holocaust survivor's inability to speak is, according to Lyotard, conditioned by four impossibilities. Since a phrase presents a universe through defining the relative positions of hearer, referent, words and speaker, the incompetence of any one of these poles can silence the phrase. Only if the testifier overcomes the obstacles of speaking in the name of others, is able to find the words in any given language to successfully refer to those experiences, and can find a listener who will *hear* his plea, will he be able to speak.

The deniers' apparent logic is uncanny, according to Lyotard, because it uses the very logic of our legal system's procedures for establishing reality, wherein, "Reality is not what is 'given' to this or that 'subject,' it is a state of the referent which results from the effectuation of establishment procedures" (4). In other words, reality is not what simply "is"; rather, it is the result of a verisimilitude operating in accordance with the rules for proving "reality" within a given genre of discourse. In legal discourse, for instance, it is the responsibility of the plaintiffs to prove the state of affairs they allege. If the survivor of the Holocaust says, "I suffered because there were gas chambers," he must first prove that there was such a thing as a gas chamber. Then, he must prove that he suffered as a result of its existence and, finally, that someone in particular is responsible. However, as Faurisson has "proved," no one can attest positively to existence of the gas chambers and because of this has no proof of any damages suffered thereby. The *differend* in this case arises out of the victims' inability to prove their victimization: It is the "unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be [phrased]," and this inability can occur along any of the

four poles of the phrase instance (13). In order to verify the truth of the witnesses' statements, thereby allowing their claim to be *heard*, Lyotard argues that the negativity imposed by the *differend* must be converted into possibilities. This is the utopian goal of *The Differend.*

Lyotard describes the silence imposed by the *differend* as a type of traumatic inability to experience pain, which interrupts the subject's identity through demonstrating that language is inherently partial. To break the stranglehold of the *differend,* the subjects must be allowed to institute new idioms. The strict adherence of the judge to a static language – and therefore a static reality – deprives the victims of a hearing. Therefore, it is only through the institution of new idioms that the victim of a *differend* can be heard. Lyotard summarizes the state of the victim as follows:

> When the human beings who thought they could use language as an instrument of communication learn through the feeling of pain which accompanies silence, that they are summoned by language, not to augment to their profit the quantity of information communicable through existing idioms, but to recognize that what remains to be phrased exceeds what they can presently phrase, and they must be allowed to institute idioms which do not yet exist. (Lyotard 13)

The *differend* marks a moment where the subject's lack of ability upsets the ego's normal relationship to itself and its language, which together provide the "trust in the world" necessary for subject formation and maintenance. The institution of "new idioms" does not return the victim to the power and self-possession that preceded his trauma; rather, these new idioms mark the introduction of difference into language.

Testimony, an exiled speech, is a paradox, since it answers an impossible demand to phrase that which speaking itself denies.[7] Since a *differend* occurs when the regulation of the conflict between two parties "is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the injustice suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom," the Holocaust critic who places himself in the position of judge usurps the alterity of the survivor's experience (Lyotard 5). This violence forces the survivor into a paradoxical assimilation whereby she can maintain her claim of alterity only by entering a discourse that always already forecloses the possibility of its articulation. The challenge to the critic in discussing the Holocaust is to identify and assert the ethical stakes in each situation – that is, to find the remnant of something other; since, any language or narratival strategy the survivor may use to answer our demand will be truthful only to the extent that it is incomprehensible. The critic fails to address the alterity encountered in testimony to the precise extent that he seeks to understand it, to wrench from it something useful. Forcibly severing survivors from the very alterity of their speech, often critics approach the other encountered in testimony from a certain angle, seeking to mine their experience for *useful information*. However, doing justice to the differend inherent in the text of testimony involves creating new idioms for hearing those texts as a demand.

Towards the In-Human: an Ethical Hermeneutics

Since what testimony has to say cannot be phrased without performative recourse to a new idiom, the testifier speaks before knowing what he will say; in ethical terms the

[7] According to Lyotard, the silence of the Holocaust survivor is conditioned by four negative phrases: "*This case does not fall within your* [the listener's] *competence, This case does not exist, It cannot be signified, It does not fall within my competence*" (13). While any given silence does not indicate which negative phrase has usurped its utterance, any speech act is possible only after a refutation of all four of them.

opening towards the other precedes and perhaps precludes the subject's ability *to use* the experience. Thereby, the listener to or reader of traumatic testimony becomes "a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening" (Felman 57). Since the original event, along with all of its repetitions, eludes the mastery of the subject the reader becomes, in a sense, the trauma's first witness. Hence, the survivor's turn – not only to the traumatic rupture but also to the other, to me – exposes him to the potential of my potentially violent reading. The institution of her "new idioms" depends entirely on my hearing her speech as a rupture with the pre-existing limits of language. In other words, by reading the texts of testimony according to the rules of an established genre such as history or memoir, I effectively silence any "new idioms" the testifier might rely upon to convey the radical difference of their narrative. In this way, I fail to do justice to the *differend* conveyed by the other's speech. On the other hand, the ethical engagement of the other is not as simple as my choosing to listen.

According to the late writings of French ethical philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, the ethical relationship – as ethics is only possible in a relation to another – revolves around responsibility and obligation. As a result of this relationship, "I" lose my*self* in the face of the other for whom "I" am now responsible. In other words, my responsibility for the other overwhelms me; it interrupts my subjectivity, dispossessing me completely of power and autonomy. Levinas therefore refers to the state of ethical subjectivity as passivity. Supplementing Levinas's point – to help explain the construction of subjectivity in the face of massive trauma – I argue that only in the moment of passivity do I become the addressee and the other becomes the addressor.

In his poetry, Primo Levi leaves the position of comfortable subjectivity to find an*other* one. This one he calls the "in-human" based on the language it forces him to speak. He is referring in this passage to his beginning to write poetry, and indeed one finds a very different place there than one does in his narratival prose. In the poetry, there is no self-identical narrator: instead, the writing slips constantly between "I," "we," "them" and "us." He also privileges discontinuity of time over chronology. Relying on abstract metaphors and symbolism, these poems read most like prophecies of a distant past that would predate identity, subjectivity and hope. They present visions of cruelty, violence and ruin not only through the words he chooses but also through his shattering of generic convention and reader expectations.[8] Of course, the distinction between one and the other Primo Levi is no simple duality; there remains a distance between the two poles. For the one to speak, the other must be largely silent. Traumatic memory remains a menacing other to the subject. To let traumatic memory "speak" requires an almost complete abnegation of subjectivity that is replaced by a rigorous, if not yet ethical, listening.

Therefore, our encounter with a divided subject, one who is entirely alien from us, engages us as listeners and readers in an ethical relationship: our obligation and responsibility to the other exceeds any recompense we could offer. I can never repay the generosity of the testifier through any intentional act or understanding. What they have to say, I argue along with Levinas, exceeds what can be contained in any given "said." Instead, the ethical relationship begins in recognition of this inverted debt, this obligation that begins in me and goes toward the other. Instead of understanding testimony through focusing on "the said," the ethical relationship begins with "the saying." In his late ethical

[8] See Ch. X "Primo Levi's Poetic Fugue." See also poems "Reveille," "*Fuga*" in *Ad Ora Incerta.*

philosophy, as presented in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas distinguishes "the saying," the non-thematizable elements of a speech addressed to one's neighbor, from "the said," the words that are communicated that can be totalized and thematized. For Levinas, the saying is indelibly tied to proximity yet cannot be limited to a mere nearness in space; rather, "proximity is quite distinct from every other relationship, and has to be conceived as a responsibility for the other" (46). Suffice it to say that proximity founds the possibility of the ethical relationship that is initiated in the saying (47). Like the saying, proximity is bound up in the openness of the subject who turns towards the other in a gesture of invitation. For Levinas, "saying is to respond to another, is to find no longer any limit or measure for this responsibility" (47). Therefore, beyond any content that would be communicated by a particular "said," saying turns towards another in radical openness. Levinas calls this openness "the supreme passivity of exposure to another" (47).

When Levi refers to in-human speech and when Jean Améry insists that a genuine testifying to torture would require him to inflict it on his listeners, they recall the demands placed on me by the other (BGA 130). In a sense, therefore, testimony cannot be heard. To the extent that hearing is related to understanding, it is precisely not called for by testimony. The "human" or "subjective" act of listening remains an action of the ego, limited as it is by its primary objective: its own perpetuation. Although Levinas does not often describe what could be considered an ethical action, he is clear that a preoccupation with one's own being falls outside of the range of ethics. Instead, ethical subjectivity is shattered by the proximity of the other in the saying. I cannot persist in my being when confronted by the other. His proximity provokes my passivity. His testimony

opposes my subjectivity at every moment that it exceeds what I will call a “common language.” This category includes our mundane usages of terms like “hunger”, “loneliness” and “despair”; our expectations of syntax and genre; and the grounding faith of subjectivity that nothing in the outside world can touch me if I don’t want it to.

Testimony concerns precisely this opening of the self, in the greatest passivity, to the power of the other. Rather than insisting on its priority, testimony speaks by turning towards the listener and communicating beyond the content of its words, through proximity. In this way, testimony is an invitation to witness. What I encounter in the text of testimony is the Other opening himself to me. This encounter makes a concrete ethical demand that I listen in straightforward vulnerability. Rather than simply assimilating this originary idiomatic expression to my pre-existing expectations, either literary or philosophical, this encounter demands a passive opening to the possibility of rupture. My proximity to the other in his immanence demands my passive openness to transcendence. According to Emmanuel Levinas, however, mundane subjectivity is unwilling to move away from the “chez soi,” the being at home with oneself that provides the ego with the necessary stability it needs to ensure its own place in the sun. On the other hand, ethical subjectivity acknowledges the other as “the first one on the scene,” whose existence demands responsibility of an order that precedes any possible freedom that may belong to “me” (OTB 11).

For Levinas, Pascal’s description in *Pensées* of the subject whose primary motivation is to assert “this is my place in the sun,” provides the *locus classicus* of the triumphal “I.” He accepts Pascal’s assertion that “That is how the usurpation of the whole

world began.[9]" In Levinas's distinct construction, the ethical "moment" is both chronologically and ontologically prior to subjectivity; it occurs on what he calls the "hither side" of time and being. The subject's attempt to synchronize all difference in a narrative of "mineness" is always already hollowed out by the diachronous trace of the other. Applied to the meeting of testimony and reader, the hollowing out of the subject's priority demands that the reader approach the text through ceding power rather than asserting it. The ethical content of the encounter, therefore, resembles passivity. In the place of anticipation the reader substitutes openness.

The Critical Urge: Georgio Agamben on Primo Levi

Given the effect of the *differend* on the testimonial utterance, the relating of traumatic experience can never be reduced to the content of the narration. Each telling carries with it a psychic appeal as an excess. Each traumatic narrative bears the trace of another referent that cannot be made materially present in the narrative and yet cannot be told in any other way. Reading these texts, the listener enters into a relationship with a traumatic event that he can only approach in its retreat. The reader must unravel the specific inversions of negativity to positivity to which Lyotard refers. One must ask "how did this specific testifier overcome the silencing effects of the *differend*?" How and to what extent does the speaker find a language to express suffering? How and to what extent am I able to hear it? What is my responsibility in the face of what I have witnessed? In what way does testimony claim or demand our attention differently than other texts? Do not these texts call for a hermeneutics of ethical response and responsibility rather than one of suspicion? Finally, how is this claim made in the specific language that is testimony?

[9] This quote is one of several epigraphs that begin Levinas's *Otherwise than Being*.

Misreadings of testimony abound. *Remnants of Auschwitz,* a recent text by Italian theorist Giorgio Agamben, has received a great deal of critical attention. *Remnants* provides a strong example of the trend towards appropriation of Holocaust testimony based on the author's clear interest in distilling some *relevant* truth from the texts of testimony. Rather than addressing the alterity communicated through survivor testimony, he guides his argument through a series of critical techniques aimed at limiting and categorizing the survivor's narrative, thereby distancing himself and his discourse from the experience and retelling of horror that is constitutive of the survivors' experience.[10] The trajectory of his argument, as announced in the preface, involves a movement towards the retrospective site of testimony, and then back to the present in order to establish "a human understanding of what happened there…its contemporary relevance" (11). This approach raises a couple of crucial questions. Why is *understanding* Agamben's privileged method of approach to alterity? Why does he direct the encounter to attend only to what happened in the past? I argue that the critical encounter for the "contemporary relevance" of Holocaust testimony happens in our present approach to the survivors and their testimonies. Moreover, I argue, that by displacing the ethical question onto the survivors' "inabilities," Agamben perpetuates an unethical discourse, since it refuses to acknowledge the other's subjectivity as a demand.[11]

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[10] See "Shame, or On the Subject" in *Remnants of Auschwitz: the Witness and the Archive.* p. 11. All further references to this work will be noted in the text.

[11] See, for example page 21, where Agamben states, "The unprecedented discovery made by Levi at Auschwitz concerns an area that is independent of every establishment of responsibility, an area in which Levi succeeded in isolating something like a new ethical element. Levi calls it the 'gray zone'…. What is at issue here, therefore, is a zone of irresponsibility." Hence, for Agamben, the ethical crisis happened there; while, we now approach the crisis after the fact as a third party. Thus, considering himself uninvolved and not implicated by the event he approaches, Agamben already distances himself from the possibility of an ethical relation.

Agamben begins by addressing the paradoxical shame experienced by Holocaust survivors. Citing examples from Primo Levi, Bruno Bettelheim and Robert Antelme, and others, he argues that this shame cannot be as simple as Wiesel's construction, "I live, therefore I am guilty," nor Primo Levi's statement "each one of us…has usurped his neighbor's place and lived in his stead" (Quoted in Agamben 89; 91). For Agamben, both of these positions "claim to present the survivor's shame as a tragic conflict," in which "what is tragic is …for an apparently innocent subject to assume unconditionally objective guilt" which, Agamben argues, is no longer reasonable after Auschwitz (96). For Agamben, shame – of the type witnessed by Antelme on the death march from Auschwitz when an Italian student, called out of line to be shot, blushes – represents a "double movement, which is both subjectification and desubjectification" (106). Stripped of all identity and agency by the time of this event, the Italian student suddenly singled out by the SS, is forced to acknowledge himself as both subject of and subject to a command. Thus, waking from a slumber of anonymity, he confronts his own radical abjection: He is simultaneously subject and object. Shame, Agamben argues, is the condition of a subject at the site of his own desubjectification: it is "nothing less than the fundamental sentiment of being a subject, in the two apparently opposed senses of this phrase: to be subjected and to be sovereign" (107). For Agamben, the "absolute concomitance" of "self-loss and self-possession" produces shame. Furthermore, the movement from language to discourse mimics the structure of shame – implying simultaneous subjectification and desubjectification – to the extent that "the psychosomatic individual must fully abolish himself and desubjectify himself as a real individual to become the subject of enunciation and to identify himself with the pure

shifter 'I'… once the subject is in discourse, he can say nothing; he cannot speak" (116-7).

Therefore, language acts partake of the structure of shame in that every enunciation testifies to the break within the speaker into the speaking subject and the silenced subject. For Agamben, shame occurs in discourse, where the "psychosomatic individual" must, in speaking and identifying himself with the shifter "I," cease speaking on his own behalf.[12] By implication, Agamben argues that in testimony the speaking subject experiences himself as a fraudulent screen blocking the addressee's view of the real subject who remains mute and unrepresented. However, unlike the model of the individual for whom the division into two distinct poles occurs internally, in testimony this division occurs, according to Agamben, between individuals. Agamben folds the terms "subjectification" and "desubjectification", which signify the two poles of the individual in speech, onto the terms "human" and "inhuman", by which he identifies the two poles of testimony: the human subject who survives and speaks, who is opposed to the inhuman subject who gives up in the camp and dies.

This inhuman subject is exemplified, for Agamben, by the figure of the Muselmann. Agamben's argument folds the inner-subjective onto the inter-subjective as it is represented in testimony. For him, Primo Levi, through the act of testifying, becomes human, while simultaneously banishing the Muselmann, whom he himself calls the true witness, to silence and death. Following Agamben's logic, Levi feels shame because, in testifying, he has entered into an economy with the non-survivor, the Muselmann, whom he metaphorically makes dead through speaking. By establishing a parallel argument,

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[12] "*Testimony*," Agamben states, "*takes place in the non-place of articulation*," in the rupture between the speaking and the silenced poles (130).

transposing the structural fracture of the subject in discourse onto the survivor in testimony, Agamben has taken literally Levi's statement: the Muselmänner are the true witnesses. This identification allows Agamben to derive a general theory about testimony and survival: "'human beings are human insofar as they are not human' or, more precisely, 'human beings are human insofar as they bear witness to the inhuman'" (121). Suffice it to say that, for Agamben, testimony narrates the becoming human of the survivor in the place of the Muselmänner. Therefore, the "human" usurps the experience of the inhuman in order to speak, and through that usurpation silences the Muselmann.

The identification of an inner-subjective structure with an inter-subjective one is the only possible conclusion given Agamben's perspective, which seeks to understand the past through its present value. The examination produces an optics that sees the survivor and the Muselmann as occurring in the same place, as two poles of one function, as a dialectic. This structure cannot function effectively as either an ethics or as an interpretative approach to Holocaust testimony. After all, Levi's utterance that "we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses…[it is] the 'Muslims,' the submerged, the complete witnesses…whose deposition would have a general significance," in its context does not seek solely to define the true hierarchical relationship between survivor and Muselmann (DAS 83-4). Rather, it indexes a certain concurrence between survival and shame that is complicated by the double valence of "survival" – surviving the other's death and surviving one's own death – and is present in many places in Levi's work. Any reading of this trope would have to account for the responsibility and the accusation it contains. Levi begins his book *The Reawakening* (*La Tregua*) by recounting the arrival of the first Russian soldiers that marks the preliminary liberation of Auschwitz. They arrive as Levi

and another inmate bury a friend in a common grave. Levi describes their reaction as characterized by "a confused restraint, which sealed their lips and bound their eyes to the funereal scene. It was that shame we knew so well, the shame that drowned us after the selections, and every time we had to watch, or submit to, some outrage: the shame the Germans did not know, that the just man experiences at another man's crime" (TR 16). The shame in this case belongs to the Russians; what binds victim and liberator, is that each side feels shame and responsibility. This shame, Levi argues, is the human response to a catastrophe he or she is powerless to stop: the witness in responsibility confronts the realization that his "will for good should have proved too weak or null, and should not have availed in defense" (16) After all, the Russian approach takes place across the dead body of Levi's friend; those who remain feel responsible, while those who fled, the SS, will never know that shame.

The notions of justice, responsibility and judgment arise in Agamben's text in a chapter titled, "The Witness." There, Agamben identifies "the tacit confusion of ethical categories and juridical categories" as one of the "most common mistakes," as law is directed towards establishing judgment as a substitute for both justice and truth. However, this distinction is not maintained, as he has extensive recourse to juridical argumentation in his chapter, "Shame, or on the Subject" (18). In referring to "the survivor's feeling of guilt," he points out the excusability of that guilt, the "suspect" nature of the survivor's claim to guilt as a condition of survival, and the "accusation" contained in Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved*. Furthermore, Agamben uses explicitly juridical terms in defining shame as "the living being's incapacity truly to separate innocence and guilt." His discourse, thereby, establishes the investigating critic as a judge

– an objective interpreter of an acknowledged and established body of laws – who is able, without bias, to apply the law to a given set of circumstances within a network of reference to precedent. Therein, the judge thematizes the criminal and the crime as an anticipated deviation from societal norms and, through this judgment, folds the exception back under the domination of the rule. These terms "thematization" and "judgment" will form the core of Levinas's critique of the "habitual economy of being," which struggles through those processes to constantly reassert its own priority in the face of alterity. Agamben's recourse to juridical discourse and his application of subjective judgment to particular textual instances from within Holocaust testimonies, however, forces a reevaluation of the ethical claims of this work.

Agamben assumes the role of judge, discriminating between true and false testimony, when he finds the chapter "Shame," in Primo Levi's book *The Drowned and the Saved*, "ultimately unsatisfying." Levi, he complains, has submitted "himself to a test of conscience *so puerile that it leaves the reader uneasy*" (88; emphasis mine). Agamben's critical overwriting of the survivor's narrative becomes most troublesome when he discusses the tendency of many writers of testimony to assume a guilt "which inheres in the survivor's condition as such and not in what he or she as an individual did or failed to do" (94).[13] He rejects this explanation as being "suspect"; for Agamben, it "recalls the common tendency to assume a generic collective guilt whenever an ethical problem cannot be mastered" (94-95). He couples this explanation of "survivor guilt" with Hannah Arendt's observations of the "surprising willingness of post-war Germans of all ages to assume collective guilt for Nazism [while displaying] an equally surprising

[13] His proof text is Bettelheim's essay "The Survivor," *Surviving and Other Essays*, (New York: Knopf, 1979):"Only the ability to feel guilty makes us human, particularly if, objectively seen, on is not guilty" (313).

ill will as to the assessment of individual responsibilities and the punishment of particular crimes" (95).[14] Agamben's movement goes from the survivors' sense of their own guilt as not rooted in any act or omission to the post-war German embrace of collective guilt and rejection of personal guilt. However, this gesture dislocates the survivor's speech by eliminating its radical difference. While the average German was deprived of political agency and, hence, his status as citizen, the Jewish victim was deprived of all agency and speech in a concentrationary universe designed to reduce him to utter abjection. Therefore, while the survivor's text can be seen as an attempt to regain humanity through speech, the German utterance has an entirely different valence. This example argues forcefully for the need for a polyvalent and perhaps even fractured understanding of shame.

However, Agamben takes the similarity between the aforementioned cases for granted, and he does not pause his discourse for explanation but proceeds to fold this forced comparison onto a further instance: that of the wartime histories of the German Protestant and Catholic Churches. Both of these institutions had very ambiguous policies towards Nazism but were willing to acknowledge only a general guilt after the war. Ultimately, each remained unwilling to cite particular instances in which they should have done something yet failed to act. Even if one can say the same thing about survivor's guilt – that someone like Levi will "fail" to cite any particular instance in which he failed to act, the inclusion of which would help us to understand his shame – reading this as a "failure" turns the symptom into a judgment. Agamben's seamless juxtaposition of victim, bystander and questionable witness/participant – Jew, German, church – is an attempt to convince the reader of a similarity between these three

[14] No citation is given by Agamben.

situations, while ignoring their crucial differences. Of course the total denial of agency and the dehumanization enacted by the Nazis on their Jewish victims is one to which the churches and average German were in no way subjected. At this essay's crucial junctures, Agamben's discourse denies difference to the survivor as subject, to testimony as text and here, to the Jew as victim. For what is indeed compelling about Wiesel's formulation, "I live therefore I am guilty" is that the Jewish survivors had no opportunity for true action within the camps, yet they still cannot absolve themselves of their inability to intervene.[15]

Conclusion: The Testimonial Texture of Philosophy

When confronted by the event of the Holocaust, the victim, the testifier and the reader can never look with eyes that would be "not contaminated by being" (OTB xliii). In testimony, a survivor turns to an internal traumatic rupture, inassimilable to his self, his memory. In short, this rupture defies his ability to control and master his relationship to the world. His trauma therefore silences him in several way: the trauma is nameless and voiceless and so must be translated from nothingness into speech; the limited paradigmatic linguistic choices fail to convey his suffering; and his lack of faith in the world promises him that no listener will be able to hear his plea. Therefore, the emergence of the reader/critic provides an ideal encounter between an I, here the reader of testimony, and a radical other. Following Levinas, I call this relationship ethical. Testimony thrusts the listener into a position of passivity and obligation for he is called to witness the speech of the other and to accept the transmission of trauma. Inevitably, each telling fails to transform the trauma into speech. What remains crucial to the interpreter is

[15] cf. *Reawakening*, p. 16, where Levi identifies guilt as arising from a confrontation with the enormity of the Nazi crimes: "the feeling of guilt that such a crime should exist, that it should have been introduced irrevocably into the world of things that exist, and that his own will for good should have proved too weak, or null, and should not have availed in defense."

the specificity of each “failure”; since what the testifier conveys is not limited to the words they use, one addresses oneself to the precise manner in which his expectations are shattered. Each sudden generic shift from sociological speech to first-person trauma, for instance, coupled with each shift of person as in first to third, and each cleaving of chronology in which the deictic “now” points equally to the moment of narration and that of the experience, all convey something of the excessive structure of testimonial telling.

Since the traumatic events that once overwhelmed the subject are not presented in testimony as completed or worked-through historical moments, but are rather presented as fractured and incomplete, the listener opens to a suffering in which he is responsible both for his own and the other’s witnessing. To this end, this I articulate a method of approach and a hermeneutics of responsibility that will allow both the testimonial text to speak and the reader to hear, as two moments of the same unfolding event.

Chapter 2

Water Fierce Dream: Primo Levi's Poetic Fugue

The typical academic response to Holocaust testimony fails to index the traumatic upheavels they relate. As the texts themselves fall outside the normal analytical categories of genre, style and purpose, these critics readily usurp their language, content and meaning into large and amorphous arguments. To the extent that these arguments fall neatly into preexisting categories of understanding literature, language, and humanity and so long as they ultimately fail to account for the radical brutality attested to in Holocaust narrative, they provide no guidance in reading testimonial texts. Testimonies index the site where typical philosophical and discursive analyses slide into meaninglessness. Discourse, argument, and metaphysics stretch beyond their breaking point and snap. In the same way, subjectivity itself – founded upon and forever reliant on the stability of the "reality" these concepts delimit – yields both in what these texts describe and in what they enact: their content and their performance. Therefore, the texts of testimony demand a hermeneutics able to account for interruption, upending, and for subjective and subjectless speech. Later, I will refer to the latest distinction also as the difference between the human and the inhuman.

These insufficient discussions tend to accumulate around certain powerful writers and intellectuals of the Holocaust including Robert Antelme, Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi[16] The cases of Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel are particularly instructive as their

[16] See especially: Robert Antelme, *L'espèce Humaine*, Éd. revue et corrigée. ed. ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1978), Robert Antelme, *The Human Race* (Evanston, Ill.: Marlboro Press/Northwestern, 1998), Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz : The Nazi Assault on Humanity*, 1st Collier Books trade ed. (New York Toronto:

interpreters often juxtapose them in the following way: Primo Levi, it is said, presents the terror of the Holocaust, while Elie Wiesel presents only its horror. This distinction, relying on gothic definitions of the two terms, understands horror as an exposure that freezes and overwhelms the viewer, while terror provokes the viewer into action. Whereas Primo Levi presents the reader with a terrifying world, which although traumatic can provoke the readers to contemporary thought and action – through serious questioning of cultural and metaphysical tropes such as "mankind," "ethics" and "philosophy". On the other hand, so the argument goes, Elie Wiesel presents only horror: an unspeakable and sacred world whose very presentation prevents active response, thereby constricting the reader to silent wonder, shame, and paralysis. In a recent book Massimo Giuliani characterizes the difference as follows: "In Levi, the approach is rational, de-mythologizing and anti-ideological even toward itself. It is not his purpose to make the Holocaust sacred or the mere object of a museum. This difference in approach makes Levi a kind of 'anti-Wiesel" (Giuliani 4). In a discussion following a presentation of his paper "Levi or Wiesel? Two Mutually Exclusive Renditions of the Holocaust?", renowned Holocaust historian Henry Huttenbach again argued this very dichotomy[17].

Not only does this overly dialectical construction undercut many significant moments in Wiesel's literary and activist life work that directly raise moral and ethical questions of response and responsibility, bystandership and victimhood, these discussions ignore the very openings to the ineffable and incomprehensible that rupture the surface of Levi's testimonial prose and especially his poetry. This chapter will focus primarily on

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Collier Books ; Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1993) & Elie Wiesel, *Night ; Dawn ; Day*, B'nai B'rith Judaica Library (New York [New York]: Aronson : B'nai B'rith ;Distributed by Scribner, 1985).

[17] This occurred at a conference on Primo Levi held at Hofstra University, entitled "'If this is a Man': The Life and Legacy of Primo Levi." (October 23, 24, 2002). See also, Bryan Chayette, "The Ethical Uncertainty of Primo Levi," *Judaism*, vol. 48 (Winter 1999): 65.

Levi, although an equal discussion could be devoted to the traditional misreadings of Wiesel cited above. Through close readings of Levi's narrative testimony *The Truce* (*The Reawakening: La Tregua*) and several poems, I will argue that relying on dialectical, binary oppositions – terror-horror, human-inhuman, power-paralysis – ignores the hermeneutical possibility that the tension between oppositions have been imploded by the Holocaust. Through recourse to Levinas, who calls this implosion the reemergence of an originary chaos, and psychoanalysis and trauma discourse, which provide a language of subjectivity and its rupture, I will attempt to inaugurate a method of reading that will allow us to read even the interruptions that scar these texts.

Before discussing Levi's poetry, I will analyze several moments of his prose corpus in an effort to demonstrate that the ineffable, the untranslatable, and the unknowable puncture the varied surface of what is often times written off or praised as humanistic prose. This common misreading converts and translates the complex textures of testimonial narrative into either memoir or historical witness texts, in order to bolster a myth of Primo Levi as the rational humanist, unchanged in his belief in "mankind" by his experience at Auschwitz. These readings tend to emphasize his scientific training before the war as a determining factor in how Levi dealt with and understood his experience. While this reading is certainly a reasonable one that the texts themselves suggest, I will argue that this type of reading ignores a violent and dismissive inwardness that animates Levi's prose and poetry, with the chaotic and unnamable inhuman voice Levi himself calls "shrill and anti-poetic" (VM 88). A reading stuck in the modalities of biography or historiography often misses the specific alterity of the survivors' narrative and the complex negotiations it traces between the rejection and acceptance of these generic

norms. This hyper-negotiated quality partially defines the genre of testimony and therefore must guide our reading.

In reading Levi's prose, we will focus specifically on moments of transgression in order to trace their effect on the text. Levi's *La Tregua,* rendered in the U.S. as *The Reawakening* – commonly considered and published as a sequel to *Se Questo È Un Uomo, Survival in Auschwitz* – for example, begins with a figure of return at the moment of a literal departure.[18] In the first chapter, "The Thaw," the narrator relates the preliminary liberation of Auschwitz, performed simply by the arrival of the first Russian soldiers to the camp. "The first Russian patrol," Levi writes, "came in sight of the camp about midday on 27 January 1945. Charles and I were the first to see them"[19]. Since it is still the middle of winter, the soldiers' arrival marks a symbolic thaw, invoked by "gusts of damp wind," which blow in from behind them (16). The book begins by telling a story of renewal, figured not as spring and liberation but as a reawakening of morality and shame. The narrator calls this "a painful sense of pudency, so that we should have liked to wash our consciences and our memories clean from the foulness that lay upon them" (16). While this reawakening is marked paradoxically by feelings of guilt and contamination, the emergence of these emotions is itself contingent on the arrival of "the hour of liberty," the thaw (16). When the literal thaw eventually arrives, rather than signifying a guarantee against frostbite and death, it turns the camp into "a squalid bog" where "the bodies and the filth made the misty, muggy air impossible to breath" (20). The food that the Russians provide for the dying prisoners guarantees neither life nor salvation: Levi explains that many survivors died because they "followed blindly the

[18] A more accurate translation of the original Italian title would be *The Truce, La tregua.*
[19] *The Reawakening,* 15. "*La prima pattuglia russa giunse in vista del campo verso il mezzogiorno del 27 gennaio 1945. Fummo charles ed io i prima a scorgerla." La Tregua,* 157

imperious command of our age-old hunger and had stuffed themselves with the rations of meat that the Russians…sent to the camp" (20). Starving survivors stuffed themselves with food that their bodies were ill prepared to digest. "The greediest of survivors," Levi writes, "died." Ultimately, "freedom" brings illness rather than hope: Levi continues, "It seemed as if the weariness and the illness, like ferocious and cowardly beasts, had waited in ambush for the moment when I dismantled my defenses, in order to attack me from behind" (20). Questioning the possibility and asserting the limitation of the victim's return to humanity, this first chapter, along with the book's epigraph and last several paragraphs demonstrate, on the level of meta-narrative, the failure of liberation and ultimately of survival.

Levi's second major testimonial text, *The Truce,* was written and published in 1963, seventeen years after its predecessor.[20] The text follows Primo Levi from the first moments of his liberation in January of 1945 to October 19, 1945 when he finally makes it home to Turin, Italy. This picaresque testimonial novel tells the story of Levi's slow and laborious journey from Poland through the Ukraine, White Russia, Romania, Hungary, Austria, and Germany before finally arriving Italy. While the first two chapters are similar in tone and affective intensity to *If this is a Man* [a more literal translation of the title of *Survival in Auschwitz*], the narrator's reappropriation of his world is mirrored by the writing's increased use of a more mundane syntactic and paratactic style. An excellent example of the linkage that occurs in Levi's text between linguistic, subject, and generic failure is rendered in the second chapter, "The Main Camp." These pages narrate the events of the first few days after liberation, during which time the prisoners

[20] Although this book, *La Tregua,* is named *The Reawakening* in its American translations, I will refer to this text via a more literal translation.

were led from Birkenau to the main camp of Auschwitz I. In the following passage, Levi describes the arrival at Auschwitz of the last member of his group:

> None of us knew who he was, because he was in no condition to speak. He was a shadow, a bald little figure, twisted like a root, skeleton-like, knotted up by a horrible contraction of his muscles; they had lifted him out of the cart bodily, like an inanimate block, and now he lay on the ground on his side, curled up and stiff, in a desperate position of defense, with his knees pressed up against his forehead, his elbows squeezed against his sides, and his hands like wedges, with fingers pressing against his shoulders. The Russian sisters, perplexed, sought in vain to stretch him on his back, at which he let out shrill mouse-like squeaks: it was in any case a useless effort; his limbs yielded elastically under pressure, but as soon as they were released, they shot back to their initial position. (23: 164)[21]

Levi's narrator does not attempt to explain this condition to us. Rather, he presents this case as a fact, one of many under examination. The scientist in Levi emerges here in part, viewing and noting the entire scene yet failing to offer a hypothesis. This analysis yields under the pressure of the unnamable trauma that has befallen this "shadow." Furthermore, as *The Truce* does not delve for more than brief moments into the horrors and traumas of the concentrationary universe, these failures – of freedom in the first chapter and understanding in this second one – stand in for a larger incomprehension in the face of Auschwitz.

Significantly, Primo Levi's testimonial style portrays adaptative failures – in this case of "the shadow" to adapt to liberation – as linguistic ones that often mark characters

[21] Whenever two page numbers are given in an inline citation, the first will refer to the English translation and the second to the page number in the original text.

with namelessness. This is true both for "the shadow" who was in "no condition to speak" and for Hurbinek, "The Main Camp's" other unknowable occupant:

> Hurbinek was a nobody, a child of death, a child of Auschwitz. He looked about three years old, no one knew anything of him, he could not speak and he had no name; that curious name, Hurbinek, had been given to him by us…He was paralyzed from the waist down, with atrophied legs, as thin as sticks; but his eyes, lost in his triangular and wasted face, flashed terribly alive, full of demand, assertion, of the will to break loose, to shatter the tomb of his dumbness. The speech he lacked, which no one had bothered to teach him, the need of speech charged his stare with explosive urgency: it was a stare both savage and human, even mature, a judgment, which none of us could support, so heavy was it with force and anguish. (25: 166)

Hurbinek exists in Levi's text with neither speech nor name of his own. Somehow he survived Auschwitz but will not survive the liberation: "Hurbinek died in the first days of March 1945, free but not redeemed. Nothing remains of him: he bears witness through these words of mine" (26). As with the figure of the Musselman that has drawn recent critical attention, these two figures occupy a liminal space in Levi's text since they have no name and say nothing that could subjectify them.[22] Yet, as Levi repeatedly insists, their testimony passes through his pen in order to reach us. In a sense, he argues, giving voice to their existence and their suffering is the true motivation for his own speech.

To act as a conduit, Levi strives to reflect in his own words the speech of the wordless. This, Levi seems to insist, is his testimony's main value. After all, he argues in

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[22] One recent example is Giorgio Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz: the Witness and the Archive*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York: Zone Books, 1999.

The Drowned and the Saved in the chapter "Shame" that those witnesses who returned from the Concentration Camps and who have been able to speak about their experiences are in fact not the "true witnesses." Rather, the true witnesses were those who "touched bottom" and who "have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute…they are the 'Muslims,' the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have a general significance." More explicitly regarding his own mission in testifying, Levi says, "We who were favored by fate tried, with more or less wisdom, to recount not only our fate but also that of the others, indeed of the drowned" (84). The stream of this argument that carries through from *If this is a Man* through *The Drowned and the Saved*, from Levi's first to his last testimonial work, provides the most rigorous undercutting of the "Levi as humanist philosopher" position. Here we have Levi as medium for the dead. Rather than giving space and privilege to philosophical speculations about the centrality of subjectivity, Levi undercuts the value of his own experiences and even his own testimony in order to acknowledge the priority of an other who has lost his name and his voice. Furthermore, Levi does not simply include the instance of the nameless, voiceless other as an example or as an element of his own struggle for understanding personal past experiences. Rather, the presence of this other in every way undercuts the continuity of his narrative and inserts a lacuna into his argument.

From the third to the penultimate chapter, *La Tregua* tells the story of a truce, a period of time that Levi's narrator experiences essentially without the return of the traumatic memories of the camps. Instead, the intense confusion and anxiety both of the camps and their aftermath evaporate as Levi's narrator explores a new world of people, places and events. The narrative occupies itself with the people Levi meets. He also

describes the unexpected detours and sojourns imposed upon the displaced victims apparently at the whim of the occupying forces of reconstruction. During this period, a series of characters model effective survival behavior for Levi, from Mordo Nahum, the reliable Greek, to Cesare, the crafty Italian. The anxiety over death and annihilation that overwhelmed him in *If This Is a Man* is here replaced by a more-or-less carefree story that combines aspects of the bildungsroman and the travel narrative.

Only in the ultimate chapter, "The Awakening," do memory, history, and trauma return as Levi moves closer and ultimately arrives back home in Turin. Here, in a twist of fate the reader has come to expect from this picaresque narrative, Levi's train avoids the straight "180 mile" path that connects St. Valentin, Austria and Tarvisio, Italy, instead crossing a "new frontier" and entering Munich (204: 322). Significantly, it is in Munich that the fatigue of the journey finally catches up with the travelers. They feel "tired of everything" and are "prey to a disconsolate railway tiredness, a permanent loathing for trains, for snatches of sleep on wooden floors, for jolting and for stations." These things, along with the smells of the train and train station, Levi's narrator says, "inspired in us a deep disgust. We were tired of everything, tired in particular of perforating useless frontiers" (204). On the other hand, the narrator acknowledges that:

> the fact of feeling a piece of Germany under our feet for the first time…overlaid our tiredness with a complex attitude composed of intolerance, frustration and tension. We felt we had something to say, enormous things to say, to every single German, and we felt that every German should have something to say to us…Did 'they' know about Auschwitz, about the silent daily massacre, a step away from their doors? If they did, how could they walk about, return home and look at their

> children, cross the threshold of a church? If they did not, they ought, as a sacred duty, to listen, to learn everything, immediately, from us, from me; I felt the tattooed number on my arm burning like a sore. [*Se no, dovevano, dovevano sacramente, udire, imparare da noi, da me, tutto e subito: sentivo il numero tatuato sul braccio stridere come una piaga*] (204: 322).

Here we find the return of the anxiety and the reopening of the traumatic wound. About to return home, finding himself for the first time in the country of the perpetrator, Primo Levi's narrator wakes up to feelings of anger, injustice, and revenge. He wanders around the destroyed city of Munich, which is "full of ruins" and searches for someone who will acknowledge the enormous debt Germany owes him. "But," Levi laments, "no one looked us in the eyes, no one accepted the challenge" (205). In Munich Levi emerges, perhaps for the first time, as haunted. After confronting in this way the perpetrators and accomplices wherever he looks, he is sure that only the survivors will ever feel the guilt of the camps: only the "few just ones, would reply," for the guilt shared by many.

When the train eventually crosses the Italian frontier, several of Levi's "less tired companions celebrate with a cheerful uproar," but Levi and his companion Leonardo remain silent. They remember the last time they passed this border, traveling in the opposite direction along with 650 fellow Italians, of whom, only three now return. Levi wonders what and how much of himself he has lost, how much has been, "eroded, extinguished?" He describes the months of his travels as a truce, "a parenthesis of unlimited availability, a providential but unrepeatable gift of fate" (206).

As Levi approaches his home, his trauma reemerges to end the truce. In trauma, exposure to an unexpected and catastrophic event overwhelms the subject's ability to

thematize and thereby maintain his/her subjectivity. Once overrun, consciousness will not allow a simple return of the subject. Rather, the psychical wound remains internal yet isolated as a volatile and destructive ghost that "returns to haunt the victim" with "the impact of its incomprehensibility" (UE 6). Crossing the border, time takes on, for Levi, a double structure in which Auschwitz evacuates a space within consciousness, leaving him between an unforgettable and un-rememberable past and a future whose energy will be spent battling these unresolved forces:

> We felt in our veins the poison of Auschwitz, flowing together with our thin blood; where should we find the strength to begin our lives again, to break down the barriers, the brushwood which grows up spontaneously in all absences [*abbattere le barriere, le siepi che crescono spontanee durante tutte le assenze*], around every deserted house, every empty refuge [*covile*]? Soon, tomorrow [*domain stresso*], we should have to give battle, against enemies still unknown, outside ourselves and inside [*dentro e fuori di noi*]; with what weapons, what energies, what willpower? (206: 324)

In this plaintive and tormented plea for strength and delivery, we have a narrator who is miles away from the simple, self-possession he exhibited during the "truce" chapters. This "reawakening," does not return Levi to the person he was before Auschwitz, but transforms him from the free spiriting narrator he was in the middle section of this book, back to the tortured victim of Auschwitz. Instead of giving reprieve, this "return" takes away, precisely at the moment of awakening, any possible rediscovery of a *present* reality. Here, "on the threshold" of home, Levi wakes up to a self already polluted by the poison of Auschwitz. More distinctly, he must wake up to the reality of his own pollution

– an event he has already missed – in order to arrive home. Home and awakening, therefore, are not given but withheld, until Levi fights his way towards and against unknown and unseen enemies. Even the idealized home Levi imagined all throughout camp life has been replaced by absence, the abandoned home, the hovel or den [*covile*]. The presence of the present is unassumable and forever deferred. Levi's anxiety that separates him from home even after he arrives, the haunting presence of Auschwitz, manifests in an even more radical form as this chapter, and so the whole book, ends one page later with the narration of Levi's repeated dream.

First, however, Levi briefly describes his arrival: "I reached Turin on 19 October, after thirty-five days of travel; my house was still standing, all my family was alive, no one was expecting me[23]" (207; 324). This sentence contains the text's greatest irony: its internal law of anticlimax and absence. Instead of to triumph, Levi returns to absence. He simply shows up. The syntax carries his flat, meticulous immobility: "I reached Turin…I was swollen…I found my friends…I found a large clean bed…only after many months did I lose the habit of walking with my glance fixed to the ground"[24] (207: 324). Ultimately, however, this return is a false ending since, in the final paragraph of the text, Levi's narrator emerges into an active present from this passive past tense. The present immediately takes up Levi's repeating dream "full of horror [which] has still not ceased to visit me, at sometimes frequent, sometimes longer, intervals" (207).

Levi begins his narration of the dream by saying, "It is a dream within a dream, varied in detail, one in substance." It begins similarly throughout its various repetitions:

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[23] *Giunsi a Torino il 19 di ottobre, dopo trentacinque giorni di viaggio: la casa era in piedi, tutti I familiari vivi, nessuno mi aspettava.*

[24] *Giunsi a Torino…Ero gonfio…Ritrovai gli amici…Ritrovai un letto…Ma sola dopo molti mesi svaní in me l'abitudine di camminare con lo sguardo fisso al suolo."*

Levi is in a peaceful and relaxed environment, with family or friends, having a picnic or a walk, at work, or in the "green countryside." Although this bucolic scene apparently lacks "tension and affliction," Levi feels "a deep and subtle anguish, the definite sensation of an impending threat":

And in fact, as the dream proceeds, slowly or brutally, each time in a different way,

> everything collapses and disintegrates around me, the scenery, the walls, the people, while the anguish becomes more intense and more precise. Now everything has changed to chaos; I am alone in the centre of a grey and turbid nothing, and now, I *know* [*io so*] what this thing means, and I also know that I have always known it; I am in the Lager once more, and nothing is true outside the Lager. All the rest was a brief pause, a deception of the senses, a dream…Now this inner dream, this dream of peace, is over, and in the outer dream, which continues, gelid, a well-known voice resounds…It is the dawn command of Auschwitz, a foreign word, feared and expected: get up, 'Wstawàch.' (207-8: 325)

"Wstawàch" is the last word of *La Tregua*. With this, the dream text swallows the memorial text, the "historical" recounting proper. *The Truce* ends with the return of the dreaded dream, this time not as prophecy but as unfolding. At the same time, testifying to the dream, in addition to being the ultimate act of the text, appears to be its ultimate purpose as well. Significantly, this dream ties the reader and the testifier insolubly to the historical time of Levi's return home, to the space that separated his return from his testifying, and to that very act of testimony in the "now" of this telling. Thereby, the dream undoes the possibility of return, survival and witnessing.

The Poetry

From the detached precision of his descriptions, to his analytic, objectifying position vis-à-vis his own experiences, the narrator of *The Reawakening* evidences a spatio-temporal removal from the events he is describing; they index a return in their very act of recalling and retelling. The beginning of *The Reawakening* echoes other beginnings; this story has been told before. First, this opening belongs to literature, in that it seems to mimic certain literary tropes. Secondly, this story, told without breaks in the narration or moments of textual uncertainty, indexes a telling that has been rehearsed, that is a retelling. To the extent that this text raises philosophical questions about the status of man and the possibility of his subjectivity to withstand torture and to return, this text also speaks within and to a philosophical tradition, and therefore quotes certain of its beginnings. To this "narratival" model, which privileges a figural return, a return of the figure as something controllable – after all, the text opens with Levi and his friend hauling a body to a grave – one can oppose the movement that dominates Levi's poetry. Guided by the figure of a departure without return, his poems are not truces but fugues; they invoke chaos and absence. The scientific, sociological search for meaning and identity that structures the prose texts is, in the poetry, entirely displaced by another language, which is shattered and repetitive, alien to the structures of logic and understanding. They are therefore far from any human subjectivity that would navigate its world thanks to the stability it finds in such things as time, space and identity. While the prose can be said to question the possibility of a human return, the poetry addresses the impossibility of a return to the human.

"*Hier ist kein warum*," a guard says to Levi in *Survival in Auschwitz*, yet the text arguably enacts a quest to find the why which the guard apparently denies. From its original title, *Se questo e un uomo* (*If This Is a Man*), this text announces itself as a search for truth and meaning, a search for answers to the questions of why and how. Here there is no why. While this figure of despair, alienation, and the impossibility of human *being* steadily guides his prose, it reappears in his poetry as the animating and numinously uncontrollable voice of suffering, moving constantly away from reference, figuration and rationality. The absence of "why" also figures as the absence of cause-and-effect and chronology. Questions of time and history are, in the poetry, displaced or replaced by a reversal inside of, or prior to, structure. In the poems such as "*Alzarsi*" (Reveille) and "*Fuga*" (Flight), this figural disruption is achieved through a denial of the possibility of an "I." The events these poems describe are never in a past that has passed – which would allow for the possibility of a present; rather, their event or crisis is always incomplete. More often than not, the crisis at stake has not yet, or at least not properly, begun. In the poem "Reveille," for instance, the narrator is lost among a collectivity, "In the brutal nights *we* used to dream" (10: 18). While history and time are annulled by a cycle of repetition that bridges dream and wakefulness, past and present, and here and there, the "I" struggles to emerge yet finds no solid spatial-temporal ground on which to stand. The poem ends with an ominous prophecy about the immediate future, which is really a threatened return to the past: "Soon we'll hear again/ The strange command: / *Wstawać*."

In *The Voice of Memory*, a collection of interviews published in 2001, Primo Levi explained that he turned to poetry after writing *La Tregua* [*The Reawakening*, 1965] due to the desire to say a few things, which had, until then, avoided being said. Levi felt that

he had "completely burned myself out as a witness, narrator and interpreter of a certain reality…But I still thought I had a few things left to say, things I could only say in another language." A language he calls "in-human [*disumano*]" (translation emended 88). In Levi's view his prose, indelibly attached to a particular narratival strategy, reproduced a certain perspective on a certain reality, but insufficiently witnessed another one [non-experience]. This other experience, present in his intentions, remained absent from his prose. In poetry, therefore, Levi hoped to find a supplement to his prose testimonies – one that could present not only the "shocking" and "horrifying" reality of the camps but also an "uncertain reality" that, years after the event, continued to agitate him and his testimony. Rather than being given to a subject – in this case the author or narrator of testimony – this other reality denies the very possibility of a subject to constitute itself, even as a horrified subject. For Levi, this other "uncertain reality" therefore opposes the reality his prose narrator was articulating and, although this trace of the absent other experience marks the surface of all of Levi's Holocaust prose as well, he turned to poetry in order to transmit this remainder more directly. To this end, Levi created a poetic un-world – neither world nor non-world, but an*other* world – whose language is "shrill, oblique, spiteful, deliberately anti-poetic; in-human…a heavy, dense poetry, like molten metal, that runs away and leaves you gutted" (88).

Levi's poetry gives voice, therefore, not to the anti-human – which would be just one more modality of the same Being's being – but to a radically different other he calls the inhuman. The French ethical philosopher Emmanuel Levinas might characterize the distinction by saying that the inhuman precedes the opposition between human and antihuman. In fact, he argues in his book *Existence and Existents* – begun in a Nazi

prisoner of war camp and published in 1947 – that before becoming a subject, existence confronts being as something horrifying. In this "anonymous current of being," prior to all subjectifying distinctions based on binary oppositions including the same and the other, the being is lost to irresolvable confusion (52). Only by taking up a stance in relation to the *there is* can the being arise out of nothingness. Hence, the human being exists through negotiating and maintaining a position in respect to the anonymous chaos of *existence*. According to this view of the subject, the antihuman would be one of the many modes in which the subject sees himself as alien. This self-image poses no actual threat to the subject and most likely reinforces it. In the negotiated existence of the existent, ego persists in spite of all need, threat and change, through thematizing all experiences: the "'I' remains there to tie the multicolored threads of our existence to one another" (87). It is through knowing and understanding the accidents of existence and reincorporating the very threat to the self-posed by the accident, that the ego, and therefore the subject, maintains itself as "something invariable."

The inhuman upends the subject's stance in relation to existence, thereby exposing the being once again to the anonymous chaos of existence. According to Levinas, "in times of misery and privation… [When] one has to eat, drink and warm oneself in order not to die, when nourishment becomes fuel… the world also seems to be at an end, turned upside down and absurd, needing to be renewed. Time becomes unhinged" (37). In other words, the contract forged by the existent with existence is revocable; its "reality," when not sustained by external conditions, crumbles. This annulment cancels all knowledge, understanding, and ability – all inherently adaptive, ideational fictions – and returns the existent to a state prior to ability. Mere biological

life, thus conceived, lacks the human and subjectifying functions of time, space, and self (subject). Once the subject is undone and re-exposed to the unmitigated distensions of the *there is*, it remains forever difficult to ignore this space of horror, insomnia, and nausea.

This conception of time, space, and being as things that can be unhinged, allows us to *read* the poem "*Alzarsi*" that serves as an epigraph to *The Truce*. Although the poem is untitled when it appears at the opening of *The Truce,* it is called "*Alzarsi"* in the collection *Ad Ora Incerta* and was translated as "Reveille" in *Collected Poems*.[25] The poem mirrors the dream narration that ends the text very closely, yet with a difference. Notice how difficult it is to determine the poem's location in terms of time, space, and human subject. *Wstawàch* means "wake up" and was used in the camps as a military reveille:

In the brutal nights we used to dream
Dense violent dreams,
Dreamed with soul and body,
To return; to eat; to tell the story.
Until the dawn command
Sounded brief, low:
'*Wstawàch'*:
And the heart cracked in the breast.

25

Sognavamo nelle notti feroci
Sogni densi e violenti
Sognati con anima e corpo:
Tornare; mangiare; raccontare.
Finché suonava breve sommesso
Il comando dell'alba:
"Wstawàch":
E si spezzava in petto il cuore.

Ora abbiamo ritrovato la casa,
Il nostro ventre è sazio,
Abbiamo finito di raccontare.
È tempo. Presto udremo ancora
Il comando straniero:
"Wstawàch".

(CP 10: ADI 18)

Now we have found our homes again,
Our bellies are full,
We're through telling the story.
It's time. Soon we'll hear again
The strange command:
Wstawàch. (CP, 10: ADI 18)

In this poem, as it was in Levi's dream, history and time are annulled by a repeated oscillation between dream and wakefulness, past and present, here and there. The poem begins by signaling a past without indicating a present. This absent present induces anxiety in the reader who must simultaneously read the given text of the poem and hold a space for the missing text of the present. That is, the reader must hold an absence in order to understand the past. Instead of beginning with an "I" whom the reader could identify, the poem begins with a collectivity, a "we." This is especially odd given that the task described is dreaming, which by definition only an individual can accomplish. While the "I" struggles to emerge from the background of the poem, he finds no solid spatio-temporal ground on which to stand. After all, this poem's present narration presents a past dream that longed for a future but evidently not this one. In the second stanza, which finally gives the reader, and narrator, a partial present in the form of "Now," an actual present is withheld more subtly by its refusal to move from the collective voice to the personal one. Furthermore, the poem quickly takes away even the hollow present that it gave: From the position of a present liberation, "Now we have found our homes again," the poem switches to a prophetic anticipation of a return to a historical past.

In their article, "The Intrusive Past," van der Kolk and van der Hart relate several distinctions between narrative memory and traumatic memory that can inform our reading of Levi's poetry. Narrative and traumatic memory exist independently and

exclusively; each experiences time, subjectivity and identity in radically different ways. Narrative memory, also called “ordinary” memory, is fully incorporated into the subject’s identity; it can be seen in relation to other events that happened before and after it, and its occurrence can be summarized. On the other hand, traumatic memory exists apart from everything that happened before and after it, and its elements must be told all together. Although they are different from each other, they are not separable; each one, and their relation to the other, remains unmastered. Furthermore, while narrative memory is a social act, meant to communicate a meaning to another person or group, traumatic memory “has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody” (163). While narrative memory is a retelling of a past event, traumatic memory is more properly a reliving; therefore, traumatic memory is not quite memory but is more like an excess charge continually upsetting the equilibrium of the subject. Narrative and traumatic memory thus function similarly to the cleaving between narrative and traumatic retelling. “*Alzarsi*” compresses these two modes of telling, these separate and unbridgeable aspects of the traumatized subject, into one utterance punctured by the effort and exertion.

Caught within loops of both figural and literal repetition – the word “*Wstawać,*” for instance, appears twice, while the confused figure of the dream works as both the past, present and future – the poem offers the possibility of a temporality without ground, a history that is not past, and a mode of narration in which neither the speaking subject, nor the subject of enunciation, ever occurs. The poem constructs itself by tracing vectors of movement, thereby privileging absence over presence (into the past via a past dream, into the present via a “Now” and into a future return to the past, via a prophetic awakening). Yet, what is the status of a prophecy within a dream? And a present trapped

between two repeated pasts? Therefore, the narrator's exclusion and removal from the narrative that he "himself" tells is what I will call, again following Levinas, radical exile or an exile from exile. The meaning of the poem's inability to construct the identity of this narrator along the lines of presence, agency and intentionality – relying instead on a trace structure to indicate his absence by referential failure – must form a central part of any interpretation of this poem. Although the present and the "I" are missing, we cannot take that absence for granted. We do not know yet what that absence means for presence. In fact, I argue that the absent subject of this poem presents itself through the traces this poem marks; we can see his continual movement away from presence.

This crisis emerges also in the lines of Levi's late testimonial poetry. In these works, he has completely displaced to the periphery all stable metaphysical categories. In the poem "*Fuga*," (translated as "Flight"), for example, narrative, chronology and survival have already, before the time of the poem and by the end of its first verse, been extinguished as possibilities.[26]

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[26] **Fuga**

Roccia e sabbia e non acqua
Sabbia trapunta dai suoi passi
Sense numero fino all'orizzonte:
Era in fuga, e nessuno lo inseguiva.
Ghiaione trito e spento
Pietra rosa dal vento
Scissa dal gelo alterno,
Vento asciutto e non acqua.
Acqua niente per lui
Che solo d'acqua aveva bisogno,
Acqua per cancellare
Acqua feroce sogno
Acqua impossibile per rifarsi mondo.
Sole plumbeo senza raggi
Cielo e dune e non acqua
Acqua ironica finta dai miraggi
Acqua preziosa drenata in sudore
E in alto l'inaccessa acqua dei cirri.
Trovò il pozzo e discese,

Rock and sand and no water;
Sand stitched by his countless steps
All the way to the horizon.
He was fleeing, and no one was following.
Gravel trampled and worn,
Stone gnawed by the wind,
Split by successive frosts;
Dry wind and no water.
No water for him
Whose only need was water,
Water to erase,
Water fierce dream,
Impossible water to cleanse himself again.
Leaden sun without rays,
Sky and dunes and no water.
Ironic water feigned by mirages;
Precious water drained off in sweat.
And overhead, unreachable,
The water of cirrus clouds.
He found the well and descended,
Plunged his hands in and the water turned red.
No one could ever drink there again.

This poem presents what Levinas calls a departure without return. Opposing the departures of Abraham and Odysseus, Levinas argues that the latter's journey was always to go back home, and eventually he makes it. Abraham on the other hand left his father's house knowing that he would never return. Levinas terms this second type of departure "ethical subjectivity" in that it leaves the comfort of the same and the familiar in order to yield itself to the unknown and the other. Here, the radical departure occurs before the poem begins. Not only is the landscape subjectless, it is prohibitively lifeless. Without introducing a subject, Levi invokes radical absence and lack, leaving the reader isolated, without the possibility of identification or security. When an actor in this deathly field is invoked, he neither approaches nor withdraws, and the reader continues to be isolated

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Tuffò le mani e l'acqua si fece rossa.
Nessuno poté berne mai più.

from him through the complicated tense of this unfolding: he had been fleeing, “and no one was following.” The gravel is “trampled and worn” and the stone already bears the marks of wind and frost. These passively constructed phrases effect an impression of petrified time that bears the mark of excessive decay, absence and isolation.

Meanwhile, the repetition of “no water” functions like a musical motif, constantly returning in various configurations. In the first section of the poem, the absence of water has cruelly desiccated the landscape, but has no clear connection to the fleeing man, whereas, in the middle section, the absence of water functions as a metonymy for the subject’s traumatic past, his suffering and impending or already consummated death or insanity. The line “Water fierce dream” summons the images of insanity, radical thirst, and death. This line encapsulates the contradictory tensions that animate the poem in the place of a realized subject, presenting radical desire and absence in place of presence and control. Not only is the poem’s “he” isolated and detached from his surroundings, but the poem’s language fails in this line to present any concrete or present referent. The verse is almost nonsensical, except that its compression yields an excess of affective possibilities. Although this utterance is not a sentence, being two nouns separated by an adjective, its violating and transgressive gesture must be read along with the specifics of the transgression. This utterance breaks down the poem’s linguistic structure by yielding to affective intuitive non-sense. Significantly, this break is “erased” or bridged by the next line that seems to return to the development of the previous line.

The penultimate section of the poem presents the unavailability of water as a hellish torture intentionally designed by nature. The subject has once again disappeared into a landscape animated by absence and desire; however, the environment has now

turned malevolent. The scenery is no longer passive: The "leaden sun" punishes but does not enlighten. Water is presented as something present yet impossible to grasp – whether it is the "ironic water" of the mirages, the water lost to sweat, or that "on high, [*in alto*] the inaccessible water of the cirrus clouds" (translation emended).

The poem's coda brings "him" to a "well" whose water promises the very purification the poem appears to seek. However, his interaction with the water, his contact and ultimately his presence are rejected thereby turning magic to curse and myth to anti-myth. Turning the water to blood, his purification fails and his curse is perpetuated. This coda also presents a reversal of the Hebrew Bible's myth of birth in its almost exact citation of the story in Exodus, of Aaron's miracle performed before Pharoah, turning the waters of the Nile, and all of Egypt's streams and wells into blood by touching his staff to the waters. Exodus 7:20-21 reads, "He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water." With this allusion in mind it becomes easy to read the rest of the poem as a flight back across the desert that once led a group of nameless tormented slaves to become a people, to arrive at one of the very first moments of divine intervention mentioned in the historical bible, and to reverse it. Whereas the story of the exodus becomes a powerful myth, this telling, by leaving no possible progeny or life, becomes an anti-myth that no group can claim as a foundation.[27]

Feldman and Swann have translated as "Flight," the title of Levi's poem "Fuga".[28] *However,* the Italian is more ambiguous and can be rendered as escape or fugue. In

[27] Although Feldman and Swann have translated it as "Flight," "Fuga,"[27] means both escape and fugue.
[28] Both the English and Italian versions appear as appendixes to this paper.

psychological terms, a dissociative fugue describes a situation in which a subject suddenly goes on a trip. When he returns, he no longer has any memory of what transpired during his absence. Fugue also has a musical usage that indicates a "polyphonic composition constructed on one or more short subjects or themes…harmonized…and introduced from time to time with various contrapuntal devices."[29] Through its repetitive structure and contrapuntal harmonies the musical fugue is often described as refusing chronology and as forcing the listener to focus on the affective quality of the music rather than on any progression of themes. In this sense, the fugue is that which returns and haunts; both senses, the psychological and musical, are at play in Levi's poem, which signifies towards the radical impossibility of the subject's return not only to the human but also to language.

Finally, language functions like presence in Levi's poems: it is missing at the most crucial junctures and mimics the failed return of the subject. That drinking has been detached from its biological function in "Flight," and reified as the object of an impossible desire resonates with descriptions of the radical thirst felt by inmates in the concentration camps. In Levi's poems, therefore, we confront a different mode of witnessing than we do in his prose narratives. These poems speak about the impossibility of return, and even of speaking: in them Levi is exiled even from his own exile. In this manner they present the ungraspable content of Holocaust trauma without reducing the experience to that which can be thematized or said. The event is given to the reader undigested and indigestible.

[29] Stainer and Barrett, quoted in the OED, second edition online.

In conclusion, I would like to return to those misreadings that began this chapter. Would it now be possible to assert that Levi is a humanist whose goal is to encourage human action in the present? Even if that were true of the historical Levi, can we say the same about the textual Levi that lives through his poems? I believe that these poems have been largely ignored by critics not only because of their complexity, but also because they refuse the vary dichotomies critics look for. Furthermore, they are, according to the gothic definitions with which we began, quite horrifying. Ironically, the ultimate mistakes of the juxtaposition of Wiesel and Levi revolve around a failure to make distinctions between these men and their work, the text's apparent purpose and the meaning it actually performs, and the variety and variety of each man's body of work. The aim of this text is to find a hermeneutics of testimony capable of addressing these interpretive gaps by opening the reader to the possibility of an *Other* experience, a radical alterity. After all, the testifier, in turning to us with this experience, has already attempted this same undertaking, and the goal of criticism cannot be the appropriation of the other. Testimony calls on us to respond; so, how do we respond responsibly?

Chapter 3

More Than Memory: Aharon Appelfeld's Literary Survival

As a young boy, Aharon Appelfeld heard his mother's "one and only scream" (52) when she was murdered in the Jewish ghetto of Czernowitz. Later, at the age of eight, he separated from his father during a forced march to a slave-labor camp in the Trans-Dniester region of Romania. From there he escaped into terrified wandering in the Ukrainian wilderness. He survived the six years between ages eight and fourteen through instinctual self-preservation, making do in the forests of eastern Romania and western Ukraine. For the most part, he lived on his own, but in winters would suppress his Jewish identity in favor of the Ukrainian and Ruthenian languages and cultures. He was able to find temporary and often violent and abusive shelter by living and working in peasant homes. When the war ended he made his way, along with thousands of other Jewish refugees, to the shores of Italy and Yugoslavia, eventually sailing to Israel. An incomplete childhood – deformed by extended traumatic loss of family, language, and shelter – robbed the young Appelfeld of a stable identity. The new Israeli culture, which sought to cleanse itself of its long history of European victimization, encouraged the suppression of European identities, languages and behaviors, facilitating Appelfeld's desire to forget.

After learning Hebrew and farming on a *kibbutz* for new immigrants, Appelfeld served a brief tenure in the army. Despite the dominant Zionist ideology of the early postwar years that imagined the "new" Israeli as a warrior-farmer who emerged from exile powerful and free, for many immigrants, perhaps especially child survivors of the

Holocaust, the constant struggle to rebirth oneself in Hebrew forced a traumatic bifurcation of now and then, here and there, memory and present/future, in order to deepen and broaden. Between languages, identities and adolescences, the childhood that occurred on a different continent seemed like a different lifetime of an*other* child conducted entirely in a foreign and incomprehensible language. Upon completing his military service, Appelfeld turned partially against this powerful demand to forget his past by becoming a student of the suppressed European "pidgin" language Yiddish. Although the subjects of his earliest short stories still related myths of the "new" Israeli, his poetry and fiction soon found the silenced voice of trauma.

Giving voice to his inaccessible past, finding a voice and a language for those early experiences, demanded a substantial overcoming of both internal and external pressures. Appelfeld recalls the world of the young survivors waiting – after the war, on the shores of Italy – for transport to Israel. Before leaving the European scene of their traumatic childhoods Appelfeld insists, "oblivion was already solidified in all of us… [In Israel] oblivion found fertile ground" (TSL vi-vii). The recent past had already been completely wiped away from their minds and with it their families, childhoods, identities, mother-languages and homelands. The essential foundations of being were gone. And yet, in spite of oblivion's priority, Appelfeld eventually found a language through which to confront the volatility of traumatic memories. Significantly, he found that these memories originated in his body rather than in his mind: He writes that whereas the mind and memory endeavor to restrain the traumatic past in the "cramped and moldy basements within him"(viii), "the palms of one's hands, the soles of one's feet, one's back and one's knees remember more than memory" (vii). Listening at times to this

bodily memory, he finds himself able to write “a few chapters, but even they,” he insists, “are just fragments of a pulsing darkness that will always be locked inside me” (vii).

From his early diary entries scribbled on the kibbutz, to his mature fiction, many elements of Appelfeld’s writing remain consistent. Appelfeld’s protagonists are typically flat, two-dimensional characters whose thoughts and actions seem predetermined and mechanistic. Frequently their obsession with the past leaves them obliviously detached from the present, at other times they are lost in fantasy, but in both cases they can neither claim, nor separate themselves from, their surroundings. For instance, In *Badenheim 1939*, the Jewish vacationers cannot understand the cordoning of their vacation town and its transformation into a fenced-in ghetto. When the trains come to take the town’s harried occupants “further east,” the town’s “impresario” Dr. Pappenheim sees a silver lining – he opines that since the trains look so miserable, the ride must be very short. Similarly, in *The Immortal Bartfuss*, Bartfuss cannot escape the shadow of his past. Although his family crumbles around him in webs of suspicion and self-righteous anger, Bartfuss remains detached and unimpressed by his failures. Instead, his mind wanders to people he knew in the displaced persons (DP) camps after the war; their faces surround him. He spends his life chasing down shadows and dreams and is tormented, through an inverted logic, only by the present world that surrounds him. Unable to draw on the will of any subjective *self*, Appelfeld’s protagonists are pulled inevitably towards a tragic fate.

Despite the similarity of his protagonists, Appelfeld’s fiction demands the reader’s vigilance as an active interpreter who gives sense and context to these phantasmagoric worlds. Although almost all of his fictional spaces are located within range of the Holocaust – either before or after or just far enough away not to see the

smokestacks – the narratives almost never describe the Holocaust itself. Avoiding the most violent territory of death, they thrive on its fringes. Since they rarely invoke the Holocaust by name, the reader fills in the suggested historical context. As Gila Ramras-Rauch puts it in *Aharon Appelfeld: The Holocaust and Beyond*, "It is the very absence of the direct depiction of the Holocaust experience and its omnipresence that conveys the sense of horror" (18-9). The world of Appelfeld's fiction, through its mediated distance from and incomprehension of the event, confounds an "absent" event with the depiction of a "present" one. Pappenheim's shortsightedness when faced with the trains, for example, forces the reader to complete the narrative's logical perspective, collapsing the story's present onto the missing event: their death.

Complicating the reader's labor, a consistently ambiguous narrator moves fluidly through the psyches of various protagonists, often speaking for one or several characters simultaneously. At other times the narrators speak directly to the reader, ironico-tragically pointing out the follies of his characters. However, they too seem unable to grasp the pressing reality that infuses these narratives with tension. The narrators' distance from the protagonists contains within it a historical perspective that the narratives otherwise lack, as if they speak from a future in which these decisions have long since played out. These invested positions invoked by Appelfeld's fiction – the writer, narrator and reader – pull apparently flat narratives and characters to the limits of their interpretability. Trauma and the Holocaust shimmer just below the surface of these newly three-dimensional constellations, uniting them in a field of potential meanings. The unaddressed horror gives dimensionality to these narratives through the active participation of both narrator and reader.

In spite of this complicity between author, reader and event, Appelfeld resists the label of Holocaust writer or testifier. He identifies himself simply as a writer: literature, he argues, is never programmatic or ideologically obsessed with a single event. Although Appelfeld is quick to insist that "the literature of testimony is undoubtedly the authentic literature of the Holocaust," he does so only after separating his writing from testimony, which he insists is "first of all a search for relief; and as with any burden, the one who bears it seeks also to rid himself of it as hastily as possible" (BD 29-30). He insists that although "it is an enormous reservoir of Jewish chronologies… it embodies too many inner constraints to become literature as that concept has taken shape over the generations" (BD 29-30). Instead of following the path of testimony, Appelfeld felt "for some reasons [his] own destiny propelled [him] towards literature" (21).

Appelfeld goes on, in the same lecture, to argue for a generational dimension to the literature vs. testimony discussion. Appelfeld begins to correlate his negative construction of testimony and his overwhelmingly positive view of literary art as relating to the different experiences of adult versus child survivors. On the one hand, history occurs to adults who inscribe contemporary and past events into a continuous narrative of being and self-understanding. Since adult survivors had a life before the war in which they were agents possessed of identity and rights, their memory of the Holocaust needed modification, repression, and transformation after the war. Therefore, "While the survivor recounts and reveals, at the very same time he also conceals. For it is impossible not to tell, and it is also impossible to admit that what happened did not change him. He remained the same person, bound to the same civil concepts" (29). The adult survivor who testifies reveals and conceals simultaneously, since the suffering of the Holocaust

occurred to one who knew an*other* life against which his experiences become understood in testimony. For this reason, Appelfeld describes testimony as a search for relief: in re-membering the Holocaust in this way, survivors can potentially bridge their pre- and post-Holocaust worlds.

Meanwhile, child survivors of the war, he insists, experienced and understood the war years differently from adults. Whereas adults survived the Holocaust by clinging to the life that had been before the war and returning to that life as quickly as possible after the war:

> For the children the Holocaust was the present, their childhood and youth. They knew no other childhood. Or happiness. They grew up in dread. They knew no other life….While the adults fled from themselves and from their memories, repressing them and building up a new life in place of their previous one, the children had no previous life or, if they had, it was now effaced. The Holocaust was the black milk, as the poet said, that they sucked morning, noon, and night. (36-37)

For Appelfeld, therefore, adult testimony aims at redemption or an expiation from years of suffering figured as an aberration: this, he says, "seems to me mainly characteristic of the literature of testimony" (29). Only children who knew no other life before the Holocaust, who were formed just out of reach of its extended claws, who were in other words completely molded by and in response to it, can understand the event. Only children, the event's true offspring, could eventually create the art of the Holocaust since "they knew no other childhood. Or happiness. They grew up in dread. They knew no other life…. They knew man as a beast of prey, not metaphorically, but as a physical

reality with his full stature and clothing, his way of standing and sitting, his way of caressing his own child and of beating a Jewish child." (36-7). The child survivor's worldview is precisely *not metaphorical*; it relates to no stable term of comparison: the child lacked a sufficiently developed preexisting life to be reborn into a previous identity.

However, the child survivor's artistic potential has a redemptive power. According to Appelfeld, in order to "bring this dreadful experience into the circle of life," we must shift our goals away from knowing the specific and exact chronology of events. Instead of asking "what was the case, from now on we must take the liberty of asking what must have been the case. In other words, we must transmit the dreaded experience from the category of history into that of art" (BD xiv). Rather than adding more pages of history telling or collecting more memorial texts, Appelfeld insists that we need to approach the Holocaust as a problem for human *being*: "Life in the Holocaust does not demand the invention of new facts and sights... The literary problem is not to pile up fact upon fact, but rather to choose the most necessary ones, the ones that touch the heart of the experience and not its edges" (xii-xiii). Child survivors are uniquely capable of producing such an essential literature since their minds remain unclouded by expectations, they do not cleave so desperately to the life that preceded the event, nor did they have any expectations of an intact world post-war. Their inability to thematize their experience of trauma by reference to an "outside" world or even an outside language left them creations of the event whose instinctual (non) understandings provide them with the greatest capacity for separating the "heart" from its "edges."

The Holocaust, in other words, is a problem of both memory and imagination. Memory alone inevitably fails to capture the truth of the event since it contains only facts

and strives for a unified subject, while imagination alone “attracts you to the bizarre, to the exceptional, to the speculative, and – far worse – to the perverted” (xii-xiii). Imagination can, however, draw on a reservoir of memory, skimming over the minute, mundane realities of historical unfolding to focus instead the essence of the horror. In this sense, literary authors create constellations of facts that together index the essential reality of the past life without "choking" on it. Memory tethers imagination to the facts, and imagination provides a narratival context and meaning to the constellated events. This dynamic interaction allows the literary author, in this case the child survivor, to escape the deterministic testimonial voice of the adult survivor.

Yet, Appelfeld does testify to the horrors of a Holocaust childhood. He does this, I argue, not only through his (semi-) autobiographical texts but also in his narratives that explicitly avoid the event. My purpose is not to insist that Appelfeld misunderstands his work, but to read his gesture of refusal against the negotiated avoidance that occurs in his fiction and the complex unfolding of his autobiographical writings and lectures. Furthermore, Appelfeld's reliance on binary oppositions – past and present, nature and civilization, even testimony and literature – whose syntheses inevitably lead to less stability, I argue, testify to the continuing gravity of the Holocaust on his thought and imagination. I read this structural pull of the event as a key that opens Appelfeld's spiraling thoughts.

Badenheim, Holiday Town

In his prose fiction, Appelfeld portrays a world disrupted by the Holocaust. Told from the perspective of dissociated, mute and lost narrators, “the presentiment and the memory” of

trauma sends tremors through the world of these stories.[30] Although these narratives almost never describe the most horrific events of the Holocaust – as if avoiding the most violent territory of death – they thrive on the fringes of the "main" event. Appelfeld's stories grow out of a narrow space between fantasy and horror: spaces, characters and stories depart from reality without gaining the pleasure of some other world. Giants and shadows, cowering men in an animistic nature, populate Appelfeld's narrative spaces; characters wander through an unknowable world struggling, as the reader clearly sees, against all the wrong enemies, all while their paths lead inevitably towards the gas chambers. Though many of his dozens of novels and novellas are clearly based on autobiographical material, many others bear little relationship to his direct experiences. Yet, they all testify to Appelfeld's central stylistic and substantive insight: the heart of Holocaust victimization cannot be found in historical facts and superficial truths. Instead, they must be excavated from the frontier bordering memory and the imagination, what was and what must have been.

Memory and imagination meet at the central absence whose specific gravity, I argue, defines each of Appelfeld's texts obscuring the reality of the Holocaust. This gravity foreshortens time, pulling even the past, the time before the Holocaust, ever closer to the event. Although the townspeople that populate Appelfeld's seminal novel *Badenheim, Holiday Town,*[31] cannot possibly know their impending fate, his narrative makes clear that this ignorance does not expiate the past's guilt and responsibility for the event. In *Badenheim,* Appelfeld presents the ignorance of assimilated Jewry before the

[30] This phrase borrowed from Emmanuel Levinas's essay "Signature" where it refers to the role the Holocaust had on forming his family, philosophy and worldview.
[31] The American title of this text is *Badenheim, 1939*, however I will refer to the novel via this more direct translation.

war against a backdrop of impending catastrophe. The ignorance of the Jewish guests to the events unfolding around them continues until the very last sentence of the story, which depicts the arrival of the transport train that will undoubtedly take them to their death. As the train pulls into the station, Dr. Pappenheim, impresario of the summer arts festival, says, "'If the coaches are so dirty it must mean that we have not far to go'" (175). The strange, Kafkaesque, other-worldliness of the narrative tone and characterizations, no longer refers, as in Kafka, to overwhelming loneliness and alienation; rather, everything anchors itself to the future event of the Holocaust. The text thinks towards it. From this perspective, the arrival of the town's "Sanitation Department," an ironic version of S.S. storm troopers, becomes the only, if coded, representative of historical reality. Their proclamations, told in a clear and straightforward narrative voice, ground the narrative in a particular time period and proclaim the doom every reader already sees, yet their message is constantly misheard by the townspeople. Badenheim's occupants' blindness plays against the reader's foreknowledge of that particular historical backdrop demonstrating the sardonic irony that defines Appelfeld's fiction and non-fiction alike.

While the Sanitation Department establishes (historical) truth, the Jewish guests staying in the resort hotel in Badenheim increasingly become two-dimensional, ghostlike caricatures. They are already flattened by a history that has not yet come to pass. While the Sanitation Department continues to act in the "real world," the guests continue to dream, and that is how the narration describes their thoughts, emotions, and actions: "in the hotel and its wings a secret seemed to be drawing [connecting: *mechaber*] the people together. The conductor appeared ill at ease and went to sit with the musicians" (48-9).

The guests do not know what the secret is, so neither does the narration; yet, the secret increases in power and effect. In the next chapter: “The secret [*sod*] was gradually encompassing [*makif*] the people, and there was a vague anxiety in the air, born of a new understanding. They walked softly and spoke in whispers. The waiters served strawberries and cream. The summer cast its dark green shade full of intoxicating madness onto the broad verandah” (53). And two lines later:

> … Between one investigation and the next the old people died. The town was suffused with strong alcohol fumes. The night before Herr Furst had dropped dead in the café. For years he had strolled the streets, immaculately dressed. And next door, in the casino, another man died next to the roulette wheel. There was a different quality in the air, a sharp clarity which did not come from the local forests. (53)

These new characters, introduced only after they have died are summoned by the narrative out of mysterious “alcohol fumes.” Their dreamlike impermanence contrasts strongly with the “sharp clarity” that arises from the efforts of the Sanitation Department.

Badenheim proceeds through the tension and expository power of juxtaposition: in this case, the secret and the Sanitation Department, crossed by another correlative axis between make believe and reality. In the world of the guests, the “secret” that binds them to each other and surrounds them is something they move away from, whispering in the hope that it will not find them. Meanwhile, secrets have a different meaning in the world of the Sanitation Department: the silence surrounding their actions, in this case, their vague connection to the deaths that occur “between one investigation and the next.” The guests stand next to the truth but are stuck within the secret and dream. As the reality

demarcated by the Sanitation Department draws both a literal and historical noose tighter around the town and its Jewish residents and guests – so that the Jews in residence have an increasingly smaller and more concentrated existence – their fantasy world expands. Ultimately, the fantasies become fixations and madness.

Only the druggist's wife, Trude, whose psychological illness was announced at the beginning of the text, appears to become increasing rational. While everyone else sinks into despair, she grows freer and less encumbered. The specifics of Trude's hallucinations provide a key to their understanding. In the first chapter, the narrator relates that "you could hear the sickness in her voice" (8). After asking if there had arrived a letter from their daughter who is married to a non-Jewish man, the narrator continues: "But her hallucinations would not leave her: 'Why does he beat her?'" Trude asks. To which Martin answers "No one beats her. Leopold is a good man and he loves her. What are you thinking of?" (8). The next morning when the guests arrive they appear to Trude "not like the familiar vacationers, but like patients in a sanitorium….Now Martin knew that his wife was very ill. The drugs would not help. The whole world looked transparent to her. It was poisoned and diseased; their married daughter, captive and abused" (9). While the narrative never tells us whether or not Trude's daughter was being abused by her husband, the symbolism appears clear: The Jewish wife is held captive and abused by her non-Jewish husband, the Jewish vacationers arriving in Badenheim look like patients arriving in a sanitorium, and the drugs will not help cure what appears like an illness of vision, of worldview. Trude's illness, in other words, is a prophetic condition. Prophets do not see the future, rather they see the inevitable reality

of the present clearly enough to know the future. In the fantasy world of Badenheim, searing truth is only madness.

Trude's "illness" reaches its most extreme and public moment when, a few chapters later, she "roused the street with her screams. The hotel guests stood on the veranda and watched the desperate struggle. No one went down to help. Poor Martin, helpless, knelt at her feet and implored her: 'Calm yourself [*heragi*], Trude, calm yourself. There's no forest here. There are no wolves here'" (36:23). Ultimately, this event marks a threshold through which the guests and the narrative pass into madness. Meanwhile, Martin's struggle to "heal" his wife, to bring her back, causes him to miss not only the prophetic content of Trude's utterance but to forget the concrete facts of his town: it is surrounded by forest, and in those forests live wolves, or at least large dogs. The forest is one of the central settings for story and appears on the first page of its text: "Spring returned to Badenheim. In the country church next to the town the bells rang. The shadows of the forest retreated to the trees" (7). In Badenheim, the natural world that surrounds the townspeople during the summer becomes increasingly important in describing a "setting" that functions almost like a complete character. The environment not only surrounds the town, it permeates it and its characters. Significantly, the narrative associates Trude's illness with the forests that surround the town and seem to be the source of the town's collective hallucination.

The forest produces the shadows that envelop the town and the dogs whose transition from wild to domesticated to wild once more mirrors Trude's own "movement" from illness to health, insanity to prophecy. By the book's midpoint, as Trude's health improves, we are informed that "Trude's hallucinations disappeared," and that the wild

dogs that come out from the woods grow sicker (79). In their transformation from early in the story when they respond to Karl's command that they "go to sleep now" by slinking "back into the bushes," to the end of the story when, having grown hostile to people, they "fell on Lotte and tore her dress," the dogs become another metaphor for the sheltered townspeople (42: 141). Two of the four dogs are shot trying to escape, after which the remaining two "wanted to die, but Death did not seem to want them yet. …they had retreated into the bushes and waited for Death, and because Death did not come for them they came out and stood under the light" (153). Finally, the last remaining dog appears on the morning of their march to the deportation trains, and after being bathed and fed by the headwaiter, he joins them in their walk looking "thin but neat" (161). So, the wolves and the forest tell a story mirroring that of the guests in madness, suffering, death, and the continuation of mere life. *Badenheim* is populated by mirrors in which every character, event, object, and narratival flourish reflects an*other* space, time, and reality. Of course, one cannot privilege any perceived referent over the textual product; however, the reader cannot entirely avoid this substitution by sleight-of-hand since the text quite often points explicitly in these directions.[32]

The intractable distance between the inspectors and residents, the outside world and the dream world, positions the narrator ambiguously inside the narrative as a character and outside of it as a wry, almost playfully sardonic observer. The narrator weaves the context out of disparate cloths contrasting the horrors of the outside reality with the fantasy of Badenheim's inner life. These transitions are unmarked and flow seamlessly together and, without alerting the reader, the narrative lulls him into a state of

[32] The point is driven home by the English title *Badenheim 1939* that leaves no question what is coming for the inhabitants of this resort town.

complicit languidness. The narrator creates a reader who mirrors the townspeople. At times, he speaks for the town's collective unconscious referring to how "the town seemed to be under the spell of a different resort somewhere else" (14), observing that it belongs to some other "time zone, not from around these parts" (18). As the new reality of the inspections invades the town, visitors and residents of Badenheim protect themselves through sharing a detachment from time. On the one hand, their apparent refusal to accept what the reader knows for a fact – the oncoming horror of the Holocaust – is easily explainable as a realistic representation of the condition of Jews in prewar Germany; ignorant of and refusing to believe in the encroaching reality of Hitler's worldview put into action. However, Appefeld's text leads the reader away from any reality bias and closer to the morality play or the nightmare. Unexpected, unreasoned and unreasonable forces permeate *Badenheim*: the reader "backshadows" historical reality onto the text. The town will not shake off its stupor, the reader begins to understand, until its population is within sight of the smokestacks. But Appelfeld does not follow his characters to their death nor even to the camps, but only to the train station, the path of least resistance that beckons them into the fire. It seems as if the "what must have been" can go only this far. From this point on, the power of the "what was" asserts itself irrevocably. It also speaks to an experience Appelfeld himself did not have first-hand: he too remained on the periphery of the Holocaust machinery that turned people into ash.

Story of a Life

Although Appelfeld associates testimony with the simpler acts of compiling data and asserting facts, all the while emphasizing the distance between this and his own writing,

his recent autobiographical memoir *The Story of a Life* belies the proximity this differentiation denies. While Appelfeld claims that writing literature is a substantively different act from writing "testimonial literature," his autobiographical, memoiristic text functions very similarly to the world of his fiction. Although *Story* is ostensibly constructed as a chronological biography of major biographical events, the anachronistic pull of the Event undermines his conceit. Just as in his fiction, *Story* is constantly drawing close to the Holocaust even when describing periods of his life that occurred before and after the Event, all the while avoiding discussing the horror in any direct fashion. As in his fiction, memory and imagination remain sites of contestation in *Story*. His interest continues to be uncovering the "what must have been" of the past rather than the "what was." My claim is not that Appelfeld is performing the type of testimony through this text that he denounces elsewhere, but rather that the distinction he insists upon is more idiosyncratic than it first appears. The reappearance of many of the "literary" elements we find in his fiction in this more "naturalistic" context provides new and potent resources for reinvestigating his "fictional" texts. Just like his fiction, *The Story of a Life* is drawn into a Holocaust orbit, which intentionally avoids touching the specific horrors of the event. Here, his chronological conceit is continuously undermined by the anachronistic pull of the event's loss, trauma and loneliness.

Appelfeld begins the text by relating how, after fleeing from the Romanian Nazis to hide in the forests of Romania and the Ukraine, memory was comforting while imagination carried him towards the unknown and therefore the terrifying. Memory, he recalls, was a constant companion, bringing him back to his parents and his childhood home. Memories of visits to his grandparents' *shtetl* and the beauty of his mother comfort

the child of eight or nine as he wanders, terrified, through the forests of the Carpathian mountains. Imagination, on the other hand, would take him "from place to place, but eventually would depress me" (v-vi). After all, what could a child on the run, fending for his life, imagine? There was hunger and cold surrounded by constant death. To survive the winters he took shelter in the home of countryside peasants, who subjected him to hard labor and various types of abuse. All the while his identities – Jewish, German-speaking, refugee – demanded constant and active repression. With the peasants he spoke either Ukrainian or Ruthenian, both languages he had picked up from the domestic helpers in his parent's home. Imagination must have reflected some part of his "current" reality, thereby becoming unreliable and threatening.

That tension, between memory and imagination, struck Appelfeld from his first writings at Hebrew University. His earliest short stories gravitate toward the imaginary without the weighty grounding work of memory; they are, therefore, abstract to the point where they actively deny location and time. The experience of several wandering loners on the outskirts of unknown villages dominates the narrative unfolding of his earliest stories. However, as his writing matures and the restlessness of his traumatic Holocaust memories becomes stronger, Appelfeld's fiction begins to acquire a historical and geographic setting. At this moment the valences of memory and imagination flip, as memory becomes stifling and silencing; only imagination, by providing Appelfeld with a requisite distance from the event, allows him to relate the past to his present life and present language. Through creating characters whose difference from himself might consist simply of a change in gender, Appelfeld gains access to the pool of memories that

no longer comfort but constantly threaten to "bubble over" into consciousness and overwhelm his carefully (re)constructed subjectivity.

The constraints of *Story of a Life*'s explicitly autobiographical or memoiristic text force Appelfeld to contend with a historically constructed reality, language, and format. This correspondence with "objective" reality throws into relief the absence and the threat that the Holocaust plays in Appelfeld's historical memory and narratival imagination. In other words, the generic demands of memoir deny Appelfeld the freedom and play of language and reference that his fiction uses as its primary instrument. In *Story*, this freedom and play emerge anachronistically, more like a new enchainment than a new freedom. This interruption of narrative continuity is particularly evident in the early chapters that relate stories from Appelfeld's childhood: this period ended abruptly in 1941 when young Appelfeld heard from his bedroom his mother's scream as she was shot on the street in front of the family home. Through these early chapters, Appelfeld tries to reclaim some stories from a childhood he remembers very little of and to relate the experiences of the youngest aspects of himself. However, these chapters cannot stay within their time; each reaches from the furthest roots of his memory up to the threshold of the Holocaust. Although each chapter begins with consecutive pre-war ages, they all end with the presentiment of the event of Nazi horror. Appelfeld's story thereby reveals the irrevocable shattering that that young part of him underwent at the hands of the event that took away his home, parents, language, and childhood.

In his introduction, Appelfeld describes the different functions of memory and imagination that can serve as a possible foundation for our reading. He says of his experiences in hiding that "Memory and imagination sometimes dwell[ed] together. In

those long-buried years it was as if they competed. Memory was tangible, as if solid. Imagination had wings. Memory pulled toward the known, and imagination sailed toward the unknown. Memory always brought me pleasure and tranquility. Imagination would take me from place to place, but eventually would depress me" (v-vi). While he was in hiding therefore, memories of his earlier childhood – spent in a nice home with two parents and a maid, grandparents in a nearby village, and summers at health spas and resorts – provided stability. Memory was concrete, verifiable, and even embracing. Imagination on the other hand "sailed toward the unknown." The text provides some examples of Appelfeld's unknown, toward which imagination pulled without arriving. For instance, Appelfeld relates a vision that appeared to him after escaping from the work camp and entering the forest:

> For an entire day I searched, and only toward evening did I find a stream. I knelt down and drank. The water opened my eyes, and I saw my mother, whom I hadn't been able to visualize for many days. First I saw her standing by the window and gazing out of it, as she used to. But then she suddenly turned to me, wondering how I came to be alone in the forest. I walked toward her, but I immediately understood that if I went too far I'd lose sight of the stream, and so I stopped. I returned to the stream and looked into the same beam of light through which Mother had been revealed to me, but it was closed. (52)

Appelfeld transitions in the next sentence to another memory: "My mother was murdered at the beginning of the war. I didn't see her die, but I did hear her one and only scream" (52). At the moment water saves him from death, Appelfeld's mother appears in a vision. Memory in this case triggers imagination; the vision immediately moves from the

historical mother looking out of the window to an imaginary reincarnation of a present mother. Although the mother says nothing, her turn from the window to face young Appelfeld invokes in him a response of caring: “she suddenly turned to me, wondering how I came to be alone.” As opposed to memory, this imaginary vision calls on Appelfeld to respond. Rather than attempt what would have been a failed response to a question whose implications he cannot possibly account for, he simply moves towards her.

Of course, the fact that the adult Appelfeld relates the narrative almost sixty years later – on a different continent from the event described and in a different language – further complicates this reading. While I will spend more time discussing these variable layers of interpretation later, suffice it to indicate that the relationship between memory and imagination affects the writer Appelfeld just as he claims it affects the child. Imagination overruns memory almost immediately, leaving the writer and presumably the child as well, not with elation at having seen a lost mother again, but with her death. In essence, imagination bridged two memories, a potentially positive one – the mother at the window – with a horrific one, her single scream before dying, which Appelfeld heard but could not see.

Therefore, in these memoiristic chapters, Appelfeld begins with memory, relating the grasped and assimilated bits that remain from his early childhood. However, the memoiristic goals of coverage, chronology, and especially of steady authorial control are radically undone; the Holocaust, whose horrors he largely avoids delving into, exerts a gravitational pull that repeatedly threatens the continuity of the narrative. The first several chapters, which in the chronological narrative of Appelfeld’s life precede the

historical commencement of the Holocaust, consistently move from the time of the narration to the event of the Holocaust.

The second chapter of *Story of a Life* provides the clearest example of this structural deviance from memoiristic expectations. Following the first chapter's narration of the visit the five year old Appelfeld makes to his grandparents, the second chapter tells the story of another common destination for young Appelfeld: his uncle's estate in the countryside. The narration is nostalgic and full of longing for an uncle he clearly loved: "My mother's uncle, Uncle Felix, was a tall man, strong and quiet. He was the owner of an estate that extended over broad fields, grazing pastures, and forests. He even had a lake of his own. His house lay at the heart of the estate, surrounded by guest houses, offices, and servants' quarters" (17). As Appelfeld describes his uncle's passions, quirks, and ethical bearing, it becomes clear how fascinated he still is with this man. Almost each paragraph announces the child's fascination: "He spoke many languages and was careful to pronounce them correctly" (18); "Sometimes it seemed to me that horses were his greatest love" (18); "Uncle Felix's pride and joy were the pictures that he'd acquired in Vienna and in Paris" (19).

The second chapter continues chronologically until the summer of 1937 when the uncle's home crumbles under the dual strain of his wife's death and the onset of popular anti-Semitism:

> The government became anti-Semitic, and the police sided with the rabble and the underworld. Boundaries were swept away, and robbery became a nightly occurrence. Uncle Felix – who had lived on the estate since his youth…tried not

> only to hold on but also to fight back. At night he'd put on this wool cap and go out to chase away the thieves. (22)

In this same year, Uncle Felix's wife Regina passed away, and after her death "Uncle Felix changed, becoming increasingly withdrawn" (23). He began coming more frequently to visit the Appelfeld family in the city, staying at their home since "the hotel that he loved had gone bankrupt" (23). Even still, Felix's magic is not completely gone: He presents the young Aharon with a "lovely antique Italian violin," and after testing the young boy's hearing, declares that Aharon deserves it. All during the narration of the chapter, up to and including this section on the changes wrought by 1937, the tone remains consistently upbeat and full of wonder at the character, ability, and knowledge of Uncle Felix. However, it is precisely at this moment – the time at which the chapter should end to maintain the chronological continuity of the unfolding memoiristic narrative – that the narrative veers into the future. This change breaks with a particular stream of memories belonging to young Appelfeld and switches to a more defined third-person objective narrator. Thereby the story of wonder dies away and is replaced by the voice of history: "Uncle Felix lived near us in a rented apartment and would come to see us once a week." Or, "Uncle Felix kept his equanimity even when life became hard." At the end however, which describes the long forced march of the Jews to Transnistria, "Uncle Felix helped to bury people so that they wouldn't become carrion for the birds of prey. He himself died of typhus in a barn, and Father, who wanted to bury him, couldn't find a spade. We laid him upon a pile of hay" (23-24). With this tone, the naïve voice of optimistic hope, Appelfeld's memory of his young self's perspective that narrated most of the story, is replaced by the voice of an adult horror in the face of the unnamable. The

ineffable, made into consciousness through imagination, claims Appelfeld's narrative at this point leaving it dry, brittle, and stark. Imagination brings Appelfeld out of reminiscence and into fathomless loss, out of memory and into history, out of chronology and into trauma. Imagination functions as a supplement to memory, connecting those isolated bits of assimilated data to the life Appelfeld came to live. Yet, imagination's language contains the mark of loss, in this case the loss of authorial or memorial control. These biographical stories cannot exist apart from the horrors that superseded them chronologically and formatively.

Appelfeld provides another perspective on the relationship between memory and imagination when he describes the experiences of his younger self in the following terms: "During the war I was not myself, but like a small creature that has a burrow, or, more precisely, a few burrows. Thoughts and feelings were greatly constricted" (vi). While the reference to burrowing creatures who spend their lives hiding in elaborate subterranean holes recalls Franz Kafka's famously incomplete short story, "The Burrow," the constriction Appelfeld references must include precisely the memory and imagination with which he began. Therefore, in this example both memory and imagination freeze or are petrified by the experience of loneliness and alienation that comes with spending years between age eight and fourteen largely alone in a forest. Appelfeld begins to see himself as a burrowing animal who must disappear, whose only protection resides in hiding, repressing, and forgetting. He continues, "In truth, sometimes there welled up within me a painful sense of astonishment at why I had been left alone. But these reflections would fade with the mists of the forest, and the animal within me would return and wrap me in its fur" (vi-vii). Once again, the figure of motherly embrace represents

the possibility of a momentary release from suffering. Young Appelfeld yearns to be wrapped up. In this example memory and imagination combine through the mothering gesture of embrace and protection.

In the next line of this same paragraph, the adult writer Appelfeld reclaims the "I" from the child as he reflects upon "the war years" and their relationship to his lifelong struggle to write about and therefore partially escape their grasp. Significantly, the writer no longer refers to the animal that defined the experience of the child, substituting instead the severed body, isolated from meaning, identity, and presence:

> Of the war years I remember little, as if they were not six consecutive years. It's true that sometimes images surface from the heavy mist: a dark figure, a hand that had been charred, a shoe of which nothing was left but shreds. These pictures, sometimes as fierce as the blast from a furnace, fade away quickly as if refusing to reveal themselves, and again there's the same black tunnel that we call the war. This is the limit of conscious memory. But the palms of one's hands, the soles of one's feet, one's back, and one's knees remember more than memory. (vii)

As the burrowing animal replaced the child's consciousness "during the war years," memories of what the animal experienced were stored in the body rather than being incorporated, interpreted, and made available to the conscious mind. Residing in the body, the animal's experience remained isolated from Appelfeld's consciousness even after the war when the boy started to reemerge. Appelfeld describes very eloquently the impossibility of reincorporating those memories either in Yugoslavia or Italy, where he wandered after the war, or in young Israel, where the ideological bent of the country

focused on forgetting, repressing, and moving on; the excavation of this deep memory never properly began.

In addition to the day-to-day survival that occupied the child's mind in Italy and the ideological drive to forget that surrounded and invaded him in Israel, Appelfeld provides a more suggestive interpretation for the continued separation of consciousness from deep memory. He now turns, for the first time, to writing: "Had I known how to draw from them [deep memories], I would have been overwhelmed with what I have seen. On some occasions I have been able to listen to my body, and then I would write a few chapters, but even they are just fragments of a pulsing darkness that will always be locked inside me" (vii: 6-7). In other words, consciousness protects itself against memory through denying the subject access to the "pulsing darkness," while writing, in those isolated moments when fragments of bodily or deep memory push through the defenses, redirects their affective power onto the page.[33] This metaphor of deep-bodily memory potentially provokes more questions than it answers: How does he "listen to" his body? What language, if any, does it speak? How does this metaphor simplify or complicate his earlier discussion of memory vs. imagination?

Before finishing his introduction, however, Appelfeld returns to the discussion of deep-bodily memory, this time clothing it in a new figural metaphor:

> For many years I was sunk deep within the slumber of oblivion. My life flowed on the surface. I grew used to the cramped and moldy basements within me. True, I was always afraid of them. It seemed to me, not without reason, that the dark creatures seething there were growing stronger, and that someday, when the place

[33] Interestingly, the Hebrew breaks the paragraph differently so that these two ideas (animal to writer) are not in the same paragraph.

> became too narrow for them, they would burst out onto the surface. And, indeed, such outbursts did occur from time to time, but the powers of suppression held them in, and the basement was again shut up under lock and key. (viii)

Here we have a mirror of the metaphor of the animal who wraps young Appelfeld in its fur, shielding him from the experiences he was undergoing. In this new metaphor, oblivion wraps him up in its embrace, keeping the "I" of deep memory from ever meeting the conscious "I." The resulting fractured subject exists within several various realms simultaneously. On the one hand, his life continues "on the surface" where daily reality takes place. Biographically we know that Appelfeld, after arriving in Israel, lived for several years in various *Kibbutzim* and agricultural schools before joining the army and eventually going to graduate school at Hebrew University. On the other hand, the experiences of the "burrowing animal" that had been shoved down and severed from the conscious "I" did not disappear; rather, they infected him: first cramping and growing mold, then creating "dark creatures" that were "seething there and growing stronger." Appelfeld goes on to relate that "from time to time" these creatures "burst out onto the surface" only to be shoved down once more by "the powers of suppression," which acts like a jailor. As opposed to young Appelfeld's vision of himself as both lonely child and a caring animal that swaddles him, in his adult visions, Appelfeld distances the speaking subject from the subject of enunciation, the "I" from the "He" of the narrative. In other words, the subject who narrates is passive in the face of the actions he relates. It is not the "I" of the narrator who creates these moldy basements; instead, he is the one who "grew used" to them. At the same time, the powers that keep the creatures down belong to suppression and not to consciousness. Therefore, the narrator Appelfeld is, like his

readers, reduced to a radically passive observational mode: trying first to become cognizant of these underground processes and then perhaps to tap into them, to experience their violent and originary movements of emergence and suppression.

Appelfeld speaks directly to this point when he says in the final chapter of the preface, “This book is not a summary, but an attempt (and perhaps a desperate attempt) to integrate the different parts of my life and to reconnect them to the wellsprings of their being [*el shoresh tzmechatam*]” (ix: 8). In line with the generic expectations of testimony, and opposed to those of memoir, Appelfeld delineates this text’s purpose as discovery and repair. In other words, it will not present a completed work of identification; rather it traces out the movements of excavation, unearthing, and suppression where necessary. Instead of announcing the course of an autobiography, Appelfeld warns his readers not to “expect a sequential and precise account… [Since] these are the regions of my life that have been packed together in memory, and they are alive and pulsating [*mefarksim*: spasm, jerk, convulsion]” (ix). This text, thereby, defers the primary conceit of the memoir: that the life can be summarized because it has already been lived. However, Appelfeld tells us that his life, properly speaking, has not been lived since fragments, creatures, darkness, spasms inevitably interrupt any possible subjective cohesion. This book therefore is “the description of a struggle” not yet lived (viii). Appelfeld struggles, in other words, to reshape and recreate his relationship to what he identifies as "the same black tunnel that we call the war… [which is] the limit of conscious memory” (vii).

Throughout the text, therefore, this “limit” exerts a powerful gravitational force on the narrative. The first chapter, for instance, begins with Appelfeld describing the richness and pleasure of home life when he was a child. He remembers looking out of the

"double-glazed window that was decorated with paper flowers" in his bedroom, and seeing snow falling: "fleecy soft flakes…with a sound so faint that you cannot hear it" (3). He goes on to describe gorging on strawberries, "'*Erdbeeren,*'" his mother calls them (3). The bulk of the chapter focuses on trips with his mother to visit her parents, who are religious Jews living in a village not far from their home. Here Appelhelf learns about Yiddish, Gypsies, religion, and mysticism. In the synagogue with his grandfather, he suddenly sees "God come and sit between the lions that are on the Holy Ark" and is crushed that he cannot speak to God through prayer like the "two children of around my age [who] are already standing and praying like grown-ups" (12). After going outside on his grandfather's suggestion, Appelfeld suddenly takes a strikingly different view of the synagogue:

> Again I look at the way the synagogue is built. The structure is so shaky that, were it not for the ivy that envelops it and holds it together, it's doubtful whether it could stand on its own rickety limbs. Suddenly I'm gripped by a great, unknown fear – a fear that in a moment the people will come out of the building, catch hold of me, and drag me inside. This fear is so tangible that I can feel the fingers of strangers pressing and poking me, and even the deep scratches. (13)

Significantly, the village synagogue, the center of *shtetl* life, transforms, apparently for both young and writer Appelfeld, into a site for Holocaust-related traumatic transference. In fact the synagogue was a common site of attack by the Nazis precisely because of its social and communal importance to the Jewish communities they were trying to destroy. Nazi soldiers used synagogues as sites of various types of torture: removing Torahs and desecrating them in the streets, confining the Jews inside them as holding cells on the

way to concentration camps, and burning them to the ground often with the community's Jews trapped inside. Although the image is clearly appropriate from a historical viewpoint, it not only breaks with the narration of a little boy's memories, it also re-imagines a past that the future has already affected.

This blurring of the lines between imagination and memory becomes more explicit towards the end of this chapter, as the young boy and his mother prepare to leave the grandparents' home and village to return to the city. After describing his mother's beauty, "with her hair loose over her shoulders and lights sparkling on her long poplin dress," which gives him a "hidden joy," Appelfeld pauses:

> Yet, even as I am immersed in this hidden joy, sorrow constricts my heart, so slight that I almost don't feel it, though, slowly and imperceptibly, it spreads inside me. I burst out crying, and Mother, who is in a wonderful mood, gathers me in her arms. But I am gripped, locked in this sadness and fear, and I refuse to be consoled. The fit of crying seizes me, and I know that this is the last summer in the village, that henceforth the light will be dimmed and darkness will seal the windows. (15)

While children often cry at having to leave a place they enjoy and people who mean a great deal to them, the additional affect and historical certainty make this gesture of prophecy difficult to understand on its surface. Again, the post-shadowing of the Holocaust in the memory and imagination of the adult writer transforms a moment of transcendence and joy from his pre-war memory. Only the adult Appelfeld knows that this is the last summer he will spend with his grandparents, the last time he will ever see

their *shtetl*, the last time he will ever lie in the sun embraced by his mother's beauty and attention.

As the image of light has already been associated with his mother, Appelfeld has already introduced a referent for "windows." In fact, windows begin both the book's preface and this first chapter, and they lie on the threshold between memory and imagination. At the beginning of the preface, he says:

> Ever since my childhood, I have felt that memory is a living and effervescent reservoir that animates my being. When I was still a child, I would sit and visualize the summer holidays at my grandparents' home in the country. For hours I'd sit by the windows and picture the journey there. Everything that I recalled from previous vacations would return to me in the most vivid way. (v)

Meanwhile, he begins the first chapter by asking himself, "At what point does my memory begin?" Two possibilities occur to him: first that his earliest memory dates from the time when he was four years old and his parents took him on "vacation into the heart of the shadowy, moist forests of the Carpathians" (3). However, the second takes him into a more vague and mystical space:

> But I sometimes think that memory began to bud from within me before that [*hazicharon hetchil lenavot bi kodem lechen* (9)], in my room, next to the double-glazed window that was decorated with paper flowers. Snow is falling, and fleecy soft flakes are slowly coming down from the sky with a sound so faint that you cannot hear it. For hours I sit and gaze in wonder, until I merge with the white flow and drift off to sleep. (3)

Once again, the windows represent the possibility of memory-imagination, which is different from the type of simple memory that Appelfeld's first memory relates. As opposed to a memory of a singular occurrence or event such as going on vacation, Appelfeld cannot assign the story of the "double-glazed window" to a date or even a specific age.

Instead, Appelfeld's tone switches from memory-speech to imagination, or possibly, fiction-speech: from recalling to reincorporating. His figural and metaphorical language re-collects deep-bodily memories from their "black tunnel" and brings them into the light through a process of renaming. Forcing language to speak, the author produces tension through his use of tone, word choice, time reference and address. The previous quotation therefore, presents several symptoms of this stress, including the sudden push of the responsibility for experience onto "you," the logical impossibility of remembering the moment of falling asleep, and the undecidability of time. These surprising figural shifts evidence a succinct type of memory-imagination, which fictionalizes in order to come to terms with six traumatic adolescent years that destroyed not only Appelfeld's ability to remember those years, but inevitably robbed him also of his childhood that preceded the war. In the end, Appelfeld's mode of access to the Holocaust, and via that event to his childhood, begins with his last trip to his grandparents' house and to this day has not ceased.

As Appelfeld announces in his preface, "These pages are a description of a struggle" (8); they are not and cannot, therefore, be read as the transcription of a pre-existing story. Rather, the distance that exists, for example, between the child and the adult writer Appelfeld, is not decided upon once and for all; instead it vacillates

throughout the text. While the adult Appelfeld peers into the memories of the child to find the first traces of memory, the memories he finds are not simply those of the child; they are memories held in between. This communication, therefore, bridges the adult with the child over the gap, or "black tunnel," of the Holocaust. However, the bridge both holds and fails. In order to see his childhood, Appelfeld must bridge his pre- and post-Holocaust identities and yet memory, which is always incomplete and fragmented, yields in this text to the pull exerted by that "black tunnel."

Therefore, an additional, irresolvable tension separates the height of the bridge from the depths of the abyss. However, another set of oppositions exists entirely within Appelfeld's body and occurs prior to any possible movement or utterance: this is the gap between bodily-traumatic memory and ordinary memory and, subsequently, the interpretive act necessary to transform bodily-traumatic (deep) memory into speech located in a given language, time, and place. That is, in order to speak about, from, or to this deep memory, Appelfeld translates them into language thereby drawing from the body and creating for them a conscious correlate. This translation requires both memory and imagination and therefore the simultaneous presence of now and then. These concrete irresolvabilities are the objective correlatives of the emotional and internal ones they inevitably fail to represent. Hence, when Appelfeld travels back through memory and attempts to reanimate the moment that he looks out the double-paned windows at the snow, he remains both within and without this memory. This is evidenced by the fact that he remembers falling asleep, which logically could not be part of the original experience. Instead, it traces the movement to a later moment of reflection. According to a similar logic, Appelfeld's attempt to return from and thereby end the stories that begin his book

leads him inevitably back over the burning coals of the Holocaust: this is the summation of each of these pre-war memories.

Hence, when the writer Appelfeld describes the initial buds (traces) of memory within the child, he simultaneously describes his "present" turning towards imagination-memory. Trying to remember the child, he tries to re-imagine himself, and the blank page or screen before him acts as both "double-glazed" window and mirror. Although Appelfeld would have us believe that memory always brings him "pleasure and tranquility," we see here that he cannot remain within a memory, since imagination, which "sails toward the unknown," repeatedly intervenes. This repetition is inevitable, since Appelfeld avoids almost six years of memories that would bring neither pleasure nor tranquility. Those years of the war cannot be remembered; neither can they be forgotten or repressed. They remain, as Appelfeld reminds us, in the soles of his feet, his back, and his knees.

Yet, the Holocaust remains: not an historical, philosophical, or sociological event, but the trace of a memory and an irresistible gravitational force. Although he cannot occupy the event or the memory of the Holocaust since it occupies him, Appelfeld cannot but stand next to the event. This is the precise threshold on which the majority of his fiction resides: between the event and the subject, the event and history, the event and autobiography. As we have seen, this position is prior to any literary decision Appelfeld might make regarding his texts; rather, the event itself thrusts him into a desire to speak and a position that makes speech possible. At the same time, however, this position makes direct speech impossible, leaving Appelfeld only the possibility to describe the

struggle, the “attempt (and perhaps a desperate attempt) to integrate the different parts of my life” (ix).

Although Appelfeld at times claims that the main conflict in his life is that between a “sense of chaos and impotence on one side and the desire for a meaningful life on the other,” or between memory and imagination, or between “moldy basements” and the surface of the self over which life flows, it seems that these terms are merely the anchors that stretch taut the canvas of Appelfeld’s existence. Chaos and impotence do not oppose the possibility of a meaningful life, they are its conditions of possibility and, ultimately, impossibility. Similarly, as I have shown, memory and imagination cannot be simply separated from each other; rather, each acts as a crutch allowing the other to move forward. Finally, Appelfeld’s corpus testifies to the fact that basements cannot be “shut up under lock and key” (vii). They live and pulsate, constantly threatening to burst out of any self-imposed container. These positions are neither chosen nor overcome. However, they do open to negotiation and interlocution. In spite of the oblivion Appelfeld sought and believed he had found in Israel, his writing surrounds the Holocaust as its exclusive domain. Surely, this evidences an interminable conversation with trauma, with alterity. Isolated from those experiences, with “all the destruction [they] wrought, and the scars [they] left,” and from the self that still bears their traces, whom Appelfeld attempts to trap in the “moldy basements,” Appelfeld nevertheless remains bound to this infinite conversation, which allows the terrifying strangeness of these experiences some degree of release (viii). While his writing certainly does not fall under the rubric of testimonial writing, which he characterizes as always in search of redemption, it does gasp for air. It

does vent the pent up lava rumbling below the surface of his skin. It frees him to the greatest extent possible from the silencing and paralyzing bondage of trauma.

Chapter 4

The Body in Testimony: Jean Améry and the Problematic Duality of a Tortured Body

> Nowhere is the sadistic potential of a language built on agency so visible as in torture. While torture contains language, specific human words and sounds, it is itself a language, an objectification, an acting out. (Scarry 27)

Throughout Holocaust testimony, victims affirm the central relationship of the body to memory and testimony. In his autobiographical text, *The Story of a Life* [*Sippur Hayim*], Aharon Appelfeld, following a common trope, differentiates between his ordinary "day-to-day" memory and what he calls "deep memory." Whereas ordinary memory allows him to relate to the world around him and maintain familial, professional and social relations, deep memory flows like molten lava just below the surface of his awareness. At times these subterranean volcanoes erupt, obscuring his daily life and returning him to his wartime experiences. The differentiation of awareness into an above and a below and of memory into a "normal" and "deep" variety institutes a geography of memory. As Appelfeld makes clear, the site of this geography is his body: "the palms of one's hands, the soles of one's feet, one's back and one's knees remember more than memory" (vii). Significantly, rather than remaining mute, the body speaks or at least provokes the subject into testimony. In Appelfeld's construction, the body appears to be not only the bearer of but also a memorial to traumatic experience. Appelfeld writes, "had I known how to draw from them [deep memories], I would have been overwhelmed with what I have seen. On some occasions I have been able to listen to my body, and then I would

write a few chapters, but even they are just fragments of a pulsing darkness that will always be locked inside me" (vii: 6-7).

Bodies also figure prominently in the metaphors and metonymies survivors choose to relate their experience of trauma, both historical and "present." Explaining the surprising and sudden reemergence of a "repressed" memory Appelfeld writes:

> Sometimes a month goes by without anything of what I saw during that time coming back to me. Of course, this is merely a temporary hiatus. Sometimes just an old object, lying on the roadside, is enough to draw up hundreds of feet from the depths, feet that are marching in a long column. And if anyone collapses under it, no one will help him get up. (91)

In this passage, feet are a synecdoche for the trauma of the forced march, the torture-enforced inhumanity of his compatriots and the omnipresence of death. Meanwhile the metaphor of feet *drawn up* from the *depths*, actively displaced from a distant geographic region to a more proximal one, is itself bodily.

In Primo Levi's poem "Reveille," there is a similar figuration of Holocaust experience as bodily experience. The poem draws on bodily sensations like hunger and thirst to explain suffering:

> In the brutal nights we used to dream
> Dense violent dreams,
> Dreamed with soul and body,
> To return; to eat; to tell the story.
> Until the dawn command
> Sounded brief, low:
> '*Wstawàch*':
> And the heart cracked in the breast.
>
> Now we have found our homes again,
> Our bellies are full,
> We're through telling the story.

It's time. Soon we'll hear again
The strange command:
Wstawàch.

While this immensely complex poem demands an extended reading all its own (see Chapter 2), for present purposes, I here wish only to draw attention to its central figuration of the body: it is the body that dreams, returns, eats, and tells stories. It is also the body whose heart cracks (*spezzava*) only to be re-cracked in its reawakening, the reveille. Finally, the specific sound of the reveille remains untranslatably foreign, harsh against the ear and tormenting.

Elie Wiesel's essay, "A Plea for the Dead [*Plaidoyer Pour les Morts*]," argues against the intellectual *obsession* with the Holocaust victim's experience, noting that it has become "a no man's land of the mind where anyone can say anything at all – a game in which everyone wins." This appropriative "exploration" of the psychological motivations of the victims teaches him, he says, "why, in the Jewish faith, anything that touches corpses is impure" (Langer 141). There are, in Jewish tradition, members of burial societies who handle corpses on the basis of elaborate training with the highest ethical precision; however, the critics about whom Wiesel complains touch victims' corpses differently. Rather than carrying them to rest, they give them nothing but a "posthumous humiliation." In contrast, Wiesel demands – completely blurring the boundary between literal and metaphorical body – that we "leave them alone. Do not dig up the corpses without coffins. Leave them there where they must forever be and such as they must be: wounds, immeasurable pain at the very depth of your being" (translation slightly amended). By offering the mute materiality of corpses as a rebuke to critics obsessed with ephemeral notions, Wiesel emphasizes the emphatic, symbolic power of

the body for the trauma victim. He does not, in spite of multiple misreadings, argue for collective and absolute cultural silence on the topic of Holocaust suffering; however he does insist that the "inner attitude" of the critic must not be simply "intellectual curiosity" (141). The intellect, he seems to argue, must not become an alibi for the absent body. In other words, the critic must be willing to feel pain.

In the testimony of Austrian-born Holocaust survivor Jean Améry, his body, both in the traumatic past and "death-*inclined*" present, comes almost to eclipse his Gestapo torturers as his ultimate tormentor. Jean Améry, née Hans Mayer, was born in Vienna in 1912. After his Jewish father died in World War I, Améry grew up with his Catholic mother and remained almost completely isolated from his Jewish heritage until the Nazis proclaimed the enactment of the Nuremberg Racial Laws in 1935. In 1937, against his mother's strong objections, Améry married a Jewish woman of Eastern European origin, and the following year he and his wife fled Austria for Belgium, where they worked for the resistance until 1943 when Améry was captured by the Gestapo and eventually sent to the infamous torture house/prison, Fort Breendonk. From his first testimonial text, *Beyond Guilt and Atonement* – devoted according to its subtitle to explaining the "overcoming of one who was overwhelmed" [*Bewältigungsversuche eines Überwältigten*] – to his later sociological testimonies, *On Aging: Revolt and Resignation* and *To Lay Hands on Oneself: A Discourse on Voluntary Death*, the body remains the locus of traumatic loss and the paradigmatic metaphor through which he relates his experiences.

Améry's idiosyncratic emphasis on body is drawn in sharp relief against his dualistic philosophy of body and mind, in which the psychic life of the intellectual – the

subject of the first essay of *Beyond* – comes to be defined against the more simple and animalistic life of other men. In that essay, "At the Mind's Limits," Améry defines the intellectual as a man "who can recite great poetry by the stanza, who knows the famous paintings of the Renaissance as well of those of Surrealism, who is familiar with the history of philosophy and of music" (2). Améry insists that intellectual gifts tended to put inmates at a distinct disadvantage compared to those with greater "bodily agility and physical courage that necessarily bordered on brutality" (4). When dealing with "a professional pickpocket from Warsaw," for instance, "an uppercut certainly helped, but by no means that intellectual courage through which perhaps a political journalist endangers his career by printing a displeasing article" (4). Further, intellectuals' bodies physically failed them even when speaking. Améry writes "in most cases, it was physically impossible for them spontaneously to use the camp slang, which was the only accepted form of mutual comprehension" (4). The intellectual, with whom Améry identifies himself absolutely, does not *have* a body; instead, it is entirely other and alien.

In torture – the subject of the eponymous second chapter of *Beyond* – the intellect is, for the first time, forced into an uncomfortable proximity to the body by the blows of the torturer's fists. The body's susceptibility to the other's violence in a moment obliterates the intellectual fantasy of autonomy. Rather, with the loss of trust in the world the intellect is confronted by the body's susceptibility as its own limitation. To the extent that the body's pain forces the subject to experience his body as pain, Améry is unable to sustain his intellectual focus and remove. Hence, the true lesson of torture is the progressive undoing of the intellect in which it becomes aware of suffering according to a strict correlation: "Body=Pain=Death" (BGA 34). In response, the intellectual can only

wish for the disappearance of the body that, reversing the truism of torture, would guarantee no pain and therefore no death to the intellect.

With more consistency in each subsequent text, Améry confronts his body as the ultimate betrayal of his intellectual intentionality. The body's materiality is subject not only to torture, but in aging, as he argues in *On Aging*, the body stages outright revolt against the subject, denying him every *possibility* through its passive and irresistible inclination towards death. Ultimately, in *On Suicide*, Améry recounts how his body yields helplessly to the resuscitating efforts of the medical staff, who grotesquely congratulate themselves on having "saved" Améry from the bodily death for which he intensely longed.

Yet, against the grain of this body-abnegating intellectualism, bodily metaphors structure his writings with an apparently irrepressible force. In the essay "Torture," Améry begins narrating the countryside of Belgium from a lofty height, noting the state of the Flemish countryside and the impact it makes upon the visitor. However, as he approaches the prison, Fort Breendonk, where his torture occurred, the narrative focuses on a sign that announces its historical significance, then on the fort's door and finally on Améry himself travelling into this subterranean space. After traveling through several passages, he finally arrives in the very room where he was tortured. Suddenly he recalls the name of his torturer, repeating it several times, even breaking it down into its component sounds "P-R-A-U-S-T." The materiality of the prison that emerges from the abstraction of travel narrative and the extraction of the component sounds from an almost familiar name, I argue, indexes the bodily configuration of Améry's narratives. That is, he fills them with the three-dimensional materiality that belongs to bodies in space, to

geographies. Thus his tortured body, hanging suspended by dislocated arms, becomes the excessive content whose trace is detectable throughout Améry's writings. Although they constantly strive to return power and authority to the subject – who, trying to be "whole," imagines an end to his subjection to the body – the texts remain permeated by the embodiment of his suffering and alienation. Améry's testimony therefore emerges from the friction caused by his intentional repression of bodily memory and the perpetual recurrence of the body's inarticulate, unadorned and unwelcomed testimony. In other words, it is the body that gives testimony, however imprecise the nature of this gift remains.

Torture

The body that testifies speaks a tortured language obstructed, as Elaine Scarry has observed, by "physical pain [that] does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). In other words, without a language faculty, the victim of trauma is turned against himself. The torturer torques the body, empowered by his ability to use language – to ask questions and to dominate the victim while threatening additional torment. The victim, meanwhile, ultimately speaks but cannot *say* anything. His words are nothing more than reflexes, an expediency aiming to end the pain by accepting the repeated accusation. Without recourse to language, the victim suffers not only bodily torture but the loss (or perhaps suspension or disruption) of subjective identity as well.

My consideration of the etiology of tortured speech borrows several key terminological and methodological distinctions from Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. In her introduction, Caruth specifies the originality of Freud's conception of trauma, which refers to mental rather than physical wounds. Traumatic events overwhelm the subject's ability to grasp them as they happen. Unlike a specific bodily wound such as a broken arm, which heals in time, these psychic wounds resist healing and the assimilatory processes of memory and forgetting. Psychic trauma resists both forgetting and memory in the sense that the survivor of trauma does not remember experiences as though they belonged to the past. Instead, the event is unavailable to conscious memory "until it imposes itself again, repeatedly" (4). In trauma literature this split is referred to as the difference between remembering and reliving; the former is the process by which ordinary memory is summoned to consciousness, while the latter describes the manner in which traumatic memory returns repeatedly to interrupt the subject. Due to this repetitive structure, Caruth argues, "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature...returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). In this precise sense, psychic trauma is never simply in the past but, in its return, is ever present and ever future. Even in its presentation, it outstrips itself. The traumatic reliving and the self-possessed subject never coincide. Furthermore, consciousness is unable, each time anew, to assimilate the trauma; instead, with each repetition the subject experiences the trauma as if for the first time.

Therefore, the relating of traumatic experience can never be reduced to the narration it possesses as its content. Each telling carries with it a psychic appeal as an

excess. Each traumatic narrative bears the trace of another referent which cannot be made materially present in the narrative and yet cannot be told in any other way. The interpreter of testimony should recognize its closest literary model in Freud's traumatic dream rather than in the memoir. Whereas the memoir posits a self-possessed narrator from its inception, Freud's traumatic dream interrupts the dream's normal process of wish fulfillment. Instead of presenting the dreamer with the image of himself that he wishes to see, traumatic dreams return the subject to the moment of his greatest abjection. Rather than allowing for any type of overcoming or return to self, the dream wakes the subject through a re-traumatization.

Similar to the situation of the dreamer, the victim of torture acts without subjective control. Under torture, the victim talks, but what he says is nonsense: "I talked. I accused myself of invented absurd political crimes, and even now I don't know at all how they could have occurred to me" (BGA 36). Like the traumatic dream that returns, repeatedly placing the subject at the scene of his greatest abjection, the tortured's annihilated subjectivity returns to him as a shattered and ashamed body, which unlike the intellect cannot forget the past. Thinking back to the cell in which he awoke after torture, Améry recalls, "It was over for a while. [Yet] It still is not over. Twenty-two years later I am still dangling over the ground by dislocated arms, panting and accusing myself. In such an instance there is no 'repression'" (BGA 36). Hence, throughout "Torture" Améry's anger is divided between his torturers and his body that survived yet cannot leave the scene of his torture. His body persists in its pain betraying even his desire to die.

Améry's text begins in a tone endemic to his writing; a caustic and cynical narrator speaks from a position of "militant humanism" (Rosenfeld 106). This self-identical memoirist is, I will argue, abruptly and repeatedly interrupted in his telling by the eruption of traumatic reliving, which crumbles the objective voice of narrative identity. The central destructive figure in "Torture" is torture itself, which speaks through the entire text and seems to control its very unfolding. As Améry tells us, the word "torture" comes from the Latin "*torquere*, to twist" (32). Just as his biographical moment of torture, when his arms were twisted behind his back and over his head until he dangled from dislocated arms, twists his body, so too does this textual torqueing twist narrator and narration. The story itself follows the structure of torture as the narrator moves from a condition of reticence to speak about his experiences of torture to suddenly blurting out exactly what happened. Unable to say the "how of pain [which] defies communication through language," Améry can only relate – in a removed yet *embodied* voice – the specific and concrete "what" of torture: the transformation of the tortured person into "only a body, and nothing else beside that" (33). In this text of torture, therefore, torture communicates itself, following the structure of a double genitive: the story of torture as the story about torture and the tortured story.

"Torture" begins in a language similar to that of a travel guide: "Whoever visits Belgium as a tourist may perhaps chance upon Fort Breendonk, which lies halfway between Brussels and Antwerp" (21). The complex condensations taking place in this first sentence carry much of the weight of the full argument of his text. In the first place, the vague allusion to Dante's "halfway through life" is in fact an entirely canonical trope for introducing liminal experiences, the tension between the title "Torture" and the image

of a chance visit ominously foreshadows the impending torquing his essay will enact. In this same tone, the narrator briefly describes the history of the fortress during the First and Second World War. Today, he tells us, it is a Belgian National Museum. After describing the "eternally rain-gray sky of Flanders" and the impression the visitor may have that Napoleon III "will immediately appear in one of the massive, low gates," the narrative suddenly flounders.

With the sentence, "One must step closer" (*Man muß näher hërantreten*), the confident distance of the removed narrator is shortened, in that even the syntax of the sentence is highly ambiguous. Is this a command to step closer, or simply an observation of the fact that seeing a smaller object demands a closer inspection (21; 46)? In either case, this sentence marks the point in the text where the narrator shifts the mode of narration away from a bird's-eye view to a localized one that no longer muses about history or weather but focuses instead on a reality "more familiar to us" (21)[34]. As the narration approaches the concrete facility of the fortress, the narrator's third person singular subject "one" [*Man*] is replaced by a first person plural subject "us" (*uns*). The concrete inclusiveness of this gesture of "us-saying" is emphasized by the fact that this "us" is not the narrator and anyone in general but a specifically constituted interlocutor who needs no monuments or yellowing wall cards that remain from the Nazi years to know "*where* he is and *what* is recollected there" (121)[35]. "Us," the "tourist," "one" and "he," the sudden overpopulation of the page announces the imminent undermining of the travel genre with which the text begins. Narrator, reader and genre grope deeper into the heart of the fortress: "One steps through the main gate…Again and again one must pass

[34] "*damit das flüchtige Bild aus abgelebten Zaiten abgelöst werde von einem anderen, das uns geläufiger ist*" (46)
[35] "*wo* er sich befindet, *was* da in Erinnerung gebracht wird"

through heavy barred gates before one finally stands in a windowless vault in which various iron implements lie about" (22). The frenzied pace of the narration, attracted as it is to "the swastika flag…murder…the damp cellarlike corridors" and other icons of Nazi terror, as well as the repetition of the "again and again," all serve to create tension and the sense of an inescapable path towards implosion. The narrator is no longer leading or directing the reader; rather, they are propelled headlong through the halls towards the torture chamber.

The movement culminates in the windowless vault from which "no scream penetrated to the outside" (22). This progression leads reader and narrator firmly out of travel literature, through its very center. From the essay's opening, "Whoever visits Belgium as a tourist may perhaps chance upon Fort Breendonk," to its insistence on the "one must," the narrative has moved away from positing a narrator who can be an agent with choices to make to one who, as *das Mann*, can no longer be even the addressee of a command. This sudden discovery occurs to the reader and the narrator too late: he finds himself without power to flee. "There I experienced it," says the narrator, finally emerging completely from the narration, "torture" (22)[36]. This introductory section encapsulates the figure of torture which animates this entire text; wherein, each genre or figure, after a period of increasing tension and expectation is suddenly and each time unexpectedly, torqued, radicalized and inverted, carrying the narrator from a position of observer to subject and from the possibility of control to a reality of abjection.

Following the narrative's initial descent into the torture room, Améry takes up the voice of the historical witness proper, who, in full possession of both his experiences and his self-reflective powers, cautions that:

[36] "*Dort geschah es mire: die Tortur*" (47).

> If one speaks about torture, one must take care not to exaggerate. What was inflicted on me in the unspeakable vault in Breendonk was by far not the worst form of torture….What did happen to me there I will have to tell about later; it was relatively harmless and it left no conspicuous scars on my body. And yet, twenty-two years after it occurred, on the basis of an experience that in no way probed the entire range of possibilities, I dare to assert that torture is the most horrible event a human being can retain within himself. (22)[37]

This paragraph would seem to confirm the psychoanalytic notion of trauma in which an event, in its occurrence, surprises an individual, overwhelming his ability to develop sufficient amounts of anxiety which would act to deflect the influx of stimulus. This event, which therefore cannot be mediated by consciousness, is retained – but not as a symbolic content in the diachronic and assimilative memory of the individual. Rather, it marks the unconscious directly as an image from the outside imprinted on the inside. Since it is not assimilated into the individual ego's historical narrative, the event lodges in the psyche as something heterogeneous to the self. In this way, the traumatic event is retained within the individual as an event and not as a memory. Furthermore, since it is lodged outside of the ego's memory – and outside its ability to synchronize all past experiences into a self-actualizing narrative – the traumatic event exists outside of time. Since the traumatic event never finished happening in the past, it is always about to happen in the immediate future. Hence the language of Améry's text, "What did happen

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[37] "*Wenn man von der Tortur spricht, muß man sich hüten, den und voll zu nehmen. Was mir in dem unsäglichen Gewölbe in Breendonk zugefügt wurde, war bei weitem nicht die schlimmste Form der Folter…. Nur das stieß mir dort zu, wovon ich später noch werde erzählen müssen; es war vergleichsweise gutartig, und es hat auch an meinem Körper keine auffälligen Narben zurückgelassen. Und doch wage ich, zweiundzwanzig Jahre nachdem es geschah, auf Grund einer Erfahrung, die das ganze Maß des Möglichen keineswegs auslotete, die Behauptung: Die Tortur ist das fürchterlichste Ereignis, das ein Mensch in sich bewahren kann*" (47-8).

… I will have to tell about later" (22). The event is previewed, but it is still to come. The effect of the traumatic overwhelming is encoded directly in the narrative retelling of that event. The original trauma was not assimilated into consciousness; consequently, it will not be assimilated into this narrative. Rather than torture his readers to convey the reality of the trauma he suffered, Améry presents a tortured text of testimony.

The symbolization of trauma is all that a narration of testimony can present. What we are interested in, however, is not solely the narration, but also the force it transmits through its gestures and figures: the way they animate and interrupt the narration. When the event arrives, Améry will not retell it, he will relive it. Améry himself indicates the futility of attempting through imagination to develop the requisite preparedness for the coming of the trauma: "Everything is self-evident, and nothing is self-evident as soon as we are thrust into a reality whose light blinds us and burns us to the bone…even in direct experience everyday reality is nothing but codified abstraction. Only in rare moments of life do we truly stand face to face with the event, and, with it, reality" (26). Améry continues:

> Yet, I am certain that with the very first blow that descends on him [the victim of torture] he loses something we will perhaps temporarily call 'trust in the world.' Trust in the world includes all sorts of things: the irrational and logically unjustifiable belief in absolute causality perhaps, or the likewise blind belief in the validity of inductive inference….The boundaries of my body are also the boundaries of my self. My skin surface shields me against the external world. If I am to have trust, I must feel on it only what I *want* to feel. (28)[38]

[38] "*Doch bin ich sicher, daß er schon mit dem ersten Schlag, der auf ihn niedergeht, etwas einbüßt, was wir vielleicht vorläufig das* Weltvertrauen *nennen wollen. Weltvertrauen. Dazu gehört vielerlei: der irrationale*

What Améry here calls "trust" seems to stand in for everything that allows one to exist above abjection. The narrator's lack of ability to maintain the boundaries between the inside and the outside of his body represents a radical deprivation of existence. The facticity of this eradication of "trust" stands for more than a generalized belief in metaphysical categories. As Améry says, "He is on me and thereby destroys me" (28).

Although Améry tells us that once he was captured, he fully expected to be tortured, and therefore, in this sense the arrival of his torturer could not have been a surprise, it nonetheless was. Significantly, the moment that marks the actual beginning of his physical torture is announced not by the narrator but by the Nazi officer who has come to torture him, "Now it's coming," he says [*Jetzt passiert's*] (32: 62). At first, the narrator does not want to name this officer, but the text comes to name excessively: "But why really should I withhold his name…I have no reason not to name him…The *Herr Leutenant*, who played the role of a torture specialist here, was named Praust. P-R-A-U-S-T" (32).[39] The second naming, in breaking down the name into its component letters, in breaking down the signifier, underscores the narrator's inability to identify his victimizer. Neither the moment of torture nor its agent can be conjured by its victim; rather it is still only the victimizer who has the power to speak. In Améry's terms, at the moment of torture, only the Nazi has trust, agency and speech.

The "I"-saying narrator is further marginalized in the next paragraph, which switches back and forth between first- and second-person narration:

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und logisch nicht zu rechtfertigende Glaube an unverbrüchliche Kausalität etwa oder die gleichfalls blinde überzeugung von der Gültigkeit des Induktionsschlusses….Die Grenzen meines Körpers sind die Grenzen meines Ichs. Die Hautoberfläche schließt mich ab gegen die fremde Welt: auf ihr darf ich, wenn ich Vertrauen haben soll, nur zu spüren bekommen, was ich spüren will." (56)

[39] "*Der Herr Leutnant, der hier die Rolle eines Spezialisten für Folterungen spielte, hieß Praust – P-R-A-U-S-T"* (62).

> In the bunker there hung from the vaulted ceiling a chain that above ran into a roll. At its bottom end it bore a heavy, broadly curved iron hook. I was led to the instrument. The hook gripped into the shackle that held my hands together behind my back. Then I was raised with the chain until I hung about a meter over the floor. In such a position, or rather, when hanging this way, with your hands behind your back, for a short time you can hold at a half-oblique through muscular force. During these few minutes when you are already expending your utmost strength, when sweat has already appeared on your forehead and lips, and you are breathing in gasps, you will not answer any questions….And now there was a crackling and splintering in my shoulders that my body has not forgotten until this hour. (32)[40]

When the narrator speaks in the first person, he uses only intransitive verbs that express the greatest passivity: "I hung," "I had to give up," "I fell." Whereas, it is only the "you," the second person, who breathes, sweats or expends energy. In other instances, it is the body itself that acts: the body that retains memory. The plainness of the language lies in its short, simple, objective unfolding of this event across a passive surface. In order to speak from a position outside of the trauma, the narrator must imagine an addressee who has replaced himself in his memory of the experience. In Améry's phrase, "whoever was tortured, stays tortured. Torture is ineradicably burned into him," (34)[41].

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[40] "*Im Bunker hing von der Gewölbedecke eine oben in einer Rolle laufende Kette, di am unteren Ende einen starken, geschwungenen Eisenhaken trug. Man fürte mich an das Gerät. Der Haken griff in die Fessel, die hinter meinem Rücken meine Hände zusammenhielt. Dann zog man die Kette mit mir auf, bis ich etwa einen Meter hoch über dem Boden hing. Man kann sich in solcher Stellung oder solcher Hängung an den hinterm Rücken gefesselten Händen eine sehr kurze Weil emit Muskelkraft nigen Minuten, wenn man bereits die äußerste Kraft verausgabt, wenn schon der Schweiß auf Stirn und Lippen steht und der Atem keucht, keine Fragen beantworten….Und nun gab es ein von meinem korper bis zu dieser Stunde nicht vergessenes Krauchen und Splittern in den Schultern*" (62).

[41] "*Wer gefoltert wurde, bleibt gefoltert. Unauslöschlich ist die Folter in ihn eingebrannt," (64).*

This radical bodily awareness that comes as the result of excruciating pain, Améry tells us, is "the most extreme intensification imaginable of our bodily being. But maybe it is even more, that is: death" (33). It is difficult to unravel what is at stake in this death. Suffice it to say that bodily existence, magnified to its most intense manifestation, leaves no room for anything but pain. Meanwhile, pain radically conceived allows for no subject, no power, no agency. He who has been tortured, the narrator tells us, is permanently reduced by the formula "Body = Pain = Death" [*Körper = Schmerz = Tod*] (34; 64). Although Améry states that logical thought cannot approach death, he concedes that "perhaps the thought is permissible that through pain a path of feeling and premonition can be paved to it for us" (33-4). With "the very first blow" and the consequent loss of "trust in the world," the tortured person also loses "all those things one may…call his soul, or his mind, or his consciousness" (40). The "human being" becomes mere "bodily being."

As soon as the narrator is back in his cell after his torture he finds thought reawakening inside of himself. He rediscovers language, emotions, and ego. He remembers, although confusedly at first, the distinctions between inside and outside, mine and yours, guilt and innocence. Perceiving this rebirth as a great relief, he blissfully allows his mind to sputter to a start, only to discover that he has passed through an experience which is not his own and which he will never come to own. Instead, arising in the space from which it was forcibly evacuated, the ego bridges the pre- and post-traumatic selves and sets to work trying to bind the excessive stimulus, or the trauma, into a meaningful, assimilated thought or memory, leaving behind the materiality of the

experience.[42] It is this abandoned materiality that will remain and return to upset whatever self is constructed on its ashes.

In summary, Améry's text on torture, which is, from the outset, called upon to be both witness testimony and cultural commentary, in fact carries torture not in its content but in its excess. From its position on the margins of the text, torture dominates the entire unfolding of the narrative, producing the need for Améry's digressions as well as his specific testimony to his historical torture. The essay testifies to something Améry does not entirely *want* to say. He seems, in fact, not to have the power any longer to decide whether or not he will speak and the essay genre, where he attempts to exercise power, becomes the very site where his ability to have mastery, to claim an authorial "I," is undone and interrupted. If in torture, one is "twisted" until he speaks, in this story of torture, Améry speaks, but his language each time, inevitably, returns to the site of its own overwhelming. His tortured body, torqued by his Nazi overlords remains tortured, demanding his constant response and attentiveness.

On Aging

Attending to his body's mute needs and its pain deprives Améry of the intellectual peace he desires, leaving him in a perpetual state of disappointment-unto-death. By the time he writes *On Aging*, the process of aging supersedes the pain of torture in depriving him of *ability*. Thus, *On Aging* expands the central theme of "Torture," which is that the body

[42] In the language of chapter IV of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud says that after the traumatic overwhelming, "the pleasure principle is for the moment put out of action. There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus, and another problem arises instead – the problem of mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and of binding them, in the psychical sense, so that they can then be disposed of…Cathectic energy is summoned from all sides to provide sufficiently high cathexes of energy in the environs of the breach" (23-4).

has become the enemy of the intellect and ultimately a field on which additional tortures upset subjective self-possession. Aging, Améry argues, forces the intellect to contend with a pained and dying body no longer "transparent" as it was in his youth. Améry posits that, "we only discover our body in pain and aging. Especially aging, in the way it heaps its burdens upon us more frequently every day" (42).

That aging humiliates subjectivity, Améry emphasizes through his insistence on the priority of the *raté*, "the failure dispossessed of all [his] illusions," who feels the pain of aging more intensely than those for whom life still holds promise (18). In aging, the self loses entirely the ability to dispossess itself, that is, to repress any bodily awareness. The youthful "forget" the healthy limb that functions well and is thereby rendered "transparent." As long as we are healthy, "we are … *outside of ourselves*, in space that is part of us and belongs to us, that is intimately and inseparably bound up with our egos" (34). With the oncoming "hideousness" of aging, exemplified by the skin's crispation, one confronts the reality of corporeal being. The *raté* comes in the end to be possessed by his hideous body. No longer welcome among other objects in society, he becomes a failing instrument. I argue that Améry's inability to accommodate himself to aging exemplifies his failed yet radical effort to separate his intellect from his body. *On Aging* clearly demonstrates his intellectual confusion in the face of the *natural* process of aging as opposed to the intentional one of torture. Gone is the confident articulation of a narrator who believes himself to be self-identical. Instead, we find a fragmented narrator, completely at a loss, proceeding intellectually through a field Améry himself recognizes as being closed to logic. Like an adolescent – horrified by his changing, pubescent body –

Améry is unable to see these transformations within a larger framework of maturation or aging. Instead he can only see these changes as a new *persecution*.

Améry's inability to confront aging is evidenced by the chaotic uncertainty of the narrative unfolding in *On Aging*. As he himself announces in the preface, "In making this effort to record as faithfully as possible the developments in which the aging person is ensnared, I used essentially a method of introspection; added to that was a striving for observation and empathy. But *any hope for scientific method, even logical stringency, had to be abandoned*" (xxi, emphasis mine). A primary example of this necessary illogic is evident from the second page of Améry's text when he introduces the text's subject as an "aging man" whom we'll know "by the cipher 'A.' just as we'll designate all those of his comrades in destiny whom from time to time we intend to introduce to our considerations." Indeed the "cipher 'A.'" comes to designate several specific and non-specific people within the text all loosely connected through their concern with aging. Although the first "A." is identified immediately as Marcel Proust, "A." comes to refer to Améry himself in short order, who informs his reader that:

> A. has gone through the war, World War II with its service at the front, its wounds, its bombings, its loss of relatives, and its expulsions from the homeland. For him, the mass of time for the years 1939-1945 is opaque and heavy. The ten years preceding the war experience have become just as lifeless, thin, and slight in his memory as the two postwar decades: five years are a longer, weightier time than ten or twenty. (9-10)

Proust, who lived through World War I, died in 1922. At this point, although Améry insists that he chose "A." as his cipher for its "mathematical and abstract specification,"

seems more like a barely cloaked reference to a very specific name, Améry (2). The confusion surrounding the cipher increases by the second chapter where "A." appears to represent an aging woman, who suffering from a jaundice-like condition called Xanthelasma, writes to Simone de Beauvoir, "a writer she considers a friend even though they have never met, who has written so thoroughly and beautifully about *la force des choses* (the force of circumstances), especially [on] the condition of aging" (28). Améry has this "A." write in her letter to Beauvoir, "I often stop, flabbergasted, at the sight of this incredible thing that serves me as a face" (28). Yet, these words are Beauvoir's own. Thus, in this instance A. is both Beauvoir and a woman who does not know Beauvoir but who suffers from a dreadful age-related condition.

This "narratival" confusion expands beyond the ambiguity of the protagonist. Améry's argument twists and contorts itself around a series of arguments whose substance remains elusive to the discourse, causing repetitive series of reformulations. Améry seems torn as he considers the horrors of an increasingly alienated ego tormented by the changing nature of time and space. Using a toothache as a metonymy for aging in a new subject "A.", Améry writes, "We know that A. became alienated from himself at this hour. We can also be just as sure that with his toothache he became himself in a new way" (46). Time can only be a potential for those who have it laid out before them, whereas, for the aged time is locked inside them. Améry defines the future as the domain of "those who believe they have what is called 'time' in front of them," since they are the ones "truly destined to step out into space, to externalize themselves" (15-6). This belief in the future is given to the young but denied to the aging who are "only a bundle of time" possessing "only a little bit of space" (18). Hence, for Améry, externalizing oneself

is the healthy actualization of the intellectual apparatus in the material world, which he opposes to the condition of the *raté* "[a] failure dispossessed of all [his] illusions" for whom space cannot be possessed since his body is full of the past. The bodies of the aged can no longer serve as containers for their projective wills: "What is in store for them is death; it will take them completely out of space, their selves and whatever remains of their bodies, it will de-space them, it will take life and the world from them and abduct them from the world and their own space" (15-6). In other words, the aging body approaches only death that will deprive one completely of space and remove one from the world conceived as the space of possibility.

As Améry argues, aging creates the subject through the body; meaning, the body's attributes – weight, pain, memory, etc. – become a part of the subject's self-image more than they had in youth. In youth, he insists, we are ourselves without our bodies (41). However, in this example, as bodily pain invokes a self-understanding more appropriate to aging reality, it takes "away from him one more piece of the world. Put differently, it has given him to understand…that the world is his negation" (46). Pain alienates the ego from the *self-in-thought* towards the decaying body, thereby severing the self's connection to the world occupied by others. That is, occupying reality becomes increasingly difficult, as the body itself demands continuous attention. Ultimately, the apparent tension between aging as productive transformation and aging as terrorizing decay resolves for Améry into a readily accepted logical paradox prompted by the arrival of death. At the point of aging, he says, "it is no longer our place to think in a way appropriate to the conquest of the world, feeling compelled to demonstrate for ourselves an image of the world in logic. The primal contradiction, death, awaits us and compels us

to form logically unclean propositions such as, 'When I no longer am.'" Logical insight and pursuit give way in the face of a death that is "already in us, making room for equivocation and contradiction" (51-2). For Améry, a man obsessed by the primacy of intellectual pursuit [his self-image as intellectual at Auschwitz], death is the Other that the subject cannot face without being changed by it. To approach death is to lose logic and discernment. Instead "nothing is self-evident anymore. The evidence is no longer believable" (52). As we lose the possibility of *potential* in aging, becoming instead a mass of accumulated time, future's absence denies us logical consistency. We can no longer project rules onto our surroundings, as they are no longer ours. Instead, we remain with ourselves, yet without the self we remember. We are thus continuously surprised by what can only seem a shock each time anew: my body is dying in pain.

According to Améry, perhaps the only possibility of dignity the aging have lies in their "futile denial of 'an-nihilation'" (77). However, Améry insists that first those who seek to "live the truth of their condition as aging persons" must accept this same an-nihilation. Only from within the reality of their condition can they mount their unsuccessful revolt against the inevitable. The very acceptance of an-nihilation as inevitable condemns the revolt to failure in advance; since "only in this futile denial" does one take an authentic position relative to the inevitable. Dignity lies in the ability of one to "present oneself at all *as oneself* to the inevitable" (77). Therefore, the dignified path lies in accepting the inevitability of one's irrelevance while constantly waging a doomed battle against that irrelevance. In this way, the "victim" of aging takes a stance relative to the widening *nihil* of death, thereby becoming a self. However, this grasp on self-hood is always ambiguous and tenuous since society prefers patsies: it welcomes

with open arms those who embrace the "deeply deceiving idyll of aging" (77). Living in truth, according to Améry, requires rejecting social platitudes that promise "Life begins at forty, at fifty," or that "Clothes make the man; if you wear them young, then you are young" (74). Instead, one remains with the dissociating thought-stream: I am dying; no potential remains to me; I reject the inevitability of my fate.

Thus, *On Aging* provides a pivotal movement in Améry's mature testimonial unfolding. It promotes an intertextual progression within his narratives of suffering in which "Torture" initiates a degenerating relationship with materiality while the mind struggles to incorporate the body and control it. From this insular perspective, the natural process of aging appears to be malignant, drawing the body away from the intellect's control into an unmasterable devolution whose symptoms – pain, inability, objectification – resemble closely those of torture. Thus Améry experiences aging as suffering on two fronts: first, it deprives the intellectual of the ability to understand a process it has no choice but to undergo, and second, the process itself is debilitating and unremitting. This trajectory completes its transformation in his *Laying Hands on Oneself* in which the intellect can only plead his case against the society that deprives it of its ultimate autonomy, the right to destroy the body thereby freeing the mind. Each text radicalizes the alienation of intellect from body and thereby of the intellectual from power, understood as the possibility to affect change. Améry's narratival self strives against the multiplying others who victimize him: the Gestapo torturers, aging, his body and ultimately his society whose doctors refuse him his final refuge.

Hand an Sich Legen

By the writing of *Hand an Sich Legen* in 1976, Améry has two symbolic antagonists against which he will struggle: *the body* that appears in pain, torture and aging; and *society*, whose terror of death leads it to unjustified violence against the subject. [43] While the body's inability to forget humiliation and torture tethers him to traumatic disruption, society's oblivion to the past and suffering of its members deafens the victim's cry. Throughout his mature testimonial texts, Améry writes *about* the intellect's struggle against its antagonists, body and society. However, the illocutionary force of these writings performs the binding they claim to undo. Améry's testimonial texts neither describe nor facilitate a successful separation of his intellect from his tormentors. Instead his testimonial utterance twists around the wounds he indicates, drawing author and reader closer to the inarticulate other of his traumatic experience.

In spite of Améry's yearning to separate intellect, body and society, *Hand an Sich Legen*, highlights the *fetters* that bind him to the world from which he wishes to sever himself. A few sentences, buried in a paragraph that begins and ends with other thoughts, encapsulate Améry's sense of persecution at what seems to him to be society's derangement. Describing his resuscitation after a failed suicide attempt two years before the book was published, he recalls a trauma that ranks "among the worst that had ever been done" to him:

> I still know how it was when I awoke after what was later reported to me as a thirty-hour comma. Fettered, drilled through with tubes, fitted on both wrists with painful devices for my artificial nourishment. Delivered and surrendered to a couple of nurses… [who] did everything quite matter-of-factly, as if I were already a thing, *une chose*. … I was full of a deep bitterness against all those who

[43] Published in English as *On Suicide*, although *To Lay Hands on Oneself* is a more literal translation.

> meant well [*Gutmeinenden*] who had done this disgrace to me. I became aggressive. I hated. And knew, I who had previously been intimately acquainted with death and its special form of voluntary death, I knew better than ever before that I was inclined [*zugeneigt*] to die and that the rescue, about which the physician boasted, belonged to the worst that had ever been done to me – and that was not a little. (78-9)[44]

Améry insists that the violence of treating him like an object, *une chose*, while forcing him to reoccupy a world he had legitimately exited through the ultimate means of escape "*belonged to* the worst that had ever been done [to him]" (79). From his biography and the essays that fill *Beyond Guilt and Atonement*, specifically "Torture," we can infer a referent for "the worst," since, in fact, much of his language echoes that other essay, in which the "first blow" delivered by his interrogator forces Améry out of the realm of the subject and into the role of a thing. His very thingness, his body, is turned against him: he is made to speak. Suddenly thrust out of subjectivity, no longer able to have trust in the world, Améry becomes one who has been tortured, for whom, he says, there is no return. Instead, according to Améry, the one who is tortured stays tortured.

In this passage Améry focuses his anger on being thrust back into the fetters of the "logic of life," by which he refers to the truism:

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[44] "*Noch weiß ich ja, wie es war, als ich erwachte nach einem, wie man mire später berichtete, 30 stündigen Koma. Ein Gefesselter, von Röhren durchbohrt, schmerzende Geräte, mir angetan zum Zwecke meiner künstlichen Ernährung, an beiden Handgelenken. Ausgeliefert, preisgegeben ein paar Krankenschwestern, die kamen und gingen, mich wuschen, mein Bett säuberten, mir Thermometer in den Mund einführten, und alles ganz sachlich, als wäre ich schon ein Ding, une chose....Eine tiefe Bitternis erfüllte mich gegen alle Gutmeinenden, die mir die Schmach angetan. Ich wurde aggresiv. Ich haßte. Und wusste, ich, der ich vordem intimen Umgang gehabt hatte mit dem Tod und dessen Sonderform, dem Freitod, besser als je zuvor, dass ich dem Tode zugeneigt war und dass die Rettung, deren der Arzt sich rühmte, zum Schlimmsten gehörte, das man mir je zugefügt – und das war nicht wenig*" (85-6).

> That all logical conclusions that we draw in statements about life are constantly bound to the fact of this life. One can't say that in order to live well it is best not to live. That would be pure nonsense. In this way, the *logic of what is* incorporates the logic of society, the logic of behavior in general, the logic of everyday activity, and finally that formal logic that must exclude death. (19, emphasis mine)

Améry bristles at the commonly asserted but false tautology that, "in the long run, you've got to live." This specious assertion, Améry insists, conceals society's death-terror, which is not nearly as inescapable as it appears. Instead, Améry asks, "*Do you have to live*? Do you always have to be there just because you were there once" (13)? Forced to reoccupy a position he had intentionally abandoned, Améry's language recalls his description of torture at the hands of the Gestapo, rather than his liberation from them; in both instances, Améry describes a radically enforced passivity. Whereas in Fort Breendonk the Nazi torturer Praust elicits speech from Améry, in the hospital, under the nurses' objectifying gaze and medicine's overwhelming need to "cure," he awakens weakened and helpless. He is "Fettered, drilled through with tubes, fitted on both wrists with painful devices… Delivered and surrendered" (78). In both cases, upon awakening Améry becomes a passive witness to all that is being done to him. Returning to life, he finds himself pinned to a reality in which he is examined as an object of another's fantastic will-to-power. Both the torturers and the doctors take Améry's ability to decide his identity as subject. The two experiences form bizarre couplings wherein torture is associated with the awakening, and liberation with suicide.

While Améry's clear aims in *Jenseits* are to educate the anesthetized German public, "who in their overwhelming majority do not, or no longer, feel affected by the darkest…deeds of the Third Reich" (xiv), and to name the Gestapo torturers from Breendonk, in *Hand an Sich Legen* Améry cannot decide who he writes for or against. He proposes in his preface to "do nothing else than to pursue the insoluble contradictions of the *condition suicidaire* and to bear witness to them – as far as language can." Instead of testifying in the first person – as he does in *Jenseits* – Améry sets out to chronicle the struggles of "specific human beings in search of their own freely chosen death" (xxiv-xxv). Writing against the scientists, doctors and psychiatrists who strive to understand suicide objectively "without being acquainted with the specific human beings [involved]," Améry purports to speak *of* and *to* those "already standing on the threshold that will become their springboard into the abyss" (16). He takes the "*condition suicidaire*," as well as the experience, or "*situation vécue*," of the suicidal to be the concerns of his text: He will "bear witness," he announces, to the insoluble contradictions of their condition "as far as language can" (xxv).[45]

Améry quickly confronts language's concrete limitations in the face of suffering. Examining the relative absence of descriptions of pain in literature and testimony, Elaine Scarry argues that pain is a non-referential experience because "physical pain – unlike any other state of consciousness – has no referential content. It is not *of* or *for* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language" (5). This same argument extends to the muteness that suffering imposes on the traumatized psyche. Améry, like most testifiers, repeatedly rails against the limitations language imposes on the testifier. He observes that language

[45] "*von ihnen Zeugnis abzulegen – soweit die Sprache reicht*" (11)

cannot convey the experience of torture since it merely substitutes one metaphor for another: "I, too, am guilty of using inadmissible metaphors, I know, but language, my only instrument of communication leaves me no choice, only the torture of insufficiency" (OS 21).[46] Language takes him as far as it can, which is to the edge of the most essential message.

Yet, I argue that neither the psychiatrists and sociologists, with their pathologizing theories of the suicidal subject, nor even the failure of language are the true targets of Améry's disgust in *To Lay Hands.* Instead, he attacks embodiment itself and the linguistic, cultural and medical establishments that enforce its *perpetuation*. After all, it is the body that ages,[47] the society that criminalizes subjectivity to the point of allowing "no exit," the doctors who resuscitate him after his failed suicide attempt, and language in which "one comparison only stands in for another" [48] that keep the subject trapped within a traumatized body always already destined for death; yet, they each conspire to keep death "natural" – that is, away. By the time he writes *Hand an Sich Legen* [*On Suicide*] twelve years after *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* and thirty years after the end of WWII, Améry has a new understanding of the victim of torture who has failed to recover himself. For this lacking subject, suicide marks an escape, an exit both from the body and

[46] "*Auch ich mache mich unzulässiger Metaphorik schulding, ich weiß das, aber die Sprache, mein einziges Mitteilungsinstrument, läßt mir keine Wahl, nur die Qual der Unzulänglichkeit." (Hand an sich legen* 32)
[47] "The aging – not just to speak of the old or even the drowsy and very old – feel the weight of time strata even when they are not fumbling after them in memory. The feeling is constantly present within them – and not only because of the diminishing powers of their bodies or the increasing sufferings these bodies cause them" (*Aging* 22)
[48] "It would be totally senseless to try and describe here the pain that was inflicted on me. Was it 'like a red-hot iron in my shoulders,' and was another 'like a dull wooden stake that had been driven into the back of my head'? One comparison would only stand for the other, and in the end we would be hoaxed by turn on the hopeless merry-go-round of figurative speech. The pain was what it was. Beyond that there is nothing to say. Qualities of feeling are as incomparable as they are indescribable. They mark the limit of the capacity of language to communicate. If someone wanted to impart his physical pain, he would be forced to inflict it and thereby become a torturer himself" (*Limits* 33).

from the "logic of life" that is constantly enforced by society. For Améry it is an essential freedom of the subject to choose not to live.

The most likely candidate for "self-given" death is the failure, Améry insists, the radicalized subject living in "*Échec* [which] means something like a failure, defeat." Playing with the sound of this foreign word he justifies why "*L'échec* with its dry sound (*son ton sec*) [*mit seinem trockenen Ton*], with its chopped-off, shattering noise, is a better word for rendering the sense of the irreversibility of total ruin. *L'échec* is a fateful word" (LH 41). *L'échec* sums up the irreversibility of the de-selfing process. Evicted from the fantasy of choice (to cling to the logic of life), the violated subject lives under the double burden of the *échec*; the constant pressure removes the subjective possibility of feeling "at home" in the world, while denying any possibility of recovery. [49] It is failure without end. Language comes to symbolize the subject's inability to master its own evolving failure: It allows him no freedom from his experiences, because it denies him the ability to either internalize or externalize them. For Améry, the one word that comes closest is "death," largely because it symbolizes a beyond to language and logic. We must, Améry tells us, learn to refer *towards* something rather than simply *to* something since death is nowhere and nothing:

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[49] "In the feeling of *échec* he is summing up all the failures of his existence, which clearly amount to a stifling outcome. On the other hand, however, all the humiliations that he has suffered, all the troubles that were inflicted upon him, his disappointed hopes, all were still very much a part of him. He can only separate himself from them with difficulty. Freud's 'pain of separation' is a cause of grief to him when he runs away from a future that he can only anticipate as new suffering, right into the hidden nonexistence of death, which by this time is for him the only natural way out: he has neither the time nor the desire to wait for a kind of dying that comes as something 'natural' and against which, he knows, his agonizing body will writhe and swell insanely without hope" (55). [*In seinem Sinne gewiß: im Gefühl des échec summiert er alle Mißerfolge seiner Existenz. Das ergibt schon ein erdrückendes Resultat. Andererseits aber waren alle Demütigungen, die er erlitt, alle Leiden, die man ihm zugefügt hat, die enttäuschten Hoffnungen, ja doch ein Stück von ihm: er trennt sich schwer von ihnen. Der von Freud festgestellte "Trennungsschmerz" tut ihm wehe, wenn er vor einer Zukunft, die freilich nur er als neues Erleiden voraussehen kann, davonrennt, geradenwegs in die verborgene Nichtexistenz, den Tod, der nunmehr für ihn der einzig natürliche Ausweg ist: er hat weder Zeit noch Lust, zu warten auf ein Sterben, das als "natürliches" kommt und von dem er weiß, daß sein agonisierender Leib sich ihm blöde und hoffnungslos entgegenbäumen und blähen wird.*. 64]

> Here we enter into an obligation [*Verpflichung eingegangen*] none other than this: that under certain impossible conditions it is necessary to think "toward" things that are doubly unthinkable [*Undenkbare 'an-gedacht'*] – just as when one begins to think or be concerned about anything, one moves mentally in that direction – and that, in proceeding, something unthinkable can be represented as something thinkable. (28)[50]

Améry invites his readers to think in the manner that he writes; unable to name things, he points towards them. While at one point, he insists that this difficulty limits his audience to "the suicidal," he simultaneously writes for the rest of us whose understanding and witness he seeks.[51] In this manner, Améry signals a departure from "viewing voluntary death from the outside, from the world of the living and surviving" and attempts to open a "view from the interior of those who call themselves suicidal [*Suizidäre*] or suicides [*Suizidanten*]" (xxiii)[52].

In other words, Améry strives to bear witness to those who search for their own death with "neither the time nor the desire to wait for a kind of dying that comes as something 'natural'" (55).[53] Améry disdainfully refers to the psychologists and suicidologists who claim to speak for the suicide but whose knowledge comes only from

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[50] "*Damit wird eine Verpflichung eingegangen. Keine andere als die: Daß unter unmöglichen Umständen das zwiefach Undenkbare "an-gedacht" werden muß – so wie man etwas anfängt, an-geht – und daß, fortfahrend, die Undenkbarkeit als eine Quasi-Denkbarkeit vorzustellen ist"* (39).

[51] "These thoughts basically concern only the suicidal or, to narrow the circle even more, only those who, from their point of view, are already standing on the threshold that will become their springboard into the abyss. Of course, because they have already long since moved beyond the smart-aleck, worldy-wise philosophy of life that "everyone has to live," this kind of feeling one's way in the dark, this kind of talk, moving forward with uncertainty and discussing what no longer can be discussed, may be the only thing that still concerns them." (16)

[52] *Ich habe versucht, den Freitod nicht von außen zu sehen, aus der Welt der Lebenden oder der Überlebenden, sondern aus dem Inneren dere, die ich die Suizidäre oder Suizidanten nenne.*

[53] "E*r hat weder Zeit noch Lust, zu warten auf ein Sterben, das als "natürliches" kommt und von dem er weiß, daß sein agonisierender Leib sich ihm blöde und hoffnungslos entgegenbäumen und blähen wird"* (64).

the testimony of "rescued suicides" upon their return to the language of life. For scientific and common sense understanding, Améry acknowledges, "suicidology is right. Except that for suicides…what it says is empty. For what it comes to for them is…the *situation vécue*" (8). Just like a photograph can convey the elements of "being there" but not the essence or experience of the event, so too, the study of suicide can never convey the experience of the before, during, and after. Suicides experience life as the "threshold" that becomes "their springboard into the abyss" (16). They step outside of language and society. Outside the logic of life, "he runs away from a future that he can only anticipate as new suffering" (52).

Following the socio-political thread in *On Suicide*, one can certainly argue that Améry writes to alter public perceptions of suicide in order to effect concrete change. The discursive thread runs throughout the text that, after having suffered the horrors of the world, one has the right to choose suicide. One's contract with society, Améry suggests, cannot extend so far as to demand that the tortured subject continue to live. Life is at the self's discretion. Yet, I argue that there is another, more pervasive thrust to Améry's discourse. The passionate movement of his argument that simultaneously thrusts against language through language, against psychologists and in favor of understanding, transforms his witnessing into a plea. In a sense, it is a plea for the dead, the silenced, and the self-silencing. More than that, it is the plea of the dead to be heard.

The act of suicide, the exiting event, sends a message that "makes no sense: not only because it's never certain that it gets to anyone's ear, but, and above all, because as he [the suicide] withdraws he will not know anything about it" (108-9). The message and the suicide, therefore, exist in inverse proportion to each other: the message moves

towards being as the suicide moves toward nothing. Especially in cases where the message is not "written down, cried out, defined by any kind of sign, but is instead given along the way in the silent act," the suicide goes one way while his message goes the other. This message demonstrates that even after the suicide has left behind the logic of the world, the logic of life, he will still have "something to do with the *other*, right up to the last flicker of [his] consciousness" [perhaps this is his only real connection to the other] (107). This doubly anonymous message represents the suicide's ultimate utterance, through which he claims both his life and his death. Where a "project to end one's own life is thwarted, there an injury occurs to the *res cogitans*, an injury that is worse than the most dreary psychic disposition can ever be" (58). By considering suicide a mental illness, therefore, society silences the suicide's message.

Conclusion

A significant confusion remains for the reader after reading through Améry's mature testimonial texts (a confusion that exists in some form in every traumatic testimony but is especially poignant in Améry's writings). This confusion arises from the reader's struggle to answer two basic questions: What is his purpose in writing these texts, and what type of response would adequately address his demand? Améry gives one possible explanation in his essay "Resentments," appearing in *Beyond Guild and Atonement*, where he describes a study he recently read that asserted:

> That all of us [victims of persecution] are not only physically but also mentally damaged. The character traits that make up our personality are distorted. Nervous restlessness, hostile withdrawal into one's own self [*feindseliger Rückzug auf das*

> *eigene Ich*] are the typical signs of our sickness. It is said that we are "warped"[*verbogen*]. That causes me to recall fleetingly the way my arms were twisted high behind my back when they tortured me. But it also sets me the task of defining anew our warped state namely as a form of the human condition that morally as well as historically is of a higher order than that of healthy straightness [*gesunden Geradheit*]. (68)[54]

Améry here insists on a negative privilege for victims of trauma and torture, accepting while transforming the judgment of the essay's author. The author's insistence on the warped minds of victims recalls to Améry his warped body, torqued by his torturers. Significantly, for our purposes, the assertion is figurative, that this warped body stands above the healthy straightened ones of all the others. In any case, he resists forgetting and forgiveness, arguing that finding "one answer or another" falls easily within language's ability to "mend anything. What the answers have in common is that they bear no relation to the questions" (142-143). Finding answers, in other words, remains the most facile human response to the unimaginable, the horrific. As Améry later writes – in a preface to *Beyond Guild and Atonement*, written in 1977 (one year after *Laying Hands* was published) – his aim is most certainly not the clarification of the victim's situation:

> Clarification would also amount to disposal, settlement of the case, *which can then be placed in the files of history*. My book is meant to aid in preventing precisely this. For nothing is resolved, no conflict is settled, no remembering [*Er-*

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[54]"*Wir alle seien…nicht nur körperlich, sondern auch psychisch versehrt. Die Charakterzüge, die unsere Persönlichkeit ausmachen, seien verzerrt. Nervöse Ruhelosigkeit, feindseliger Rückzug auf das eigene Ich seien die Kennzeichen unseres Krankheitsbildes. Wir sind, so heißt es, "verbogen". Das läßt mich flüchtig an meine unter der stellt mir aber auch die Aufgabe, unsere Verbogenheit neu zu definieren: und zwar als seine sowohl moralisch als auch geschichtlich der gesunden Geradheit genüber ranghöhere Form des Menschlichen"* (110)

> *innern*] has become a mere memory. What happened, happened. But that it happened cannot be so easily accepted. I rebel: against my past, against history, and against a present *that places the incomprehensible in the cold storage of history and thus falsifies it in a revolting way*. (BGA xi, emphasis mine)[55]

In other words, Améry must save something from the past, from history and the present in a manner that remains opposed to the closure of historical discourse. He is unwilling to dispose of or settle the "case." Indeed, clarification, disposal and settlement are the tools of history and the "present" – time as we remember and project it forward second-by-second. That clarification, disposal and settlement are the tools of the living and the logic of life is the message Améry insists should "concern all those who wish to live together as fellow human beings" (BGA xiv). Torture, aging and suicide, like testimony and historical trauma, should not be understood, nor grasped through enlightenment; the symptoms must not be added into sums, nor their remainders discarded. The passive suffering to which Améry testifies throughout his corpus is not a wrong that can be adjudicated in court, just like it is not an historical event that can be left behind. Language and society conspire to enforce life by silencing the traumatized, pathologizing their suffering and pitying their attempted escapes. Thus,

> It doesn't mean a thing when the 'cured,' [those who have been "rescued" from self-inflicted death] once they no longer know who they are and function as dimwits, say with gratitude that Dr. So-and-So prescribed for them a medicine

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[55]**"***Abklärung, das ware ja auch Erledigung, Abmachung von Tatbeständen, die man zu den geschichtlichen Akten legen kann. Gerade dies zu verhindern, will mein Buch beitragen. Nichts is ja aufgelöst, kein Konflikt ist beigelegt, kein Er-innern zur bloßen Erinnerung geworden. Was geschah, geschah. Aber* daß *es geschah, ist so einfach nicht hinzunehmen. Ich rebelliere: gegen meine Vergangenheit, gegen die Geschichte, gegen eine Gegenwart, die das Unbegreifliche geschichtlich einfrieren läßt und es damit auf empörende Weise verfälscht" (13-4).*

> and since then they see the world once again in a rosy light. In this case someone is babbling, having been denied any other speech.[56] (58-9)

And yet, what of Jean Améry, testifying here to his death still two years in the future? How are we meant to understand his loneliness, his isolation and his terror more than thirty years after Breendonk? Surely he implies there is much to despise in a society that makes it possible for Améry to be tortured first by the Gestapo and again by medicine, particularly when his suicide manifesto was followed shortly by his successful performance of death.

Améry seems to have lived his life as an example, which he experienced as a responsibility to reject forgetting at all costs, to not heal, move on or adjust to life after the camps. He experiences his resentment as a responsibility. In his excellently argued *Resentement's Virtue*, Thomas Brudholm describes the immense pressure the concept of reconciliation brings to bear on victims of torture and political violence where:

> In the context of efforts to promote forgiveness and reconciliation, anger and resentment are often seen not merely as inferior emotions. More than that, they connote self-preoccupation, weakness, and danger insofar as they are seen as intimately connected to desires for revenge. Atrocity survivors who express their willingness to forgive or who testify in court with decorum are commonly admired and appreciated. They incarnate magnanimity, strength, and humanity - and they provide reasons to hope that recovery and reconciliation are possible even in the worst of cases. (3)

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[56] "*Daß allenfalls der "Geheilte". Wenn er erst selber nichts mehr weiß und stumpfsinning funktioniert, dankbar sagt, es habe Dr. Soundso ihm ein Medikament verschrieben und seither sehe er die Welt wieder im rosigen Licht, meinte gar nichts. Da plappert einer, dem man andere Rede untersagte*" (67).

This image of the survivor, eager to forgive, ready to be welcomed back into the arms of a society that will now forgive him for having earlier harbored his resentment, is strikingly similar to Améry's characterization of the "rescued" suicide. By contrast, Améry will not allow himself to rejoin the society, nor will he allow it to forget or forgive *him*. The demand to reconcile is symptomatic, Améry argues, of society's continued violence against survivors. Rather than allowing for forgiveness in society, no less his personal life, his mature testimonial texts project one static image throughout: a human body dangling from a hook in the ceiling by dislocated shoulders. This warped body, to which his testimony constantly returns – both explicitly and implicitly, literally and *figur*atively – speaks in place of the soaring intellect Améry mourns. It demands neither understanding, clarification nor sympathy. His testimonies rigorously reject therapeutic approaches to the experiences of victims, focusing instead on the responsibility incumbent on the perpetrators, namely acknowledgement and a plea for forgiveness. He demands that the perpetrators provide an impossible double-movement, both a "regression into the past and [a] nullification of what happened" (BGA 68). Yet, Améry's texts testify to an awareness that nothing can be restored and they transform everything that exists into an anti-world that is subservient to the nothing a mangled body *becomes*. He summarizes this movement as follows: "*nihil = nihil.*" In the absence of everything that was taken away from him, he seems to demand that we live with this fact, that we accept bodily the implications of this radical exile, that we com-miserate. Disavowed abstractions such as progress and mourning, Améry seems to insist, must not blind society to its failures just as it must not, I argue, lull his readers into complacency.

Chapter 5

Surviving in Hebrew, Thinking in Greek: Emmanuel Levinas's Testimonial Philosophy

> To the memory of those who were closest among the six million assassinated by the National Socialists, and of the millions on millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-Semitism. (Vernacular dedication to *Otherwise than being*)[57]

לזכר נשמת אבי ר' יחיאל בר' אברהם הלוי,
אמי מירתי דבורה בת ר' משה,
אחי דב בר' יחיאל הלוי, ועמינדב בר' יחיאל הלוי
חותני ר' שמואל בר' גרשון הלוי, וחותנתי מלכה בת ר' חיים.

תנצבה

In his ethical philosophy, Emmanuel Levinas is concerned by philosophy's historical obsession with Being, which he understands as the continuous and tireless efforts of a *self* to remain *itself.* Appropriating every encounter into a continuous narrative of self-creation and self-understanding, Being protects itself from the outside world via a series of defenses including denying the alterity of the other. To enable its perpetuation through every potential threat to its continuity, subjective Being reduces every encounter with radical difference to what is assimilable; thereby, Being reduces what is its other to a mere aspect of itself. Every encounter that challenges the Being's self-identity, in other words, is immediately transformed into an awareness *of* that difference. Awareness and knowledge supplement the *I*'s sense of *well-being* and of "being at home" in the world.

57 "A la mémoire des êtres les plus proches parmi les six millions d'assassineés par les nationaux-socialistes, à côté des millions et des millions d'humains de toutes confessions et de toutes nations, victims de la meme haine de l'autre home, du meme antisémitisme."

Levinas proposes throughout his writings that there is an outside to the insular and self-referential world of identity, an "otherwise than being" that would not immediately become simply another recoverable mode of being. The shattering of subjectivity opens the possibility of an ethical relationship to alterity. In a sense, it is the ethical yielding of the self's very selfness, its "place in the sun," to the other, whom Levinas often describes as the stranger, the widow and the orphan.

Jacques Derrida's 1964 essay "Violence and Metaphysics," – written as a response to Levinas's mature philosophical work, *Totality and Infinity* (1961) – understands Levinas's critique of the Greek philosophical tradition as an encounter between the "Hellenic" and the "Hebraic." He writes that the "entirety of philosophy is conceived on the basis of its Greek source…and it would not be possible to philosophize, or to speak philosophically, outside this medium" (81). Greek, Derrida continues is "our language," referring not only to the language of philosophers but also to Western vernaculars. The history of Greek thought, its worldview, its conceptualizations of rationality and right and wrong action pervade contemporary Western societies' sense of self and their linguistic identities. Derrida insists that the entire history of philosophy is pervaded by the "domination of the same" (81). From Plato to Heidegger, whether the philosophy's obsession is reason or resurrecting "the thought of Being," philosophy emphasizes the ontological above the ethical, the self above the other. In fact, it is difference itself that Derrida correctly recognizes as the most difficult thing to express in "Greek," by which he refers to Western thought and Western languages in general. Speaking of the primary concerns of Greek thought, Derrida argues that "no philosophy could possibly dislodge them without first succumbing to them, or without finally

destroying itself as a philosophical language" (82). Yet, he insists that "it is at this level that the thought of Emmanuel Levinas can make us tremble": Levinas's departure from the "Greek site and perhaps from every site in general" introduces us to "an inconceivable process of dismantling and dispossession." Thus Derrida indexes – with an allusive reference to "the heart of the desert," and the "growing wasteland" – the Hebraic interruption of Greek identity, which moves thought "toward what is no longer a source or a site" (82).

What concerns Levinas most about the Greek tradition from which he strives to break is the position of prominence given over to Being, which he also calls "the same." Any obsession with Being inevitably reduces every other to an aspect of the same. Through a reliance on enlightenment and a presumption in the power of logic to reduce every complication to pieces of knowledge, Levinas sees the Greek philosophical tradition as obsessed with ignoring the Other and therefore the priority of ethics. Summarizing Levinas's resistance to aspects of recent philosophical developments, Derrida explains that "Incapable of respecting the Being and meaning of the other, phenomenology and ontology would be philosophies of violence. Through them, the entire philosophical tradition, in its meaning and at bottom, would make common cause with oppression and with the totalitarianism of the same" (91). Philosophy, through proceeding by bringing everything into the light cannot help but view the world as that which it gives itself. In this way, philosophy appropriates everything it examines. To counter ontology's pervasive authority Levinas proposes metaphysics or ethics. In Derrida's phrase, metaphysics (in Levinas's sense) is "the positive movement which takes itself beyond the disdain or disregard of the other" (92). As this movement is non-

philosophical or at least pre-philosophical it cannot be simply an intentional act. Instead Derrida argues that it is a type of blindness of the same or the invisibility of the "infinitely other" (93). In either case it denotes an encounter with alterity which cannot be reduced to a "play of the same" or a "mode of identification." Instead, Levinas characterizes the encounter with the other as an interruption. The face of the other (*le visage d'autrui*) interrupts my habitual mode of being and engages me in a relationship that is non-reciprocal and cannot be reduced to any totality. In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas call this religion. As Derrida puts it, this is not "*a* religion, but *the* religion, the religiosity of the religious" (96). Ethics as religiosity is therefore the only defense against Greek philosophical violence and its prolongation in contemporary philosophy.

To the extent that philosophy limits its range of vision to that which can be argued, proven, and brought into the light of consciousness knowledge, it turns away from the event and every alterity in order to create the distance necessary to analyze, categorize, and learn. To this "understanding," Levinas opposes what he calls metaphysics, by which he refers to an investigation that recognizes the *prior*ity of the unknowable over the known and the radical departure from "the same" over every safe return. He uses *metaphysics* as a synonym for *ethics*. In his early work, Levinas explores existence before it coalesces into subjective being. He refers to this existence without existents as the space of the "*il y a*," the anonymous pure alterity of bare existence. Subjectivity, he insists, takes a stand within this anonymity to project a continuous self, whose mission immediately becomes self-preservation, since return to the "*il y a*" remains a perpetually threatened death for the subject. Therefore Levinas insists that Being itself is an overcoming of a pre-original alterity. The encounter with the face of the

other disables the subjective being, exposing her once more to an absence more originary – in *Otherwise than Being* Levinas uses the term "on the hither side" to refer to the pre-original – than presence. Hence he contrasts time, presence and other philosophemes of "Greek" modalities of thought and experience, with what are biblical Hebraic modes of relation to the other.

Yet, Derrida objects to what he sees as Levinas's attempt to speak philosophically about philosophy's other. He asks rhetorically if one can pretend to speak Greek in order to unmask it. He concludes that Levinas cannot speak Hebrew in Greek. He argues passionately that "the attempt to achieve an opening towards the beyond of philosophical discourse, by means of philosophical discourse, which can never be shaken off completely, cannot possibly succeed *within language*…except by *formally* and *thematically* posing *the question of the relations between belonging and the opening*, the *question of closure*" (110). Throughout *Otherwise than Being*, written thirteen years after *Totality & Infinity*, Levinas responds to this paradox by forcing the language of philosophy over the limit. He argues that while conversation and language provide the model of ethical behavior, as a relation that maintains the separation between two beings, philosophical speech relies on the freedom of objective distance and rhetoric to surround the other and reduce him to an object of reflection. I show in the discussion that follows that Levinas further denies philosophy the possibility of closure and therefore identity by "beginning" his argument to begin outside of the text, on its margins. Starting with the page of dedications that transform and transgress the possibility of philosophical writing and reading, the "outside" or "beyond" of Levinas's text begins the discussion before the text has a chance to begin. Rather than follow the convention of philosophical dedications

that thank previous philosophers, family members, patrons or others who helped in the book's production, Levinas writes two dedications in two distinct languages to two irreconcilable and untranslatable groups.

Within *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas attempts to expose this outside through complex philosophical argumentation that is perpetually ruptured by the intrusion of what I will call the "non-philosophical." Significantly, the in the case of the dedicatory page, interruption precedes the coherent argumentation: the text's very first page appears to be a dedication repeated twice over, once in English (French in the original) and again at the bottom of the page in Hebrew. On closer inspection, however, the Hebrew text appears to differ from the English one even for the non-Hebrew-speaker: It has what appears to be a word all alone on the bottom line. This distance between the comprehensible English and the unintelligible Hebrew confronts the reader with an irresolvable conflict before the text properly begins. Still on its margins, on the near side of its boundary, the reader encounters a non-translatable and therefore impassable threshold. Rather than reassure the reader through her felicitous ability to grasp what she confronts, this marginal inscription introduces an apprehension. Interestingly, this state is hardly mitigated for the Hebrew speaker/reader. In fact the distance between the two poles of this bifurcated text only grow, while any possible resolution becomes more remote.

These dedications devote the text to almost incompatible memories, people, and ideational worldviews. They both literally and figuratively speak different languages: the twentieth century diction and ideological content of the first dedication can be neither translated nor signified by the ancient, incantational Hebrew of the second. Whereas the vernacular dedication implies a humanistic posture full of confidence in the ability of

men in society to recognize the mutual give-and-take of rights discourse, the Hebrew responds to the biblical imperative to remember the dead and to honor our fathers and mothers. While these dedications expresses his belonging to these two divergent cultures, their irreducible difference remains unresolved for all readers, both Hebrew and non-Hebrew speakers. The radical fracture of the generic expectation that what is given in a foreign language will also be rendered in the vernacular, rends the fabric of the dedication for both those who understand the Hebrew and for those that cannot.

Although Levinas attempted to maintain throughout his life a distinct separation between his "philosophical" and "confessional" texts – those in which he relies solely on argumentation to prove a claim vs. those in which he has recourse to the personal or biblical – whether speaking Greek or Hebrew, Levinas's work insists on the priority of the other and on his radical difference from *me*. These two epigraphs, separated into the Greco-Latin French and the Hebrew text of familial mourning both speak of the Holocaust. The vernacular mentions the event explicitly as a historical and human tragedy that befell a certain group of people. The implicit reference of the Hebrew dedication is hidden, drawing its context from the vernacular dedication and from Levinas's biography. Those who are familiar with Levinas's family history – and can read incantational Hebrew – will recognize the implicit reference to the family members Levinas mourns. They were all lost *to him* in 1946, when returning from a German POW camp he heard for the first time about the murderous extent of the Nazi Holocaust and the total destruction of the Jewish community of Kovno, Lithuania. That is where, in 1923, he left his family to begin his studies in Strasbourg. He later went on to study philosophy with Husserl and Heidegger in Freiburg in 1928. Surprisingly, the German POW camp

kept its inmates sufficiently isolated that they learned nothing of the genocides going on in “the east.” Therefore, it was only upon his emergence from the camp that Levinas learned of the deaths of most of his family members.

In order to convey this otherwise than language, philosophy, being, etc., without reducing the distance between the text and its referent, without turning that other Levinas wants to indicate into something the text can know, *Otherwise than Being* continually breaks with referential language, philosophical argumentation, and textual expectations. This chapter argues that the dedications to *Otherwise*, in their formal, referential and gestural complexity, perform the shattering of subjectivity – in this case of the narrator, “Levinas” – which the remainder of the text struggles to unpack and to indicate. This dedication page thereby resists its own marginality, or rather insists on the centrality of the marginal. Rather than belonging to an economy of thanks or an acknowledgment of debts these dedications function otherwise. As the text will come to define it, the spatio-temporal relationship of the dedications to the text is defined by diachrony and proximity. These texts, dedication and argument are bound in “a relation without relation”: neither can be reduced to nor absorbed in the other. Instead, both exist, face-to-face, in an irreconcilable but non-indifferent proximity.

Marginal Inscription and Repetition

Levinas begins *Otherwise than Being*, with a double-dedication, followed by a page of five epigraphic mottos (selected from biblical, Talmudic and philosophical sources) and an introductory “note” before the text properly commences in its first section, “The

Argument."[58] That even this "Argument" itself functions as an introduction to the text proper and therefore also stands at a certain distance from "the text" reinforces the text's emphasis on the impossibility of a totalizing discourse. The following discussion will primarily investigate the relationship between this marginalia and this text focusing primarily on the ways these dedications perform the text's concerns with the failures of closure and the priority of alterity over identity. Together, the dedication, the epigraphs and the introduction index the impossibility of beginning such a text. For it is the very excessiveness of these inaugural gestures, the figuration of a space both outside and inside the text, that indicate most forcefully to the reader the complexities involved in *Otherwise than Being*'s notions of time and subjectivity which are an*archical* and *diachronic*. Yet, it is precisely their alterity from the body of the text that empowers them to rupture its surface. In a sense the text's structure argues for a continuity between Levinas's pre-original ethical encounter of the self and the other with that of a text and its outsides.

The dedications that appear before the main unfolding of *Otherwise than Being* therefore ensnare the text in a series of contestations. They interrupt a disclosure that they appear to announce and dispense with any confident reading. Without the promise of presence, they set two languages in an opposition that allows no resolution and only the slightest possibility of relation. As such, the relationship of the text proper to its *outsides* prefigures Levinas's description of the economy of the same to the difference of the other. Wrenching open the questions of address, addressee, and even addressor, they indicate a beyond to being through their refusal to speak about something to someone

[58] The epigraphs are selected from Ezekiel, 3:20; Ezekiel, 9:40-6; Rachi on Ezekiel 9:6; Pascal *Pensées*, 112; and *Pensées*, 404. Strangely, Levinas's introductory "note" is listed as a "Translator's Note" in the 1998 translation published by Duquesne UP.

who understands. In a way, these two dedications perform, as if in preparation, the contortions of language, philosophy, and understanding that form the text's argument. Interrupting the philosophy before it can open, let alone close the text, these dedications disunite the reader's attention, forcing her to enter the text aware of both its content and what precedes content without reducing the latter to a moment of the former. These complex and compounding gestures demonstrate the subject's disempowerment in the face of what is *otherwise than being*: the face of the other signifies, according to Levinas, as a signification in retreat (AR 139).

We will begin our discussion of *Otherwise than Being*, therefore on its face, margin and threshold. The dedication page divides, one in the upper right and one lower right. The upper one in appears in French (English in the translation) and the lower one in Hebrew. While this construction is familiar, the reader's generic expectation, that the top is a simple translation of the bottom, is frustrated by the ideological gulf between these two languages, ideologies, and worldviews. The French text reads:

> *A la mémoire des êtres les plus proches parmi les six millions d'assassinées par les nationaux-socialistes, à côté des millions et des millions d'humains de toutes confessions et de toutes nations, victimes de la même haine de l'autre home, du même antisémitisme.*
>
> To the memory of those who were closest among the six million assassinated by the National Socialists, and of the millions on millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-Semitism.

Meanwhile, the Hebrew dedication reads:

Le'zecher neshamat abi mori Rav Yechiel bar Abraham ha'Levi, Emi morati Dborah bat Rav Moshe, Achi Dob bar Yechiel ha'Levi, ve'Aminadab bar Yechiel ha'Levi, chotani Rav Shmuel bar Gershon ha'Levi, ve'chotanti malcha bat Rav Haim.

T.N.Z.B.H.

To the memory of the soul of my father, my teacher Yehiel son of Abraham the Levy

My mother, my teacher Dvora the daughter of Moshe

My brothers Dov son of Yechiel the Levy, and Aminadav the son of Yechiel the Levy

My brother in law Shmuel the son of Gershon the Levy, and my sister in law Malka the daughter of Chaim.

MSIBL (May their Souls be Inscribed in the Book of Life.)

The vernacular dedication begins, "To the memory of those who were closest among the six million assassinated by the National Socialists." This sentence lacks a subject that can be locatable. After all, it is dedicated neither to Levinas's memory nor to the memory of those who died. "To the memory of those who were closest" can refer either to their personal memory or to society's collective memory of them. In addition, and this is suggested only later by the Hebrew text below, this could refer to God's memory. In Jewish tradition, righteous acts by living children and descendents helps the souls of the dead reach favor in God's eyes. Indeed, on tombstones, the Jewish equivalent to the Christian epigraphic motto "Rest in Peace," is "May His/Her Soul be Bound in the

Bonds of Life."[59] The "Bonds of Life," refers to the record of all the righteous souls who, according to tradition, will be resurrected on the day of the coming of the Messiah. Significantly, a soul in limbo can still make it into the book of life through good deeds of their descendents, since having produced righteous people qualifies one as righteous. In other words, a good soul produces just people. Hence dedicating an ethical work to the memory of relatives who have died is to dedicate the book to their souls, or rather, the trace of their lives that remains to be determined by the living.

Yet how do we understand the phrase, "those who were *closest among* the six million [*les plus proches parmi*]?" We must ask, those who were "closest to what?" A simple reading of the original French would understand this as a clear reference to Levinas's own family, as those who were closest to him. Yet, the language of the dedication explicitly avoids any clear reference to any subject, leaving the question open to other potential readings. For instance, one could read "closest among" as referring to those to were closest to the horror itself: those who approached the gas chambers, or who stood by the long open trenches, or simply to all those who lost those who were closest to them. In any case, the following word "among" takes away our ability to decide between multiple possible readings. Although this dedication uses a conventional language that would be generically considered political or sociological, this moment of undecidability interrupts those discourses, just as a dedication "to the memory" and not to persons, leaves the reader only traces of meaning and foundation. This is an example of the way in which the saying punctures the said, or what Levinas also calls the other in the same.

One is also struck by the tone of the dedication that speaks from within the language of 19th and 20th Century French enlightenment. Although Levinas will, later in

[59] The Hebrew abbreviation תנצהב is taken from the first book of Samuel, 25:29.

this text re-appropriate the term "*fraternité,*"[60] to index a radical notion of my responsibility to the other as a brother whose existence is more crucial than my own, here he employs a very common political and ideological trope of the fraternity of men, who are all prone to "the same hatred of the other man." Although the straightforwardness of this gesture is undone by the next phrase that seeks to understand all "hatred of the other man" as anti-Semitism, what remains is the universalizing tone of this dedication. One can say that this dedication strives to speak in a common language, which is to come close to saying that it speaks "Greek." After all, the text conjoins "the millions on millions of all confessions and all nations." However, the dedication refers to those "who were closest among the *six million*," which is, of course, the commonly accepted figure for the number of Jews killed by the Nazis. While apparently appealing to a common language and available notions of justice and politics, this dedication simultaneously subverts them by inserting the specificity of Jewish victimization, and the anonymity of an absent speaker and referent. In the Hebrew dedication the subject-referent link is clear: the dedication speaks about "my father" and "my mother." In a traditional memorial form, Levinas here dedicates the text to the memory of family members who perished during the Holocaust.

In addition to their radically alternate referents, the dedications' linguistic, cultural, ideological, and semantic status articulate an irreconcilable divergence brought into proximity by the page and the text on whose margin they occur. These dedications speak to different memories, different people, and different ideational worldviews. After

[60] "The approach is precisely an implication of the approaching one in fraternity. When it becomes conscious, that is, thematized, the indifferent approach destroys this kinship, like a caress surprising itself to be a palpation, or recovering possession of itself. The subjectivity of the approaching subject is then preliminary, anarchic, prior to consciousness, an implication, a being caught up in fraternity" (82-3)

all, the twentieth-century diction and ideology of the first dedication strikes an odd note when read in conjunction with the ancient incantational Hebrew of the second. Whereas one implies a humanistic posture that analogizes repressions within a French republican discourse, the other responds to a biblical injunction to remember the dead and to honor one's parents. At the same time, while both speak to and within available discourses – the first of politics and justice, and the other of the spiritual demands of loss – they break with the generic expectations of those forms themselves while cleaving improbably to a philosophical text that never mentions their "shared" referent, the Holocaust.

These dedications devote the text to almost incompatible memories, people, and ideational worldviews. They both literally and figuratively speak different languages: the twentieth century diction and ideological content of the first dedication can be neither translated nor signified by the ancient, incantational Hebrew of the second. While these dedications expresses his belonging to these two divergent cultures, their irreducible difference remains unresolved for all readers, both Hebrew and non-Hebrew speakers. The radical fracture of the generic expectation that what is given in a foreign language will also be rendered in the vernacular, rends the fabric of the dedication for both those who understand the Hebrew and for those that cannot.

In the Margins of Emmanuel Levinas

In order to understand the function of these two dedications as epigraphs we turn now to the intricate relationship of these texts to Levinas's general philosophical emphases. In *Otherwise than Being* proper, Levinas never mentions the Holocaust explicitly or implicitly. In fact, after this dedication page, the event of the Holocaust and the discourse

of mourning disappear almost entirely. We will see, however, that these opening remarks guide the text more than is readily apparent and, in fact, provide a hermeneutical tool to unravel some of Levinas's more inscrutable ethical constructions. Ultimately, we will ask what role this marginal speech assumes in the unfolding of the text, and what Levinas's conjoining of the philosophical and the confessional means to our interpretation of this text?

Jacques Derrida considered the relationship of philosophical speech to its margin in "Tympan," a *margin*al essay that serves as an introduction to his text *Margins of Philosophy* [*Marges de la Philosophie* (1972)]. There he describes philosophy as a pursuit obsessed with its own limitlessness in that it constantly seeks to define, for itself, its margins. Philosophy, Derrida argues has "always insisted upon this: thinking its other" (x). That philosophy regards nothing as outside its scope is proven by its originating gesture, identifying itself against the non-philosophical, which it goes on to define as the non-rational and the naïve. However, Derrida points out, in a very Levinasian gesture, that by insisting "upon thinking *its other*…In thinking it *as such*, in recognizing it, one misses it. One reappropriates it for oneself, one disposes of it, one misses it" (xi). In other words, Derrida here indicates a failure in the very thought of philosophy: that its thinking reduces the distance between thought and the objectified difference upon which it intended to reflect. Reflection is by definition an inauthentic encounter, since it reappropriates the alterity of the other for itself, it "disposes of it" and thereby "misses it." Philosophy's vulnerability is therefore most clearly visible along its edges, the sites of its most egregious over-reaching. The escape from the totalizing tendencies of

philosophical thought therefore lies along its margins, where an *other* speech articulates "a movement unheard of by philosophy, an other which is no longer *its other*" (xiv).

As if in sympathy with Derrida's argument, Levinas's dedications refuse the traditional mode of marginal inscription, in which the margins are within the "control" of the text: instead, the dedications to *Otherwise than Being* belong more clearly to the Hebraic notion of dedication, *hakdasha,* a notion more similar to consecration than proclamation. The radical ceding of authority these dedications imply, slip the control of an authorial thought which would "give credit to" another. Rather their position vis-à-vis the text, as occupiers and oppressors controlling the discourse before the first word has been spoken usurps the ground even of the philosophical text that follows. The dedications themselves, like the marginal writings of the rabbis of the Talmud do not obscure the text within, while not necessarily clarify it either. Instead, these dedications de-limit what is possible for the text to say; they de-limit the power of language, philosophy, and of a writer named Emmanuel Levinas. Although throughout his career Levinas insisted on a separation between his philosophical writings and his non-philosophical or confessional texts, it is my contention that these epigraphs reverse authorial power and control, performing rather than constating the failure of both philosophy and confession to state being's otherwise without reducing the distance that separates them.

In a sense, Levinas's text demonstrates the proximity of the philosophical and the non-philosophical utterance, both of which fail to transmit the radical enormity of what passes under the name Holocaust. Those who know Levinas's biography, can read Hebrew and recognize the incantational formula, the implicit reference to the family

members Levinas mourns in the second dedication becomes apparent. Levinas spent the majority of the war in a German POW camp, where the Jews were separated from the other prisoners but not subjected to the murderous tactics Jews faced in concentrations and death camps in the east. Due to an efficient news blackout that existed in the camp, Levinas only discovered the murderous extent of the Nazi Holocaust and the total destruction of the Jewish community of Kovno, Lithuania in 1946. Since it was only upon his emergence from the camp that Levinas learned of the deaths of most of his family members, their absence predated his discovery. This trace structure, a finding of the other only in his disappearance, informs one of Levinas's most direct statements on the effects of the Holocaust on his life, worldview and philosophy, all of which he insists in his 1963 essay "Signature" have been dominated by the "presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror" (DF 291). Presentiment and memory share an absence, which Levinas insists persists at the center of his subjectivity and his philosophy. For Levinas, as Jill Robbins phrases it in her *Prodigal Son, Elder Brother*, "both this 'presentiment' and this 'memory' take the form of an unwavering concern to render ethics, the imperative to be responsible to the other" (17). Although she goes on to call this a "first philosophy," this approach pervades both his philosophical and his Judaic writings. To use Levinas's terms, it appears that this horror exists on the "hither-side" of the distinction philosophy/non-philosophy, personal/professional and intentionality/passivity.

Already back in his first original philosophical text, *Existence and Existents*, begun in the German Prisoner of War camp and published the year after his liberation, Levinas introduces a notion of a subjectivity that emerges *from* and remains perpetually vulnerable *to* eradication in the face of the unmasterable and unknowable infinity of

existence. He argues that subjectivity, the world, and society are not constitutive structures of a reality that is "given" to a subject; rather, they are the result of the human being's taking a stand. Subjectivity gives itself a reality formed by the position it takes relative to unknowable existence. The existence of existents, Levinas argues, demonstrates that what "is essential in human spirituality [subjectivity] does not lie in our relationship with the things which make up the world, but is determined by a relationship" (3-4). Prior to subjectivity, the world and being-in-the-world, the existent must take up a position in relation to the chaos of Being. It is only through the event of taking a stand, which Levinas calls hypostasis, that the subject articulates a positionality, a ground. Thus, the subject emerges into an existence that seems to have always already have existed. This hypostasis marks the birth of consciousness and the ego both of whose immediate and perpetual task becomes *their own* preservation.

No soon does Levinas celebrate the hypostasis as a significant accomplishment, he emphasizes its fragility in the ethical encounter. The relationship between the existent and existence remains tenuous, relying on the constant attentiveness of the ego to maintain the subject as continuity beyond all the intrusive threats of bare existence. According to Levinas, the reality of subjectivity, "the truth of this 'duality,' the effecting of this takeover, is attested to by certain moments in human existence where the adherence of existence to an existent appears like a cleaving" (9)[61]. In other words, the truth of this relationship between subjectivity and bare existence is revealed in the subject's fall (dissolution). Using nausea, fatigue, and indolence as examples, Levinas argues that these affective states are not merely coincidences in being, they are symptoms

[61] "*Mais la vérité de cette 'daulité', l'accomplissement de cette conquête sont attestés par certains moments de l'existence humaine où l'adhérence de l'existence à l'existant apparaît comme un clivage"* (27)

of the cleaving and of its potential failure. In these states the hypostasis reveals its failure to secure the subject against anxiety, dread, dissolution and death. Levinas describes the threat to the subject as follows:

> To be in the world is precisely to be freed from the last implications of the instinct to exist… It is in times of misery and privation that the shadow of an ulterior finality which darkens the world is cast behind the object of desire. When one has to eat, drink and warm oneself in order not to die, when nourishment becomes fuel, as in certain kinds of hard labor, the world also seems to be at an end, turned upside down and absurd, needing to be renewed. Time becomes unhinged. (36-7)

Significantly, it is in times of dire need – as when instinctual drives for food, water, and shelter replace the meandering interests of desire – that the hypostasis begins to fall apart and the subject falls out of world. Without the guarantee of the hypostasis, the existent is thrown back into the realm of the chaos of existence that Levinas calls the *il y a*, the "there is." Within the *il y a* the subject ceases to exist as such and becomes a mere existent, a living entity exposed to abjection, helplessness. This inability is different from a subject's concrete incapacity to accomplish a specific task, rather it represents a more originary helplessness. It is an "impersonal, anonymous, yet inextinguishable 'consummation' of being," that Levinas wishes to "designate by the term *there is* [*il y a*]…. *there is* transcends inwardness as well as exteriority; it does not even make it possible to distinguish these. The anonymous current of being invades, submerges every subject, person or thing" (52). In the state of the *il y a*, the subject is disabled through a dislocation from every potential seat of power: identity, subjectivity and language.

The Approach of the Other

In the author's note to *Otherwise than Being* that precedes the opening of the first chapter Levinas outlines "the propositions of this book which names the *beyond essence*" (xlviii). The first one of these proposes to see or recognize in subjectivity an "ex-ception," a taking-out that upsets the conjunctions of "essence, entities and the 'difference'" (xlvii). In other words, he argues that within subjectivity itself there exists a force of disorganization and interruption. Furthermore, this force is originary in responsible. He claims that this alterity within me, which he calls a substitution for the other, exists in or perhaps even defines "the hard core of the 'unique' in me." Hence, I am not first myself only later to be modified by an encounter with an other; rather, the self constructs its being around an absence that is defined by difference and alterity. Third, the note proposes that this absent core of subjectivity should be conceived as "abnegation prior to the will" (xlviii). Before there is any subject to will it, this hole exists; Levinas describes this originary complexity as the result of a "merciless exposure to the trauma of transcendence." Levinas argues that the subjective act of taking up my existence is founded upon an original exposure prior to the possibility of an *I* who might will this encounter.

He concludes his introductory note with a final aspiration that marks more precisely the "breathless" hope of its writer, "But to hear a God not contaminated by Being is a human possibility."[62] The strangeness of the phrase "to hear a God," is not mitigated but compounded by the following one "not contaminated by Being." In the first case, why does Levinas say "a God" rather than simply God? Secondly, why does he

[62] "Mais entendre un Dieu non contaminé par l'être est une possibilité humaine non moins importante et non moins précaire que de tirer l'être de l'oubli où il serait tombé dans la métaphysique et dans l'ontothéologie."? (10).

speak of hearing a God rather than hearing the *voice* of God or the movement or thoughts of God? What sound would it be? The French word here rendered as hear, "*entendre*" can also mean several closely related things: "to listen to; to understand; to know; to intend; to mean" (Carney 328). It can also mean to attend to. Clearly to hear God is a radically different idea than to listen to God because one can listen even when there is no sound. This sense of *entendre* comes close to that captured by the phrase, "to attend to God," in the sense of "to direct the ears, mind, energies to anything" (OED). This direction, along with the possibility of glimpsing the trace of the ethical or the holy, is in the face of the other.

However, we still have not addressed the question of contamination by Being. How does Being contaminate? What type of contamination is this? To answer this question we will need to refer to the first section "Essence and Interest" of the first chapter. Here, Levinas insists that the essence of Being is interest: "*Esse* is *interesse*; essence is interest" (OTB 4). Egos have interests in every outcome that surrounds them. According to Levinas's argument, the function of Being's ego is to ensure the perpetuation of itself indefinitely into the future. According to Adriaan Peperzak's reading of this phrase, "Being is being interested in maintaining and developing itself, the maintenance of a *maintenant*, the self-interested handling of a presence in the continuing present of one's own essence, not allowing disturbances or interruptions or swallowing these as soon as they threaten the ongoing flow of this *basic* "*inter-essence*" (Katz 344). Crucially, however, perpetuating its existence means avoiding change, since any transformation of the Being, regardless how mild, necessitates a death of part of the current ego. In other words, ego exists as it is, and it constantly works to ensure the

perpetuation of that exact configuration of interests. Therefore, Levinas asserts that the essence of Being is this continuing, interested drive by the ego.[63]

Since interested-Being is the essence of Being, "Transcendence is passing over to being's *other*, otherwise than being. Not *to be otherwise*, but *otherwise than being.*"[64] Although there are an infinite number of ways in which Being can seem *other* to itself, such as in states of alienation, isolation, self-hatred, and even amnesia, Levinas insists that all of these are simply modalities of the being the same. In alienation, for instance, identity incorporates a sense of alterity into itself as part of its self-image as one who contains the other. None of these however reflect or address alterity.[65] Even in the case of giving charity, an apparent act of "selflessness," Levinas indicates the ways in which the act of giving resembles the act of appropriating and claiming, and is, therefore, "simply a form of hatred" (see n. 7). These are Being's contaminations, acting like reflecting crystals interpreting the outside world in terms of self-interested desire. Therefore, transcending Being, not being otherwise but otherwise than being, becomes a condition of possibility of attending to God. In this introductory note, we see once more the competition between two different languages: that of philosophy and that of a God. Once again, this time entirely explicitly, Levinas indicates a crossing of these two alternate languages, by implying that the highest goal of his *philosophical* argumentation will be to "hear a *God*."

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[63] Levinas summarizes this concept in one of his epigraphs taken from Pascal's *Pensées*, number 112: "'This is my place in the sun.' That is how the usurpation of the whole world began."

[64] Ibid. 3. "*Passer à* l'autre *de l'être, autrement qu'être. Non pas* être autrement, *mais* autrement qu'être" (*Autrement* 13).

[65] Again, an epigraph Levinas includes from Pascal's *Pensées*, number 404, can provide the best intertext for this discussion: "They have used concupiscence as best as they could for the general good; but it is nothing but a pretense and a false image of charity; for at bottom it is simply a form of hatred."

Since any act of Being immediately returns to strengthen the ego's interest, how can a being ever transcend itself? The very phrasing of the question is intensely paradoxical, and Levinas begins precisely from within this paradox. He calls it staying with the "extreme situation of a diachronic thought" (7). The ego, happy to stay within its domain conceives of time from within "its temporalization, in which, thanks to retention, memory and history, nothing is lost, everything is presented or represented, everything is consigned and lends itself to inscription, or is synthesized" (9). The ego's timeless present creates and sustains itself by summoning a certain memory and history to combat every potential threat via a continuous narrative. On the other hand, time and experience threaten the subject's ability to persist. The crack, says Levinas, arises from the fact that all of this intentional reconciliation of divergent experiences into a unified identity leaves a great deal of experience out. These experiences "do not return"; instead, they remain "a diachrony refractory to all synchronization, a transcending diachrony" (9). This alterity and the threat of alterity, according to Levinas can remain "foreign to every present, every representation, and thus signify a past more ancient than every representable origin" (9). Alterity can never be made present: I and the other can never be contemporaries. Instead, the structure of missed and irrecuperable time, a model of the other in me, opens the possibility of my hearing the voice of the other and thereby of responding to him.

Levinas names this structure of an originary alterity within the same, the "absolutely diachronous pre-original" content of being (10). Alternately, he speaks of the "hither-side" of essence; a phrase that marks an originary pre-subjective condition of the existent. In this vein, Levinas speaks of "a passivity" that is more and differently passive

than the opposition passive-active. That is, a passivity that occurs without the subject's intentional decision to be passive rather than active. Instead, this passivity comes to pass on "the hither side" of the distinction passive-active. Accordingly, I act without intending to, before any consideration of my desired result. My intentional action to pursue one course over another happens within Being and hence according to the rules of essential interest laid out above. What Levinas articulates with this gesture is a pre-conceptual non-space, "null-site [non-lieu]," (8) where every concept articulates the borders of a u-topia. This differentiation indicates a radical separation between the "hither-side" of existence, which is to be understood as the necessary diachrony in temporalization, and the synchronous aspects of existence, concerned with being and essence. Thus, the hither side of existence is found only through the holes it leaves in time and awareness, but it is not yet present as an accessible presence.

In Levinas's words, responsible subjectity "does not thematize the diachronical as though it were retained, remembered or historically reconstructed." Instead, it recognizes diachrony as "the refusal of conjunction, the non-totalizable, and in this sense, infinite."[66] Levinas goes on to say that the diachronical "can not be recuperated by reminiscence not because of its remoteness, but because of its incommensurability with the present." This absence never rejoins the present because it is, in a sense infinite, as opposed to the present whose "beginning and end [are] assembled in a thematizable conjunction." The diachronic, therefore lacks the ability to limit itself sufficiently to fit into a synchronic view of the world. It is excessive, refractory to the imagination, and ultimately incapable of being reduced to intentional language. Suffice it to say that this absence signals a space the subject cannot master, and as such, it poses a grave threat to the ego and the being.

[66] Ibid. 11 (all three citations in this paragraph)

This threat finds form and expression in the face of the other who turns to me. Her alterity calls on the alterity in me, revoking my power and ability to synchronize my experience: to be me. The face of the other calls me to respond on the "hither side" of intentionality, before I decide how to respond, I am already responding. The other's demand, according to Levinas, "provokes this responsibility against my will" (11). In this way "I," as ego, am substituted for the other "as a hostage. All my inwardness is invested in the form of a despite-me, for-another." Here we have an example of the otherwise than being: it indexes the state of being hostage. My responsibility before the face of the other is infinite and can never be fulfilled. Yet, I do not choose it. Indeed, as Levinas argues, the world begins not with "my place in the sun" but with obsession by and responsibility for alterity. Since, before being a subject, the being lives in alterity. As he says in his early text *Existence and Existents*, subjectivity arises when the being "takes a stand" in relation to the chaos of existence, thereby separating himself from that otherness. Therefore, it is the approach of the other calls on me, returning me to a state of radical passivity and responsibility. Revoking my ability to act, to assert my will, even my ability to accept or reject responsibility, Levinas call this response, which answers to the ungraspable and infinite transcendence of the other, a "trauma" [*traumatisme*] (12: 26).

In addition to diachrony and passivity, another crucial distinction Levinas isolates in *Otherwise*, concerns the irresolvable gap between the said and the saying. The differentiation between the saying and the said lies embedded in his conception of essence and beyond essence. A specific "said" – the thematizable elements of a speech act – can be examined synchronously. That is, after someone has spoken, their words can be written down and formed into sentences and paragraphs that must be read in time but

examined as though all the words happen at the same time. The said becomes a closed system that exists separate from the subject. On the other hand, the saying is inextricably bound to responsibility for the other and exposure. Saying names the turn of the I to the other in openness. That is, saying exposes the self to the power of the other, and supersedes or transcends any specific content that is transmitted. Levinas terms this "disinterestedness of subjectivity," this forgetting of the self, "a passivity," that oddly coexists with an obsession for the other. Ultimately, the ethical consists of offering oneself to the other "even in suffering" (12).

Levinas insists, and we shall return to this point later, that from this vantage point the face of the other expresses the trace of transcendence. The infinite itself cannot be expressed because "it transcends the present in which it commands me" (12). In whatever form, the subject cannot occupy the time of the infinite. This is not to say that "seeing infinity" is the end or goal of the ethical departure from self. Rather, it implies that in the approach of the other transcendence is glimpsed. Once again Levinas's text enacts the tension between philosophy and some other discourse, another language. Levinas's ambiguous placement of transcendence yields to the emergence inside the text to that which comes from outside of philosophy. Once more, Levinas's exposition yields to the emergence inside the text of that which comes from outside philosophy: the non-rational utterance. To use Jakobson's terms, Levinas moves from the cognitive to the conative[67] utterance: From a referential examination – that is most appropriate to philosophy – he

[67] Interestingly, the OED traces the etymology of conative to the latin root *conari* meaning, "to endeavor." This notion is very suggestive since an endeavor, a journeying forth, a "departure without return" are all Levinasian terms for describing the ethical movement of the subject in the encounter away from self and towards the other. At the same time, Levinas here enacts exertion rather than refer to it. This phrase referencing the trace of the transcendent in the face of the other testifies to Levinas's struggle against the linguistic and generic limitations of philosophy, or, what the Derrida of "Violence and Metaphysics" might name the limitations of speaking Greek.

moves to the second-person centered locution. As Levinas says, “At this moment language is serving a research conducted in view of disengaging the *otherwise than being* or *being’s other* outside of the themes in which they already show themselves…Language permits us to utter, be it by betrayal, this *outside of being*.”

Language that speaks about *something* speaks via a betrayal that, in each instance, molds out of the infinite complexity of alterity *a content*. That is, translating an event into memory, understanding, or even experience causes the loss of everything that cannot be expressed, condensed, and grasped. Hence, we can begin to understand those sentences where Levinas’s language and discourse escape the defined realms of philosophy as a non-thematized opening to an alterity that he calls the “pre-philosophical”; crucially, the pre-philosophical is not a naïveté with respect to philosophy, but an emphasis on the “hither-side” of philosophy. *Otherwise than Being*, therefore describes and performs the irreconcilability of the saying to the said, the failure of the said to refer adequately to the unsaid except through a betrayal. Levinas enacts this referential crisis through pushing the “Greek” language of philosophy as far as it can go towards a certain “Hebrew” language and also leaving it behind. Levinas describes his endeavor as discovering “whether one can at the same time know and free the known of the marks which thematization leaves on it by subordinating it to ontology” (7). Levinas sketches an answer when he gives the clearest statement of his method: “We must stay with the extreme situation of a diachronic thought….If, after the innumerable ‘irrefutable’ refutations which logical thought sets against it, skepticism has the gall to return…[it is] because a secret diachrony commands this ambiguous or enigmatic way of speaking” (7).

I argue that this diachrony can be uncovered and traced, at least partially through a reading of the dedications with which we began.

Holocaust, philosophy, mourning

This reading understands Levinas's dedications as a performative reproach to any ideology that seeks to master its limits. Obsessed by the "presentiment and memory of Nazi terror," these dedications reflect on the persecution of the six million and millions on millions, while hiding the personal obsession with an absent family. They are gone: The subject is displaced by the obsession, the philosophical by the non-philosophical, and the linguistic utterance by an *other* language. To approach this text, Levinas insists on a prior divergence that cannot be set in a chronology, as in a "before" the text, unless we understand this "before" as the most radical reference to both an object and its distance, difference from that which it names. These dedications, therefore, make reading the following text simultaneously possible and impossible through their reference to an event that inaugurates yet interrupts the logical unfolding they announce. For Levinas, interruption, the yielding of authorial control and allowing the other to speak without prior subjective thematization, is the condition of ethics. His dedications then do not "thematize the diachronical as though it were retained, remembered or historically reconstructed" (11). Rather, these utterances exceed these generic limitations by denying the reader the possibility of closure that a "name" gives. This "giving" is, however, no generosity since it forces that which is names to sacrifice that which it is for the goal of communication. An ethical giving, gives without a reciprocal exchange. That the "I" gets nothing in return, establishes the possibility of the gift. In this sense, through the Hebrew

dedication Levinas gives not only what can never be returned, but through sacrificing himself and the text to their memory, his dedication is an act of holiness. By turning towards the other in openness – in this case both the reader and the family – he exposes himself to a vulnerability that is without limit. This gift of openness and righteousness opens the text to me across the offered subjectivity of "Emmanuel Levinas," who in this moment holds nothing back. Since, "to what could not be contained there corresponds no capacity," I too am left without capacity if I pass through or beyond this preliminary threshold (11).

In this sense, the incommensurability between the Holocaust and philosophy, mourning and communication, Hebrew and Greek, the saying and the said, although written on the same page, indexes the simultaneity of radical distance and proximity, hence diachrony. This concurrence cannot be contained and does not correspond to any capacity on the part either of the reader or of the writer: that means that one cannot simply translate them into other terms. Rather, these dedications function as testimony. They testify to a past that is "immemorial, unrepresentable, invisible… [that] can not be recuperated by reminiscence not because of its remoteness, but because of its incommensurability with the present" (11). This traumatic break between the past and the present, occasioned by the Holocaust, left Levinas without his family. Their radical absence – radicalized by its distance, suddenness, and horror – remains unrecuperable not because he has forgotten its details, but because the present bears no relationship with traumatic loss. That which cannot be understood, known, approached, or represented defines diachrony, alterity, and here, loss. The personal trauma caused by the Holocaust transcends interested being, and the self contains an*other*. The "memory and

presentiment" form a trace structure that erases presence and by extension also Being and interest.[68]

Conclusion

These dedications, like his philosophy, respond to a traumatic wound centered on the years of the war, during which Levinas lost his family and his freedom. In his collection of "confessional" essays, *Difficult Freedom*, Levinas writes an intellectual biographical essay, "Signature," where he states that his philosophy has been obsessed by the "presentiment and the memory of the Nazi horror."[69] As in *Otherwise*'s dedications the phrase itself is marked by the absent middle it describes: that which falls between presentiment and memory, the present, the only possible ground for action. The "horror" is presented via the historical estimate of the number of Jews killed during the Holocaust, which is a horrifying figure, and through the shattering of the dedication phrase itself via the phrase, "closest among." The obsession breaks through in the Hebrew dedication, where horror is absent, but mourning continues eternally. Between these two dedications lies presentiment and memory, that which the mind can imagine and speak about – hatred, murder, history – and that which forever evades reflection – loss, mourning, absence. The political and colloquial speech of the first dedication – that names, identifies, and locates within a theme the event and aftermath of the Holocaust –

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[68] In Jewish mystical philosophy, an answer is given to how God, a perfect being created Earth, an imperfect place. Since everything exists in God, the argument goes, how can a part of God called the Earth contain so much evil? The answer given is that God withdrew himself out of a certain space in which he then created the universe. The Hebrew term for this is Tsimtsum, contraction. In this, I and others, find an originary Jewish source for Levinas's philosophy; since in this example, even God must yield his space, and therefore priority, to the other. Perhaps Levinas had this in mind when he penned the introduction to Otherwise than Being, and in particular, the line "to hear a God not contaminated by Being." *cf.* Seeman, Don "Otherwise Than Meaning: On the Generosity of Ritual."*Social Analysis*, Volume 48, Issue 2, Summer 2004, 55-71

[69] "Signature." *Difficult Freedom*

confronts the ancient Hebrew incantation for the deceased members of one's own family, leaving between them the absent space that the subject, Levinas fails to occupy.

Significantly, the diachronic thought that bridges these two radically alternate dedications fails to unite them. This text uses the "Greek" of philosophical, and political, speech while indicating an*other* text that would say similar things in Hebrew. The purpose is neither to replace the Hebrew or the French with the other, but through speaking one, to allow the trace of the other to appear momentarily, shifting the surface of the text enough to make alterity the very neighbor of the text. This ethical failure, that does not reduce the same and the other into another same, inaugurates this text's mission: to approach the other without reducing the distance between us. After all, Levinas constantly reiterates that the self and the other are never on the same plane, but that a dimension of height separates us. The other is on a higher plane than I am; he transcends me.

In his book *The Writing of the Disaster*, written partially as a response to *Otherwise than Being*, Maurice Blanchot describes "the disaster" as a phenomenon that is never present except as that which has always-already occurred or as an approach, in other words as either a memory or a presentiment. While through the many constructions and articulations of the word "disaster" it becomes clear that Blanchot has no sole event or idea in mind, the Holocaust clearly grounds most of the discussion. Indeed, similar to "the disaster," the Holocaust is an event without a present tense, which can never be isolated in a temporality or a history. Instead, the disaster is that which rushes to fill in the space that a forcefully evacuated subject leaves behind. Disaster, as Blanchot refers to it, crowds out the subject, occupying him not simply as an event occurring in the world;

rather, it happens simultaneously out and inside, bringing the outside in, thereby evicting the subjectivity inside. This creates an unbridgeable chasm between the subject that was and the one that will rush in to reoccupy the self as soon as the disaster dissipates. The disaster, Blanchot argues, never occurs to an individual because it cannot be contained at the moment of its occurrence.

The failure of this attempt to thematize the disaster and thereby contain and bind it into a narrative of subjective continuity informs our reading of Levinas's dedications and the correlative absence of further explicit reference to the Holocaust in the remainder of this text. Philosophy functions generically through containment, continuity, and surety. Discontinuity, interruption, and therefore, according to Levinas, Ethics cannot be signaled inside this Greek language because they will always be coded as a failure of the philosophy to communicate. Levinas's challenge therefore consists in indexing a beyond from within this Greek language. He enacts that beyond explicitly on and through the margin of the text, through dedications that are both part of and separate from the text proper. Readers can skip over them, yet they are the threshold of the text: they demand to be read before the remainder of the text. As opposed to epigraphs however, these dedications point simultaneously into and out of the text: in other words, they point equally to imminence and transcendence. Thereby, they force the reader to confront an impossibility, an irreconcilabilty, and a diachrony. Bridging the confessional with the philosophical – the Hebrew memorial of Levinas's disaster with our cultural inheritance of hatred and evil – the dedications force us to consider the status of alterity. Could it not be argued that the English text is a thematization of the non-thematizable and non-translatable Hebrew lament? To use Levinas's terms, the lament is a saying since there is

no essence to the locution except the exposure and the offering of suffering to the other (i.e. Levinas offers his suffering to his reader); while, the political remarks are always a said because there is no exposure and no offering, they occur in a language ostensibly closed by its rhetorical aims. Yet, Levinas is not interested in placing the one above the other, but rather, privileges this moment of indeterminacy as an originary ethical transcendence: he instructs us to "stay with the extreme situation of a diachronic thought" in which "one can at the same time know and free the known of the marks which thematization leaves on it" (7). There is no possible dialogue between these two texts; they are of a different order. Their linguistic difference is almost superceded by their grammatical oscillations: Which text is the accusative case and which the nominative? While the Hebrew text appears more anchored in the past than the other one, it is the Hebrew that speaks of a present condition, while the English speaks of something that has passed.

Perhaps it would be more useful for us to consider these dedications in terms of the same and the other, terms that ground Levinas's ethical philosophy. The same is everything that I understand, know, and believe, while the other is that about which I can neither know nor understand anything. Instead of encouraging my belief it throws it into doubt; instead, of bringing me to a place of power and ability, it *dis*ables me. This disability, and the radical passivity that accompanies it, is ethical. To be dominated the presentiment and memory of the other is ethical. That other approaches from out of the darkness of the Holocaust, not to be assimilated or made into political slogans but to elicit response. This encounter provokes fear and trembling, disability and passivity.

Conclusion

The Ethics of Testimonial Speech

> In Australia there are professional survivors, a woman called Mrs. Altman who will roll up her sleeve and show the tattoo to prove that, yes, she was in Auschwitz…I'll say "Mrs. Altman, you have suffered undoubtedly, and I'm sure that life in a Nazi concentration camp, where you say you were…was probably not very nice. And life in Dresden probably wasn't very nice, and probably life in Pforzheim wasn't very nice. But tell me one thing," and this is why I'm going to get tasteless with her, because you've got to get tasteless, "Mrs. Altman, how much money have you made out of that tattoo since 1945? How much money have you coined for that bit of ink on your arm, which may indeed be real tattooed ink?" (David Irving)

Testimony scares Holocaust deniers like David Irving. Unlike historical texts, primary source documents, artifacts and even destroyed concentration camps, Holocaust survivors speak to us in voices almost identical to those we hear daily. Yet, the events, experiences and trauma they describe transmit an otherworldly distance between our present and the victimization of the survivor. In Emmanuel Levinas's ethical construction, there is no common ground between myself and the Other: In our proximity, he transcends me. My subjectivity is always sacrificed to the needs of the other. The primordial violence that he cites, following Pascal, is the claim to "my place in the sun," which has already ignored the voice of the other through the assertion of the "mine." Testimony shatters my comfortable self-identity, my *mineness*. In giving voice to the traumatic interruption of subjectivity that left him punctured by incapacity, homelessness and isolation, the Other of testimony offers his suffering – and the repetition of his suffering – as a gift. Unable to receive this gift, I enter into an ever-increasing debt to the Other. Although I cannot completely hear his words, I can neither ignore them. The human voice of the survivor revokes the possibility of the hearer's

comfortable subjectivity; instead the hearer becomes a witness to the retraumatization of a Holocaust victim. Hence no amount of historical argumentation or obfuscation from a denier will divert my attention from the voice of suffering. So, Holocaust deniers attempt to discredit survivors before they speak, before I can hear them.

However, their intentional, ideological silencing of the victim's voice differs only by degree from a process that inevitably occurs in all contemporary subjects. The Holocaust, even at a removed of 65 years resists direct confrontation. The suffering of its victims, the violence of its perpetrators and the cruelty of the by-standers – a category that includes not only the polish and German neighbors of Jews and camps, but also the governments of Western Europe and the U.S. – remains largely unfathomable. Hence, it is easier to read testimony quickly, find conclusions and lessons, pity the survivor their suffering and re-commit ourselves to slogans. Truly listening to the suffering of Holocaust victims, on the other hand, necessarily interrupts the hearer's self-identity, his ability to remain himself. In subjectivity an ego strives to maintain contiguity through all challenges, disappointments and obstacles. Trauma, both the original event and the secondary effect of listening to the translated event in testimony, shatters the subject's ability to master his surroundings, thereby rending the ego's continuous narrative of self-identity. In trauma's retelling that shattering is transmitted through language, gesture and lacuna. I am disempowered by what I hear. My inability to hear the victim's voice emerges from my inability to cease existing enough for the victim's experience to fill me. Even in the face of the other I encounter in testimony, I cannot stop being me. For this reason, my debt is irredeemable; I cannot completely listen to the victim, nor can I accept

the gift of his testimony. The very nature of subjectivity prevents anything but a facile reading; an ethical reading, therefore, requires an interruption of subjectivity.

The testifier speaks, and I listen. In this case, the testifier, Frida Ephrati, is my grandmother. She escaped the strafing Nazi planes that attacked Lwow in late June 1941. At sixteen she left her little sister sitting on the porch of their apartment building, her mother and father huddling in the basement and ran for the Russian border in the hope of finding safety. Her experiences over the next five years are not my experiences. In a certain sense they are not hers either. Struggling for bare existence the subject is deprived of agency, choice and autonomy. From her incredibly brief experience as a Red Army medic – cut short by her inability to stomach the sight of a recently legless soldier spraying blood like sheets in the wind away from the crevices that once were hips – to her train ride to Tashkent – during which a kind Russian woman fed her from her meager stores while the car's other Jewish inhabitants spared her nothing – her experiences belong to a past she neither owns nor can leave.

The Holocaust, of course, never left her. I remember when, as a fourteen year-old boy I mentioned my recent Bar Mitzvah, she turned to me in anger and practically shouted, from mere feet away, "There is no God!" This memory and my perspective of her life inform the following translation and transcription of her testimony. In my experience she was always a very kind and loving woman who had "survived" the Holocaust in many ways: she divorced the husband married hurriedly during the war and remarried to a man she deeply loved and continues to love. She raised her two daughters who live complete lives of their own. She worked for years in a paper factory as a bookkeeper. At some point in her late sixties she whispered her wartime experience into a

dictation machine in short segments. The telling is address to her sixteen-year-old granddaughter and begins, as she insists all stories begin, with “Once upon a time.”

Whereas this beginning is entirely conventional for a fairy tale it belies a radical uncertainty in a text of testimony. It seems that testifiers, no less than hearers of testimony, do not know how to answer two essential questions: What is the role of testimony and the goal of the testifier? Certainly, our answer to this question informs the interpretation, or as I have referred to it elsewhere throughout this dissertation, the translation of the texts of testimony. Many Holocaust testifiers cite a responsibility to tell the story of those who were murdered. “The world must know,” one often hears. So, one must ask oneself before speaking about testimony, “what is it that the world must know”? That people suffered uselessly, that the world was silent, that human beings are capable of burning thousands of murdered bodies day after day – are these the lessons the sufferers want us to learn? When Jean Améry tells of his loss of “trust in the world,” which caused him to forever lose his faith in humanity, he follows with a different lesson, that to truly transmit the reality of torture demands a retorturing. In other words, there is no truth but in the thing. What is he telling us and why? When Aharon Appelfeld translates his experiences as a lost child fleeing the Nazis through the forests of Romania through modifying at times a single detail – such as changing the sex of his character from the boy he was into a girl – is he pointing out, as he claims, a radical difference between testimony and literature, or is he indicating a more basic feature of human *being*. If he wishes to write “literature” why stay so close to the specific geography of that event that erased his childhood and his family?

If these questions are not only unanswerable but also unapproachable, what is the role of the ethical reader? The following appendix serves as a very personal exploration of something that must perhaps be answered personally, certainly subjectively. As my dissertation demonstrates, there is no objective position from which to view the text of testimony except through a great violence to the Holocaust survivor and victim. This is the "objectivity" of the Holocaust denier who, turning to reason as his alibi insists that if something is too horrible to imagine it probably did not happen. His question is "does it make any sense for the Nazi's to have done that?" He attacks the survivor by pointing out small discrepancies either internal to the testimonial text or between that text and the historical record. He claims to do all of this in the name of an objective search for "facts." If testimony says anything, I argue it cautions us to resist simple answers. Testimony describes, and repeats in a smaller way, the powerful interaction of historical forces, thought, subjectivity, domination and humiliation to strip a human being of his ability to *be* human. For this reason, testimony always fails to reveal its subject as its readers fail to hear the testifier's voice. However this failure is ethical. The turn to an other in openness, the responsibility I have to the face of the other and to the useless suffering of the other is always ethical, in spite of or perhaps due to the certainty of my failure. That trauma demands to be phrased does not guarantee the subject's ability to speak, nor the listeners ability to hear.

In the ensuing appendix I present four hours of my grandmother Frida Ephrati's testimony. Translating and transcribing these recordings I strove to attend to her voice, surroundings, interactions with the micro-cassette recorder. Generally she would speak through an anecdote and then stop, but at certain moments she stops mid narrative as if

choosing her words “off the air.” Her intent to tell a strictly chronological narrative is undone repeatedly as she returns to fill a time she had glossed over. One of the limitations of the media is that I could never know how long the recorder had actually been off between segments. I have no way of knowing whether she took it with her to work finding brief moments supplement a narrative she was in the process of telling. I suspect that she recorded them in the evenings on the Kibbutz Nir David where she continues to live, although she suffers now from dementia.

I include her testimony for several reasons. First, it relates a Holocaust experience that, while not unique, is not often discussed. Secondly, it represents my attempt to engage the ethical themes this dissertation raises on the most difficult subject matter, that closest to me. Thirdly, the life and testimony of my grandmother, my *safta* Frida forms a pillar of who I am. To a reader of this dissertation, my own subjectivity is clearly relevant. Finally, I have no other answer to the demands this text places upon me. This dissertation may be in its entirety a partial answer to this same demand. Of course, I translate, transcribe and publish her testimony as a betrayal of her initial recording. It is addressed to Talonet Sheli (My beloved Tal), that is, to one person who is neither me nor almost all of you. Not only that, but all my intentions to “fully attend” to her voice fail to accomplish their goal. My text is therefore unfaithful, as my obligation to her remains unfulfilled. Yet, I can only hope that the violence of my appropriation and betrayal falls somewhere on a continuum of the ethical. I beg you to inductively infer the reality behind my failures. This is something I think Frida might wish for as well.

Appendix

The Translated and Transcribed Testimony of Frida Ephrati

Talonet Sheli,

I very much want to tell you the story you asked to hear, and I really want it to be interesting so that you will have the patience to listen until the end. The story itself is not smooth [*chalak*] because I am not giving a speech [*noemet*], and it is very difficult to record things that do not have advanced preparation [*hachana mookdemet*].

[stop]

Like all stories, I will also begin with "Once upon a time…" I will tell you about this distant time, all that my memory – which is not among the great ones – remembers. What I remember, I remember my grandmother. Her name was Regina Brenig, and she had seven kids. My grandmother lived in a small town in Poland, in Galicia that was called Dobromyl. Over the later years, my grandmother became a symbol, not only to her children, but to all those who knew her. She became, during WWI, a widow with seven kids. Her husband Abush contracted some kind of disease that was epidemic at the time, and died.

After she was left alone, she wanted to raise her children, and so she became a merchant – maybe she was also a merchant before that, I don't know. In any case, much of her time was devoted to traveling for buying and selling – mostly buying – inventories that she imported from Czechoslovakia mostly. This I know from my mother's stories. In order to sustain this, this battle for existence, my grandmother retained a cook, a housekeeper and a nanny. Take into account, that all of these things in 1916, that at the

time this was a house that was advanced above and beyond the norms for a small town and the people that lived there. Her eldest daughter was Sara. Sara is the mother of Abi Miller who changed his name to Misha. After her came my mother, Matilda. Other than them, there were seven people in the house, but I won't tell you about all of them. What I want to relate is that in the Second World War they were all married with children and in good financial situations, and not one of them remained.

My father came, I think, from the same town. He was born in 1900. His father also died during WWI, and he, at age 13, became his family's main earner. Their family remained in dire straights [*kshat yom*]. He made his living in a leather shop – in any case, this is what I remember. That he had a leather shop, and from my early childhood I remember that the business didn't do well, and they made significant changes.

[stop]

My grandparents on my father's side, I don't remember. In any case, my grandfather was no longer, almost certainly, alive, and even my grandmother laid sick for a long time in the home of the woman you know as Rachel Sidon, whose mom was my grandfather's sister who, in her last days, was also sick and also died in Rachel's home... She had a mother also named Regina who she took care of her. My father also had two additional sisters in Poland, and there was a brother or brothers in Romania, or at least they moved to Romania after the war. In any case, I didn't know them and never saw them.

[stop]

Everyone called grandmother Regina, Rifkele, and she had the strongest influence on my life – actually on my parent's life – but through them, also on me. She was a symbol, as I have already said, of an independent woman that knows how to decide and act. And

many of these characteristics, she bequeathed to my mother and to Avi's mother. In any case, she knew how to care [worry] about/for everyone. In particular, in that small town, she cared for her brothers, my grandmother's brothers, because their situation was not good, and she would always extend help to them.

[stop]

Grandmother's married name was Brenig but she came from a home whose name was Blau or Blum. I don't know which. I mean they were both names they used because of some problem with marriages at the rabbinate and marriages in the court-offices, such that everyone whose name was either Blau or Blum belonged to the same family. I remember this in relation to Marcus Blau of Afula, who was my grandmother's brother in law, and Baruch Blum who died in Germany who was also a brother in law of grandmother. In other words, both of them were uncles to my mother.

My early childhood was spent in Przemysl, a small city, where Rachel's parents also lived. As I have already said, Rachel's mother was my father's sister, and between us we had a good relationship. My father had a leather store, and after it wasn't doing well, my father sold the business – that was in '33 – and visited Palestine in order to check out our options for immigrating here. After that visit, my parents decided that we – by that time my sister was alive, Rachel was her name and she was 3.5 years younger than me – would move to Israel, and so we all moved in the mean time to live with grandmother in Krakow after my parents sold their apartment and all their inventory. They started saving money in order to be able to move to Palestine as capitalists. That was their idea. That was the only way then, when Palestine's borders were closed. So I remember in '33 or

’34, we moved to Krakow and moved in with my grandmother to await the arrival of all the necessary papers that my parents had applied to the powers for.

At that time, I got very sick with diphtheria and scarlet fever, two difficult diseases, and my condition was very rough. I was in the hospital, and my mother was in the hospital with me for six weeks. At the same time, my mother’s brother, Hersh, who had a nice children’s clothing store in Krakow, made some kind of business deal or asked my parents for a loan, and since at this time, while waiting for their papers, they weren’t using their cash, they loaned him money. I guess it was probably all of the money that they had, or at least a big part. When the papers arrived – and I was feeling better meanwhile – Hersh wasn’t able to return the money to my parents. His business got complicated, or he lost the money. I don’t remember what the problem was, but the fact remained: my parents were left without a house and without jobs. At that point, my grandmother left and traveled to Lwow where she bought a store and an inventory and started a cotton shop in which my parents and my mother’s younger brother, Bonu, were partners.

[stop]

That was the store that started earning money. My parents started, Abba mainly, started other business dealings outside of the store. In short, we became independent people. At the same time, Bonu lived in an apartment not far from the store in Lwow, and there he met the sister of Visha Lota, and they got married. From her, she was my only relation to Visha.

[stop]

One can say that my life, up until the Second World War, can be divided into two parts. One part was my childhood in Przemysl that ended in ’33, ’34, and our life in Krakow was the last point of that life, when I got sick and when we prepared to immigrate to Israel: an immigration that never happened. The second part was our life in Lwow. Later, when I began to reflect on my life, I arrived at the conclusion that my life divided into seven-year periods, as it says in the Tanach: “Seven good years and seven bad years.” But seven years and another seven years, until ’41 when I left Lwow were very good years. The first seven years in Przemysl are very distant: I was a young girl, and things did not stand out before me… In any case, they don’t now stand out so distinctly as my period in Lwow. That was essentially the stage of my development. In Przemysl, the memories that stand out are our visits to Rachel Kiddon, with her family, my father’s sister, whose name was Rasa (her name was Regina but everyone called her Rasa). She had four kids, and Rachel was the oldest among them, and I played with her younger sisters. The way between our and Rachel’s house, her parent’s house – Baruch was her father; he was very smart and warm – this path I remember particularly well because it was a long way, and we would do it on foot, and my parents would visit them until I was very tired and wanted to fall asleep. I even think that Abba would carry me all the way home because I don’t remember the way home on my own two feet. At some later stage my sister Rachel was born, and somehow I don’t remember anything from Rachel’s childhood in Przemysl that was parallel to mine. Rachel, I remember only from Lwow. Both of us were by that time, young women. We fought, as young women do, about all kinds of ridiculous things. I remember that she would ask me to take her with me to

places I went, but I was the older sister, and I didn't want to take her with me. And she was the good soul in my eyes, and I was the less good one.

In Lwow, this whole period in Lwow from '34 to '41 is very bright: full of light and love. Full of things that I discovered as a youth, the beauty of life, and my parents afforded me every opportunity that a childhood in a big city can experience. In the area of culture, education… Both of us, Rachel and I, studied at a Jewish school where only Jewish kids studied. And our parents did it so that we wouldn't feel the anti-Semitism that one could feel in every place in Lwow. My parents, in any case felt it, and tried, up to a certain age to protect us from it. Rachel was, as I mentioned, three-and-a-half years younger than me, and we tried to live, us two, each of us in her own way. Rachel loved her youth movement and was born to be involved in social things, while I was buried in my studies. I learned at home, outside of school, things that mostly boys are taught. My father had hoped that his first child would be a boy, but he had a daughter, and he gave to his daughter all that he thought a boy should receive. This means that he taught me Tanach, Torah and Gemarrah. I had a private teacher who came, and I learned it eagerly. Outside of this I learned to play piano, along with Rachel who also went to classes. Later, in '39 I transferred to a musical high school that ran parallel to the high school I had gone to.

Otherwise, we were members at all the operas and plays and concerts. We spent a lot of time in sports. In the summers I played tennis, as did Rachel. Each one with her own group. In the winters we skied and ice-skated. I did it a little less. I remember it more in Przemysl, but in Lwow, I did it less. At the same time I started to get interested in boys. Until '39 boys and girls learned separately, boys were separate. But after '39…

in ’39 essentially the Second World War started, but because of the Ribentrop-Molotov arrangement, the Russians stopped in Poland and the Germans stopped, and we had two years of quiet. But in ’39, when the Russians entered Lwow, because this area was theirs according to the agreement, they started introducing their own subjects and teachers into the schools both at the Jewish school and the secular one I then attended. They thought that Jews should get a break because they did well in all the subjects. Then, in the first year, they decided that in our school the language of instruction would be Yiddish. These two years, ‘39-‘40 and ‘40-‘41, I can say that we learned very little. The level of study, compared to what it had been before, fell. The Russians didn’t bring with them a high level of education. They canceled learning about the humanities, which was a large part of our education up to ‘39 – like Yiddish and literature – and they shortened the school year from twelve to ten: this essentially caused us to slow down. We fell back and waited to finish the years, but we hadn’t learned enough, for example in math. Either this or something else caused us not to have our heads in our studies, and after they changed the language of instruction to Yiddish, that year of school turned into a year of jokes, that I, until this day, remember and still laugh at the memory.

Our parents, with us kids in Lwow spoke Polish, amongst themselves Yiddish. From this I learned Yiddish, but I knew a little Yiddish only as the language of my parents when they didn’t want us kids to understand. Later they didn’t do this anymore and would just talk amongst themselves freely. But, to teach in Yiddish, physics or chemistry, this was above and beyond what we could expect our teachers – who were all university educated with two degrees in Polish – to give us. The classes then, were essentially as follows: one kid stood outside as a lookout for the principle that the

Russians brought from the Ukraine, who they stuck in one of the rooms near the bathrooms. This Jew was short and red, and we made sure that this red principle wouldn't come close to the class. One kid would give the signal and the instruction in Polish would cease and the teacher would try to teach for a moment in Yiddish in a very horrible way. I remember, as if it was today, a particular course in math, or maybe physics, but in any case, we were talking about the roots of, how to extract the square root of something. In any case, she translated root in Yiddish in the following manner: "*Und jetzt, liebe kinder, aroisshlecken abortsdu*." And whoever doesn't understand Yiddish doesn't know what that really means, but us, the kids in the class, boys and girls, started laughing. It was completely hysterical, and we even went home dying of laughter because "*aroisshlecken abortsdu*" really didn't belong in a class on physics or math.

In general, we were sick of our lessons that were added to the curriculum designed to teach us about air defenses [*anti-averit*]. These classes had to be held in Russian or Ukrainian because the booklets were printed only in these languages. The expert in this area was Yulek Kamerer, my friend who sat in front of me. He was taking courses on air defenses in town, and on this occasion he learned some Ukrainian. In these courses, the teacher sat down, and Yulek stood up in front of the class and spoke. The teacher didn't even understand a single thing that he was saying. In any case, he wasn't talking about this topic at all: he told all kinds of jokes and made up various fantasies on all sorts of topics except the one at hand, not about defenses. So how was it possible to sit and listen to this course with a straight face while watching the teacher who made as though she was following along while Yulek just talked shit for all 45 minutes that he

stood in front of the class? These classes would fall apart because of our laughter, or because of any other excuse that someone made up.

One time, just to play a prank on our teacher we put all of our erasers in the oven, the ovens in winter were – as they were built all throughout Poland and eastern Europe – they were very tall and when they were on with the flu closed and heating the room, the smoke would go into the classroom. The smell of burning erasers was unbearable, so we had to leave the room, and so the class ended because when it was -15° or -20° outside and you opened all the windows it was impossible to learn in those classrooms.

So basically, there were constantly such interruptions that didn't allow us to be students paying attention to class. And all the political changes that were in the air made it difficult for us to pay attention, so that we tried to escape from reality. Escaping from reality meant essentially escaping from all kinds of fears and anxieties that were in the air, from rumors that came from German-ruled Poland brought by Jews who would escape to Lwow. There were all kinds of accusations and rumors about the conditions in Germany. All the abuses of Jews from Poles and Ukrainians. When one speaks about Poles and Ukrainians, it is important to note that Poles hated Ukrainians and vice versa. But both together were anti-Semites and hated the Jews. Lwow, a city of 300,000 people was divided into thirds by all these three groups and many times it happened that if someone, if a Jewish couple would come across a group of young anti-Semites, would recognize that they were Jews, a young woman, the most common thing was that they would pinch her butt. They were just going for a walk in Lwow's famous center. This is just one example. I didn't go walking there, but I also passed there many times, in all kinds of places because that was where the big, nice stores were. And also the political

situation was very unclear. Something approaching was in the air. I remember many times that I sat in my room that I shared with Rachel in the house on the third floor and I thought, I looked around, say at Rachel who was asleep in her bed, and I was on my bed, and everything was purple and mom worried that everything would match and I was always concerned in the evenings, at these quiet hours before I went to sleep I would fearfully wonder, “Is it possible that all this is temporary? That it is all about to end?” I was afraid about this, and I couldn’t stop thinking about these things. All of us would put off these thoughts and because of this, we didn’t learn a lot and we didn’t have the chance to surpass the level of learning that was brought to Lwow.

In the second school year, ‘40-‘41, the Russians decided that Yiddish wasn’t working and changed the language of our classes to Ukrainian. And Ukrainian I knew much less well than I knew Yiddish. In one season, we learned both Ukrainian and Russian. Both of these Slavic languages have many words in common but the difference is mostly in accent. The same word in Russian, built essentially of the same letters, is pronounced with an accent with a different emphasis than the same word in the other Slavic language. So, I remember that the Ukrainian teacher, when she would get mad at me would say, “Rosner, you speak in such a way that you dry out my ears.” That’s how you say it in Ukrainian. It’s difficult to translate. In any case, I didn’t do well in these two languages.

In addition to this, I was at that time busy with boys and my parents were very careful that I shouldn’t spend a lot of time with one boy, as if I would fall in love and immediately get married. If the boy, on top of this, wasn’t a good student, this was really a complete failure in their eyes. I remember for a while dating one boy named Millek. He

went to the US, and Rena, my friend from school who lives in New York is in communication with him. He passed the war in the forest, thick forests [*yaarot, achagav be yaarot avim*?][33] and also Rena, she was hidden underground, and Rena says that she stole him from me. Millek used to come to our house, and my parents were given to understand that he wasn't a good student. As soon as my father found this out, he came into my room as soon as Millek left and said that if Millek ever again came to our house, he would throw him down all the stairs. From the third floor! And I understood this threat as realistic and imminent. I didn't have the strength to tell Millek, not that I had any real interest in him, but I didn't know how to get rid of him. But, the next time he came over, I sat at the piano, we had a grand piano at home and I practiced my scales while Rachel sat at the table with us. I thought that if, for two hours I practiced my scales, alone, he would get tired of it and leave. But it didn't work out this way; the first person to leave was Rachel, because she understood what I was doing and fled to the kitchen to laugh. Somehow, I kept up this game and the issue with Millek ended. My dad came home and didn't throw him down the stairs, but somehow I stopped meeting with him.

In June '41, when the Second World War broke out, in fact, for us, on the twenty-first of June, it was a beautiful day, that we were supposed to spend at the pool, but first of all, I was supposed to go with all my friend to get our grades at school. But, everything happened differently. Many weeks earlier we had heard about the battles that were happening between the Germans and the Russians, and that the Germans were making additional strides. Actually this wasn't a couple of weeks but only a couple of days before that, and the air was very tense on that same day. I remember that I went to the store and stood in line for bread, because there was already a big rush on all kinds of food products,

and Emma had sent me to buy bread. When I returned with the bread and entered the stairwell, standing in the door was the doorman. In our three-floor apartment building downstairs there lived only two families, non-Jews, one Polish and one Ukrainian. The guard was Ukrainian, and he was drunk like always. He saw me going up with the bread and shouted, “Your time is over now, now we are the masters.” When I went upstairs with the bread, my parents were in the living room. The night before we were in the basement. We went upstairs in the morning. I had gone to get bread while my mother made the beds, and I remember Abba stood by the windows in the living room, and I said to my father, “Abba, lets escape. Let’s escape on foot towards Russia,” and my father broke into tears saying, “If you can go save yourself, go, our situation is hopeless.” This was, in essence the last sentence I heard from my father, “Escape yourself.”

At the same moment, somehow, my friend Marila, who was my neighbor on the third floor, called to me from the yard saying that she had seen a lot of our classmates going to school. I must say that the school was very close to home and the kids all lived in the area of our apartment. On our street many of them lived, and Yulek lived a couple buildings away and was also a student at the same school. It was essentially a Jewish neighborhood. So, I said to my mother, “Emma, I just need to go for a few minutes to school, I will be right back.” I ran downstairs, and my sister, Rachel was sitting in the stairwell reading a book. If there is something I regret, and have regretted my whole life, is that I didn’t ask Rachel, who was sitting reading a book, to run with me to school. Because, as it worked out, this run of mine to school ended up being the last time I was ever at home. I suppose that if Rachel had come with us, with me, maybe both of us would have survived. It is hard to know, but it is possible.

When I arrived at school that morning in June, the twenty-first of June, there were already a lot of kids from other classes. All of us were in the yard waiting for the appearance of the red principle who lived in the first floor at the corner of the house. He came out. He came out from his building and stood up there.

[stop]

He stood on the balcony – it was a long balcony that ran the length of the entire building – and he delivered a patriotic speech saying that we are young, and must defend our city and to help the army dig anti-tank ditches and for this reason soon transportation would arrive to take us to the outskirts of Lwow where we would be able to help. After some time, a truck came and we got onboard, now I am talking about myself and Yulek and Isek Isner, Isek who sat with Yulek on one bench, and from our class us three boarded on the truck. There were lots of other kids but from other classes, and we drove, we didn't know where to. In any case we saw that we were driving to the outskirts of Lwow.

What we felt was that we were being fired upon. I don't know how they knew that we were Jews, but people were firing on us from buildings' windows, or perhaps the street. In any case, it was afternoon by the time we arrived at the outskirts, and take into consideration that this was June, and the sun stood before sundown, so it was evening. We had lost our sense of time. Then it turned out that nothing was prepared: we had nothing to do. We were standing next to a young meadow on the edge of town and there were no organizers for anything, no one to tell us what to do. Nothing, just us and the trucks.

Eventually they told us to get back onto the trucks, and we boarded and drove back to Lwow. Meanwhile it was night. So, someone began to worry about us, either the

teachers or the administrators from the school, they worried about us and in order for us not to become targets of fire they brought us to the basement of the University that was near our school. We sat in that basement, and I remember that I sat with Yulek on a wooden bench and either we fell asleep or dozed off, in any case we didn't even wonder what would happen to us: We were in shock.

All of a sudden at four in the morning there was a phone call, and after that someone, I don't remember who, someone hysterically shouted at us: "Escape back out of Lwow! The Germans have entered Lwow, they are about to enter the town." We then knew what Germans were and what Jews were. We had heard about what had happened to the Jews who had remained on the other side of Poland in German hands. So, we started to run. On the way we passed hills of glass, and we had to pass through a *passage* with a glass roof and the explosions had shattered the glass roofs and the vitrines – of course in the dark we couldn't see exactly what had happened – and the way through which they lead us passed through mountains of glass. And I had on only summer sandals and a summer dress that was in poor shape, which I had put on that morning to mop the floors, and I didn't have anything else. What I did have, in the end, was my report card that I had gotten from school – it wasn't really even mine, but rather my sister's because our teacher hadn't yet arrived at school. So, what I had in my hand was my sister's report card.

And, we ran. We ran through the streets and through the piles of glass, and I remember that I was itching from my feet up to my ankles, and I was bleeding. And Yulek said that when we sat he would look at my feet, but meanwhile we were running. And like this we arrived at the same village where we had been a few hours earlier with

the trucks. We stood at the edge of the road that led from Lwow east. We were then many young people, and someone stood up and said, I don't remember who, "You shouldn't walk on the streets as a large group, because the Germans will be bombing the roads. We should only walk in groups of ten." So, they arranged us in tens, and like this ten-at-a-time we walked along the roads.

Really, German planes passed by low to the ground and Yulek who passed a course, as I said, for anti-aircraft defense, became an expert on German planes and stood in the middle of the street and tried to tell whether the planes were German or Russian until the planes started to fire. We jumped to the side of the road and hid in a ditch with high sides and waited until we could stand and continue walking. I think that there were some tragedies, not in our group of ten, but in others that they were shot at. In any case, our ten decided to continue barefoot since everyone's feet were swollen from the walk. So Izek Eisner had a bag. He had taken the bag when we were in the truck going to the outskirts so that we could stop at his grandfather's bakery and fill the bag up with bread, but he didn't get off the truck and didn't take bread and we didn't see the bakery, and in any case it was probably long closed up. But what he did have was the bag. So, into this bag we all placed our shoes and we decided that everyone of our group of ten would take turns carrying this bag as we walked. So, we continued like this for about thirty kilometers east in the direction of the city Zolochiv, until my turn to carry the bag arrived.

[stop]

The bag was very heavy.

[stop]

Because of its weight, I remained behind, far behind the group that had continued walking. Yulek, who always tried to help me, noticed that I was falling behind the group and ran towards me to help me carry my heavy load. As Yulek arrived, a truck passed by going back west towards Lwow. I don't know if the truck stopped on its own or if I stopped it. In any case, he stood next to us, and I without a second thought, told Yulek, "Yulek, we are returning home." And I threw the bag with the shoes into the truck, jumped in and Yulek after me. Like this we began to return in the direction from which we had come. We managed to get only about ten kilometers back in that direction when we struck upon the Russian army in retreat from Lwow. This encounter with the unit of tanks fleeing Lwow was a sight, the likes of which I had never seen before nor after. The tanks and the other military vehicles rode along in a thirty-meter-wide wave, or maybe more, took over the street and rolled on both sides of the streets. In this manner they drove forward, making easy targets for the German planes that flew overhead bombing the Russian tanks. At some point there came the order to stop. All the wave, the whole wide line of tanks and trucks and every other – I don't know which types because, at the time, I was not used to paying attention to what went on around me. The Russians stopped us and ordered us off the stopped truck, and the Russian army took the truck we had ridden in and drove it into a trench. And like this we were left on the street, Yulek and I, with the bag of shoes that belonged to our group that was who knows where, and we didn't know what to do.

I, who had already removed my sandals, couldn't put them back on since my feet had swelled. I, in my life, had never gone barefoot, at least not in the road. So, I sat in the road and cried. When the Russian troops made their way up to us, stopped directly

opposite us was a Russian ambulance. I ran to the driver and asked him to let Yulek and I ride with them, since we had decided that if the Russian soldiers' were retreating, there could no longer be any reason to return to Lwow – we knew what it meant that the Russians were leaving – but the driver said that he wasn't allowed. So I told Yulek that maybe, if we offered ourselves to the Russian army as volunteers, than perhaps as soldiers they would let us ride. So, we offered to volunteer, but he told us that he wasn't authorized to accept volunteers, unless we could get the officer to agree. I think that the driver was very scared, he was short with dark hair. I think he was Uzbecki or something. In any case, he didn't really know how to behave or what to do. In any case Yulek ran to find the officer. It took him about twenty minutes or something like that, I don't know where he went, but all of a sudden I heard the Russian order to move out. "Forward." The ambulance started moving, while I was still sitting on the road. At the same moment, I saw Yulek returning. He spoke to the driver and told him the Colonel, Lieutenant Popov, the officer, whose name the driver had given us, had authorized our participation and allowed us to join the Red Army and allowed us to get on the ambulance. So, Yulek and I threw the bag of shoes, that for some stupid reason we still carried, and Yulek and I also jumped in the ambulance and we started driving back to the east. That is the moment that starts Yulek and my travels into the war, into the unknown and into the incredibly brutal. When Yulek and I, many years later, met up after many years when we moved to Israel, Yulek told me that this was a heroic moment in our lives. I think that he was right.

[stop]

We sat in the ambulance as it drove forward. Meanwhile it got dark. We hadn't had anything in our mouths the whole day, but we weren't hungry. All the experiences that

had happened over the course of the day were above and beyond a normal person's feelings; in any case, we lost our sense of time. I only know that it got dark. And at a certain point we stopped. It was a tank unit that we had joined. And they called all the soldiers together, and we stood in a row, all the soldiers in the unit. I'm not sure if it was a complete unit, in any case the row wasn't very long. Yulek and I wore civilian clothes. After they told us that we could join their ranks as volunteers, there came an order that we be dressed in military clothes. And so I received pants and a shirt and the smallest size they could find of shoes and that was number 40. In any case, we also got some rags; they called them *onutze*, which were like socks that were designed to fill in the empty space in our shoes. And Yulek's was easier than mine, of course. After we dressed we drove on.

I don't know what this is called, but the specific group of soldiers that we were with got an order to continue driving since we were informed that in the region the Germans had dropped a *dessan*, which was a unit of paratroopers, and we got the order to capture them. So our tank unit stopped in a certain place – that wasn't really a place – any case it was on the way, and they told us to run into a field. We all ran into the field. And we all lay down inside a trench that was in the field, not that we dug, it might have been a water canal or some other sort in the field. And I was very curious to see what was a paratrooper and how Germans looked in that function, so I raised my head. And Yulek hit me on the head and said, "Have you gone crazy! What are you doing?" I told him, "I really want to see a paratrooper!" He told me "Didn't you notice that the commander sitting opposite us in the trench has his automatic pointed at us? Don't you understand that they suspect we are German spies! He immediately knew how to understand this situation: it occurred to me that they could suspect such a thing *of us*. In any case this was

a fact, and I very quickly lowered my head back down. We never met up with the German paratroopers. They said that maybe, in a certain place, they later explained that there had been a battle with all kinds of atrocities. I didn't hear or see, and I almost certainly slept until morning in that same place, in that same ambulance that we rode in and that served us as a home.

The next morning we resumed driving to the direction West. Yulek and I received a membership in the first aid unit, and I got a large first-aid bag, as did Yulek. We were supposed, as volunteers, to be [*sanitarim*] in the army. The bag was almost my size: It was heavy and large. But when it was lying in the ambulance, we had no problem with it. So we drove in the same way. Maybe the width of the wave narrowed because the distance between the vehicles also grew smaller. They drove while almost touching the two cars to each other. They drove in a skewer like that. All of a sudden German planes appeared out of nowhere and began bombing and shooting at us. [TV news begins in the background] So, everyone jumped from their ambulances and other vehicles, and tanks and others just stopped. In any case, Yulek and I jumped into a trench, and then the Germans bombed all the, they shot into all the vehicles in a row like a string of beads and all the vehicles were in flames in the street. Our ambulance was also in flames. As was the fueling truck that I only now realized had been driving behind us. Possessed by fear, I buried my face in my hands and didn't look, but Yulek began to shout at me "Fire is pouring down on you!" and I thought, "Why is he using such military language?" I though he was talking about gunfire from the planes.

Tape 2

I began to understand that he wasn't using military slang: he saw that fire was pouring from the gasoline cistern and that I was closer to this lava of burning benzene. And so he yelled at me. We began, the two of us, to flee into the field. I was in my size 40 shoes and all the rags that were wrapped around my feet, didn't help make the shoes fit better, the ground was soft and wet my shoes sank into it as we ran. Somehow we both managed to arrive at a big bush that was very close, maybe ten meters away, and we lay beneath it. We then noticed that by the bush there was lying, or perhaps less lying than jumping, a man who was screaming in Russian, of course, "Children, go and enjoy yourselves. Go and enjoy yourselves." And this man had in one hand links of sausage that he had taken most likely as the cook of the division, and in his other hand he held a bag of sugar broken into pieces. And like this, with two hands full of all this good stuff, he jumped, apparently in shock at all the fighting going on, and so I took a link sausage from him and wrapped it around my hand and in my military hat I put many of pieces of sugar and like that we continued to flee into the field, the plowed field, in order to flee as far as possible from the road on which burned all the vehicles and among them our ambulance and the bag of shoes with which we originally fled.

I don't know how much time this whole situation stretched on, but we found, during our flight, or during our return to the street, another ambulance with another driver who shouted that he had an injured soldier, and we left the road into the field where there stood two soldiers who held between them a third soldier who had no pants and, and and had a large whole where his butt should have been. Blood poured from him: there was a wind that waved his legs in the air and the blood also streamed in the wind [*vegam ha'daf kacha hitnafnef ba'ruach*]. At that same moment my task as a nurse ended. I couldn't

look at blood and buried my face in my hands while Yulek ran with two with two first-aid bags to the injured soldier and after brought him to the same ambulance where we were, and they brought him, and we began to drive him to the hospital in *Zuotsu.* That was the closest hospital.

In the meantime, there were a couple more explosions and bombings and again we fled the road with the injured soldier and fled into a trench where there was a bunch of poison weed. But at that time, who noticed those types of things. And afterwards we returned anyways to the same ambulance and began driving. Meanwhile it was dark, because the day had ended and we didn't pay attention. In these times, calculations of time lose all consideration; there is no hourly consideration. There is only an awareness of continuation, I don't know, of horror extending, of something happening, something happening that is beyond the ordinary senses of a person.

When we arrived, I don't know, I guess it was 10 p.m. When we arrived at the hospital with the injured soldier and another injured person we had picked up on the way from the road. We left them there and drove back. Me, I don't remember the drive back. I remember awakening, because when I lay in the ambulance the ceiling lamp was under my shoulder. I lay on the ambulance's ceiling and Yulek and the driver were outside. Apparently the ambulance had tipped over, and we all slept on the ceiling, this was the only explanation. They tried to dig and stand the ambulance back up on its wheels. Most likely they succeeded since I remember another drive, a drive that never ended during which the ambulance driver searched for his unit in order to rejoin them. This wasn't the same unit that we, Yulek and I, had arrived with but this was another unit, but that had no significance. At the end of the way, at some point on the way, he saw again a crowded

line of soldiers moving. He asked if we could join, and we began to continue deeper into Russia. We had crossed the border and continued towards Kiev. Kiev is already in Ukraine.

I simply don't know how many days this lasted, maybe two. And in Kiev there was, they had had big losses in the tank unit, and they wanted to drive further into Russia in order to resupply and replace the lost weapons, equipment and people that had fallen, and they had many catastrophies. We were in a very young forest. I remember we arrived at it, and the two of us, me and Yulek, lay on some kind of jacket made from some kind of impermeable canvas that soldiers have. And I know what it is called in Russian, but I don't know – it is some kind of raincoat made of canvas but it is a square that you tie with ropes. On that we lay, and that was June or maybe it was already July? And we had a quiet and beautiful night, and I lay and sensed the smell of the Acacia that surrounded me, and that smell suddenly returned to me all that I had had until that day, the 21st of June when I fled my home. It reminded me of my last vacation that we had spent in the mountain town, and it reminded me of home. And I began to cry. I think that until that moment I was in shock: Maybe today, they call this war shock. But I was, without any doubt, in shock because I didn't feel anything. I didn't even feel the injuries in my feet from which Yulek had, in one of those resting places, removed glass from my feet that had been there since the meeting in Lwow when we fled out of the city. I think that it was the crying that returned my sense of reality.

And Yulek, who wasn't able to stand my crying, began hitting me. He thought that I was hysterical. He hit me in the face. I don't remember how I calmed down, but Yulek later cried over having hit me. In any case, we didn't spend much time in that

forest with the same tank unit. […] After several hours, in the morning, came a Russian soldier with a gun aimed at us, and said that we were ordered to appear at the command center. He guided us like prisoners before him while he and his gun faced us from behind. And we went a distance that was fairly great; in any case it felt like a long walk, perhaps because I was scared. When we arrived at the tent in which sat the commander, we saw a long table in the back which was seated 2 or 3 officers, and us and that soldier: it was a very large tent. They told the soldier to leave and we, with Yulek remained in the same commander's tent. One of the officers turned to us – evidently they had had my identity papers and my sisters' and Yulek had his identity papers, and they asked us about personal details. They knew that we were Jews, but wanted to know when were we born, what had we learned, and what were we doing there. We told them everything, and then one of the officers said to us, "Look, you are children. This place is not for you. You need to learn, and we will help you. We will guide you further into Russia so that you will be able to receive an education that you deserve."

Yulek always claimed later that that officer had been Jewish. Maybe. There were many officers in the Russian army. In any case we then received a letter for a party secretary in some city: I no longer remember its name. We received also a request that the secretariat of the party would give us every assistance we needed, including money. A military car transported us to the village, and they were waiting for us there; they knew that we were about to arrive. The same night, they told us that we would receive, Yulek and I, two host families. I got one family and Yulek another. And there it was still quiet. The Germans hadn't arrived there yet, they were still in Poland, or maybe near Lwow but not in Kiev, which was still a few hundred kilometers away. And we bathed and even

received a loan of civilian clothes from the girls of these families. And we went to communist party office [*consomoldovta*] in the same village, and there they gave each of us 20 rubbles and a letter to the train station manager in that same village. The next day they gave us sandwiches and all kinds of food – they were very warm with us – and they brought us to the station, and to the head of the station. The station manager read the letter and said that now no civilian station, passenger station, no passenger train was stopping. And the only thing that could transport us in our direction was actually an industrial train. He placed us into an industrial train that was sitting at the station, and there wasn't anything there except for a bit of straw on the floor, and we sat there and waited for the train to move. She started to move and drove a few kilometers, and then it turned out that the track needed repairs because of explosions that had happened along the way, and this is the way our trip went, until we arrived in the area of a big city.

While we were traveling in this train, I told Yulek – either way I was childish and naïve, but in any case – that if we should drive so far away, there was no chance that our parents would find us: That we should get off. And Yulek listened to everything I said and agreed. So when we arrived at the first station of the bigger town. I think it was called. I don't remember what it was called, maybe I will remember. In any case we got off the train. In the town there were already a lot of Russian refugees who had fled from captured German cities, and they created for these refugees some kinds of central points where people could lie down on the ground, concentration points. And also, there they provided what assistance they could, and tried to find people work or to direct them, everyone according to their needs, and according to the abilities of those people who dealt with this. When we arrived there, at the secretaries and they looked at our papers,

they determined that since we were children it would be good for us to work in the preserves factory. And they gave us a referral for the factory, that didn't really make jelly, but only processed sugar cane. And they brought us again to the train and we went. We drove maybe half a day, before they told us that we had to disembark since this was the last station the train serviced, and it didn't go any further.

Waiting for us there were mules and a type of wagon, and we drove a very long time to the place where the sugar factory was located, the sugar processing factory, and there we were assigned a space in a dorm, and Yulek went to the male dorm while I went to the women's dorm. And we were supposed to begin our civilian lives there as factory workers. Yulek related to me that they had asked him if he had any profession, so he said that yes he knew how to paint. It wasn't true, but he knew that it was good to be a professional. I didn't know to invent a profession that would be appropriate for a woman, or at least a young girl, so I remained without a profession. So the solution that those men came up with was that I would be taken out everyday to work in the fields – and they were talking about the fields that encircled the plant – and Yulek would stay in the factory. This was before the plants were harvested and the plant was having an *overhaul*, a fix up and Yulek was supposed to paint the machinery and all kinds of jobs that were appropriate to his profession that he invented. We worked there 10-14 days. Announcements on the radio reported that the Germans had captured Harkov, that the Germans were blitzing through Russia. And in fact they were advancing very quickly, and again I told Yulek: "If we fled to here from Lwow, from the Germans to here, it doesn't make sense that we should stay here and fall into their hands now. We should flee!" We immediately set out. Before we set out they calculated our pay, and I remember

that Yulek got extra money for the work he did, and minus the cost of the food, I mean what he ate there in the factory cafeteria, he received 120 rubbles. I got 16 kopinks, since I, of course, had a lower daily wage, and they removed from that salary, from what I had earned, the value of the soup that they brought out to the fields. In any case, in the end we had 120 rubbles and 16 kopinks.

The town in which we waited, its name was Shegyekinof, and when we had arrived there, they had brought us there in a horse-and-buggy since the train didn't go all the way there. Now that we decided to leave, we had to overcome this first difficulty: transportation. How should we make it back to the town where the station was located? I don't know how, but I remember that we caught a truck, and the driver agreed to drive us to the town, called Novgorod – that town that had the train – in exchange for 10 rubbles. That was between us, something new: to pay for black-market transportation like this. In this way or another, we spent our joint money and arrived in Novgorod, at the train station. There were many people; they were lying on the floor, on the ground and on every available plank [*balata*]. All of these people were refugees from the Ukraine, which had meanwhile been captured in a very fast manner by the Germans, who had fled for their lives. Many of them were Jews. At the same station, in the same town, at the station we waited for night. I still need to relate that Yulek and I were dressed in our military clothes, since, when we left the army these were the only clothes we had, military pants and shirt. And we also had that strange raincoat a "*pashkalah"* that was made of *brezent* [treated canvas] that we had been given. But other than that we had nothing; except Yulek had a "*chinelle*," that was a kind of military coat, but I didn't have

one. So, that was all we had, except for a canteen [*menashka*] that we had along with one of its plates.

Yulek tried to get information on whether it was even possible to buy a ticket. He came back and told me that no train stopped at this station. All the people lying there, like a living carpet, on every square centimeter of the floor, were waiting; they didn't know what for. Night arrived and we wandered about in the station until we heard an approaching train. It was an industrial train. She stopped, well she didn't stop, but she slowed down a bit at the station and then we, both of us, jumped. We decided that we would jump on this train when it passed. Yulek jumped up onto the steps on one side and I onto the steps on the other side of the industrial car. Every car was industrial, but the car we jumped in was open and uncovered. And the reason we jumped on that one was that its stairs were lower and simply, we were *able* to jump onto it, at least *I could* jump onto it. And like that we jumped on and sat in that open car on aluminum sheets. On the car's platform, its cargo was aluminum sheets tied with steel cables to the platform itself, and we sat on top. We were very tired, but couldn't sleep since there was a danger of us falling off. So, we decided to take turns sleeping. I wasn't able to stay awake during my turns. We sat up top and held onto the steel cables that held the aluminum sheets, and even still we shifted along with all of the aluminum sheets with every movement of the train.

Then, for the first time, I was surprised to discover that it was possible to sleep with open eyes. And I didn't only sleep; I also dreamt and spoke. I spoke in my sleep. Yulek, lying next to me, seeing that I had open eyes and that I was speaking off topic, thought that I had fallen completely off the tracks, and what he did was he started hitting

himself on the head and in the face and he shouted like a crazy person. So I awoke quite simply from his cries. It was raining: The rain fell on us. We were soaked to our bones, and later from the wind we also dried off. The train drove for almost 12 hours without stopping, northwards toward Moscow.

The problem, of course, was with the bathroom. With our needs, somehow we needed to get by with leaning over the edge of the platform. We didn't have any options, and we couldn't be ashamed. Like this we arrived in Moscow. The train stopped on the outskirts of Moscow, and Yulek decided to find a store near the train where he could get us some food. We hadn't eaten this entire time, but we did have 110 rubbles. We had a deal, with Yulek, that if one of us got off and for some reason did not return in time and the train started moving, the other would disembark and wait for the former. So Yulek went to find food and didn't return while I waited and waited. I heard them giving all kinds of instructions, moving the sections of the train we were on from one area, from one track to the others. And then I decided to get down since with all of this movement, eventually the train will begin moving forward. And then, at the last moment, I saw Yulek running over the hill. Yulek was wearing, as was I, tall military shoes and pants, and he ran. He didn't bring anything. I asked him where he had been and what had happened, but first we had to jump back on the train that had brought us, and she had already moved several tens of meters to the side. Somehow, between the trains we ran and jumped and this time, not in an open car, since Yulek remembered how I had slept with open eyes, and he, through sheer strength lifted me into a closed car (well the door was open and people were inside) and he jumped in after me. Yulek related that it was his appearance that stopped him. The police, who were very alert in Moscow, decided that he

was German. Yulek had red hair and blue eyes, and this fitted apparently the Russian stereotype of Germans. Until he could prove that he was who he said he was, he spent all those hours at the police station, and luckily he was able to get free and to run back to the station. Like this we continued traveling without having eaten anything in that same closed car.

In that closed car, there were many beds. It was divided in the middle with boards that made one level and people arranged themselves above the boards and below the boards, while we were in a passage, and other than us, in the same passage was another family. And this family included a woman, a teacher from Moscow, with a young child and her mother. In effect, that young woman was the only Russian in the car; all the rest, it turned out over the course of the ride were Jews, all those who were sleeping on the first level and those on the second level. And they didn't make any place for us at all; they were simply unaware of us. The only person who related to us was that young Russian woman. Every time she took out a piece of bread, she always broke off pieces for her daughter and for her mother, and she always broke off a piece for Yulek and me as well. And off of this we survived. Off this, we survived, as long as the train moved and we didn't need to get off. However, it later turned out that this train rode to the Urals. We had a discussion, Yulek and I, and decided to get off in a city, I don't remember its name, but this was already a city pretty far from Moscow, but still north, from which point the train would turn even further north. Since we decided that there would be a horrible winter up in the Urals, and we didn't have anything to wear. Both of us had read a book called *Tashkent, City of Bread*. That was a book we had read in school, and this affected our decision to try to make it south to Tashkent. In the end we got off the train and parted

from the Russian woman, and we remained – this was a large city, soon I will remember what it was called – and looked for the refugee center. Eventually we made it and received something to eat, and there they tried to direct us to somewhere in the area where we could sleep. But we didn't want to go to some hostel because we were rich: We still had 100 rubbles. And we thought that in the worst case we could buy transportation to Tashkent. Later, Yulek discovered that a ticket to Tashkent cost 90 rubbles, which would have meant that in the best case only one of us could go with a ticket. And if the other one had to go anyways maybe he could travel underneath the seat.

[stop]

Yulek made big efforts in all kinds of offices in the *consomol* offices and parties, to prove that his hands proved that he was a working man – that was far fetched that someone would believe him, but in any case he told me about the scenes he made by waving about his feet and how he overturned a table, and this was all simply out of exhaustion and disappointment. Still, in the end we both received a referral and permission to get on an industrial train heading south. And so it went. We got on, I don't remember how, again an industrial train traveling south. The way was very long. We bought along the way – then the women would come out to meet the train – and everything we bought were pickles: sweet pickles, sour pickles, and from these pickles we survived. Yes, I think, no on this train we met that teacher from Moscow, not on the other one, but now: this was the meeting between us and the Russian teacher and her mother and daughter. At this exact point, as soon as we entered the train going south. And everything that I explained earlier actually happened to us on the way south. Of course, the Jews also were on this train and not on the earlier one. I confused it a little bit.

We arrived – after traveling for a full week – in Tashkent. In Tashkent we had to get off and part. And the teacher, I don't remember – and don't think I knew her name – she asked us to remove her bags from the train onto the station. We did it. We helped them get down, and then she opened one of the suitcases and gave me a jacket. And that was a jacket that served me almost five years: until we returned to Poland and were repatriated. That was the only jacket I had during those years. So, in Tashkent we went once more to a refugee center, and they asked us to where we hoped to get and what we wished to do. We replied that we wanted to learn, and then they decided that the best place for us to study was in a city called Kokand, where there was a technical school for agricultural machinery. With a referral from the center we would be able to be accepted there as students. And again, we got a referral to the train, and once more we got on an industrial train from Tashkent onwards. This was a very long trip: I think this took several days.

[stop]

One day, I was sitting; well we were sitting together really, in the opening, watched the train pass through the countryside. We watched as she pulled into a station that was pretty far from Tashkent, and who did we see? We saw there in the station two children, Nushka Furma who had been one grade higher in the gymnasium where I had learned and Isek Eisener, who had been a friend of Yulek's who had shared a bench with him at school. Essentially, Isek was one of the kids with whom we had left Lwow, but from whom we parted because Yulek and I had jumped on that truck that was driving back to town. And them, we met, along with other children from Lwow whom we didn't know – children our age – and they were waiting for a passenger train. As soon as they saw us, Isek and

Nushka, they all came over and jumped onto the same train, and we traveled the remainder together.

We told them about our referral to the technical school in Kokand, and then Nushka and Isek decided that they would also go to that same school. And even four other guys who were there, who were apparently much smarter than we were, decided that they didn't want to learn, but that they would ride even further away. Before that, we decided that we would operate as a commune: each person would place in the collective pot all that he had. Yulek then gave more than half, about 50 rubbles out of the 100 he had – and he didn't even have 100 because of all the pickles. So he put what he had in the collective pot, and I had nothing to put in. But what happened to that collective pot was that the boys who were going further took the entire pot because they reasoned that their future was not at all clear while ours, at the school, was guaranteed. And like that we lost the money we had had, and the four of us arrived in Kokand. Once more we went in search of the refugee center.

[stop]

At the refugee center we handed over the referral that we had, and Isek and Nushka announced that they too wanted to study at the technical school, and that very same day we walked to the school. They had a dormitory, and this was the determining factor for many: there would be a place to live and a place to sleep. Nushka and I lived in the female dorm, and Yulek and Isek stayed in the boys' dorm, but they were simply two adjoining rooms. It was then the middle of August. The school year had not yet begun, and we were supposed to start only on the first of September. We were very hungry. We received an advance on the scholarship we were supposed to get, and when we got it, and

even after, it was such a miserable sum, that even bread that was distributed daily at 400 grams a day, that was all we got to eat. Even to buy 400 grams of bread a day, our stipends were insufficient. The main reason was that inflation continued to grow, and there were many Ukrainian refugees in that town. It was very difficult to find work. Meanwhile, we didn't think that we would need work and hadn't considered looking in our first or second day, but it was difficult to get by. The only thing we could buy was a single radish. So we ate a radish instead of bread, and I don't remember any longer how it was. In any case, also in the dining hall of the technical school they served only a very thin soup. And we ate only soup with a radish, since we didn't have our bread; we had sold it in order to buy a lot of radishes.

At the same time, I tried my culinary talents. Since we were so hungry, I decided to try to make cookies and sell them. The cookies, we were supposed to prepare from apricots that were very cheap there in Kokand. We bought a kilo of apricots, I took out their pits, and I tried to find some almonds because I remembered that at home my mom used to make some kind of almond and walnut cookies with jelly. I tried to copy mother. The mix I got from this wasn't thick enough; it didn't have sugar so there was nothing to thicken it. In any case it hardened, and I poured it out onto a board so that it would harden. I cut it into pieces and told Yulek that since I had baked, he should sell and Yulek set out with those cookies to sell them. When Yulek returned, it was a few hours later, it turned out that he didn't bring money with him: he brought one rain boot that is what he had. He revealed that a policeman caught him in the street, while he was trying to sell what I had baked and had asked him if he had a permit from the township to sell in the street. Of course, he didn't have one. So, he had no place to try and sell the cookies. So

he had gone to the same refugee center from which we had left a day or two earlier. He related that there was a woman there with a young girl who really wanted the cookies. And the woman asked him to sell them to her, although she didn't have any money. The woman had one rain boot (galoshes) and explained that the other had fallen on the train during the ride. So Yulek took the boot and gave the child some of the cookies, and so he returned with half a tray of unsold cookies and instead of the other half I had a boot. And with that ended, essentially, my attempts to earn or to eat; since, we didn't have any more money to buy another kilo of apricots.

By the way, I did later wear that boot. When we returned, one day to the dorms, we discovered that our high military boots had been stolen. All I had left were some kinds of ballet shoes that I had bought somewhere in the Ukraine at the time they released us from the army, when we began our trip. These were very light canvas or cloth shoes. And I used them to go to classes. The boots I had left under the bed as had Yulek. When I returned my shoes were missing, and I remained only with my "ballet shoes" that I was wearing. Over time they ripped completely and I had to tie the sole to the uppers with string. Then Yulek told me that I had that one rain boot that was a decent shoe; so why should I have two shoes held together with string, when I could have at least one dry foot by using the rain boot. In the meantime winter had arrived, and it was very wet.

Then, I remember that out of hunger, Nushka was the first one to leave the school. She took a job in a cotton factory that was in the same part of town. And Yulek, Isek and I remained behind in the dorm. Later, I also tried to leave the dorm and the school to find work, and it was very difficult. I tried to be a mailman, and I tried to deliver mail in a commercial area of the city. The bag was big, heavy and full of newspapers. I was

hungry, and didn't even have energy to carry myself around town, let alone the mailbag. So, after one day, I gave up my career as a mailman and returned to the dorms. Then, one day, I remember we were cold, and essentially we used to wrap ourselves up, with Yulek, for example when we were waiting for something, in my jacket and his together. And I saw an add on the door of the same cotton factory where Nushka worked, and they said that they were looking for truck drivers for guaranteed work. The tuition for studies would be paid for by the factory. I signed up for the course and after several days, I went to learn driving in Fergana, a big city, maybe the second largest city after Tashkent. We were now in Uzbekistan.

Yulek told me in a letter that a teacher at the technical school passed him a package for me. She had seen me and knew that I was cold, and she sent me underpants and undershirts, those types of things – the Russians weren't rich either – but, she gave those things to Yulek, although I wasn't there, a small package for me, to help me. And also because she thought that the friendship between the three of us was so crucial and rare in the world that she was surprised and awed.

[stop]

The driver's course, for which I went to *Targana* was supposed to last three months, but in reality it lasted half a year. All this was because in this driving school, there wasn't the possibility to really teach us to drive. The only truck they had stood in the yard without wheels because its parts had been drafted into the army and the truck on stones couldn't teach us to drive. So, after the theoretical portions of the course, we waited three months until the army sent appropriated wheels and tires in order that they could finish teaching us the profession. Meanwhile we lived in some kind of *tchaichana,* that had a certain

section for the drinking of tea. Tea, in Uzbekistan is a very common thing, especially since in those day no one drank coffee. They built a *tchaichana* which was really just a room with low tables at which Uzbeks typically sit to drink tea. So, on these tables, they arranged straw mattresses and gave each person a blanket and a pillow and there we lived. Each person received 400 grams of bread each day, and that was it. We didn't have money or anything else except for that 400 grams bread, and I couldn't even afford to keep that bread, but had to sell it in order to buy enough food for the day. It made more sense to buy these tiny apples that fell from the trees, they were very cheap, and in exchange for the 400 grams of bread one could get 4 or 5 kilos of those strange tiny apples. They were small and not always good, but there were a lot of them. One could eat all day long, and to eat all day long – for a person whose hunger rolls in his bowels – was a great solution.

We sat there six months and waited, and during that time my only communication with Yulek was epistolary. It was cold. Many of us got sick with the flu, as did I. They thought…and then there was a very big outbreak of Typhus that was transmitted by [stop]

fleas, and everyone that thought he had contracted Typhus would first go through a complete examination of her hair. They took me to the hospital and shaved all my hair, and then it turned out that I wasn't infected, but had a simple cold. In any case, I got used to wearing a kerchief on my head. I covered my head with a kerchief. One day I tried to break an apricot pit between my teeth and broke a front tooth; so, I did not have hair, and I had a hole between my front teeth.

This had an effect later, but for now we suffered only from cold. We were around thirty girls in the same *tchaichana*, on the same mattresses and we got in the habit of sleeping in pairs: we slept two on one mattress and covered ourselves with both blankets. This was much warmer. I had a special luck: the girl I slept with was always hot, and I grew hot next to her. She was sick with Tuberculosis, and she had a temperature on a regular basis. I, of course, had no idea what Tuberculosis was, or what contagion was – these were things I knew nothing about. What happened was that I contracted it, but I learned that fact only six or seven months later.

In the meantime, we finished the theoretical and practical elements of the course, and I returned to Kokand with my driver's license. I went to meet Yulek, who in the meantime had also left the dorm and was then working in a military factory. I came to the factory and waited next to the gate until all the workers poured out waiting for Yulek. I knew that he would have to pass by me. In the end, when he passed by, I did not recognize him – by the way, he did not recognize me either. Perhaps it was because of my kerchief or the whole between my teeth, but in any case, I recognized him first. He was about 10 meters away from me, and I recognized him from his gate. I saw his back from behind, and then I recognized him and shouted. He stopped. Then I realized that he had broken his glasses. Yulek had always been short sighted in such a severe way and when his glasses broke, he could not see the beauty waiting for him by the gate. However, he was also walking barefoot, and I had never seen him go barefoot. He was wearing military pants designed to be worn with high boots: and when you see someone wearing those kinds of rolled-up pants barefoot and with a torn shirt, I could not

recognize him. We were very happy at meeting each other again, and Yulek invited me to lunch where we ate our lunch for the next three or four days.

Tape 3

I will start from my meeting with Yulek beside the gate when I returned from Fergana to Kokand and Yulek treated me to the food with his coupons for the next several days; since, I didn't have any food or coupons of my own. And we sat and ate lunch on his coupons in the factory cafeteria, and he told me – when I asked about Isek, he had already written to me about this before but not exactly –that Isek had fled to [*abnirshe anders*], but only after he had stolen from me and Yulek everything there was to take, which wasn't much. It was the undergarments the teacher had given to me, but which Yulek did not have the opportunity to give to me earlier. And there was a bar of soap and a pair of shoes that had belonged to Yulek. That is why he was barefoot. We sat and talked and decided then, or at least I did, that if I ever saw Isek in my life, it would only be in order to spit in his face, and not a single word.

I want to add that when I got to Israel, I found out that Isek was living in Haifa and that he was an electrical engineer. In any case, I knew it, but never went to see him. There was a time when he passed a greeting to me through a woman he knew at Nir David, to whom he was somehow related. She had visited him and transmitted his greeting, but I never sent one back. Another person who had known Isek was Dora, since he worked at an electrical company, and they had met at some engineering conference and somehow began speaking about me. These were two instances where, and even if I

had looked in a phone book, I could have found him, but I never tried. Today, I have no interest in him, not even to spit at him. Yulek has even less than me.

But at the same time, in the same year ‘42, when I sat with Yulek and we ate, I don’t remember what else we talked about, but we spent an hour together, and later I went to my dorm and he to his. Later, we met several more times, under differing conditions. For instance, Yulek suffered terribly from hunger, and his hunger led him to the idea that at least people in hospitals are fed and so he tried once to act like he was crazy. They brought him to the mental hospital there in Kokand where I visited him once. That’s it. But these were ultimately futile efforts. Meanwhile, I had begun working as a driver. My work consisted of working 24 hours and getting 24 hours off. The work was difficult for me in every facet. First, I was always hungry, and I worked then as an intern driver, which meant that I had to work for three months as an assistant to another driver in order to get a full license. In the end, the factory only had to prove that I had done this internship for me to get my license: I didn’t have to pass any tests. I worked in a truck without a starter, and none of the trucks had starters.

The Uzbek driver used every opportunity to use me, and whenever we had to start the truck, he told me to do it. So I tried to turn the crank with both hands: sometimes I would even sit on it because the engine hated to turn over. This went on until the driver got frustrated and came out to start the engine himself. He would stop in front of his house in the lower city, take his food from home, while I sat and waited. We used to drive very long distances, around 60 kilometers in one direction, to all sorts of communes that the same time collected cotton, and we had to bring cotton to the factory since it produced industrial cotton from raw materials that arrived by train into the factory and

from trucks that traveled to places to which trains didn't go. So, 60 kilometers in one direction and 60 back, most of the time I drove while the driver slept.

One time, we left from the commune late and the accumulator died on the way, and it got dark. Now, the way was 60 kilometers of desert along which there was no community. So, we had to wait until morning for the first truck from Kokand would pick us up, and this is what happened. So, the whole night we dunked cotton in gasoline and made torches since before we did mosquitoes ate us up. At the same time, I scratched my bite-ridden leg, evidently with slightly dirty hands, and how could they be clean considering the tasks I had to perform. In any case my leg began to swell. I had a wound at the bottom of my leg, around which a black ring would form periodically. I would then go to the infirmary where the nurse would cut the black ring off with scissors, and in a day or two it would reappear even larger. This was clearly gangrene but the doctor thought that the black ring was due to a vitamin deficiency and told me that what I should do was buy a tomato and place that tomato on the wound. She told me to chew the tomato and put it on my wound. So, when I sold my 400g of bread I would buy one or two tomatoes, chew them and place them on my wound. On the one hand, this caused me to smell horrible and swarms of insects flew around me, diving at my leg. And the final thing was that the black circle kept getting bigger and bigger. Until the doctor sent me to a larger infirmary inside the city where in the waiting room women sat and chatted. As Russian women love to tell horrific stories that would terrify everyone listening, I learned that everyone who saw a doctor in this clinic left with a referral to the hospital where they routinely amputated legs.

I never went in for the examination: when my turn came I fled, gangrene and all back to my dorm. And on one of my visits to Yulek in the mental hospital he tried to heal my leg. He tried to retie my bandage. I remember that the way between Yulek's hospital and my place was very far, and I couldn't really step on my foot, I could only step on my big toe, and like that I limped the whole way to the mental hospital and back in order to visit Yulek. At the same time they brought mostly Armenian drivers to the factory who had suffered serious injury and therefore needed to pass a test period. For that reason they sent them with their trucks, these were already American Dodges and Fords, to collect the cotton from the collection points. Soon, they decided that these drivers needed to be housed in a more central location, so they collected them in a certain place, and I was appointed their dispatcher who was notified in advance which sites were ready for a cotton pick up, and I would send the drivers. All this time I suffered from the gangrenous wound, however, at this time the injury was mild enough that bandages somehow allowed me to walk. The drivers, there were 30 of them, young men, and I would dole out benzine to them and keep logs in their work papers. In Russian it was called *Pujowske*, but I don't know how to say it in Hebrew, and they were supposed to bring me, at the end of each month, a log of their travels.

At the same time, I tried to escape hunger by taking a canister of 2 or 3 liters of gasoline, and I went to an open market and there found a Jew I knew who repaired primus stoves – the day before I had asked him if he would be willing to buy gasoline from me, and he had said "happily" – so I went with the canister to the Jew in the evening to sell him the gasoline. On the way, I heard someone following me – the way to the Jews house, passed by the train tracks – in the middle of the tracks, I heard someone running

after me and I stopped. He was the tire repairperson of the drivers unit I supervised, an Uzbek, and he said to me "what do you have in your hands?" I told him it was gasoline, and he began lecturing me there on the tracks. "You know this is a war, and that *Tovarish* Stalin has said that every drop of gasoline should be devoted to the military victory. And what are you doing? You are committing sabotage!" So I asked him "what do you want?" He answered that if I would do him one time, and those were his words, he wouldn't tell anyone anything. I told him that if that was the way it was, he should lead me back to the captain, who was the supervisor of fleet drivers and that he should speak to me. We got back to the same place where I lived and worked, and all the soldiers were sitting at that moment in the dining hall eating. And that Uzbek man led me and the gasoline canister I was holding in my hand to the middle of the room and gave them the same speech he had given me: that I had tried to steal and that I was sabotaging the military victory.

So, they all shut up, and I stood pathetically trying to make myself smaller, I was 15 years old then. I stood in the middle, and later I stood a bit to the side because they finished eating, so I moved near the door. The weirdest thing is that no one said anything to me, except the captain who asked me to come to his room to speak to him privately. But all the other drivers that passed by gave me friendly pats on my shoulder: one-by-one, all thirty of them. I walked after the captain to his room, and he asked me why I had done it. I answered, "Because I am hungry." So he said, "If you are hungry why didn't you come talk to me? Tomorrow morning," he said to me, "fill 60 liters of gasoline to this certain driver. He will drive and you will get the credit." The next morning I did as he had asked, and within two days, the captain came to me and gave me 1000 rubbles, this was 6 months' salary. He said buy yourself milk for New Years, which was

approaching. “Buy yourself milk,” he said to me. And like that ended the affair with the tattletale Uzbek driver.

I had to leave my new post earlier than was planned because I got a fever and couldn’t continue working. When I returned to Kokand, I had a temperature and wanted to go to Yulek’s factory, so someone from the factory said that Yulek had been there looking for me and had left a note. She gave me the note a week after he had written it. In it, Yulek told me to take care of myself, since he had been conscripted for a work group. I was sick with a fever, and they discovered that I had Tuberculosis and admitted me to the hospital.

I don’t remember many moments of satisfaction that I experienced in Russia. However, in the first days of my time in the hospital they placed soup on the table in front of me, and I didn’t have any appetite. I was so pleased with myself that I had the luxury not to eat when I had something to eat. It was soup, but because of my high temperature, I didn’t eat anything. Then began my additional battle: Russian hospitals had horrible conditions for Tuberculosis patients. At this time, during the war in Russia, medical treatment for TB was very backwards, and I had to deal with this alone. I lay in the hospital for three months, and no one came to visit me. One of the female drivers came to visit me once and brought me two pears; I remember that. But other than that, no one came. Oh, wait maybe another female driver came once and brought me some salted fish. Yes. Salted fish, a few salted fish. That was a delicacy.

In short… When I got out…Oh yeah, of course, during this time spent in bed, my gangrene healed. Somehow my foot healed. I had some baths there with various additives, and that was it. My foot healed, and after about three months I returned to

work. Of course, I couldn't continue driving anymore, so I returned to my post as dispatcher. I had to arrange the drivers, both soldiers and factory workers. I had to manage them. At the same time, I learned that to communicate with drivers it was not necessary to learn neither the military language nor the normal language, it was only necessary to know how to curse. So, I studied at home. I stood in front of my notebook, in which I had written the important curses, and I cursed at full volume and I practiced giving orders to the drivers. And all of this was…before, when I would tell them to go pick up cotton from certain places on routes where it was impossible to earn money from passengers, they would get angry. In any case, I had to send drivers also to routes where there was no way to earn money on the side, and the power of persuasion depended on the depth of the curse.

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[nightly news] In the world, at the same time – the year was '43 – WWII was raging. In the place where I was located, in Kokand, they brought each time more and more refugees from territories the Germans had conquered. There were all kinds…I had at the time all kinds of encounters with people who, without the war, I never would have met, certainly, not at such a depth. One of these meetings was with a driver of a movie star with whom I was familiar from her films in Vienna. The driver, his wife and a young daughter had fled first from Vienna to Poland and from there to Russia, and I have no idea what other paths they took to get to Kokand, and to my factory. They were…they lived in the refugee center, I don't know exactly how one would call such a place in Hebrew where they collect all the people who don't have homes and who therefore live in all kinds of temporary shelters. In any case, their living conditions were like the rest of

ours – below any possible standard. We were all hungry. But that man, and I don't remember his name, was by definition used to living conditions very different from those we had because of the war. I met him only a few times, and when I asked about him afterwards, it turned out that he had gotten sick with dysentery. I am not sure if this was typhus or dysentery – most likely it was dysentery – and he passed away. I myself was, as they say in Yiddish – *gehakte tsures* – dealing with big problems, and I didn't have the opportunity to interest myself in him further.

But, I also had other encounters. I lived in a dorm that had 10 separate rooms that were connected by a hallway, five on each side. It was a single-story building. Generally, in each room lived a family, but in my room, we were four single women: there was me, a woman called Marussia who worked for the post office, and two sisters from Leningrad whose names I no longer remember. What I do remember were the nights; we were all hungry, and they would take out their guitar. They played the guitar, one of those sisters, and the three of them sang Russian songs. They played all sorts of songs, but they never made it all the way through a single one before they broke into tears. But I remember those songs and those tears. In the next room over there was a woman called Marussia, and I called her Chochya Marussia. She lived there with a girl who was 3 or 4 at the time. She was from Leningrad like the two sisters who lived in my room. She had arrived in Kokand after the outbreak of the

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siege of Leiningrad, at the same time people also arrived from other cities to this part of Asia.

That Chechya Marussia was one of the characters, along with the three girls with whom I lived – and others I met afterwards – about whom there should be written a book called *Meetings with People*, and the P should be in *capital letters*. We all suffered from hunger, and Chechya Marussia, who had worked in Leningrad as a mail carrier, was a very sick woman. Evidently from the heavy packages she carried, I mean, I had also tried that career and knew how hard it was to carry two bags of newspapers and to walk such distances. Chechya Marussia did it, and she was a young woman, although she looked old because she was extremely thin and shriveled. She had a daughter that was only 3 or 4, after all. She suffered from an inflamed uterus. The inflammation was so bad that her uterus dangled between her feet, so that she tied it somehow. I don't know, but no one offered her surgery that could have helped her.

I knew the whole time I lived there that she was right next door, that was almost two years, and she didn't get surgery. Since Chechya Marussia, who worked at the factory in the fields, didn't want to flat-out steal a whole ear of corn, so she would take a few seeds from each ear of corn, along with all kinds of herbs that she knew were edible and would make soup from them. So her soup would be water, a few grains of corn, all the plants she had gathered on the way, and that was it. This is what she would cook for herself and her daughter. Every time, she would also give me a plate of that soup. She gave soup to me as I lay there with a temperature, since, other than Tuberculosis, I also had Malaria. Malarial attacks caused fever, and their coming was completely unpredictable.

In any case, they were very difficult episodes. In the first case, before the temperature, there are nauseas and your hands shake like leaves and then arrives fever.

After the fever passes, the person is a rag, which she was also before. First, she was a hungry rag, and then a wet rag. She knew I was this sick, and would, each time, bring me this soup. This is simply a priceless thing: simply, one must know under what conditions we lived, and what it meant for a person to give another a plate of soup. I can only compare it with another experience. In the same hallway, across from my room, there was a Jewish family, that was essentially from Poland and when they received help, I don't know from where except that certain Polish Jews got assistance from some organization in America.

I never received this kind of help, because I was considered someone who had fled from inside Russia. We are talking about Lwow. The family that lived opposite me was from the Patowicz region that was further inside Poland. In any case they received packages with food. From that family, never even a crumb. They could have helped, but from them, I never received even the smallest assistance. This was exactly how in the travels I had in the train with Yulek, as we laid in the passageway of the car and the Jews were sleeping in stacks on the planks, no one, except for the Russian teacher who was next to us with her daughter and mother. Help, we got only from that Russian family, that Russian teacher with her mother and daughter. They saved us from dying of hunger. So, the same thing happened with Chechya Marussia.

There was another instance that was very, very typical: I used to go for therapy for my lungs to a place very far away in Kokand. There, they had train tracks on which passed many boxcars, including some transporting beet sugar [sugar beets?]. The Uzbek children would jump up into these cars and throw out as many sugar beets as they could lay their hands on. Afterwards, they would jump down and collect what they had thrown

and sell them. So, when I would go to my therapy, I would generally see young Uzbek children who, underneath their swollen shirts kept many beets. In exchange for 400g bread, that was my daily allowance, I could buy at least 5 kilos of sugar beets, and I would always do this. I would trade in my bread for some huge beets that I could barely carry the several kilometers back, especially after my lung therapy that made it difficult for me to breath.

In any case, I carried them all that distance, and in my room, I would cook it on the built-in stove that we would light with cotton soaked in crude oil that the girls brought from the factory. Of course, we had neither wood nor coals. In any case, I cooked the beets and tried to make patties out of them, the way my mother had done at home: with a fork I broke up the beets and made patties on nothing, on a dry pan. In any case I always burned them. One time, I remember, from the beets I made forty of these faux patties, and that was a pleasure. I didn't have a plate big enough to hold them all, so I put them in a bathing tray, I put the tray on the table, and I sat down to eat. Around me the three roommates sat and each of us ate his dinner. They didn't eat the same beet patties that I ate, since each person had his own way to earn money on the side. I will tell you about that in a minute. I began to eat, and I thought to myself, "These patties are pretty good, but a human being should be full." No matter how much I ate, however, I couldn't feel full. So, the girls told me, "Maybe you should leave a few for tomorrow morning. After all, tomorrow you will wake up and have nothing to eat." But I said, "No, I want to eat all of it. And, I want to feel that I am hungry."

After I had eaten half the amount, about 20 of them, I got a stomachache, and just like that I ran outside. After the 22nd patty, I ran outside again. And like that, because of

the diarrhea I got from those patties, I continued to eat, spending more time outside than in. Eventually, I finished all the patties and went to sleep. In the morning when I awoke, I saw the same washing dish at the side of my bed, covered with another pan turned upside down and weighted with a stone to keep away the rats. Inside were ten more patties that the girls had hidden from me the night before so that I would have them in the morning.

I don't know how to relate a greater story of integrity than this, since, these girls were all young. They were older than me, maybe around 18 or 20, and to supplement their measly income of bread, they used to spend the night with the soldiers/drivers working in the factory. Once they got very concerned about my welfare, and when I returned home from a late shift at around midnight, I saw a body in my bed and the light of a cigarette. So I asked, "What are you doing in my bed?" He answered, "I'm waiting for you." But I insisted, "Well, what are you doing inside my bed?" He asked, "Do you allow me to be here." And I said, "What kind of question is that? You are already in my bed! No, I don't give you permission." And this was all whispered since on the other three beds were my roommates and three other soldiers, each of them working for a bread roll. Each of them received a roll for the night. And this was the food that they had eaten while I ate my famous patties. In short, his friends turned at some point and asked, "Tell me, why is your cigarette burning so low?" It was because he was sitting on the floor, while I was in bed. He smoked his cigarette on the floor. In any case, it was because of their concern for me that they invited him into my bed, so that I would also get an extra serving of bread, but this manner of earning bread was not for me. I didn't use this avenue ever.

In any case these were moments, vignettes that I remember from my life inside the dorm full of suffering and hunger. One other time, at another meeting I had, I was on a shift when Marussia arrived, the dominant character. She hurriedly told me, “Come quick to the room. There is someone there. We have a guest, and he wants us to cook him food like he had at home.” So I asked her, “Who is this guest?” I had already heard stories before this about all kinds of Mafiosos who roamed around Kokand, and I knew that Marussia was involved with them and knew them well. In any case, the person who visited us this time, I think his name was Baruch (although I am not sure), he was a short, well-dressed young Jew. Marussia later told me that once the police had caught him and placed him in a hospital because he claimed to be ill and faked a high temperature only to flee at night with a rope made out of his sheets. Marussia came and offered him her place to organize himself; later he had disappeared for two years. This visit was exactly two years since the last time Marussia hosted him. In short, he came and heard that there was a woman there from Poland. He was from Warsaw, and he was a Mafioso: I don’t know if he had this profession since Poland, but in any case, in Russia he was simply a thief. Anyway, he gave Marussia and I 1,000 rubbles. I explained earlier that 1,000 rubbles was almost six months’ salary for me. Maybe the others made a little more, but all the salaries were so low. In any case, I went with Marussia to the market, and I bought chicken, vegetables, and all kinds of other things that looked good to me. When we returned, I made a chicken soup like the one he wanted – something like what his mother had cooked at home. So, he slept in Marussia’s bed, while Marussia stood guard trying to sniff out any coming danger.

At eight p.m., she came and told him that he had to dress immediately because a snitch had seen him, and he was in danger. The girls took him immediately to the train station, and I went to sleep. Late that night, almost morning, I awoke to find that the roommates had returned with two suitcases. What had happened was that as Baruch was about to board the train, he stole two suitcases from somebody waiting on the platform and gave it to the girls in exchange for having hosted him so nicely. So, they arrived home with two suitcases that contained sheets, towels, and amongst the rest also a passport and identity papers from the guy the cases were stolen from. They immediately tossed the papers into the ovens, and I received, as my part, a large *Frotello* (terry-cloth) towel. It was the only *Frotte* towel I ever had, and it was precisely the one I got from them as my spoils for housing the Polish thief.

Later, I don't remember things that stand out, except that I suffered all the time from a real inability to eat. I received three additional weeks off for health reasons to aid in my recovery for the disease. They gave me good food from a special cafeteria in the factory. In Russian they called it *Spezpitane*, which means special food, and I received three weeks of special food that really did include good things. However, after the first meal I got diarrhea, and all that special food I ended up giving to my roommates because I couldn't eat anything. My stomach couldn't handle special food just as it couldn't handle regular food. The hunger continued tormenting me.

At about the same time, I met Abba, my husband, Moshe. Moshe worked at the same factory where I worked as a metal worker. Once he knew that I was a young woman from Poland, he would drop in the office from time-to-time, and on the way, he tried to pursue me. He started by bringing me bread. To a starving person, the gift of bread was

the biggest possible gift, an extra piece of bread. I was sick. He invited me to his home. They lived rather far from the factory, in the center of Kokand. Their home was made of teak, and consisted of four tiny rooms that all led onto a shared yard. The owner of the yard was a rather rich Russian woman named Chenya. But she was very friendly to us, and in general felt kindly towards Jews: every time she saw us together she would say, "Oh" these are my "*Yizidi*"; these are my little Jews. This was the peak of friendship, and like this we understood her feelings for us.

In any case, one time I saw on her dog some insect that had bitten into her dog's neck and was just sitting there. Of course, I didn't know anything about the nature of dogs, like that one shouldn't touch them while they eat, but I wanted to help evict the large insect. I approached to remove the insect, but the dog apparently thought that I wanted his bone and bit me. I healed. This was my first experience with a dog, trying to help a dog.

Moshe from time to time would invite me to visit so that his family could get to know me. His family included his sister and his mother who shared the house with his cousin, her husband, and two young children. Those children were named, Natan and Tzvika, and they live in Ramat Gan [Israel]. There were then two experiences that showed me clearly that his family did not love the idea of Moshe dating me. At the time I walked to the *ambulatorium* where I received a treatment called a Pneumothorax in which they inserted a needle between my ribs and into my chest to pump in air. They hoped that this would help to heal a hole that had developed in my lungs. They thought that by inserting air into my chest cavity they could compress the lungs and connect the two edges of the hole. I received this treatment for about a year. On one occasion, when

the doctor was inserting the needle, she missed my lungs and somehow hit my stomach. This was about 600 square centimeters, and when they shot that amount into my stomach, I couldn't breathe at all and certainly couldn't walk. I remember that when I left the *ambulatorium* I walked by simply sliding my feet forward on the road. 5 or 6 hours later when the nurse finished working she saw me sitting on the sidewalk only a few meters from the clinic doors, maybe 50 meters or less. That's what I had covered in this crawling method. So, she asked what was wrong with me, to which I replied that I couldn't breathe; she just told me not to worry, that it would pass and continued on her way. I also continued in my slow shuffling manner, dragging my feet along the ground to minimize my bodily exertions.

Finally, I made it to Moshe's home, which was much closer than the dorms. I arrived at the house, and he cleared a space for me on the bed. However, I couldn't lie down, so he made a space for me to sit. Sitting on the bed wasn't comfortable, so I moved to sit on the house steps. Moshe brought me a pillow and a blanket, but I couldn't bear any slight pressure on my back or anyplace else. I sat like that for three days. Everyone around me thought that I was dying because I couldn't move, eat, or drink. Until the air really dissipated away from my stomach, I couldn't return to the dorms. After three days I was able to leave, and I returned to the dorms, but the damage had been done. Moshe's family knew that I was sick and they didn't want Moshe to be stuck with a sick lady.

After awhile the doctors determined that the ambulatory treatments weren't working and they held me for surgery. I underwent that surgery to remove a part of my lung in order to compress the lung: like one does with elastic in sewing, whereby the

elastic forced the fabric to compress. They took out a part of the lung and folded it upwards, and thanks to that they allowed that hole in my lung to heal. That was the treatment I underwent. After the surgery, I once again went to Moshe's home to heal because I needed someplace to lie down after the day or two in the hospital. I had a huge incision that needed to heal on my neck that had 10 or 12 stitches in it. The surgery only demanded a small incision, only 1.5 centimeters, that would eventually disappear completely, but the nurse who did the cutting couldn't find the right spot and so started at my ear and cut all the way down my neck until she found the small section that she should *a priori* have cut. From that I have this scar here on my neck. First I had stitches, which they took out, but then for years I had what looked like a red rope running the length of my neck. In any case, this was the second occurrence that showed the family Zipziner [Moshe's family] not to be happy with Moshe and I dating.

After these two instances, I thought that the debt I owed Moshe was the future, me myself. When he proposed to me, I said yes because I thought that this was the only thing I could do to pay him back for all the attention and effort he had spent on my during my illness. So, we married, and I moved to live with him and his family. I switched my workplace as well: I'm no longer sure why, but it might have been because I could no longer work shifts as I had in my old job. So, I went to work in a factory that was near the cotton factory, but this was a combination factory for knitwear. That means that they first made the yarn, and then used that yarn to knit. There I worked first on machines, until the woman who worked in payroll was caught trying to steal a pair of socks. They then asked who had education, basic education. It seemed like they were asking simply who can read and write. I was only one qualified, and from then on I became the payroll processor and

the quota manager. By the way, the payroll secretary who was caught steeling wasn't alone: everyone stole, but she was caught because she didn't come to any "agreement" with the men who did the searches at the end of the day. She didn't give them enough socks, or some other inventory item, so they chose her and her one pair of socks. Others used to walk regularly walk out with one-kilogram spools of yarn between their legs and no one bothered them, but that poor woman with her sole pair of socks was caught. I think they sent her to jail for a long period of time: they knew how to do that. In any case, I took over her job.

It was my task now to pay salaries according to norms. There were some jobs however that didn't have salary norms, or whose norms were so off that I simply couldn't abide by them, since there were some norms that were virtually impossible to attain in order to receive the minimum salary. For example, to get the minimum salary one had to put on and remove 800 socks on an inspection post in a single day to detect any flaws. There was one very short Jewish woman who worked there who all day would flail her arms installing and removing socks from that post, but she never managed to complete more than fifty percent of the quota. So, I decided that we needed to change the quota: I measure and followed all the protocols, and I paid according to …

Tape 4

I return once again to complete the story of my "heroic acts." I paid salaries according to the revised quotas that I researched and applied, according to what I thought was right. My fear after this period was so great – maybe not everything I did was legal – it was so powerful that as we sat in the train on our way back to Poland, I still feared that NKVD

would discover my strategy and would come and take me off the train in order to accuse me.

At the same time, around ’45 already, began the repatriation to Poland. We signed up and began our return to Poland. I want to add that half-a-year before that, before all the arrangements turned in the direction of return, I received an invitation to the NKVD. A person that receives an invitation to NKVD does not hurry to go; in any case, I was scared. However, when I showed people the invitation I had received, they told me that I had nothing to worry about since the invitation was for the office of addresses [*ktovot*]. When I showed the invitation at the office of addresses, they gave me a letter. They said, “Someone is looking for you!” I thanked them, walked outside and started to read the letter. The letter was written from the Segal family, and the handwriting was Yulek’s. It turned out that he, over the course of two years, wrote to me; yet, none of them arrived. Until he turned to the NKVD (once he was in the army) so that they could help him find me. By the time I received the letter from Yulek, he was before his recruitment to the army, and he told me in later letters about what occurred to him from the time he was drafted in my city up until the time that the NKVD found me in the same city I had always been in. So, he related that when he had written to me that he was being inducted, they took him first to a work-camp, a Gulag. Since, somehow that had a quota to fill on workers to send to the gulags, they caught him on the street and sent him there. It wasn’t all that simple, according to what he said, since half went by train, while another half went by foot. Most of them froze because they weren’t dressed well enough.

About living conditions in the Gulag, Yulek never related the whole story. Maybe he was afraid of telling it by letter. In any case, he wrote me that it wasn’t what he

thought it would be. He told me in a letter that his future was sure, but that I should watch out for myself. His future was to be buried along with his friends. What happened was that his friend Segal died. And he took his papers and fled from the Gulag. When he fled his plan was to live off of his friend's identity.

The letters that came to me were from the Urals. I no longer remember which city it was where he lived and worked. In any case, shortly after the communication between us was reestablished, he was drafted, this time for real to the Army. These were the times of Stalingrad; he participated in the fight over Stalingrad with an artillery unit. He sustained serious injury, and thanks to his galoshes, he was saved. When the crews came to find the injured on the battlefield, they tried to take the nice pair of galoshes sitting on the snow and only by yanking discovered him buried, noticed he was alive, and pulled him out from this temporary grave. They transferred him to a hospital. He was badly hurt, but eventually regained his health. Once again he was drafted into the army, but this time as a translator. As a translator, he worked his way with the Russian Army all the way to Berlin. Meanwhile, this was '44. He knew German well, since we had learned in school; so, he translated from German to Russian. This caused concern among the Russians: why did this red haired young man speak such good German? Judging by his complexion and features he looked sort of German, so the Russians decided he was an infiltrator. At night he fled from Berlin on horseback, eventually arriving in Bratslav. In Bratslav at that time, 1945, there was a Kibbutz, and a very strong resistance movement. He received a new identity, and they feared that in any case he could be found. So, they transferred him on the first train, before anyone else, to Italy.

At the same time, my journey from Russia brought me to Szczecin, Poland. I was already in writing communication with him, and I knew that he was in Bratslav. From Bratslav he rode to Italy, exactly the same week that I arrived back in Poland as part of the repatriation program. So, I didn't meet him until several years later in Israel.

[stop]

I am returning to Kokand. After the doctor decided that I couldn't have children, that it would be too dangerous to be pregnant, and I cried a lot, since I thought that I wanted children. However the result was that in 1946, when the repatriation began, I was pregnant. During the month-long train ride that took us from Kokand, Uzbekistan to Szczecin, Poland, this wasn't easy. For some reason, I was embarrassed to admit that I was pregnant, and no one noticed. Because of this I didn't receive the extra ration of food, although eventually I did get it, this wasn't really the point. The point was that we rode in industrial cars, and when we finally arrived, I remember that we passed through Eastern Poland, and we sat in open cars because it was a nice day. I sat in the open door of the car with my feet dangling outside. There were Polish peasants working in the fields we drove through, and as we rode by they shouted out, "Here the cats are returning. The cats are returning!" I don't know why they called us cats, except maybe that every Jew is named Katz. Maybe that was their reason; there were also people who threw stones at us.

In short, after the long ride we finally arrived in Lwow, and the train stopped at the industrial depot. There was a half-day stop about which they informed us, so I got off the train and went along the street that I knew well. This road led to the side-road on which I had lived, but on the same Yanofska Street, Yulek and many other of my friends from school also lived. At the end of that street there had been a very old Jewish burial

grounds. I read, even before I returned and heard more about it later, that the Germans had destroyed the cemetery and used the headstones to pave the upper part of that same Yanofska Street. I wanted to arrive at the house I had lived in so that I might see the girl Lavska, who had written to me from Poland. But my feet wouldn't carry me, I felt like I was walking on graves. I returned to the train, without reaching my destination.

Later, we continued driving and passed through Krakow. One of the passengers who had a big family in Krakow got off and told us he would meet us at another stop. He knew our destination. Before he left, I gave him a list of all the family I had had in Krakow, my great-grandmother and her extended family, everyone. We continued until we arrived in Szczecin, and the man who had gotten off in Krakow caught up with us. He brought me the list and told me that he had checked with the Joint and with the Jewish Agency and that, from the whole list, only my mother's name had turned up as someone who had registered with their office. No one else had registered. I didn't have the opportunity to check if this "Rosner, Mathilda" was my mother or someone else. This was what he reported happened with my father, "Rosner, Hirsch" who on closer inspection turned out to be a young man and not my father.

We arrived in Szczecin, and there they put us up in a house that had been practically destroyed during the bombings. There was only one complete room, while all the rest of it – a typical German one-story building with a Garden, with a garden that contained – I don't know how to call it in Hebrew—a small red and sweet flower. I ate a lot of its fruit, and later, I even had a stomach ache from eating too much of that fruit that was probably unripe. In any case, the rains started. And in that house we lived in the rains would leak in. We decided to move to a different building that was close to the Jewish

Agency. It was a building with many floors, and we lived on the ground floor. The rains already – I was close to giving birth – and the rains no longer threatened us. The climate in Poland in the months of July, August were full of rain.

At the same time many Jews began posting notices in the Jewish Agency – maybe it wasn't really the Jewish Agency, they called it the *Komite Zidovski*, but maybe it was. There were secretaries and people who worked at helping find relatives. Letters also used to arrive at that building, since none of us had permanent residences, someone who, like me, sent out many letters to all parts of the world looking for relatives who might have spread out – and amongst them I also wrote to Israel, looking for Avi. I knew he was in Israel since my parents had supported his studies in Israel. I wrote also to the Jewish Agency in Israel without knowing his address, since I was writing to Avi Miller as part of the whole list of letters I was writing in search of relatives.

So, many other Jews searched for each other through posting notices in buildings, especially buildings which, like this one, housed an agency to which many people came. In the meantime I went into labor: This is also a story unto itself. I didn't think that I was in labor; I simply thought that I had pain in the evening from eating something bad for dinner. I ran all the time to the bathroom. Moshe, my husband's mother was an older woman, and she thought that it was labor. She ran after me the whole time saying "look this isn't a stomach malady, it's labor. You will end up giving birth in the bathroom from all of this running." In the end, Moshe decided to go looking for a midwife, and they returned around 11 or 12 p.m. In Szczecin most buildings locked their gates because there were many anti-Semitic pogroms in those days, and Jews would lock the main gates. So, Moshe, the father of my daughters, left and didn't return in time. Meanwhile, I got more

labor pains and I gave birth, simply. We called a neighbor – who later lived in Kfar Saba – and she was my midwife, essentially, while Moshe's mother stood at the side and shouted, "Wait a little longer! Just a little longer!" She was simply panicking.

So, I gave birth to Cila. I didn't have any idea how to behave with her. I didn't know what to give her to eat, and she didn't want to suckle. I had sores on my nipples because I didn't treat them properly because no one told me how to treat them. In short, she was a girl who cried day and night, and I had neither day nor night. We used to buy her milk at the store where the salesman apparently thought that the milk he sold was too rich, so he used to water it down. Then, a doctor came and told me that I should water down milk before I give it to her, so what Cila got was essentially whitish water. It is therefore, no great surprise that the child was hungry and cried all the time. At the same time, since I gave birth, and for two weeks didn't know how to deal with the baby, I didn't visit the Jewish Agency. When I returned – when I finally left my bed and returned to the Jewish Agency – I wanted to ask if any letters had arrived for me. As I walked towards the post-board, my eyes saw a note with my family name. Rosner. I neared and neared that notice that was in the size of a folio letter and saw that the note said "Rosner, Mathilda searching for her daughter, Frida." I stood before that notice and shouted; I shouted so hard, that I don't even remember what happened to me or when I stopped, (21:12) and I don't remember how or when I stopped screaming. What I don't remember was that all the people who were around in the street filled the entryway in which I stood, when I screamed, everyone cried.

In the end, I stopped and noticed that the notice wasn't dated. At this time, many refugees were being moved across the "black border" into Germany. They were

smuggled out of Poland because of the pogroms. There had just been one in Kielce, and after that Jews were afraid to stay in Poland and so made every effort to contact smugglers who could help them escape into the west. We didn't have that luck. I also wanted to escape to Germany even before I gave birth. From there we could have gotten to Cyprus or to Israel. In any case, we met a smuggler who was trying to make some money off of us. We didn't have enough money to pay for the whole family, so that we couldn't pay what he demanded. Much later I learned that essentially all these smugglers were being paid to transport Jewish refugees, and the fact that some charlatan demanded money from us means that he simply was, I don't know if one can say this…

[stop]

But, this was the reason that we, Yosef's family, I mean Moshe's family – his mother, his sister who had meanwhile married and had a husband – didn't escape to Germany but remained in Szczecin.

So, I wrote a letter to the address on the notice, and that is how I found my mother. My mother was coming. I knew approximately which train she would arrive on, and I stood at the tram stop that was closest to my home, since I knew that she would have to get off there in order to arrive at our house. So, I stood and stood, but I didn't notice that someone had disembarked that even looked like my mother. Then, Moshe ran from home to the tram station and called to me, "Your mother is already at home, come." I went home, and my mother was there in the room with a friend of hers, Kalina. They had been in the concentration camps together and had then moved together through all the camps. So from Płaszów Gubernia [*Hachen mi Płaszów Governa*] it turned out that Kalina and mother ended up in the same camp. So, I didn't recognize my mother, and it

turns out, she didn't recognize me either, since she must have passed me at the station where I leaned against the post marking the stop, and she walked by me to the address she had written down. When I came home, and she saw Cila and me and the whole scene (like she enjoyed saying later) her first words were, "How could you have made such a mistake." She meant my marriage. These were literally her first words. I couldn't then explain to her how, and I'm not even sure whether all the explanations I later gave her convinced her. That was my meeting with Emma after five years of absence.

This meeting was made possible by the letters I wrote to the Jewish Agency in Israel that advertised in newspapers here in Israel to help people find relatives, and Avi Miller, saw it and notified my mother that I was in Szczecin. People who came looking for me looked for someone named Rosner, which was the name I put on all the correspondence I sent out instead of my married name. Because of this, no one was able to find me, since I wasn't listed anywhere as Rosner but only as Zipzener, which was my married name. The person who came searching for me was Kilina's husband, and after he didn't find me, he put up the notice. I found that notice three hours after he hung it.

When mom came she told me first of all that I should come with Cila to where she was staying in Piława Górna. She lived in a duplex [*dol mishlo*], lower [*zlede*], but I didn't have the strength to flee from my reality. Later I came with Moshe and his mother to Piława Górna. Moshe's sister was at the time preparing for kibbutz life [*behachshara be gdood*] in Szchechin, but later she joined us in Piława Górna. These were very difficult times for all of us. At times Moshe's mother and mine treated Cila in a manner very energetic [*neemratz beyoter*] she was covered in scabs and bent like an old lady. She was always a beautiful child.

When we arrived in Piława Górna I began to work immediately in the factory where Emma was head engineer. She managed the work there, and after my husband wasn't willing to search for a job anywhere else, Emma found him a job in the factory as well, and he learned there a profession, how to repair sewing machines it was a factory for sweets [*konfectzia*] and his sister traveled to Dzierżoniów where she found her husband, while we stayed. It was Moshe, Cila, and his mother in the same house where we stayed at the end, and Emma lived in the same building one floor up. I worked at the time in payroll.

I continued writing to Yulek. In one of the letters Yulek wrote that a friend of his would be arriving in Poland that was active in the movement helping people escape and that should I turn to him, and he would help me and Cila – I mean he know I had a daughter. One winter, I travelled to Krakow. Travel was not easy: the trains were full of people, none of whom sat in a seat. People travelled even on the roofs. I don't remember how I travelled, but in any case I met the man Yulek sent to Krakow. He knew who I was, and he took a very negative attitude when I explained to him that I wanted to join Yulek with Cila. He gave me 1,000 reasons why it was impossible, and so I returned to Piława Górna. It was '47 or '48. Much later, it became clear that that guy wanted his sister to marry Yulek and so had tripped me up. In the end Yulek did not marry his sister, and my life flowed on because I didn't have any choices, mostly because I didn't have any internal determination to change my life out of pity for Moshe. Since I married on a false basis that was also how I lived with him: out of pity. Over time, the pity wasn't enough in the face of other feelings that I couldn't resist physically. The physical impact

of my relationship with Moshe was there from the beginning, but I hadn't been aware enough to decipher it.

[stop]

In 1948 I tried again to change my life: I tried to immigrate to Israel. Poland's borders were then closed. We applied for a permit to leave, but Piława Górna was a small town. There were Jewish groups [*mayupesnikim*] who worked to ensure that Jews wouldn't "jump beyond their stature." At the same time I was called before the head of their party, and they warned me that I was trying to move to capitalist society at a time when I was living in a communist paradise, and that this wasn't appropriate given my work as head accountant at the factory. I knew what fear was from my five years in the Soviet Union. They then assembled the committee in Piława Górna of all the party members and invited me and I don't remember if Moshe came as well, and I was forced in front of the combined group to confess that it had been a mistake on my part to submit the request to emigrate, and life returned to its path. I didn't give up on anything internally, but publicly this was something I had to do to stay alive there.

I acknowledged that I was wrong, and everything went back to normal. I worked, I liked my work. I still like my work, but then I liked what I did. For me, I really have to be happy with my work or else it is impossible for me to remain. Two years later, Rina was born. The difference between Cila and Rina is 3.5 years. It was easy to deal with the kids since Moshe's mother still lived with us and I didn't necessarily need to bring Cila and Rina to the nursery that was near the factory. The kids were sometimes sick and at times there was bad weather, and it was better at home where there was food. I looked for entertainment, but there wasn't much apart from the dances we had at our home. Friends

would come and we would dance to records. Later, I got very crowded in Piława Górna when I began to understand that I wouldn't be able to live forever with these feelings of rejection in spite some short term affairs [*bchia meton col menay keroriote ve romanim she hayo li etlai moed*] that didn't develop and couldn't fulfill what I was lacking. I simply wasn't raised to live a double life although I never stood for this test.

At the same time I decided that if we couldn't emigrate to Israel, then in Piława Górna, a small town, I wouldn't be able to give my children a future and education that I wanted. I wanted to move to Wrocław to give them the benefit of a big city. Like all of my desires, if I wanted it to happen, I had to do it on my own. I left the job I had and found another accounting position with a company in Breslau, and that was the condition to get an apartment. I had to have a job in the new town in order to receive an apartment from the township. Half a year I commuted back-and-forth to Breslau for work. Here in Israel, a sixty kilometer drive: there it took more than an hour by train. I had to walk each time to the train station. Nowadays we know that it is healthy to walk, but then, when I had to do it in the winter and in the summer, especially in the minus thirty degree weather it wasn't nothing to get to the train station early enough in the morning to arrive in Breslau by eight. But I did it for half a year, and in the end, I was able to get an apartment but it didn't go smoothly. We had to pay under-the-table to people who would leave the apartment, they wanted to leave anyway, but we had to have it empty in order to submit it empty to the government so that they would give it to us. The apartment was in Breslau and then Moshe and the kids came afterwards. I don't remember where Moshe worked in Breslau, but in any case the children began studying in school there, but in any case the whole situation didn't last long since this whole experience was is '53 or '54 and in '57

we got the opportunity to immigrate to Israel. This was after Stalin when the power shifted in Poland and the request that I had once submitted in ’48 was approved in ’57 and we received permission to emigrate, and in ’57 we actually moved.

We emigrated with Emma. The time we spent in Poland from ‘46-‘57 was a period of time in which impermanence was my dominant feeling. I completely didn’t believe in Poles, especially when I hear the stories of how Poles had behaved under German occupation and the stories my mother told of her experiences in the camps about cooperation between Poles and Germans. I didn’t believe in them so strongly, that I waited constantly for the situation to change enough for us to be able to emigrate. Until we could leave Poland, I imagined an anti-Semite waiting for me behind every corner, armed with a knife and waiting to stab me in the back. They didn’t stab you in the chest. I never was able to understand Jews to who bought furniture and a house beyond the necessary minimum. I just couldn’t understand the people who strove to settle. The temporariness was very destructive and really disturbed me to the point that when we were on the ship heading from Szchechin in France and we were in the middle of the sea, I still couldn’t believe that we were free of Poland.

After we moved to live with Emma in Piława Górna, I heard from Pia all the stories about the Shoah that happened to our families, especially from Emma who survived the camp in Skarżysko-Kamienna. My grandmother and sister, the Germans took to the execution camps in one night, during the “liquidation” of the Krakow Ghetto. They did it in stages: the stage that included the elderly and the young swept up my grandmother and my sister Rifkele, Rivka Brenig. Emma stayed with Abba, and they worked. These are the stories Jews tell about working various jobs, about how they would

pick them up and send them to the execution camps on the way to work or in the workplaces that were themselves small camps. In any case, in one of these actions they separated my parents: my father was taken to a concentration camp, though I cannot remember its name. I know it was in the mountains. Emma they took to Płaszów and later to Skarżysko-Kamienna with Celina whom she had met the morning after the action that took Safta and Rachel, they met at the Gestapo station to which they had gone to inquire into the situation of their children.

[stop]

Emma told me that she met one person who survived the camp my Abba had been sent to. This man related that Abba got sick and they threw him along with other ill people into a room they called an infirmary and that was the room in which they threw sick people and where they let them die of starvation. They didn't give them any type of treatment; they simply died of hunger, and this was the end of my father. Emma worked at a military factory in her camp in horrible conditions that I don't want to go into. In any case, when I returned from Russia and found Emma and heard all of these stories, I listened to them only once, since, to this day, I am not able to hear about it, but I did want to relate that for almost 2 years I was sick with the memory of Rachel and from my sorrow about the day I left her sitting there in '41, and that I didn't take her with me when I ran to school. But who knew then where I was running to? Who knew what was coming for us.

When we spoke to Emma about other things, each topic with which we started would turn into some story about the camps. There was simply no subject about which we could speak without Emma automatically switching to these stories. They were so

deeply ingrained in her, and in me, that ever since I run from every movie, story, book on the subject of the Shoah and the camps, since, I live it. It stays within my consciousness and my awareness and is something I cannot erase. From a place very deep to every other thought a person thinks in the course of his life. This thought, about the Shoah that happened to everyone, and how they all died and were murdered, its something that belief can't bear, so it shoves it away. It is not possible to shove it too far away. In any case, this is what Emma told me, and later, when Cila and Rina were big girls, and these were the days we left Haifa and came to live with Emma in Kfar Saba, this subject continued to emerge. I made a deal with Rina and Cila that if they sense that Emma is approaching this topic they needed in some manner to change the subject. It was simply unbearable to hear it. For me it was the "nth" time, and the girls had also heard it innumerable times, and it was impossible to hear it again.

[stop] …

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