Therefore Choose Life
Historiography and the Encounter of Holocaust Testimony: Towards a Redemptive Historical Practice

by

Ari Lev Shuldman Edmundson
Class of 2009

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors from the College of Social Studies and with Departmental Honors in History

Middletown, Connecticut April, 2009
For my Oma and Opa,
Anne Shuldman
&
Philip Shuldman,
And their daughter,
My Mom,
Eddy Shuldman
Anne and Philip Shuldman at their Wedding in Dayton, Ohio, November 13, 1949
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to begin by extending my thanks to my numerous thesis advisors, official and unofficial, for their guidance, criticism and moral support. Professor Erik Grimmer Solem, my advisor for the fall semester, patiently met with me every week as I slowly immersed myself in a vast and difficult body of scholarship, helping me to find a niche that was both challenging and personally meaningful. This thesis would never have gotten off the ground without his knowledge or dedication. Through the sophomore year history tutorial in CSS, he was also the inspiration for my decision to double-major in History. Professor Nathanael Greene, who graciously accepted my desperate last-minute request to be my spring thesis advisor despite his many commitments, always managed to give me critical feedback on my chapters almost as soon as I sent them in, and helped me keep this project in perspective. If it were not for his cautioning, this thesis could have become even more unwieldy. Professor Brian Fay also deserves many thanks for giving his time and applying his unparalleled editorial skills, helping me to refine my ideas and writing.

I owe a very special thanks to Professor Vera Schwarcz, who not only voluntarily involved herself in the fate of my project, and not only set me up for an interview with Dr. Dori Laub, co-founder of the Yale Video Archive for Holocaust Testimony, but also helped me discover the personal and meaningful core of my thesis by sternly encouraging me to acquire and listen to my Opa’s testimony. This thesis would not have had the same depth or perspective, could not have developed the same insight, if it were not for her guidance.

The CSS community has offered me an unparalleled academic and social experience during my time at Wesleyan. The close relationships I have developed with professors in the CSS helped extend my studies beyond any of my expectations, and aided in my growth as a scholar. The CSS class of 2009, all eighteen of us left standing, despite our fallen comrades and the ‘lower’ moments of our sophomore year, have developed into a group of remarkable individuals from whom I am deeply sad to depart. Having my academic experience so thoroughly socialized not only made the experience enjoyable, but it also helped me grow into a more sensitive, receptive, and thoughtful human being. In particular, I want to express my appreciation to fellow gentlemen Benedict Bernstein, Chris Sarma and Jared Keller, and their ‘mostly’ friendly antagonism.

To Ravid Chowdhury and Lucas Hoeffel, for their committed and genuine friendship over the last four years. Their support and generosity never wavered, even as my social existence during the last month was effectively ‘terminated’ by this thesis. The memory of my time at Wesleyan is virtually synonymous with our shared experiences.

To Cait MacLeod-Bluver, whose loving support helped me transform what I had anticipated would be a long, solitary nightmare in front of my computer into a healthy, fulfilling, and memorable journey.

Most of all, I want to thank my Dad, Jeff Edmundson – the single most important inspiration in my academic career, both in emulation and competition – for spending even more time reading my thesis in its various stages than any of my advisors, and for his moral and intellectual support, friendship, and love.

April 13, 2009
**PROLOGUE**

* * *

**Phillip Shuldman**

I didn’t know what his voice would sound like. It had been over fourteen years since I had last heard him speak. I was eight years old.

I was two and half when they made the recording, May 19th, 1989. Eight years old when he passed away, October 12, 1994. He used to pick me up from school every day. The last time I spoke with him I gave him a picture I drew, an image of him as a superhero, as he lay smiling in a hospital bed.

*The first words I learned in German were ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’.*

I finally received a copy of my Opa’s oral testimony in the middle of writing this thesis. A Jewish tailor from Radom, Poland, he was a survivor of the Holocaust. He had been approached for years, asked to bear witness, and had declined for decades. Finally, he left this one recording, this one testimony. And it had never been in my family’s possession until now.

It is a poor recording, hard to understand, muffled and frustrating.
But his voices penetrates. It is elastic; sometimes like a generalized collage of all the accents of those aging survivors, of family members, of the old Jewish men I grew up with. It was the voice of an atmosphere. A generation.

Other times I consulted his image, and it could have been no one else.

I wore his suit at my Bar Mitzvah. I wear his jackets today. I used to wear them to synagogue, back when I still went. Sometimes I wear them to formal occasions, out to dinner. I often wear them when I go out to get drunk on Saturday nights. I always get compliments on his jackets. They fit me perfectly.

The Ukrainian guards at the factory slave camp would get drunk on Saturday nights. They would get drunk on Saturday nights and take seven or eight people out of the barracks, his peers, fellow slaves in the factory, and kill them for fun. Every Saturday night. They looked forward to it. Every Saturday Night.

*Shirley Tanzer.* For decades he had refused to testify. Though he occasionally spoke to family members and close relations about his experience, he had resisted the offer to give a formal, recorded interview. But then in 1989 he agreed to give one to her, this stranger I have never met. And why her? She had no idea what to ask. She pronounced Radom ‘ra-dam’. She did not ask about the Torah he hid from the Nazis. She did not ask about his first child, who he never saw again. The sister my mom never knew. What was *her* name?
His world was destroyed and he speaks, and he can laugh, and his voice can implode. It can wither away. What was his child’s name? How old was she when she was taken from him?

He never speaks of his own fate. He never speaks of his confrontation with death. These are things he saw. Could another interviewer have evoked something else? Something more?

But this is who he was. Humility gathers his narrative. Who was he, in his own eyes, to exercise some attempt at profundity? No, his life resists such pretensions. This happened. That’s all.

* * *

_I stood on the foundations of your barracks at Dachau. I was fourteen years old. I stood there with your daughter, the one that survived because she didn’t have to, but for whose very birth you had to survive._

_She directs me to the spot – my father had stood here years before. You slept and watched people die here. You tailored coats to stay alive here. But you and my father were not related. Somehow this seems more appropriate. This is me. This is not an attempt at ‘learning’. But I am surrounded by the Tourist. The stranger, a child that now plays games on your memorial unawares. Exposed to this ‘museum’, he is_
supposed to come away a better person. But what can that possibly have to do with you? The Tourist cannot look you in the eye, cannot speak to you. The Tourist needs to be aroused. The Tourist needs diagrams, pictures of corpses, stories of death and survival. The tourist wants heroes. What do I need? What am I searching for in these crevices? For I fear that flexing these memorial muscles will only hollow out your memory, perforating it with the traces of a prior remembering.

I have often found myself repelled by the thought of others who pretend to undergo some profound and transcendent experience in their encounter with the Holocaust, some transient and superficial identification with its victims, which they can then use to assure themselves that they have witnessed something special. Perhaps they will experience guilt for an hour, a day, maybe a week. Then what?

Let me mourn in peace, I say under my breath. After having visited memorials – Dachau, the United States Holocaust Museum, the Berlin ‘Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas’ – I cannot help but feel provincial, perversely estranged by their intrusion, as if they were crashing a funeral. But then what is it I’m really hoping for? For everyone else to forget? To fail to engage that past? That is not my wish.

Is there a responsibility to represent the Holocaust, not just in terms of some arranged set of events we call facts, but to imbue its reconstruction with an “historical sensation”? Do we need to make people feel something – a certain uneasiness or discomfort, a debt – a recognition of the incongruence between their lives and what
they read? Not an identification, nor a lack of recognition, but rather a confrontation with the past in its deepest relevance to the continuity of human existence? Might then testimony not make certain demands on the present, might it find itself confronted in the very interstices *between* generations?
INTRODUCTION
THE PLACE OF TESTIMONY IN HOLOCAUST HISTORIOGRAPHY

* * *

‘Guilt’ has been one of the most commonly invoked words in the discourse on postwar Holocaust memory. Be it the evaded yet ever-returning guilt of the Germans, the paradoxical guilt of the survivors and their children, or the guilt of the great war-crimes trials of the 20th century, the figure of guilt has an unavoidable presence in Holocaust memory. However, the nature, strength and origin of these instances of guilt are radically heterogeneous and often times elusive.

The historiographical debates that have taken place at a theoretical level, in particular those exhibited in the first part of Saul Friedländer’s edited collection Probing the Limits of Representation, are often articulated in terms of epistemological difficulties such as the problem of how to represent the elusive ‘truth’ of atrocity through historiographical methods. But lurking behind these debates is always the problem of guilt; for that is always what is at stake in these debates, what motivates their very occurrence – which is the strength of Dominic LaCapra and Eric Santner’s contributions to Friedländer’s volume, insofar as they stress the emotional and therapeutic aspects of history with regards to the Holocaust.¹ They both emphasize the problem of trauma, from which guilt is indissociable, for understanding the difficulties in Holocaust representation. There has been a sense in which this guilt, or has been an impediment to the progress of historical inquiries into the Holocaust. But

would the disappearance of that guilt actually signal a more ‘progressive’ movement in historiography?

The sense of collective moral guilt has been particularly difficult to ‘work through’, in part because the ascription of criminal guilt through the judicial institution has functioned as a publicly visible yet inadequate surrogate for collective moral guilt. The handing down of the verdict in a criminal trial is designed to affect closure and perform a restorative function in society. Much faith was put in these trials’ ability to establish closure and to bury the past – especially in Germany – because such closure would aid in discharging a difficult and elusive guilt. However, this guilt did remain elusive, it would refuse to die, being revived again and again, especially through the turnover of generations. It would provide historians – German and Jewish alike – with their primary motive for investigating the Nazi past, although they would each differ precisely insofar as their affective relationship to the past and its victims differed. But the enormity of the trauma also hindered their ability to engage this guilt head-on, which is why early historiography was so explicitly concerned with the question of the perpetrators: Who was really guilty?

German Philosopher Jürgen Habermas has famously stated that, “Auschwitz has changed the basis for the continuity of the conditions of life within history—and this not only in Germany.”\(^2\) Insofar as modernity, civilization – even humanity – failed, we are all implicated in its shadow. Guilt is the link that sustains this sense that ‘life within history’ has changed, though it affects those filial relations who experienced the loss of family members differently than it does everyone else. The

\(^2\) Quoted from Saul Friedländer, “The Shoah in Present Historical Consciousness” Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1993) 49.
relatives and survivors of those who died in the Holocaust often could not mourn the loss of loved ones to the Holocaust the way we normally mourn our relatives. For their death occurred in conditions which challenged the very way we understand life and death; those who survived the Holocaust came back carrying the experience of having lived through non-human death as erasure, annihilation as a denial of the possibility of the continuity of life and human immortality. The moral guilt we all feel in relation to this disruption could not be rectified by the easy juridical solution of the verdict, achieving closure by locating the specific criminal guilt of a few.

The way that the Nuremberg trials dealt with the problem of guilt had a direct impact on the development of historiography and its inability in the first several decades to grapple directly with survivor testimony. Beginning with Nuremberg, Holocaust historiography would inherit a juridical epistemology that would manifest itself in its conceptual interpretive framework, its evidentiary paradigms and its fixation with ascribing responsibility for the Holocaust in terms of criminal guilt to discrete actors with proper names. The interpretive framework bequeathed to early Holocaust historiography proposed a conceptual polarization of barbarism and civilization within which Nazi crimes fell squarely under the purview of the former, portraying the criminality of Nazism as an historical aberration rather than as an expression of something intrinsically ‘German’. But Nuremberg also reinforced a preexisting, though not unchallenged predisposition among historians to discriminate against certain forms of evidence – such as testimony recorded after the event by ‘biased’ victims. Early narratives also replicated other juridical procedures and
principles, such as the need to provide impartiality through a strict adherence to emotional sobriety, which reinforced these historians’ inability to engage testimony.

Chapter One will begin by summarizing the relevant features of the Nuremberg trial, locating the foundations of the interpretive frameworks that would be adopted by later historiography in the political considerations that guided the trial’s legal, pedagogical and restorative functions. I will then briefly summarize the social conditions of survivor integration in relation to the collective memory of the Holocaust in Germany, Israel and the United States between the Nuremberg and Eichmann trials in order to illustrate the forces at work in testimonial production in this period. This will prepare the social context in which the three earliest comprehensive Holocaust narratives, Leon Poliakov’s *Harvest of Hate*, Gerald Reitlinger’s *The Final Solution*, and Raul Hilberg’s *The Destruction of the European Jews*, were published, which will then be interrogated in terms of the legacy of the Nuremberg trials. In some cases they corrected constitutive weaknesses in the interpretation proposed in the trials – such as the absence of the Final Solution as a discrete event in which anti-Semitism played an essential role – while in others they merely replicated the problematic juridical interpretive, evidentiary and operative principles. Testimony is not only largely absent, but its lack of evidentiary veracity is even explicitly discussed in the texts.

The Eichmann and Frankfurt-Auschwitz trials, as seminal events in the production of testimony and collective Holocaust memory, partially reversed some of these prejudices. While, on the one hand, establishing the Holocaust as a discrete topic and legitimizing the social status of the survivor and the evidentiary role of the
witness among older and younger generations, these trials, I argue in Chapter Two, also reinforced the juridical perspective of Holocaust memory and historiography. Especially in the Eichmann trial, the prosecution attempted to use the emotional (and thus pedagogical) power of testimony to evoke a sense of guilt from a younger generation of Israelis, largely as part of a political effort to further legitimize Israeli statehood, though these pedagogical efforts to use testimony often exceeded legal constraints. These ‘instrumental’ uses of the emotional power of testimony foreshadow some of the intricacies of using testimony for historical pedagogy that will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

The tension between pedagogy and law exhibited through the courtroom drama of these trials also provides us with a lens for discerning the inability of the juridical apparatus to grasp and present the particular challenge that the Holocaust offered to ‘modernity’ – in particular the problem of perpetrator responsibility in a bureaucratic or ‘totalitarian’ regime, what Hannah Arendt would call the ‘banality of evil’ in Eichmann in Jerusalem. The controversy surrounding Hannah Arendt’s interpretation of the trial (and the Holocaust itself) in particular would energize Holocaust research, on the one hand, into the nature of Jewish resistance and collaboration, but also into a renewed assertion of the criminal guilt paradigm by what were soon to be known as the ‘intentionalist’ historians in the following decade.

The 1970’s witnessed the emergence of the ‘intentionalist-functionalist’ debate. What I believe was essentially a debate over a problem of guilt became the central polarizing theme of historiography about the Holocaust, especially in Germany, coloring most aspects of any major interpretation of the Nazi era. A
legitimate question concerning the specific role of Hitler in the functioning of the Nazi regime – was he a ‘weak dictator’ or ‘Master of the Third Reich’ – turned into the central question of Holocaust research. What was Hitler’s role in the Final Solution? Radical intentionalists asserted that the Holocaust was the direct result of Hitler’s ideology as voiced in Mein Kampf, and that the line of decisions resulting in Auschwitz should be read as moving intentionally towards it.³ Functionalists, by contrast, replied that though ideology and anti-Semitism played an important role in the Final Solution, Nazi Jewish policy must be understood as having been developed through constant improvisation, which, keyed to a plethora of other domestic and foreign policy considerations and contingencies, was guided in particular by the structural interplay of different party and state bureaucracies, each operating according to a particular modular logic. Thus the Final Solution, in this interpretation, could not be understood as the direct result of a persistent ‘intention’ of a single or collective historical subject.

Even for the functionalists, their prime object of inquiry remained individual actors. Though they applied wider time scales to look at economic and sociological factors, it was only in order to grasp the effect of their structural imperatives on individual decision-making. Their analysis, I argue, still ultimately returned to the question of criminal guilt, even though by widening the range of explanation, they did challenge the simplicity of the intentionalist’s solution to guilt. But rarely did they perform research into social opinion and the behavior of the everyday German that

³ The line between Nazi and Holocaust research becomes particularly blurry here, as intentionalists had to posit Hitler as a strong dictator for their claims to be plausible. Thus note the parallelism between the two consecutive chapters in Ian Kershaw’s The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in Interpretation, “Hitler: ‘Master in the Third Reich’ or ‘weak dictator’?” and “Hitler and the Holocaust.”
might have challenged the juridical notion of criminal guilt more directly, or expanded the field of research beyond facile notions of guilt. Meanwhile, the victim was totally excluded from the German entries into this debate. Thus, though functionalist historians in particular began to look at a wider range of evidence, I argue that nonetheless, the general fixation on the question of perpetrator guilt completely prevented German historians from encountering victim testimony, and that this lack of engagement further contributed to the explanatory cul-de-sac of the intentionalist-functionalist debate.

Jewish historiographical contributions, because they were interested in the victim, were different in that they began to give testimony a greater – although still a rudimentary amount – of attention. Testimony thus happened to be useful in reconstructing the behavior of Jewish communities and their Judenräte (Jewish councils established by the Nazis to aid in administering the ghettos), a topic that had been so highly politicized in postwar Jewish discourse because of the veneration of heroes of the resistance and the accusations of passivity and collaboration made against the rest of the survivors in Israel. Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and Raul Hilberg’s *Destruction of the European Jews*, by making claims about Jewish passivity which had become controversial as a result of the Eichmann trial, were the catalysts for these new research endeavors. Nonetheless, much of the research was still oriented around finding factual rebuttals to accusations of Jewish guilt, and in the few instances in which they gave accounts of the perpetrators, such as Lucy Dawidowicz’s *War Against the Jews*, they vehemently asserted an account of
the guilt of the perpetrators that precluded any analysis of what they might have been thinking.

Chapter Three provides an account of the intentionalist-functionalist debate in terms of its relationship to the problem of guilt and testimonial engagement. I will argue that for both German and Jewish historians, the moral guilt felt by the historians played a significant role in the way they constructed their narratives around the need to attribute criminal responsibility. Historians, overwhelmed by feelings of guilt with regard to the past, felt the need to establish closure with regards to it through assuming the role of the judge – to discharge a vague feeling of guilt by assigning it to discrete actors. Given the extreme nature of Nazi ‘crimes,’ there seemed to be a moral imperative to judge. To do otherwise would be seen as exculpation. This was also reflected in the self-proclaimed ‘sobriety’ of their approach – especially among German historians, but also reflected in the ways Jewish historians such as Dawidowicz explicitly approached the victims – which had the effect of aiding historians in distancing themselves further from the victims and the emotions (including guilt) that they arouse. When Jewish historians engaged testimony, it was almost always in the light of its redemptive or heroic aspects, as part of the tendency of Jewish historians to emphasize acts of resistance. Even the issue of attributing guilt was disguised as an epistemological debate about modes of historical interpretation. In his analysis of the German Historikerstreit (Historian’s debate of the late 1980’s) Dominic LaCapra has identified this as a psychological mechanism of defense and denial akin to what Freud called ‘acting out’, an “overreaction prompting a
confinement of historiography to self-defeating positivistic protocols that may stimulate a return of the repressed in relatively uncontrolled and uncritical forms.”

However, as this positivistic fixation had its roots in the transferential positions of the historians with regard to the Holocaust, there are no fixed modes for expressing these ‘defense mechanisms’. Chapters Three and Four will detail some of the different ways these mechanisms can be expressed, and the relationship of testimony in particular to the transferential positions of historians. Furthermore, a central tenet of my argument is that there is a generational basis for the evolution of historiographical inquiry that operates on the basis of a kind of transgenerational mourning. Each generation was born into a different state of affairs, and confronted the Holocaust through the stories of the previous generations. Thus the guilt of each generation, mediated through the previous generation’s attempt at ‘working through’, yields a new constellation of transferential positions. Thus the failure to grapple with testimony or move beyond the need to interpret the Holocaust through the lens of guilt had a generational basis, which is part of the reason why the Hitler Youth generation was never able to transcend the intentionalist-functionalist debate by itself.

It is no coincidence that the coming of age of the first postwar generation in Germany and the ‘second generation’ constituting the children of survivors marks a significant transition in Holocaust memory and representation. It was at this time that oral testimony projects began to proliferate, boosted by the recent cultural and linguistic turn within academia. These children would begin to reconstruct their parent’s pasts – the children of survivors tending to their parent’s memoirs, while the

---

children of Nazis, engaging the more elusive moral guilt they feel as part of the larger community which perpetrated the Holocaust, were the first historians to begin to systematically examine the attitudes of everyday Germans like their parents and ask more difficult questions about the complicity of those closer to them.

This greater engagement with testimony during this period of generational turnover led to more troubling conclusions about the persistence of the Holocaust in the present. The release of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* was particularly salient in this regard. The redemptive appropriation of testimony that had its roots as far back as the 1950’s (i.e. with the veneration of Anne Frank’s diary) was now called into question because it implied a closure that simply hadn’t taken place. Critics such as Lawrence Langer, after spending time with oral testimony archives, thus voiced their concern over the ‘life lessons’ that people had tried to appropriate from testimony, claiming that oral testimony expressed only the “ruins of memory,” which bespoke only a fractured life, a premature experience of incomplete death. But at the same time, the discourse evolving around this ‘authentic’ way of listening to survivor testimony led to another ‘sanctification’ of the witness by privileging the unique authenticity of testimony from the limits to transmit the raw experience of the past.

Gary Weissman has issued a particularly incisive critique against this particular revival of testimony in Holocaust discourse. In *Fantasies of Witnessing* he argues that, in many cases, proponents of the ‘authenticity’ of testimony, such as Lawrence Langer, seek to ‘re-experience’ the Holocaust and believe that testimony – oral in particular – provides us with some special unmediated access to the past that

---

can allow us to share the survivor’s trauma. Anxious about the so-called ‘limits of representation’ in Holocaust discourse and the potential for Holocaust memory being turned into kitsch, these scholars, according to Weissman, believe that testimony provides a direct entry into the past through the words of survivors, allowing us to bypass the concerns that the Holocaust is somehow incommunicable and beyond incomprehension. If properly listened to, they claim, oral testimony can provide an ‘authentic’ comprehension of atrocity.⁶

Weissman has, I believe, correctly identified a component of this desire to re-experience the past in the anxiety felt by those with close relations to the Holocaust – the second generation in particular – towards the burden of an absent traumatic past that they could not directly experience themselves. Though Weissman does not call it this, the second generation’s guilt generated an imperative to mourn the past and prevent its banalization that was too strong to fully ‘work through’ alone, much as their parents, in many cases, had been unable to mourn themselves. Some children of survivors thus felt that the only way to adequately engage and mourn that past would be to resurrect it, to seek to undergo that trauma themselves and thus discharge their guilt for not having been there, for not being able to do anything to help their parents.

Chapter Four, in addition to summarizing the history of testimonial production from within social and generational change, unpacks the components of the very act of bearing witness to the Holocaust in order to better understand how it can and should be engaged, and what sorts of possibilities and dangers it offers. This will also highlight the tension – but also complementarity - between the ‘filial’ and universal

levels of guilt feelings about the Holocaust in its persistence in the present through survivors and testimony.

This notion of ‘universal’ guilt requires me to introduce a modification of our understanding of guilt: it is the guilt we all feel insofar as we are human, a guilt that is constitutive of our historical sense, and is part of the reason why Habermas’s belief that Auschwitz changed the conditions for life within history beyond the families of victims and perpetrators is valid. We learn to take up the debt to those who came before us and handed down our existence, we learn to take a responsibility for the possibilities they have given us, possibilities which are often only disclosed once we recognize our debt to our ancestors as a result of their death. Mourning is thus the process of constructively engaging, but not discharging or laying aside, this debt. In this sense, what the second generation experienced in the extreme is something we all share with regard to the past, insofar as our relationship to the past, to history, is always to the dead.

Henry Greenspan has criticized the various reasons for listening to testimony, especially the ‘legacy’ discourse initiated by the second generation that prioritizes the necessity of preserving testimony for later generations. If this discourse were as empty and banal as he portrays it, I would be forced to agree. Insofar as the ‘legacy’ discourse focuses only on how the stories handed down through testimony are in themselves ‘redemptive,’ teaching moral lessons to future generations, his critique carries weight. However, he fails to offer a convincing alternative, explaining rather

---

that the only reason to listen to survivors is “to listen to survivors.”\textsuperscript{8} Though he intends something deep by this statement, it is utterly empty and conceals his own frustration with the apparent misuses to which testimony has been put.

My notion of a redemptive historical practice, on the other hand, which situates testimony and historiography within the paradigm of storytelling, places a crucial emphasis on the very practice of intergenerational transmission and the ways it holds open the past and establishes historiography as one mode of coping with existence and death within a broader historical practice. Redemption does not come through listening to the words of a story. It is a process by which we recover a past, not in order to forget it again, as Greenspan claims the ‘legacy’ discourse does, but in order to continuously mourn it and inscribe its legacy into the chain of human life – into \textit{immortality} – especially insofar as that legacy bears witness to an absolute denial of this life. Mourning the Holocaust is thus keeping the void of absolute, mass death \textit{visible}, for there is nothing else to transmit except the fact that this death haunts our own collective – filial and universal – relationship to mortality and immortality.

Chapter Five will work towards outlining the basic features of this redemptive historical practice. It should be read in light of the difficulties discovered in the historiography in Chapter Three, where the various strategies employed by a generation of historians in dealing with guilt were limited by their fixation on the question of responsibility. It is an explanation of the incapacities of these historians, as well as of the difficulties emerging from listening to Holocaust testimony, discussed in Chapter Four.

\textsuperscript{8} Greenspan, \textit{Listening}, 171.
What then, are we to say about the confrontation between the judge’s task and the historian’s task? The conditions under which the verdict is pronounced within the courtroom have opened a breach in the common front maintained by the historian in the face of error and injustice. The judge has to pass judgment…this historians do not do, cannot do, do not want to do; and if they were to attempt it, at the risk of setting themselves up as the sole tribunal of history, this would be at the cost of acknowledging the precariousness of a judgment whose partiality, even militancy, is recognized... Penal judgment, governed by the principle of individual guilt, by nature recognizes only defendants who have proper names and who, moreover, are asked to state their identity at the opening of the trial.¹

Paul Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting

* * *

The need to apportion historical guilt to discrete actors with proper names has dominated most comprehensive studies and representations of the Holocaust. This imperative almost invariably brought with it juridical norms of epistemological veracity with respect to conceptual frameworks of analysis and evidentiary collection and interrogation. As the experience of the Holocaust denied legal forms of justice the ability to give closure to the trauma, the juridical positivism within historiography has only been reinforced in its attempts to achieve such closure. This is in part a result of what Saul Friedländer has identified as the “moral imperative” intrinsic to the impact of the Holocaust on Western society, that seems to regularly constrain the range of options open to Holocaust representation.²

Dan Stone has argued that this has resulted from historians’ lack of engagement with the philosophy of history, which has sidetracked Holocaust history from engaging the memory and trauma of the Holocaust and its implications for human existence and experience within history – what some would call our ‘historicity’. He therefore thinks that historians’ attitudes towards survivor testimony is a result not of the latter’s deficient epistemological status as historical documents, but rather of the inability of historiography to integrate the experience of temporal rupture voiced in testimony into traditional narrative form. While I agree that this comprises one aspect of the problem, it does not explain it. I believe that it merely begs the question as to why this has been the prevalent state of affairs, especially with regards to the Holocaust: why have historians clung to these methods so ardently? There is a circularity at the heart of this obstinacy – an attempt to bring closure, to reassert normality and the continuity of modernity, an attempt which Nuremberg exemplified and transmitted to subsequent analyses, and which both shaped and was facilitated and reinforced by receptive social attitudes in Germany, Israel and the United States. Thus the early historians often directed statements concerning their use of testimony towards anticipated objections from other historians and lay-dissenters. The level of historians’ commitment to this particular notion of historical-juridical veracity is simply too great to be reduced to their supposed inability to grapple with the philosophy of history. There is still a very tangible pressure within the intellectual community of Holocaust researchers to preserve this commitment to strict epistemological veracity and its corollary in the emotional distance expected from the narrator – in no small part because of the fear of yielding ground to Holocaust
deniers. But because the Holocaust appeared as the nadir of human criminality, early historians clung ever more fervently to juridical standards of truth in their efforts to dissect the past, even once the issue of responsibility and denial was no longer particularly salient.

The years between the Nuremberg and the Eichmann trials laid the groundwork for this development. The relative silence of survivors about their experiences was matched by their exclusion from the meager historiography of the period and their marginalization in the collective consciousness of the West. Hence this chapter is largely preliminary in that it will engage, more than anything, the conceptual foundations out of which the later historiography would spring. It is concerned with the absences and gaps in the historiography that would first be reproduced and then eventually recognized and mended. For in this period the question is often not how the Holocaust was portrayed, but why it was not understood as a discrete event separate from Nazi criminality. The legacy that would develop into the intentionalist position can thus be read as a transposition of a juridical framework in the pursuit of an understanding of the Holocaust that had been precluded by the legal and pedagogical restrictions of the Nuremburg proceedings.

**Nuremberg and the Legacy of Juridical Historiography**

Though in some cases Nuremberg prepared some of the basic conceptual and conventional assumptions about the Holocaust that took decades to transcend, in other cases it was rather its very inadequacy that prompted later historical research. The transmission of its conceptual apparatus was effected through several media; the
establishment of certain kinds of historical narratives and conceptual categorizations about the Holocaust and its place in the Final Solution; the trial’s effect on broader public consciousness about the Holocaust; its foundation of an immense documentary archive, conspicuously lacking in Jewish witness testimony; and its propagation of a kind of juridical thinking towards analyzing the Holocaust. This last effect, to be fair, is not only a result of the trial itself: in many ways the historico-juridical gaze grew out of the nature of the West’s inability to deal with an unprecedented mass atrocity such as Holocaust through the closure affected by the judicial institution. This event seemed to demand a special kind of response, an assertion of the guilt of the perpetrators that could not be fulfilled immediately through traditional forms of justice. Hannah Arendt has thus stated her belief that “The Nazi crimes… cannot be apprehended juridically; and that is precisely what constitutes their monstrousness.”

But in some ways, the failure of Nuremberg to deliver the kind of restitution for which many had hoped ultimately would impart an even greater moral imperative upon the historian to satisfy this demand, to construct closure and provide restitution to the damage done to memory, to history, and to modernity – which we will exhibited in the narratives later in this chapter.

The most crucial aspect of the legacy of the Nuremberg trials was its feeble relationship to the Jewish aspect of National Socialism, an aspect largely effaced by a variety of political decisions, juridical considerations, and cultural assumptions. Donald Bloxham has noted a problematic circularity in the intent and function of the trial in the eyes of its creators. It was to have a didactic purpose, which would

---

‘inform’ the Germans about their own past. But it was a ‘past’ that had already been
determined and preconceived by the Allied powers (although mainly at the behest of
the United States and Britain) according to the framework of the prosecution, which
sought to charge the Nazi defendants with crimes of conspiracy to wage an aggressive
war and crimes against humanity. The knowledge of the past that the trial would
attempt to impart to the Germans would therefore reflect the prosecution’s
understanding of history, and thus the Jewish issue was subsumed under these
categories and became merely an adjunct to the Nazi’s broader preconceived
intention of engaging in an imperialistic and aggressive war. Jewish suffering became
a special case of a more basic Nazi criminality.4

A variety of political considerations were instrumental in bringing about this
outcome – factors which not only had nothing to do with the Holocaust itself, and
which influenced later perceptions of the Holocaust indirectly through the
consequences of the Nuremberg trials, but that also impinged directly on the public
memory of the Holocaust in the West in the 1950’s. Foremost among these was the
developing Cold War, which rapidly reversed the attitude of the Western powers,
especially the United States, towards the rehabilitation of Germany, and greatly
influenced the approach taken by the courts and the prosecutors at Nuremberg.

According to historian Donald Bloxham, the decision to grant a sort of amnesty to the
German people as a whole was granted de facto by the policy of using ‘representative
examples’ of the perpetrators that reinforced the conception of Nazism as articulated
by the liberal-democratic theory of totalitarianism – a concept which was deployed to

4 Donald Bloxham, Genocide on Trial: War Crimes Trials and the Formation of Holocaust
History and Memory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 57.
intentionally draw parallels between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Insofar as it informed the trials, the model of totalitarianism exculpated everyone below the top echelons of the Nazi regime because of its emphasis on the all-encompassing, systematic nature of its totalitarian rule. Only those at the top could be held responsible.\textsuperscript{5}

The totalitarian approach permitted the trials to acquit many key figures in the Nazi regime that were needed to administer a rehabilitated Germany, increasingly seen by the Allies as a necessary bulwark against the USSR in the East. Many mid-level bureaucrats as well as the Wehrmacht were thus pardoned as part of this effort, perpetuating the myth of the uncorrupted and honorable status of the army during the war – a myth that has only very recently been dislodged. There were also psychological and legal reasons as well, for many in the Allied camp needed to see that “a fellow European culture had not been totally corrupted.”\textsuperscript{6} Civilization could not be indicted.

Concerns over the psychological rehabilitation of Germany also factored into the didactic framework of the trial: the reeducation of the German population gave the trial an important pedagogical value that reinforced the totalitarian approach to indicting only those at the top. The courts, according to Bloxham, were intent on establishing “a representative image of Nazism,” to demonstrate the basic outlines of Nazi criminality to the public, without undermining all of its bases for rehabilitation.\textsuperscript{7}

However, the new legal category formulated for these trials, “crimes against humanity” – which provided an original interpretation of Nazi criminality that was to

\textsuperscript{5} ibid. 219
\textsuperscript{6} ibid. 180
\textsuperscript{7} ibid. 200
become implicated at the core of subsequent historical controversy – required the propagation of the image of atavism. The conceptual framework grounding this new crime had to reinforce the paradigm of ‘civility’ against which Nazi crimes were to be judged, castigating them as atavistic and barbaric, pathological aberrancies rather than structural possibilities inherent to modernity. One historian believes this to have resulted more from the attempt to filter history through legal concepts, rather than from a deliberate attempt to provide an interpretation that expunged aspects of modernity in the Final Solution from the historical record because civilization was logically required as a foundation upon which Western justice could claim its legitimacy. At the same time, this interpretation reflects a significant trend in early perceptions of the Nazi regime, and can be seen both as a deliberate attempt to create the foundations for German restitution, as well as a psychological aversion to the implications of the association of Nazi crime with civilization and modernity. The most common images depicted the Nazis as a sadistic, brutal and inhuman evil, turning them into an aberrant ‘other’. Fostering a memory of Nazism as an aberration from the Enlightenment narrative of progress permitted the Stunde Null myth to flourish by placing Nazi atrocities outside of history. Furthermore, the idea that the Holocaust called into question the very notion of progress and civilization was not particularly widespread in the West the first fifteen years after the end of the war. It simply did not garner much enthusiasm among the victors.

---

9 ibid. 89
10 Stone *Constructing the Holocaust* 84
More than anything else though, it was the focus of the courts, especially the IMT, on the crime of ‘conspiracy to disrupt peace’ that provided the greatest obstacle to the court’s ability to represent the Final Solution as a significant and distinct event in itself. That is, the new legal category invented for the prosecution of the specific atrocities of Nazism, “crimes against humanity,” was in practice subordinated to the crime of conspiracy in order to maintain a veneer of German sovereignty and thus avoid charges of ‘victor’s justice.’ It was also linked to the trial’s didactic value insofar as the Allies hoped to demonstrate to the German people exactly what it was they were supposed to reject – a corrupt politics susceptible to ‘conspiracy,’ a notion strongly informed by the liberal-democratic ideal the West hoped to foster in the defeated country. One of the prosecutors at Nuremberg, Telford Taylor, offered a picture of this ideal by its contrast with his description of Hitler’s rule as resting upon “the unholy trinity of Nazism, militarism, and economic imperialism.” The role of the trial was therefore to expose this trinity and condemn its main proponents, and not to delve to deeply into their motivation, which was blandly acknowledged to have arisen out of the mutually-reinforcing structure of the trinity. The ‘Nazism’ component became a disguised signifier for the ‘radical ideology,’ which was supposed to make sense of the apparently random and senseless killing of Jews. Yet as it was always subordinated to the other two components of the trinity, the uniquely Jewish aspect of Nazi atrocities was largely effaced. This effacement is important because it is not as if there was no understanding at the time of the nature of the death

---

11 Bloxham Genocide on Trial 21
12 ibid. 204
13 ibid. 203
camps and the work of the *Einsatzgruppen*. The trial dealt with these, though the centrality of anti-Semitism to their purpose and functioning was never made explicit.

The downplaying of the Jewish factor in the Nuremberg trials was compounded by the Allies’ fear of projecting an image of ‘victor’s justice.’ They believed that by emphasizing the Jewish aspect of German war crimes, the courts might be held to be acting as a proxy for ‘Jewish vengefulness,’ thus stirring up anti-Semitism in Germany and any other country that had nationals being tried at Nuremberg.\(^\text{14}\) The British in particular were concerned with the possibility that giving too much attention to the Jewish issue would have negative effects on the stability of their rule in Palestine by generating increased sympathy for the plight of the Jews.\(^\text{15}\) The prosecution also wished to demonstrate a sort of ‘even-handedness’ with respect to the types of crimes it pursued, in line with their strategy of convicting ‘representative examples,’ despite the non-evenly distributed nature of the crimes committed.\(^\text{16}\) Thus, Bloxham analyzes what he calls a policy of ‘non-differentiation’ of victimhood, in part a result of the universalistic intentions of the Western powers, but largely a manifestation of their need to downplay the Jewish aspect of what had occurred.\(^\text{17}\) The totalitarian concept only worked to reinforce this tendency, as it implied political rather than ethnic, religious or racial victimhood, which also resonated with the Allies’ liberal-democratic ideal.\(^\text{18}\) Indeed, there was what appeared to some to be a failure of liberal ideology to grapple with the ethnic core of anti-Semitism, which was reflected in the inadequacy of the new legal concepts being

---

\(^{14}\) ibid. 66
\(^{15}\) Douglas *The Memory of Judgment* 78
\(^{16}\) Bloxham *Genocide on Trial* 66
\(^{17}\) ibid. 76
deployed for the first time at Nuremberg to do justice to the unprecedented nature of the Final Solution.\textsuperscript{19}

The effacement of the specificity of Jewish victimhood in the Nuremberg trials was augmented by their absence as witnesses. The Nuremberg trials are well-known for the overwhelming boredom incurred on all those present at the court proceedings, which was the upshot of the trials’ near reliance on an endless parade of Nazi documentary evidence.\textsuperscript{20} Jewish testimony was deliberately excluded, despite some controversy, in part because of an implicit belief that Jews harbored a tendency to exaggerate their own persecution.\textsuperscript{21} It was also largely a manifestation of the belief that the case would be more ‘objective’ if it were expressed in universalistic terms, and if Jewish suffering were presented instead by Christian representatives.\textsuperscript{22} But more than anything it was the logic of juridical evidence – that the objective proof of crime becomes “less credible and more impeachable as one moves from perpetrator to bystander to victim” – which determined the absence of victim testimony.\textsuperscript{23} The epistemological assumption against testimonial reliability has plagued Holocaust historiography, not only in its distrust of memory, but also in its inheritance of interpretive misrepresentations that resulted from the lack of survivor voice.

\textsuperscript{19} Bloxham \textit{Genocide on Trial} 65
\textsuperscript{20} Douglas \textit{The Memory of Judgment} Ch. 1
\textsuperscript{21} Bloxham \textit{Genocide on Trial} 66
\textsuperscript{22} ibid. 67, Douglas \textit{The Memory of Judgment} 79
\textsuperscript{23} Douglas \textit{The Memory of Judgment} 78
The limited impact of the Nuremberg trials on Germans’ engagement with their past, what was known in Germany as *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, did not stem only from the problems associated with applying juridical concepts to an event such as the Holocaust: the principles put forward at Nuremberg were deliberately curtailed once the occupying powers handed the task of trying war criminals over to Germany. The emergence of the Cold War and the division of Germany had a role to play in this, as it did in virtually all crevices of public life through the 1950’s. At the same time, other political and social forces worked to efface the memory of the Holocaust, and in different ways in the East and West. We must remember that to a large extent, many German civilians were rather preoccupied with their own struggle to make ends meet, with the sense of defeat, with cities reduced to rubble and thus with a sense of their own victimhood at the hands of allied bombers. Local imperatives aided Germans in concealing their own complicity, in rejecting the principles of Nuremberg, while simultaneously using it as a justification for having rectified their crimes.

In West Germany, the imperative of integration, both internal with regard to the consolidation of German democracy, and external with regard to acceptance by the West, hindered an authentic encounter with the Holocaust and its survivors. Jeffrey Herf has characterized the West German post-war situation as being pulled between the opposing poles of justice and memory on the one hand, and democracy

---

The first Chancellor of the Federal Republic (BDR), Konrad Adenauer, played a central role in pushing post-war Germany towards the latter, by emphasizing the priority of the consolidation of the political and economic foundations of the state over coming to terms with the past. The accent he placed on Germans as victims and his abridgement of Jewish themes appealed to many voters, who elected him Chancellor over Kurt Schumacher, who as leader of the Social Democrats had criticized Adenauer for his evasion of the Holocaust. Nuremberg had already closed the door on the notion of collective guilt: Adenauer, by choosing to grant amnesty to Nazis who had been indicted at Nuremberg and or in other Allied war crimes trials alleviated the burden of guilt and the work of remembering for even greater numbers of Germans, generating a “myth of innocence” to effect collective amnesia. His emphasis on amnesty proved appealing to German voters, who according to a variety of surveys at the time did not reject Nazism or those linked to it as much as is sometimes assumed. Though he resisted calls for outright general amnesty, he narrowed the burden of guilt to a very select few top Nazi officials, most of whom were already dead.

Adenauer rather chose reparations as a symbolic means of restitution (Wiedergutermacherung) after Israel formally requested reparations payments in 1951. But these reparations only aided the evasion of guilt; they merely became

---

25 Ibid. 203
26 Ibid. 272-3
27 Mary Fulbrook, German National Identity after the Holocaust (Cambridge: Polity Press 1999) 77. Fulbrook actually argues that the configuration of post-war German memory was one dominated by the ‘myth of innocence’ rather than by collective amnesia. I do not see these two notions as being at odds; rather, with respect to Jewish suffering and German persecution, the former facilitated the latter insofar as it was an attempt cancel out the very guilt that would have forced a retention of the past.
28 Herf Divided Memory 274 and Fulbrook 169-170
29 Fulbrook German National Identity after the Holocaust 59
another part of the annual budget. They did not require a sustained reflection on the past. And to some degree, reparations payments reinforced the sense among many Germans that “the Jews (still stereotyped and perceived as ‘other’) continued to be a ‘problem.’”\(^{30}\) Michael Geyer and Miriam Hansen have spoken of “a near total usurpation of memory – every kind of memory – by the post-war state and its institutions.” Rather, many Germans found that “even if they had wanted to remember, there was no space or collective language for memory experienced. Memory remained private or marginal… or it was state sponsored and institutional.”\(^ {31}\)

Efforts were made to construct more open forms of sustained official remembrance, for example through memorial ceremonies held for the victims of Nazism. But they remained relatively small and marginalized in popular consciousness – Adenauer was conspicuously absent from these memorials – becoming just another distant ‘state-sponsored’ form of memory.\(^ {32}\) Even the most sincere efforts were blindsided by their own evasion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. In 1952 President Theodore Heuss attended the annual memorial service held by survivors at Bergen-Belsen, giving a speech that was exceptional for its recognition of Jewish suffering, and for his insistence that “no one will lift this shame from us.”\(^ {33}\) But not only was this perspective unpopular, it also repeated the narrative of continuity within German history that side-stepped National Socialism, linking the present directly to a pre-1933 past, and thus depicting Nazi crimes as a departure

\(^{30}\) ibid. 149  
\(^{32}\) Herf *Divided Memory* 300  
\(^{33}\) ibid. 324
from civilization. Germans, he believed, carried the moral injunction to remember
because they “possessed the moral resources and the multiple historical continuities
to have prevented genocide.” As powerful a message as this was, it still
recapitulated Germany’s evasion of the damage done to the conditions of ‘life within
history’ by the Holocaust.

Though even the early non-German Holocaust narratives expressed the same
evasion, West German historiography, embodied in these years by the works of
eminent historians Gerhard Ritter and Friedrich Meinecke, not only portrayed Nazism
as a departure from standard course of civilized German history, but also evaded the
topic of the Holocaust altogether.

Under such conditions of amnesty, perceived innocence and widespread
silence, it is no surprise to find that the few surviving Jews that remained or returned
to Germany were silent about their experience, in public and in private. There was a
sense of alienation from the public myth of discontinuity and innocence, since for
Jews returning to Germany “it was not a simple matter of reintegration… there could
be no easy return to the integration characteristic of Jewish life prior to 1933” after
the wounds incurred by the previous 12 years.

East Germany, on the other hand, despite, or perhaps because of its early
willingness to tackle the issue of Nazism, ultimately diminished the history of Jewish
suffering to an even greater degree than in West Germany, which at least officially

34 ibid. 324
35 Friedländer, Saul “German Struggles with Memory” Memory, History, and the Extermination of the
Jews of Europe (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1993) 3-4. Chapter Three will discuss these
works and their legacy in more depth.
36 For first hand accounts of the experience of post-war German-Jewish relationships and mutual
impressions, see Geyer and Hansen in Hartman, Holocaust Remembrance (1994)
37 Fulbrook German National Identity after the Holocaust) 148
promoted remembrance and ‘philo-semitism’. Drawing on the moral capital associated with the communist resistance to Nazism, the GDR was able to alleviate its own guilt rather efficiently. Jews were not given official status as victims. One was rather referred to as a ‘fighter against fascism.’ Given that most Jews in the GDR had chosen to be there for political considerations, most Jews wanted to integrate, and thus did not want to carry the image victimhood, as this would have countered the rhetoric of the state. Martyrdom and heroism became the dominant symbol of East German memory.

* * *

Nowhere was Holocaust memory mobilized through the myth of martyrdom more than in Israel in the first decade and a half of its existence. The Holocaust became a major mobilizing myth for the consolidation of the state of Israel. Much has been written over the years linking the destruction of European Jewry to the founding of Israel. The term ‘Holocaust’ has been directly linked to this event, given its etymological origins as a sacrificial burnt offering. The Holocaust was therefore, in the eyes of the some members of the Yishuv (the inhabitants of Palestine before the creation of the state of Israel), the sacrifice made to reestablish the Jewish homeland.

Though Holocaust memory was ever-present in Israel in the early years, this did not translate into the creation of forums for survivors to bear witness. In fact, survivors in Israel were about as likely as anywhere else to be found discussing their

---

38 ibid. 149
39 ibid. 57
40 ibid. 151
experiences. On the one hand, there was a general hostility held towards Diaspora Jews in the immediate post-war years, especially among the younger generation of the Yishuv who had arrived in Israel on the last wave of aliyot. In addition to a general prejudice toward the image of the conformist, helpless Diaspora Jew, thought of as ‘human dust,’ there was a lack of sympathy for those who had embraced Europe as a homeland, and who thus could not see that Jews would be unsafe anywhere but in Israel.\(^{41}\) They were perceived as being weak, propagating the myth of ‘sheep led to the slaughter,’ in contrast to the ideal of the Sabra, the strong, young, and idealistic Jew born in Palestine, who was supposed to build the new state of Israel. They were thus seen by many of the Yishuv as a burden, rather than as welcome help.\(^{42}\)

The immediate post-war years also witnessed the genesis of the notion, represented both popularly and in much early Jewish historiography, that the survivors were guilty because of their very survival. There was a perception among many Israelis that the survivors must have been of base and immoral character to have survived the concentration camps. David Ben-Gurion even shared his belief that “Among the survivors of the German concentration camps were those who, had they not been what they were—harsh, evil, and egotistical people—would not have survived, and all they endured rooted out every good part of their souls.”\(^{43}\) There was a fear that these people “were liable to ‘poison’ Zionism.”\(^{44}\) Nonetheless, the Yishuv on the whole felt a responsibility to their brethren, in large part at the insistence of

\(^{42}\) My own grandfather, a Polish Jew and survivor of the Holocaust, was told by his relatives in Israel not to come after he got out of the sanitarium because they didn’t want to have to support him.
\(^{44}\) ibid. 120
Ben-Gurion. But the myth persisted and percolated into central Jewish historiographical debates, resulting most famously in the condemnation of the ghetto Judenräte by Raul Hilberg and Hannah Arendt during the Eichmann trial. But by then the tides had begun to change, and their accusations resulted in a backlash that signaled a new era in the Jewish memory of the Holocaust and in Israeli perceptions of survivors.

Sympathy for survivors in Israel in the 1940’s and 50’s was further undermined by the practical imperatives of the times in the first years of the new state. There was a sense that everyone had suffered, given that one-tenth of the population died in the wars for independence in the 1940’s. Why should these recent European immigrants have a special privilege to victimhood? Israel had, passed since 1945 through two and a half stormy years of political and armed struggle against the British mandate, years also of illegal immigration; through a war of independence, the foundation for national rebirth in which many European survivors took active part while suppressing the Holocaust chapter of their lives; through years of mass immigration in the early 1950’s which saw the young nation double within five years, and the Sinai campaign. It was a time of non-stop events, daily hardships, difficulties with immigrant absorption, and skirmishes with terrorist followed by retaliation campaigns.

Israeli poet Haim Gouri continued, “The Holocaust was nowhere and everywhere in the land.” This is not to say that they kept silent about the Holocaust per se, as was the case in Germany and in the United States (at least in the 50’s). Many survivors were integral to the efforts of many of the commemorative movements in the early years. Rather, much like in Germany “the official culture of remembrance pre-empted

---

the expression of individual memory,” which led to the dominance of a myth of redemption couched in the framework of Zionist beliefs.\textsuperscript{47}

The ‘average’ survivor was ultimately overshadowed by the redemptive myths that were widely propagated in the 1940’s and 50’s. The Warsaw ghetto uprising became a mobilizing myth for the new state, as immigrating former resisters were lionized while the dead were conferred martyrdom. Friedländer has noted how these events became inscribed within the interpretive frameworks of “Catastrophe and Heroism” and “Catastrophe and Redemption” narratives, situating the Holocaust within “the historical tradition of Jewish catastrophes leading to the redemptive birth of the Jewish state.”\textsuperscript{48} In this vein, in 1951 the Knesset officially proclaimed the 27\textsuperscript{th} of the Jewish month of Nissan “Yom HaZikaron l’HaShoah v’laGvura”, literally, Day of Remembrance for the Holocaust and Heroism. The date was chosen because of its close proximity to the anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising and Israeli Independence Day (which is now preceded by the Memorial Day for the Fallen in Israel’s Jewish Wars).\textsuperscript{49} Then in 1953 the Knesset established Yad VaShem, the Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Authority as a museum, archive, center for research and commemorative site.\textsuperscript{50} Thus the bond between the Holocaust, heroism, redemption and the birth of Israel was firmly cemented. The work carried out at Yad Vashem would for several decades recapitulate these themes, focusing attention on research about resistance efforts among Jews across Europe.

\textsuperscript{47} Cesarani \textit{Eichmann} 331. Italics are mine.
\textsuperscript{48} Friedländer, Saul, “The Shoah in Present Historical Consciousness” 44
\textsuperscript{49} ibid. 44. It was originally proposed to commemorate this day on the actual anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, the 14\textsuperscript{th} of Nissan, but because this was the day before Passover it had to be moved.
\textsuperscript{50} Cesarani \textit{Eichmann} 331
If Israeli and German memories of the Holocaust were characterized by their high degree of institutionalization, in the United States Holocaust memory was notable for the absence of a dominant institutionalized narrative. We should be wary not to draw this distinction too far though: other official narratives, largely tied to the political aspects of the Cold War, shaped the dimensions within which perceptions of the Holocaust would begin to congeal. But we can attribute this difference to the lesser importance of the Holocaust in the construction of American identity. Nonetheless, given the massive influx of survivors into the US, in addition to the prominence of Jews in American political and social life, the production of the memory of the Holocaust emerged in crucial ways in the post-war period. But they would tend, much like in Israel and Germany, to efface the voice of survivors.

The reception of Holocaust survivors by American Jews in many ways paralleled their reception in Israel – their perceptions of the former were often directly imported from Jewish leaders in the latter. Thus we find similar debasing statements regarding the supposed immorality of those who managed to survive in the US as well. At the same time, there were still major efforts by the American Jewish organization to facilitate the immigration of Jewish DP’s, either to Palestine or to the US, depending on whether or not they were Zionist in inclination or commitment.
Ultimately, by the early 1950’s around 100,000 survivors had made it to the United States, a number that increased later on as some left Israel and came to the US.\textsuperscript{51}

Though there were no institutional narratives speaking directly against the survivor experience as there was in Israel and Germany, Jews still found that Americans had little patience to hear them out. Survivors were told to look into the future, towards building new lives, and not to perseverate on their ‘distant’ past. And indeed, the imperative of integration, of starting new lives did generate its own incentive beyond what survivors were being told to do (or not to do, as the case may be) by their new community.\textsuperscript{52}

The social climate of the Cold War held significant sway in the lives of survivors as well as in public representations of the Holocaust. The relative amnesty granted to Germany at the Nuremberg trials only increased with the onset of the Cold War, to the dismay of many American Jews,\textsuperscript{53} diminished the ubiquity of the atavistic image of Nazism in favor of the totalitarian model in some sectors of American society. This facilitated the displacement of Americans’ negative imagery of Nazi Germany on to the Soviet Union, thereby creating a new narrative of continuity between the American struggle against fascism and communism. The totalitarian model also had the ‘side effect’ of displacing the Holocaust from representations of Nazism during this period, as its ethnic emphasis did not fit the rationalized and highly political structure of totalitarian theory.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{51} Peter Novick \textit{The Holocaust in American Life} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999) 82-3.
\textsuperscript{52} ibid. 83
\textsuperscript{53} ibid. 90
\textsuperscript{54} ibid. 87
The Cold War had a direct impact on the integration of Jewish survivors, recently emerging from the Displaced Persons Camps in Europe. As the association of Jews with Communism was widespread in the United States – not just in Nazi Germany, the imperative felt by American Jewish associations to distance themselves from any link. Indeed, Jews were disproportionately represented in the American Communist party, even though the vast majority of Jews were not themselves communist. But the image of the Jewish communist irked many American Jewish communities, who then tried to dispel this myth at any cost. Jewish communists, on the other hand, regularly invoked the Holocaust to oppose mobilization for the Cold War, causing a number of liberal Jewish organizations to deliberately downplay the Holocaust in their rhetoric.\footnote{ibid. 93}

On the whole, there was a general ambivalence as to how the Holocaust was represented in the United States in this period. On the one hand, especially at the more educated level, the totalitarian model was rather predominant. But for most Americans with only a vague perception of the Holocaust, it was certainly associated much more strongly with a savage and primitive barbarism, rather than with modern civilization. At least in America, the atomic bomb was the most apt image of the destructive power inherent to civilization, not the Holocaust.\footnote{ibid. 110-112}

Early television portrayals of the Holocaust also emphasized the divide between Western civilization and the barbarism expressed by the Nazis. Jeffrey Shandler tells us of an introductory placard on one newsreel from May of 1945 that warned that, “These scenes of horror are an awesome indictment of Nazi bestiality.
To the civilized mind such inhuman cruelty is incredible."\(^{57}\) But these early portrayals also were not about the Holocaust – they were about Nazi criminality. The Jewish aspect of these films is simply not present. As Novick has indicated, this was not necessarily an expression of a deliberate prejudice, but rather the result of the American liberation of Germany having encountered primarily non-Jewish suffering. The camps liberated by American troops – Dachau and Buchenwald in particular – contained predominantly non-Jews, especially since most of the Jews that had been in these camps were led out on death marches prior to their liberation. Thus most Americans encountered the concentration camp as an abstract symbol of Nazi persecution and universal human suffering.\(^ {58}\)

Whether or not these tendencies were intentional in the immediate aftermath of the war, they were certainly selected for during the following decade. Jewish suffering was intentionally universalized by American Jews who wished to continue the process of integration and not be publicly marked by the image of the victim.\(^ {59}\) But it was also a matter of a more general mood of American optimism that sought images of redemption couched in universalistic messages. Alain Resnais’s *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog* 1955) was well received in the US, but it did not mention Jews even once, speaking rather of “deportations from all over Europe,” while offering both redemptive messages (“Yet man has incredible powers of resistance… they look after friends worse off than themselves, they share their food with them. They help each other.”) and universal warnings about persecution (“who is on the lookout from this strange watchtower to warn us of our new executioners’ arrival?"

---

58 Novick *The Holocaust in American Life* 65  
…There are those… who pretend all this happened only once and in a certain place”). 60 The hints towards the Soviet Union and the current Algerian conflict were hard to miss.

The success of Anne Frank’s diary and its stage and filmic spin-offs and its canonization as a key Holocaust text have attested to this universalization of the ‘messages’ of the Holocaust, especially in the United States.61 Much has been written in recent years lambasting this canonization because the diary is not representative of the experience of most survivors of the Holocaust. Langer in particular has drawn attention to the relatively tame image of Nazi persecution depicted in the Frank diary, and has ascribed its popularity to its universal themes of adolescence. The Holocaust’s use as a backdrop for this drama became largely incidental to its public reception.62

It also cannot be claimed that there was simply no other Jewish victim testimony available at the time – though its extent was rather limited by today’s standards. In fact, another diary by a young girl has been largely forgotten, though it was used as a source in Reitlinger’s The Final Solution. Mary Berg, an American Jew living in Poland, who spent time in the Warsaw ghetto before making it to the United States in a prisoner exchange deal, also had her diary published in 1945.63 Though by the standards of most testimony Berg’s view is relatively tame and sheltered, it still witnesses some of the atrocity and dehumanization that occurred in the Warsaw

60 Night and Fog, Dir. Alain Resnais. Argos Films, 1955
61 Lawrence Langer believes that the tendency to universalize and downplay suffering more broadly – as manifested in the popularity of the Anne Frank diary, play and film – to be a uniquely American disposition. See Lawrence Langer “Anne Frank Revisited” in Using and Abusing the Holocaust (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2006)
62 Langer Using and Abusing the Holocaust 16-29.
ghetto. But Berg’s diary was already out of print by the 1950’s, displaced by that of Anne Frank.

But far more important survivor testimonies existed at the time that were either unpublished, ignored, or that simply generated little interest outside of Jewish communities. Though written immediately after the war and published in Italy in 1947, Primo Levi’s Se questo é un uomo (literally, If This Is a Man, though the American title was rendered as Survival In Auschwitz), not published in English until 1958, was turned down by Italian publisher Einaudi in 1946, and after being published by a small publishing house, only sold 1,500 copies, and mostly in his home town of Turin. Ringelblum’s archives from the Oneg Shabbes project had been discovered in the 1940’s, and were used extensively in historical works, but remained unpublished in English until 1958, when a short abridged selection was released. Charlotte Delbo similarly finished writing None of Us Will Return in 1945, but it was not published in English until 1965. Even Elie Wiesel’s Night had significant problems finding an American publisher because it was too dark for optimistic American audiences. After finally being published in English in 1960 it sold just over one thousand copies in the first 18 months. There was simply no market for testimony lacking redemptive or universal messages.

* * *

64 Langer, Using and Abusing the Holocaust 125.
THE EARLY NARRATIVES: JURIDICAL HISTORY AND TESTIMONIAL EVASION

The first two comprehensive Holocaust narratives, Leon Poliakov’s *Breviaire de la Haine* (1951) and Gerald Reitlinger’s *The Final Solution*, emerged out of this complex of perceptions and misperceptions, representations, and social trends and forces. Their use of evidence, their narrative structure, and their implicit assumptions about the role of history all evoke the absent specter of the witness. The kind of history they write, the actors they deploy, the processes they trace, the essences they distill are to some degree representative of their context, of social identities, memories, and needs, and of the conspicuous absence of testimonial production. That testimony is not used in these narratives is a fact of the times. Little of it existed, and what had been produced was in large part summarily abandoned. But these dismissals, which we witnessed in the Nuremberg trials, is also a symptom of more widespread beliefs and attitudes towards victims and towards the relationship between present memory, harbored by survivors, and the broader significance of the past.

Nevertheless, we should resist the temptation to be overly critical of works that made huge strides in opening up Holocaust research. Poliakov’s and Reitlinger’s narratives are of considerable importance as they gave the first accounts of the Holocaust as a *discrete event* (even though the term Holocaust was not yet being used). These narratives were the first and only histories in the first 15 years after the Holocaust to isolate and comprehensively examine this event as a subject in its own right, raising the annihilation of the Jews to a new ontological status within history, as something more than a side-effect or characteristic of Nazism and the Second World
War. This point should not be understated: These narratives were to provide the backbone of a necessary corrective to the legacy of the Nuremberg trials, insofar as the image left by the latter was one of the subordination of Jewish suffering to the more universal criminality of the Hitler regime.

At the same time, both narratives are ultimately about the realization of an extermination program – they are not about the concrete extermination itself per se, though the latter aspect does emerge at times in Poliakov’s work. In part, this is a reflection of the way this event was conceived: as a part of the larger totality of Nazi criminality in which the identification of the perpetrators garnered the greatest interest. In this, the historians replicated the operative principles of Nuremberg. This framework had given rise to an almost exclusive attention to Nazi plans as the operative force behind the ‘Final Solution’—a term that itself connotes an isolable decision. Hence, both of the early narratives have sections and chapters with titles such as “The Overall Plan of Extermination,” and “The Wannsee Conference and the Auschwitz Plan.” The conspiratorial unfolding of a preconceived plan is ubiquitous in both narratives. In this way, the juridical explanatory framework was transposed to give a coherency to the very genocide that had been displaced by the trials.

**Leon Poliakov: Harvest of Hate**

Leon Poliakov’s *Breviaire de la Haine* (1951), translated into English as *Harvest of Hate* (1954), was the first comprehensive narrative documenting the

---

extermination of the Jews. It is uncharacteristic in its precocious use of victim
testimony, which at times unintentionally ruptures the otherwise seamless and linear
flow of the narrative. In his fourth chapter, Poliakov makes extensive use of long
excerpts from Emanuel Ringelblum’s diary to illustrate the operation of the Polish
ghettos.\textsuperscript{66} Ringelblum, an historian and leading figure of the Jewish underground
group \textit{Oneg Shabbos}, was instrumental in recording and preserving the history of life
in the Warsaw ghetto before its liquidation in 1943. At the time of the writing of
\textit{Harvest of Hate} it was one of the only documents that gave a detailed description of
how Jewish life in the Warsaw ghetto was organized. Because of the level of Jewish
administrative autonomy that had been exercised through the \textit{Judenräte} there is a
dearth of Nazi documentation of the more concrete workings of the ghetto. Thus we
should be wary not to celebrate the apparent precocity of this use of testimony insofar
as it was a fallback for the lack of more highly privileged forms of documentation.
For in the case of ghetto life, there was simply no other documentation but testimony
to rely on. Poliakov makes his evidentiary prejudice explicit: “wherever possible, to
forestall objections, we have quoted the executioners rather than the victims.”\textsuperscript{67} He
thus follows the Nuremberg evidentiary paradigm, not only in his heavy dependence
on the documents produced at the trials, but also in his mode for selecting among the
evidence available.

This reading of Poliakov’s use of testimony is borne out by a glance at his
larger project as embodied in the rest of his narrative. Its essential characteristic is
explanatory – but to explain without a clearly defined end in mind. It does not seek to

\textsuperscript{66} Poliakov \textit{Harvest of Hate} Ch. 4
\textsuperscript{67} ibid. xiii
foster *understanding* in the strong sense of the word. It is rather an analysis of how extermination unfolded through a discrete set of actors who can be identified and thus held responsible. It seeks to give a comprehensive overview of the destruction of the Jews of Europe and generate an outline of what Poliakov perceives to be the essential features of this process. In doing so he replicates not only the juridical gaze of the courts but also some of its historical and explanatory assumptions. The only actors indicted by the narrative, as they require proper names, are the top figures in the Nazi power structure: “Undoubtedly it was the Master himself, Adolf Hitler, who signed the Jews’ death warrant.” Poliakov would thus initiate the historiographical tradition of intentionalism. Poliakov then only briefly considers the motivations and more abstract causes of the annihilation.

For example, Poliakov’s explanatory paradigm repeats Nuremberg’s atavistic definition of the ‘Holocaust’ in its emphasis on the irrational, anarchic desires that motivated and enabled its execution, similarly overlooking the apparent paradox between its systemic nature and its barbaric motivation and manifestation. “What they wanted was to make the Jews suffer. The system they created was dominated by this sadistic desire, which soon erupted and against all economic logic sought satisfaction for itself in total genocide.” On the other hand, the barbarity emphasized here is also linked to civilization itself in the introduction to the book: “When one reflects that we are dealing here with a highly civilized nation that for many years

---

68 ibid. 108
69 Of course, I do not mean this to imply that the two are irreconcilable – rather both components can be said to have some range of action. But the systemic, bureaucratic and modern nature of the genocide is glossed over in the pursuit of a more direct, agent-driven, causal explanation that allows guilt to be apportioned to individual criminals.
70 Poliakov *Harvest of Hate* 74
was a torch bearer of Western society, one realizes that we are concerned with an anti-Semitic problem that is intrinsic to our entire Western civilization, an aberrant and pathological phenomenon that lay at the center of the 1939—45 catastrophe.”

Here he seems to reject the atavistic pedagogy of Nuremberg by accusing civilization itself for its role in the murder. However, I believe a closer reading reveals this passage to maintain the Nuremberg paradigm: though Poliakov universalizes this problem to all of Western civilization, the Nazi regime is depicted as a pathological aberration away from civilization in that it is driven by a deviant ideological notion – anti-Semitism. It is not a structural component of civilization itself – not a pathology of modernity – though it happens to be one he sees as historically prevalent in Western society (We should keep in mind that Poliakov was born to Russian parents, and grew up in France. Both countries were considerable more outwardly anti-Semitic than Germany prior to 1933).

But there are two particularly important aspects of this history that should be emphasized: its incipient relationship to the later intentionalist-functionalist debates, and the change in narrative tone that occurs in the chapter on the Jewish ghettos where he most extensively deploys witness testimony. In the case of the former, though he offers us a broadly intentionalist perspective, Poliakov is not blind to the structural aspects of the Nazi “machine” – and sees the two as requiring one another to construct a sufficient explanation of the system. Yet as Poliakov was the first to write a comprehensive Holocaust narrative, other interpretations did not exist to generate controversy.

71 ibid. xiii
72 “so true is it that genocide is not a movement of collective fury (a necessary but insufficient condition), but must be set in motion by a determined will guided by exact orders.” ibid. 57.
If we look closely again at his reason for avoiding victim testimony as evidence we can observe the social context of his decision: “wherever possible, to forestall objections, we have quoted the executioners rather than the victims.” Here he seems to reference a general social expectation that victim testimony is less privileged epistemologically in the production of ‘objective’ history. Yet he appears torn at a deeper emotional level whenever he invokes the voices of witnesses in his text, thereby betraying his self-professed commitment to sober ‘objectivity’.

Indeed, the tone of his chapter on the ghettos shifts dramatically, and with it his apparent historical intention. Though to a large degree his attention to the inner workings of the Warsaw ghetto can be said to have an explanatory value that fit the broader aims of the narrative insofar as they address the role of Jewish passivity and supposed collaboration in facilitating the process of annihilation, the passages he includes and the ways they are deployed in his text seem to exceed any purely explanatory value. For example, his description of the hopefulness with which Jews in the Warsaw ghetto looked towards the end of the war serves to explain their alleged passivity in the face of deportation; he looks not only at explaining this docility, but goes into some detail about why Polish Jews, in contrast to western, German Jews, were able to maintain this degree of hope. Their more integrated community and stronger ties to history ameliorated the emotional shock of persecution and dislocation.74

Poliakov evokes a more passionate voice in these passages – both his own as well the voices of those who suffered. The passages he offers to Ringelblum are often

73 ibid. xiii
74 ibid. 99
a full page in length. But Poliakov betrayed his own ambivalent feelings on the matter: In the foreword to the 1974 revised edition Poliakov actually reprimands himself for this breach in objective posturing in the original edition: “I felt I might have kept a tighter rein on emotions which are considered unacceptable in historians.”

This assertion of the necessary and antagonistic dichotomy between emotion and the duty of the professional historian will be evoked again and again in virtually every major Holocaust narrative over the next several decades. Its tie to the partiality of the judge corroborates its immersion in a juridical epistemology. If a verdict must be passed on the guilty of history, then it must be done only after ‘bracketing’ out all affective disposition towards the culprits or their victims. Neither sympathy nor hate could be acknowledged to inform the historian’s transferential position towards the Holocaust.

Dan Stone has noted this ambivalence, but commented on how the progressive strains that begin to emerge at times in the narrative are ultimately constrained by the traditional, closed-narrative form we have been analyzing. His insights are clouded by the imperatives of the judge, but also by the traditional historian seeking to commemorate through an apportioning of responsibility, through an explanation that seeks to assert a re-establishment of normality and give closure to the event, and thus to abridge the process of mourning. But the insights are there – and Stone indicates where Poliakov seems to presage some of the anxiety felt by post-modern philosophers about the aporias opened up by the Holocaust. What is interesting is that they were not taken up in later historiography. These insights were largely ignored in

---

75 ibid. xiv
76 Stone *Constructing the Holocaust* 112-5
subsequent Holocaust discourse, both at the popular level and within historical scholarship, until the 1980’s. No review of *Harvest of Hate* appeared in any historical journal during the 1950’s, only garnering attention in Jewish publications such as *Commentary* and a couple sociological journals.77

**GERALD REITLINGER: THE FINAL SOLUTION**

Gerald Reitlinger’s *The Final Solution* carries much of the same conceptual baggage as Poliakov’s work, but is even more concerned with narrating the actions of individual actors. Unlike Poliakov though, the traditional narrative nowhere seems to falter; the book’s pretensions to objectivity and its direct causal ascriptions to isolable actors, deployed within a totalizing and ultimately teleological framework remain firm and constant throughout. Foremost, there is distinct narrative closure: much like Nuremberg, this particular closure grants a sort of amnesty to contemporary Germans – and all of Western civilization along with it. By handing down a clear verdict on the guilty, whose actions emerge within a closed, discrete time period delimited by the very contours of the eliminationist plan on which they are said to ‘act’, Reitlinger replicates the judge’s attempt at generating a restorative closure. In particular, it gives weight to the myth of the *Stunde Null*, the ‘zero hour’ out of which Germany emerged from the ashes of Nazism and reconstitutes itself anew, shed of the burden of its bloody past. The Nuremberg conspiracy theory is therefore reasserted to the same effect and as part of this general evasion of the depth and relevance of the event to

77 There were two reviews of Poliakov’s book in *Commentary*: the first by Hannah Arendt, actually reviewed the original French version before the English translation: “Poliakov, Leon. Breviaire de la Haine: Le Ille Reich et les Juifs (Book Review)” *Commentary* 13 (1952) 300-304. For the review of the English version 3 years later see, Bloom, Solomon F. “Poliakov, Leon. Harvest of Hate: The Nazi Program for the Destruction of the Jews of Europe (Book Review)” 19 (1955) p. 89-92
history. It allows history to continue its profession naïvely, escaping reflection on the Holocaust’s implications for life within history.

The impartiality of the juridical gaze is invoked to a greater degree in *The Final Solution* than in *Harvest of Hate*. The subjectivity of Reitlinger’s voice rarely impinges on the dry, methodical description he engenders in the name of historical objectivity. In fact, his voice is largely effaced, in accordance with the dictates of the historian’s profession at the time (as we have observed in Poliakov’s self-admonishment over his emotional excesses). This stance towards historical representation is reflected in his selection of evidence to be given space within the text to speak for itself. Only the most objective and descriptive accounts are given the privilege of speaking. His sources are chosen solely for their epistemological veracity in the positivistic legal sense, and thus originate primarily from the Nuremberg documentary archives. Though it does contain ‘testimony’, virtually all of it consists of depositions by the perpetrators.

However, Reitlinger does use some testimonial evidence, though he explicitly states why his use of it is so limited: in the introduction to his bibliography Reitlinger makes known his prejudices as he adds a cautionary note to his use of survivor testimony that had been collected in the immediate aftermath of the war:

The hardy survivors who were examined [by the Polish State Commissions or the Central Jewish Historical Commission of Poland] were seldom educated men. Moreover, the Eastern European Jew is a natural rhetorician, speaking in flowery similes… thus readers who are by no means afflicted with race prejudice, but who find the details of murder on the national scale too appalling to assimilate, are
inclined to cry *Credat Judaeus Apella* and dismiss all these narratives as fables. The witnesses, they will say, are Orientals.\(^{78}\) The reader might then wonder, what is the point of using this testimony at all?

Reitlinger responds that the “impressions recorded from the receiving end give a new twist to the often oblique language of German bureaucracy and they are necessary to complete the story.”\(^{79}\) A new ‘twist’ indeed. Unfortunately, Reitlinger rarely quotes any of these narratives, usually opting rather to summarize what they witnessed to round out his description. And when he does quote testimony it is usually of a purely informational character, filling in gaps in the record or providing more concrete descriptions of Nazi crimes.\(^{80}\) But he still remains suspicious of these testimonies, mentioning in the bibliography that, “not all the works quoted are equally reliable, but certain works, which are written with exceptional objectivity, are marked with an asterisk.”\(^{81}\) To get a sense of Reitlinger’s rubric for testimonial objectivity, consider some seminal works he does not consider ‘objective’ enough to warrant an asterisk: Primo Levi’s *Se questo e un uomo*, Ringelblum’s *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* (which was only introduced into later editions because it did not exist in English when the first edition came out), and even the *Black Book of Polish Jewry* – from which he cites heavily. A perusal of the ‘objective’ testimonial evidence marked by an asterisk in the bibliography reveals virtually all of it to have originated in German.

Reitlinger not only follows the Nuremberg evidentiary paradigm, but he is also bound to the Nuremberg narrative of conspiracy. However, Reitlinger is not an


\(^{79}\) ibid. 581

\(^{80}\) For example, Primo Levi’s *Se questo e un uomo* is used only to describe Italian deportation and to confirm an impression of Auschwitz life in the one paragraph he commits to the subject. In neither case is Levi quoted.

\(^{81}\) Reitlinger, *The Final Solution* 588.
extreme intentionalist – he does not think that the notion of exterminating World Jewry was an ever-present intention dating back to 1933 or earlier– although the perceived need to destroy their global power was, for Reitlinger, the primary cause of Hitler’s expansionistic war. Thus the evolution of the intention and its physical manifestation through discrete actors is the subject of his book. Though he kept the Final Solution tightly linked to the war itself, unlike the picture that emerged from Nuremberg he reversed the relationship between war and extermination, with the solution of the Jewish question gaining primacy over the expansionistic aims of aggressive war. Of course, largely due to the emergence of the Cold War, neither Reitlinger nor Poliakov linked the Jew with the Bolshevik threat as closely related components in Hitler’s ideology (Reitlinger does make one or two references to Eastern European “proletarian Jewish masses,” but his careful wording only betrays his aversion to make this link explicit). But to explicitly relate in the West in the 1950’s that Nazism had been inimical to the core towards Bolshevism would have undermined the Cold War rhetoric of the time: it would have also undermined the East-West civilizational divide buttressing Reitlinger’s atavistic definition of Nazism.

We have already observed Reitlinger’s Western chauvinism at work in his attitude towards Eastern European Jewish survivor testimony; but this bias goes deeper than his suspicion of testimonial evidence in the name of historical objectivity, and might be attributed, at least in part, to his inability to read Polish or Yiddish. Either way, his lack of engagement with these voices is apparent in his discussion of life in Auschwitz. After praising the survival skills of some prominent Western Jews, he remarks how the “Talmudic students of Eastern Europe, penniless, unworldly,

82 Ibid. 3
proverbially helpless and utterly unassimilated to the German way of life” were only occasionally spared by the SS. He then dryly gives an account in his own words of the “outstanding features in all Auschwitz narratives” – none of which are quoted – in a single paragraph, only to conjecture that in these features it really wasn’t that different from other ‘ordinary’ concentration camps.⁸³

Even more, he concludes a chapter entitled “France: Final Solution Not Achieved” with the moral that “The Final Solution, which was applied so successfully in Central and Eastern Europe, failed in France because of the sense of decency in the common man who, having suffered the utmost depths of self-humiliation, learnt to conquer fear.”⁸⁴ Not only is his hostility for the East exposed, but he recapitulates the very Nazi ideological esteem for Western civilization that was in fact a crucial reason for the lessened impact of the Final Solution in those countries. Furthermore, the redemptive liberal-moralistic tone evoked here is as clear an indicator as any of the kind of narrative closure at work. It emphasizes the effect of decency on rejecting criminality and the possibility of courage in facing down atrocity. One must wonder how he managed to read Primo Levi’s Sé questo e un uomo and still come away with this conclusion. But this is the view taken of suffering when survivor testimony is read only for its objective content. Suffering becomes muted when it becomes merely evidence for the existence of a crime. Understanding suffering, understanding what this event meant to communities that were destroyed, is overlooked. Moral imperatives to represent atrocity never cross the threshold of a vague, universal repugnance to suffering.

⁸³ ibid. 126-7.
⁸⁴ ibid. 351
In fact, Reitinger ends *every* chapter of the book with similar moralizing statements that emphasize this kind of feel-good redemption that justice provides in the face of ‘crime’. As Stone has commented,

> Each chapter, containing a terrifying concatenation of atrocities, ends with a neat closure as the various villains from each camp or regional reign of terror meet their just deserts. This form of narrative resolution sits uneasily with the plethora of crimes that has preceded it, but nonetheless intends to leave a last impression of a restoration to normality.\(^\text{85}\)

Guilt is allocated to individual criminals, not to a system or a civilization, allowing justice to be triumphantly delivered. Normality is reconstituted, the indictment of modernity is deferred, and the world is fit to continue as it had before.

The title of the book, *The Final Solution*, indicates very clearly what Reitlinger is pursuing in this narrative: his history, more than anything, is a methodical, step-by-step chronicle of the evolving contours of the Nazi extermination plan – *it is not* a history of the annihilation of the European Jews. The conceptual focus of the book is introduced by its narrative structure: the first division of the book, titled “The Search for the Final Solution,” unpacks the essential structures of the development of the annihilation. The second half of the narrative, “The Final Solution Country-By-Country,” takes the background narrative laid out in the first division as its point of departure and looks at the concrete application of the Final Solution on a regional basis. The narrative thus unfolds systematically, “the events described with a rigorous attention to sequence and implicit inevitability, and all

\(^{85}\) Stone *Constructing the Holocaust* 137
resolved into a seemingly logical outcome permitting continuity in history and in the way history is represented."

It could be objected that the systematic account he gives implies a recognition of the highly bureaucratic nature of the Final Solution, and thus an implicit rejection of the intentionalist position voiced at Nuremberg. But in contrast to true bureaucratic accounts, such as that of Raul Hilberg, Reitlinger’s ‘machine’ really only comprises the actions of the power structure constituted by leaders at the second level of the Nazi regime, right below Hitler. Rather, the apparently ‘mechanical’ elements of his text speak to the image of inevitability that arises through his attempt to rescue the disruption to history caused by these events. They engender a narrative resolution by packaging the Final Solution as an inevitable process carried out by pathological and discrete (and therefore indictable) individuals, recapitulating Nuremberg’s conspiracy paradigm.

**RAUL HILBERG: THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EUROPEAN JEWS**

Much has been written about the place of Raul Hilberg’s *The Destruction of the European Jews* in Holocaust historiography, still hailed as one of the seminal books on the Holocaust after over four decades. Indeed, it is at least as important in a historiographical context for the stern criticisms and debates it spawned as it is for the positive benefits of its research. It also had the fortune to have been published in the midst of the Eichmann trial, at time when a second generation that had not experienced the Holocaust was coming of age, and during a cooling of the Cold War.

It has often been depicted as the one of the first ‘functionalist’ responses to the

---

86 Stone *Constructing the Holocaust* 137
intentionalist trend that we have already traced back through Nuremberg. In part, this was the result of Hilberg’s training as a political scientist in the vein of the Frankfurt School (his mentor was Franz Neumann), and not a conscious response to what he felt was a surfeit of intentionalism. He is therefore critically concerned with the features and operation of the German bureaucratic machinery, which is the subject of *The Destruction of the European Jews*. Whereas intentionalist accounts usually document the unfolding of a plan according to agent-driven actions, reading Hilberg’s analysis is rather like a watching a Rube-Goldberg machine in action; a single impulse starts a chain reaction of complex, yet utterly pre-determined actions.

The traditional narrative form has often been described as a natural mode of representing human action, given the narrative quality of human experience.\(^8\) Hilberg’s work, as a structural analysis rather than a historical narrative proper, therefore subordinates agents, at least at the level of the book’s framework, to their function within a structural process. It is chronological only insofar as the destruction process he details was played out across several distinct and successive phases—definition, expropriation, deportation, concentration, and extermination. Otherwise historical figures come and go through the book, suddenly being conjured up once their role in a structural process is called into view. They thus have no agency, they are cogs in a machine that, once set in motion, unfolds according to a relentless logic: “With an unfailing sense of direction and with an uncanny pathfinding ability, the German bureaucracy found the shortest path to the final goal. We know of course, that the very nature of a task determines the form of its fulfillment. Where there is the

\(^8\) For example, Paul Ricouer argues this in the two volumes of *Time and Narrative*. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer trs. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984, 1985)
will, there is also the way, and if the will is only strong enough, the way will be found.”

The will is an equally transhistorical force – anti-Semitism – which Hilberg traces all the way back Roman anti-Semitism in the 4th century which does not so much evolve as change its costumes. He can therefore claim that, “most of what happened in those twelve years had already happened before. The Nazi destruction process did not come out of a void; it was the culmination of a cyclical trend.”

Nazism is merely a manifestation of the most recent resurgence of anti-Semitism, for “When in the early days of 1933 the first civil servant wrote the first definition of a ‘non-Aryan’ into a civil service ordinance, the fate of European Jewry was sealed.”

There is thus an irreducible teleological determinism at work in Hilberg’s meta-narrative beyond the mechanical quality of his central analysis: once the essential ingredients – the machinery and an initial will to annihilate – are accounted for, everything operates to its predetermined end. Hilberg may have dispensed with the Nuremberg conspiracy paradigm: but he goes even further in effacing German responsibility. It is not merely a question, for Hilberg, of the culpability of modernity in the form of bureaucracy: the destruction of the Jews lay in the broad sweep of history, in a European anti-Semitic longue durée. Bureaucracy, the focus of the book, by his own words becomes the mere condition for the possibility of extermination.

Such transhistorical forces operate on the history of the Jews as well. Hilberg claims that his “study does not encompass the internal developments of Jewish

---

89 ibid. 3
90 ibid. 669
organization and Jewish social structure. That is Jewish history.\textsuperscript{91} But perhaps this is an excuse for not engaging Jewish perspectives and testimony, for he explicitly recognizes the need to account for the reactions of the victims in order to understand the process of their destruction.\textsuperscript{92} What is so strange is that Hilberg places clear responsibility for the catastrophe on the Jews themselves for collaborating rather than resisting, while at the same time denying them the ability to make a choice by submitting them to the imperatives of their own history. For Hilberg, no historical personae have choices: but he manages to condemn the Jews for not making a choice that his theory leaves no room for them to make. The Jews are reduced to a determined and totalized collective singular – they virtually operate as one throughout the text – that is irretrievably chained to its history: “This experience was so ingrained in the Jewish consciousness as to achieve the force of law.”\textsuperscript{93} At the same time he still feels that he has found a standpoint from which to pass judgments, not only on the Jewish people as a whole, but on particular Judenräte and some of their individual leaders: He invokes some of the most egregious and morally charged decisions made by some of these councils – such as commissioning abortions in order to comply with the Germans – in order to curry moral capital against their compliance.\textsuperscript{94}

Hilberg is perhaps more explicit than any other historian in his decision to deliberately exclude witness voices from his reconstruction of history. Clearly this has affected the content of his narrative. But it also indicates the type of historicoepistemological concepts under which he is operating, concepts which lead him to

\textsuperscript{91} ibid. v
\textsuperscript{92} ibid. 662
\textsuperscript{93} ibid. 666
\textsuperscript{94} ibid. 664
look at testimony in only the most positivistic light: In an article written much later in life Hilberg makes this operative bias explicit: “Witnesses, especially Jewish victims, struggle with language to express what they saw. Consequently, neither Germans nor Jews will convey much about the atmosphere of the time… Although survivors have greater motivations than their tormentors to provide details about the impact of the blows inflicted on the Jewish community, the results are nevertheless meager.” After describing the repetitiveness of a testimony given by a former inmate of a Croatian camp, he then claims that “in the extensive survivor testimony this kind of rendition is fairly typical,” in order to demonstrate that nothing of value for the historical enterprise is to be gained through such testimony, generic and undifferentiated as it is.\footnote{Raul Hilberg, “Incompleteness in Holocaust Historiography,” \textit{Gray Zones: Ambiguity and Compromise in the Holocaust and Its Aftermath}, Jonathan Petropoulos and John K. Roth eds. (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006) 87} Hilberg thus conforms to the same overall epistemological-interpretive pattern we witnessed in the previous narratives: information is to be compiled systematically in an ordered, linear, and totalizing account that presents and explains how and why the Holocaust happened from beginning to end.\footnote{To be fair to Hilberg, it is important to note that later in life he radically revised his skepticism towards testimony. In an essay published in Michael Berenbaum and Abraham Peck’s \textit{The Holocaust in History}, Hilberg writes that historical use of survivor testimony can have three uses: First “we might look at testimony to understand a document. Most often, we are going to find such explanations in judicial proceedings… no document really speaks for itself.” Second, “because many documents were destroyed during the war, there are now conspicuous gaps in the official wartime correspondence. In lieu of records, we must therefore exploit testimony.” And finally, “there are also times when we want to acquire knowledge about the events that were never recorded in the first place… In sum, the use of recalled events for the reconstruction of a history is important but limited.” (6). These considerations were plainly not at work in \textit{Destruction of the European Jews}.}
In line with Arendt’s assertion that the monstrosity of the Holocaust lies in its very resistance to juridical closure, Hilberg offers an analysis that, compared with those of Poliakov and Reitlinger, resists passing a verdict on the Germans. A difficult tension emerges out of this representation: on the one hand, it deprives the Nazis of all humanity. It is as if the extreme evil of their crimes lies beyond what can be confronted with a human face, while the Jews, alas, remained all too human, and thus still subject to judgment. On the other hand, by depriving the Nazis of this humanity Hilberg creates the potential to elicit two conclusions from the reader: either a total lack of identification, which transforms the Nazi into an ephemeral and faceless evil, or a difficult engagement with the inherent possibility of one’s own guilt insofar as Hilberg’s analysis forces a recognition of the potential of our shared ‘modernity’ to generate such appalling evil. The latter I find less likely, given the active causal force Hilberg accorded to historical anti-Semitism. Since administrative bureaucracy neither provided its own impetus to action in the Holocaust, nor is it an aspect of modernity with which most people identify, the average reader would likely avoid the potential feelings of guilt raised by a compromised bureaucracy. For as long as bureaucracy does not ‘fall into the wrong hands’ we can assure ourselves of its benevolent nature.
II

THE SEEDS OF WITNESSING
THE EICHMANN AND FRANKFURT AUSCHWITZ TRIALS AS VEHICLES FOR HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING

Clearly what we know they said, and the innumerable other things they probably said but did not reach us, cannot be taken literally. One cannot expect from men who have known such extreme destitution a deposition in the juridical sense, but something that is at once a lament, a curse, an expiation, an attempt to justify and rehabilitate oneself: a liberating outburst rather than a Medusa-faced truth.¹

Primo Levi The Drowned and the Saved

* * *

In the early 1960’s Holocaust memory began to take a momentous turn; at the confluence of generational change, a cooling of the domestic climate caused by the Cold War, consolidation of Israeli nationhood, and as survivors, through their children, became more solidly integrated into their adopted homes, the image of the Holocaust gained visibility within public consciousness. But it is unclear that such a turning point could have taken such drastic form without the timely occurrence of the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, beginning with his capture in 1961, and the subsequent Frankfurt Auschwitz trial that took place between 1963 and 1965. Both made important leaps forward in the development of memory by inserting themselves as sites of testimonial production, reversing the perpetrator-centric documentary paradigm set by Nuremberg, and by using their visibility as government-sanctioned trials along with the emotional power of testimony to elicit a public engagement with the past.

Both trials featured the deployment of professional historical narratives to elucidate the broader contours of the Holocaust; Gerald Reitlinger and Leon Poliakov’s narratives were featured in the prosecution’s case in Jerusalem,\(^2\) while the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial actually commissioned a group of historians from the Munich Institut für Zeitsgeschichte to present a narrative of the Holocaust through an analysis of the SS apparatus. The series of narratives presented were ultimately published as *The Anatomy of the SS State*, marking a seminal moment in German historiography’s attempt to grapple with the Nazi past, deficient as it was in some respects.\(^3\) But the trials themselves would leave a greater historiographical legacy than the narratives from which they drew. The discourse of ‘sober’ historical scholarship would be explicitly articulated in the Frankfurt trial’s historical briefs, keyed directly to the traditional exigencies of the court with regard to the ‘facts’. But while juridical standards of ‘impartiality’ and ‘sobriety,’ and their corollary documentary prejudices were fully articulated in these trials, the feelings of guilt harbored by many Germans would continue to invest these standards with a certain vitality beyond the direct imperatives of attributing criminal responsibility in court.

I will thus present a distilled summary of some of the most pertinent aspects and legacies of the trial in the development of historiographical inquiry, testimonial production, and the emerging social conditions for the subsequent development of

---

\(^2\) David Cesarani *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes* (London: W. Heinemann, 2004). 272. Leon Poliakov, *Harvest of Hate*. Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution*. They were the only important comprehensive narratives of the Holocaust to be published in the 1950’s. They are discussed in Chapter One. One German narrative, Wolfgang Scheffler’s *Judenverfolgung im dritten Reich* was published in 1958, though it has been justifiably forgotten. It seems to have made little noticeable impact on later scholarship or on collective memory.

\(^3\) In terms of pure, sober historical scholarship, this text has remained in very good standing. But as we will see in the next chapter, its inability to grapple with the Jewish aspect of the crime, with methodological difficulties, or with the startling implications of the ‘big picture’ were notably absent, and express salient trends in this phase of German Holocaust historiography.
novel modes of memorialization and historical truth and narration. Chapter Three will continue these themes by exploring their expression in German and Jewish historiography, particularly in the form of the play of guilt in the intentionalist-functionalist debate.

* * *

THE JERUSALEM TRIAL OF ADOLF EICHMANN

In many ways the trial of Adolf Eichmann represents a deliberate effort to challenge the traditional juridical framework for understanding Nazism espoused at Nuremberg, which can be perceived in the tension between the imperative of the court and the desires of the prosecution. Whereas the former was constrained by the need to uphold the formal tenets of legal procedure, the latter vehemently pressed to use the trial as a vehicle for fostering collective understanding, memory and catharsis. Thus the court often found itself in the awkward situation of forcing Attorney General Gideon Hausner, the lead prosecutor, to modify his original approach to allowing the survivors to speak largely uninhibited, since only a handful of testimonies had even a tenuous bearing on the criminal guilt of the accused.

However, the prosecution’s pedagogical ‘excess’, as it were, had ambiguous effects. The prosecution depended on the dissemination of witness voices to curry a kind of emotional engagement with the Holocaust, and chiefly among a younger generation. Significantly, it also shifted the balance of focus to the victim rather than the perpetrator. But the necessarily political dimensions of this excess also
highlighted the burgeoning instrumental use of the Holocaust for political ends. And this could be seen in the very way testimonial extraction proceeded, through the kinds of leading questions that were used and the ways in which given testimonies were inserted into a broader narrative of redemption. Naturally, the very nature of testimony itself often disrupted these meta-narratives, and the darker secrets that began to emerge testified at the same time to the inability to contain these experiences, not only within a legal format, but given the leeway given to the prosecution, within politicized meta-narratives in general. Needless to say, they could still be packaged in edited bits and pieces in order to touch people emotionally without requiring the commitment of *listening*. In this way, Holocaust testimony and its emotional power were now offered up on the altar of populist political strategy. The instrumentalization of the emotional power of Holocaust testimony, first discovered at the Eichmann trial, would find frequent expression in subsequent historiography. For the prosecution was only partially interested in the transmission of *stories* and *legacies* to a younger generation. Rather, by using the brute emotional power of testimony, the trial could instill in them a kind of guilt that could be molded to justify the political imperatives of the day.

Along these lines, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion was quite open about his views on the political possibilities to be reaped from the trial, and was highly involved in developing the direction to be taken by the trial. There was a need to inspire national pride, as many were losing their “pioneer spirit.”4 He wanted the trial to project an image of a Jewish nation, at home and abroad, seen not as a nation of

---

victims, not as sheep led to the slaughter, but rather as a strong and independent state that could offer Jews their only safe haven in the world. Among Jews, Ben-Gurion wanted to use the trial, in effect, to justify Israeli statehood by contrasting it with the danger of the Diaspora, only too well elucidated by the Holocaust. By demonstrating the power of anti-Semitism, he also hoped to curry favor with the rest of the world by drawing analogies between the anti-Semitism of the Nazis and the hostile disposition of the Arab world towards the existence of the state of Israel.\(^5\)

Hausner also harbored more global pedagogic aims for the trial, concerned with the memory of the Holocaust beyond its potential exploitation in Israeli politics. The Attorney General was quite clear about his decision to use testimony as a dramatic centerpiece to “reach the hearts of men” \textit{worldwide} and to “make tangible ‘the incomprehensible statistics’,” therefore making explicit that the demonstration of Eichmann’s guilt was not the sole focus of the trial.\(^6\) But for Hausner, the trial’s pedagogical value was intimately bound up with the problem of justice encountered at Nuremberg: He wanted to show how one of the most pernicious of the Nazi’s crimes was the attempt to efface the memory of the Jews and their extermination. To thus have embodied memory invoked on behalf of those who were killed was itself a kind of historical justice – especially insofar as it shook the world out of its slumber and ensured the impossibility of such effacement. Witness testimony was therefore destined to play a crucial role in the realization of these goals. But a particular meta-narrative would be pieced together through the selection and presentation of witnesses.

\(^5\) Cesarani, \textit{Eichmann} 256
The selection of the survivors to testify derived in large part from suggestions provided by Rachel Auerbach, former survivor and participant in the Warsaw ghetto uprising, who was the head of the division for collecting testimony at Yad Vashem—at that time a rather small operation. She prepared a list of witnesses she thought would best represent a narrative of ‘atrocity-followed-by-redemption’, selected from a pool of survivors who had previously issued some kind of testimony. She focused predominantly on the extermination and the particular horror stories of this phase of the Holocaust, intending to discern what she termed the Nazi’s “odiousness and satanic cruelty” through the most visceral and immediately emotional stories. And although Hausner later asserted that he had wanted to exhibit the most diverse social profile among witnesses, the selected witnesses were generally the very ones who had already written or spoken publicly about their experiences, whose responses would be predictable and thus could be trusted to deliver the appropriate message about the atavism and utter otherness of the perpetrator.

* * *

This strategy was only partially effective, for testimony often overflowed the imposed boundaries of the prosecution’s narrative. Citing Langer’s critical work on “Heroic Memory,” Lawrence Douglas has exhibited one of the more jarring testimonies given at the trial in order to demonstrate Hausner’s failure to give

---

7 Segev The Seventh Million 339
8 ibid. 339. This was in part due to the reluctance of most survivors to speak during this era. Only as the trial approached did offers to testify begin to multiply at Yad Vashem.
redemptive closure, despite his best efforts, to an otherwise exceptionally bleak testimony. Attempting to avoid ending on such a dismal note, Hausner asked the witness, Leon Wells, about a scientific award he had just received. Wells dryly replied only with the name of the award and no more, resistant to Hausner’s efforts to enact a superficial rehabilitation. But for the most part, Hausner was surprisingly careful to avoid subjecting the witnesses to the standard adversarial procedure of intense questioning, traditionally designed to evoke a highly structured and precise testimony. The first series of witnesses, on the contrary, were generally given the space to produce their own, more spontaneous narratives, with only brief clarifying questions interjected every few minutes. But after objections from the defense during Wells’ testimony, the court asked Hausner to quicken the pace of the examination through more pointed questions. This had an immediate effect upon the coherence of the narratives presented. Suddenly, the testimonies were transformed from stories into assent for the preconceived notions of the events offered before the court, losing their disruptive power.

However, the testimony delivered before the court was hampered by the very structure of courtroom deposition even before Hausner was forced to take a more active role in the testimonial delivery. The underlying imperative to construct a continuity emphasizing the preservation of the self through the Holocaust was particularly evident before this shift. Hausner had begun every testimonial session by asking the witness to describe their current occupational status and family life just before asking them to delve back into their pre-Holocaust life. This had the effect of

---

9 Douglas *The Memory of Judgment* 128
10 ibid. 135
projecting the normality of their functional existence across the dark chasm of trauma, effacing the specificity and depth of the loss encountered there.\textsuperscript{11} But this strategy also merely indicated some of the difficulties inherent to the tension between testimonial extraction and representation. Given that collective catharsis tied to a narrative of redemption was the central aim of the prosecution, the need to use the testimonies \textit{as a means} to evoke emotional responses meant that certain rhetorical tropes were deployed to facilitate an emotional connection between the witness and the audience. Juxtaposing the normality of everyday existence with the atrocities encountered allowed a greater affinity between the listener and witness – though the external imposition of continuity, Langer claims, may hamper the witness from fully engaging the absent self at the heart of testimony to atrocity – what I will refer to in Chapter Four as the ‘subject-to-the-event’.

The imperative to communicate through emotional evocation and the rhetorical narrativization of continuity was targeted especially at the younger generation. Hausner later stated that he deliberately emphasized testimonies that featured violence done against \textit{youth} for precisely this reason – he thought they could identify with those victims, feel a sense of consanguinity, of guilt or debt to their kin and ancestors, and establish a sense of continuity between the violence of that past with the dangers of the present.\textsuperscript{12}

The exposition of this continuity was particularly marked in Hausner’s efforts to encourage witnesses to recount acts of defiance, a theme that had been largely predetermined by the prior selection of numerous survivors who had participated in

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{11} ibid. 165
\textsuperscript{12} Segev \textit{The Seventh Million} 351
\end{flushleft}
resistance efforts to bear witness. Survivors such as Abba Kovner, who were already well-established public figures due to their resistance efforts, were especially important as witnesses in this regard. But Hausner also asked the witnesses to talk about more minor acts of defiance that could be interpreted as attempts to provide an image of an undisrupted self through atrocity, emphasizing the efforts and risks involved in preserving one’s identity, for example, through continuing to practice their Judaism even in the camps, “lighting candles and singing Sabbath songs in the darkness of a Birkenau block”.\textsuperscript{13}

While on the one hand, it was just another step in the appropriation of suffering to serve the development of political meta-narratives, the theme of resistance also worked to reverse the previously hostile attitudes of many Israelis towards survivors that had depicted them as weak, corrupt and a drain on the vigor of the new nation. It thus helped to facilitate a more appreciative social atmosphere in which survivors became increasingly willing to speak about their experiences, and would therefore be an unprecedented boon to bearing witness in the following years.\textsuperscript{14}

The particular effect of the testimony used during the Eichmann trial – what was produced and how it affected subsequent acts of witnessing and collective understanding – is a rather contentious issue in the literature even today. Hannah Arendt, for example, castigated the prosecution for going “as far afield as to put

\textsuperscript{13} Douglas, The Memory of Judgment 158.

\textsuperscript{14} However, this emphasis on resistance generated a corollary problem: it made it more difficult to account for the lack of resistance among those witnesses whose experience denied any such possibility. Hausner thus inadvertently humiliated a number of survivors when he tried to give them a chance to explain why they did not physically resist, disrupting their narratives with questions: “Why didn’t you attack then? Why didn’t you revolt?” Hausner pressed repeatedly. The testimony of at least one witness completely fragmented at this point, exhibiting what Lawrence Langer has described as “humiliated memory”. Douglas, The Memory of Judgment, 165.
witness after witness on the stand who testified to things that, while gruesome and true enough, had no or only the slightest connection with the deeds of the accused.”

But recognizing that this was the very intention of the prosecution, she also attempted to undermine the notion that the trial might actually succeed in its didactic mission:

But in this audience there were hardly any young people… It was filled with “survivors,” middle-aged and elderly people, immigrants from Europe, like myself, who know by heart all there was to know, and who were in no mood to learn any lessons and certainly did not need this trial to draw their own conclusions.

Despite this, it is clear that the trial did succeed in mobilizing emotion and guilt across multiple generations. Both Segev and Cesaran claim that it was a cathartic, collective experience for Israelis, “a sort of national group therapy,” and a shock to the world that stood by watching, though the nature of subsequent struggles with the memory of the Holocaust meant that the ‘therapeutic’ or ‘cathartic’ aspect was limited. But the very fact that the past was now being spoken about openly was at least a step towards a difficult confrontation, albeit a limited one.

Yet even the most sympathetic non-survivor Israelis often found themselves initially repulsed by the stories they encountered. The poet Haim Gouri, one of the trial’s more thoughtful commentators, whose book The Man in the Glass Booth has been one of the most referenced pieces about the effect of the trial, was initially disgusted by the testimony he first witnessed, stating of one Morris Fleischman in particular that he did “not want to listen to this broken little man go on and on about

---

16 ibid. 8
17 Segev The Seventh Million 351
his sufferings, his ills and indignities, the way the mob jeered at him and his fellow Jews… I did not want to see him, I did not want to hear him.”

On the other hand, a closer reading of *The Man in the Glass Booth* demonstrates the very power of the Eichmann trial to force non-European Israelis (*Sabras*) to question their preconceptions about their Diasporic brethren, especially as regarded their supposed passivity. Gouri, a *Sabra* himself continues in the same article: “But with an uncanny force, this Morris Fleischmann grabbed hold of us by the scruff of our necks, as if to say ‘Sit still and hear me out’.” Later Gouri admits, “he was, in the end, telling the tale of his own helplessness, with a frankness and explicitness that made me hang my head in shame. That story got to me, it did.”

Even in a passage where he had so clearly denigrated the person of the witness, we can watch as his preconceptions begin to unravel. In his next entry, Gouri ends his piece with a witness’s reply to the question, “Why didn’t you resist?” Gouri does not pass judgement. The testimony had its effect.

However, the concerns raised by Hannah Arendt over the negative aspects of this testimonial instrumentalization should not be overlooked. Her concern for their abuse by contemporary politics therefore took precedence over their therapeutic and historical significance. The object of this concern has been borne out by subsequent historiography and popular representations: Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* in 1996 would use the morbid descriptions found in testimony

---

19 ibid. 31
20 ibid. 33
21 ibid. 37
to arouse emotion and reinforce his thesis of universal German criminal guilt; in Israel in the 1960’s, much popular Holocaust literature had a puerile fixation with the most morbid aspects of the atrocity – some of it written by survivors.\textsuperscript{23}

The satanic qualities imputed to Eichmann, the attempt to demonstrate his barbaric evil and the ridiculous attempt to assign the blame for the entire Final Solution to him undermined the particular significance of trying a “desk murderer” for crimes on such a scale. The prosecution thus reinforced the paradigm of criminal guilt in its interpretation of the causes of the Holocaust. But standard conceptions of criminal responsibility do not resonate well with the troubling possibility of bureaucratic murder – which is why the prosecution attempted to tag Eichmann with a greater personal responsibility for the Holocaust than he actually had. Arendt was quite prescient in her disdain for this, even if her interpretation of Eichmann in particular was wrong,\textsuperscript{24} for it was this very problematic model of juridical guilt that intentionalist historians would later replicate. But her ‘banality of evil’ thesis would also supply later functionalist historians with some of the conceptual ground for challenging the juridical guilt paradigm of the intentionalists, which will be exhibited in the next chapter.

\* \* \*

\textsuperscript{23} Ka-Tzetnick’s (aka Yehiel Dinur) \textit{House of Dolls} is one such example. He was also well known for his collapse while giving testimony during the Eichmann trial.

\textsuperscript{24} David Cesarani has actually demonstrated that Eichmann, far from the ‘banal’ desk murderer portrayed by Hannah Arendt, was actually a highly motivated ideological proponent of Nazism, and not merely a bureaucratic ‘careerist’. Arendt was determined to find a test case for her theory of totalitarianism. But her disingenuousness in the case of Eichmann should not detract from the important questions that her thesis raised in respect to the particularly modern challenge offered by the Holocaust to our traditional juridical conceptions of guilt.
In conjunction with the controversy generated by Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and to a lesser degree Raul Hilberg’s *The Destruction of the European Jews*, British historian David Cesarani has perhaps justifiably claimed that the trial “marked the birth of ‘Holocaust studies.’” 25 To a large degree, this issued from furor raised over the conclusions of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* with regard to the alleged collaboration of the *Judenäte* in the face of annihilation. She famously wrote that, “the whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million.” 26 With these words Arendt touched on what were already particularly acute political difficulties involved in the presentation of the *Judenräte* during the trial, which was generally avoided to emphasize Jewish resistance. The two paths in Israeli discourse about Jewish leadership that had emerged from the Katztnier trial – the heroic way of resistance or the shame of the *Judenräte* – had a long political legacy in Israel, and often stirred up the most public emotion from survivors during relevant moments of the Eichmann trial. 27 But part of the strength of the response came from the fact that she had offended all shades of the Israeli political spectrum. Though her condemnation of the *Judenräte* fell on welcome ears among Israeli conservatives, she was equally as derisive towards the Zionists on the Left who supported the trial. Tom Segev thus writes of the latter that, “they did not want to defend the Judenrats, but Arendt left them no choice, since her argument encompassed Zionists as well.” 28 Jewish, and in

26 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* 125
27 Segev *The Seventh Million* 352
28 ibid. 360
particular Israeli, Holocaust historiography was born in their response. The vast majority of Israeli research through the 1970’s would focus on either rescue, resistance and rebellion, on the one hand, or on creating a more nuanced understanding of the functioning of the Judenräte, on the other.

**THE FRANKFURT AUSCHWITZ TRIAL: TESTIMONY AND FAILED PEDAGOGY**

German public discourse in the first 15 post war years was marked for its silence about the Holocaust. In many cases, the pursuit of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was largely an intellectual matter that rarely touched the popular consciousness; hence the importance of highly visible events, such as the Frankfurt-Auschwitz trials for bridging the gap between elite concerns and public perceptions. But the trial can also be seen as a result of certain new trends in German social memory, not just a catalyst for them. The Frankfurt Auschwitz trial is just the most prominent member of an increasing line of Nazi trials as a result of the Central Office of the Judicial Administrations of the States for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Ludwigsburg in 1958. Generational change among intellectual elites and the public at large would have significant effects on the course of development of memory in the 1960’s, which was just beginning to spiral off into several competing approaches to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, that largely corresponded to evolving class and generational divisions. A burgeoning separation emerged on the one hand, between the popular perception of the Holocaust, which, expressed through the news media and television essentially amounted to aversion, and on the other hand, the intellectual

---

representations which took much more seriously the issue of guilt, which otherwise was not publically manifested until the explosion of the post-war generation student movements only a couple of years later, and was not politically legitimized until the Chancellorship of Willi Brandt in the later 60’s.

The Frankfurt Auschwitz trial, occurring shortly after the Eichmann trial, replicated its testimonial evidentiary paradigm, even though it possessed its own particular inertia. Instigated through the efforts of then Attorney General Fritz Bauer, the aim of the trial was to facilitate and force a renewed Vergangenheitsbewältigung through a better understanding of the nature of Auschwitz and that would implicate the lower echelons of the extermination machine, thereby renewing the sense of moral guilt which many Germans had managed to avoid publicly confronting. Yet, much like Nuremberg and Eichmann (although in many ways, more like the former), legal frameworks significantly obstructed and deformed the trial’s pedagogical impact. Whereas in Jerusalem the prosecution had been rather successful in achieving its didactic goals, the prerogatives of the court decisively curtailed the Frankfurt prosecution’s didactic mission. As with Nuremberg, the atavistic and sadistic image constructed at Frankfurt permitted many Germans to erect a gap between themselves and the perceived inhumanity of the defendants. This resulted from the particular features of German criminal law: prosecution had to show how individuals went beyond their orders in their cruelty, or as the case was, in many cases, directly defied ‘official’ orders, known as the Befehlnotstand defense. Specifically, the prosecution was charged with the task of demonstrating “sadism, desire to kill, base motives and so on,” in order to indicate “individual initiative and knowledge of the illegality of the
act, which went beyond following orders,” as the basis for showing perpetration of murder. Thus those who ‘just did their jobs’ directing masses of people into the gas chambers could only be charged as accomplices to murder. Not only did it thus restore to them their much of their dignity as average Germans, it simultaneously aiding them in relieving their moral guilt.

Eyewitness testimony was deployed strictly in fulfilling this legal necessity. The function of the witness as evidence, unlike in the Eichmann trial, was thus devised to implicate the individual criminal for his actions. Given the extremity of the criminality that had to be proved to secure murder convictions, witnesses were called in specifically to attest to the sadistic acts of individual camp functionaries. They had to demonstrate a subjective propensity to murder: Thus one historian has written that “The individual actions of these men upstaged the true crime that landed them on the stand in 1963: Auschwitz and the Final Solution.”

This is not to say that pedagogical intent was absent from the trial: rather, it was of a limited scope, and was frustrated by the need to adhere more strictly to legal codes than at Nuremberg or Jerusalem. Thus, rather than presenting the broad history of the Nazi state and society through the voices of victims, the prosecution substituted a 200 page historical overview of the history of the evolution of the Nazi state machinery and its criminal nature as an important piece of the indictment. This document later became the first comprehensive overview of the entire Nazi

31 There were some very good reasons for this of course: by putting Nazism on trial as itself criminal, the court had to maintain the most stringent regard for respecting and defending the rule of law in order to uphold and promote its adherence to Western democratic ideals and demonstrate its decisive break with its National Socialist past.
32 Wittman Beyond Justice 140
machinery written by professional German historians.\textsuperscript{33} It was especially notable in its description of the SS worldview, with anti-Semitism given a central place in its ideological structure – something that had not been largely acknowledged outside of Israel at the time. Moreover, basic information about the administrative structure of the camp system had not been readily available to the public before the trial, thus making this introductory overview one of the most potentially significant pedagogical results of the trial – even if it never became the dominant theme.\textsuperscript{34}

The historical overview was given relatively greater import for changing the content of perceptions of the Holocaust, especially in its treatment of the Jewish question, by the lack of Jewish presence in the trial itself. Due to the nature of the camp system, hardly any Jews were sufficiently privileged to be close enough to the defendants to attest to their crimes. Therefore most of the witnesses brought to the stand were either Polish or Ukrainian political prisoners or German criminals. Naturally, their testimony still had the potential for with representing the entire Auschwitz system: but their disproportionate numbers with respect to the original population of the camp was not representative of that system, and tended specifically to efface the centrality of anti-Semitism in the SS Weltanschauung.

A handful of Jewish witnesses did contribute substantially to the proceedings: the testimony of one Otto Wolken was a particular exception, as he was accorded a kind of testimonial privilege and scope denied to most witnesses due to his immediate post-war written testimony, which, because of its early date, could not be accused of

\textsuperscript{33} Wittmann actually claims that it was the “first comprehensive scholarly text to examine the entire Nazi machinery” to have been produced in any language, somehow overlooking Raul Hilberg’s \textit{The Destruction of the European Jews}. Wittmann \textit{Beyond Justice} 106

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Anatomy of the SS State} Helmut Krausnick et al eds. Richard Barry et al. trs. (New York: Walker and Company, 1968).
‘faulty’ or ‘distorted’ memory – a prejudice which would be encountered in subsequent historiography in its excuse for excluding testimony. Unlike other witnesses, he was thus given the time to speak about the texture of daily camp life, and about the gassings of entire transports of Jews from Salonika, which was perhaps one of the few moments when Bauer’s didactic ambitions came to life. Surviving the selections for gassing because of his profession as a medical doctor and his personal relationship with his Blockältester, he was also in a privileged position to observe the particular actions of some of the indicted individuals, further reinforcing the court’s toleration of the ‘irrelevant’ aspects of his testimony.35

Unfortunately Wolken’s testimony was the exception. Most testimonies were much more highly structured, and focused not on generating a narrative of experience, but on the precise details of who did what, when and where. Interruptions and challenges to the credibility of the witness were omnipresent. Whereas Dr. Servatius had approached survivor testimony by challenging its relevance to Eichmann’s crimes, and only rarely interrupting or cross-examining witnesses, the Frankfurt defense was far more irritated by the testimonial procession, finding far more opportunities to exercise traditional adversarial techniques in order to undermine the factual veracity of the witnesses. Narrative coherence easily fragmented when every step of the way witnesses were challenged as to their accuracy, often accused of either making up the story or being influenced by stories they had heard from other survivors. Furthermore, the very challenge offered by the defendants’ denials of the truth of witness accounts marginalized the concrete expression of an individual’s suffering, transforming their act of bearing witness not

35 Wittmann Beyond Justice 145-7
only into a mere vehicle for historical facts, but limiting the scope of those facts to those pertaining to the name of the accused. Under such conditions, the narratives that emerged were often severely truncated and confused, emptied of their potential therapeutic and historical significance. Lawrence Langer has written of his experience watching the trial witnesses, stating that,

Readers of the proceedings… will discover not a narrative leading to insight and understanding, but a futile dispute between accusers and accused. The prisoners in the dock deny virtually everything. Guilt exists, but the agent is always someone else. Little in this bizarre courtroom drama leads to a unified vision of the place we call Auschwitz. Scenes remain episodic and anecdotal; scenarios never coalesce; characters stay vague, as protagonists dissolve into helpless victims… while antagonists collapse into mistaken identities or innocent puppets moved from afar.\(^{36}\)

In this sense, it is the very nature of testimony given in a juridical setting, where its truth value is contested as it is produced, to be thus curtailed; it was not only the particular framework in Frankfurt within which testimony was produced that proved problematic.

Nonetheless, due to the need to demonstrate the inhuman brutality of the perpetrators in order to convict them of murder, the ‘stories’ offered were transformed into a source for a “pornography of horrors,” that had the potential to produce either fixations or numbing repulsions. Hence an endless stream of images of bloody sadism, which merely played into the perversion inherent in a morbid curiosity with atrocity, a fascination with the aesthetics of death, dominated the testimonial presentation. Insofar as the strictly morbid was adopted as a point of reference for fostering an everyday intelligibility, its gaze could not even make a gesture towards grappling with the very possibility of the unthinkable expressed in

and through these stories. By fixating on the physical aspects of death, the vision presented at Frankfurt could then be appropriated by the German public without contesting their everyday frameworks of understanding, without forcing the viewers of the trial into a difficult engagement with the possibility of their own guilt.

Such an understanding can only operate within fixed parameters and can only assimilate what has been conceptually prepared for it. Corpse is piled upon corpse, and the slippage of the ‘civilized’ categories of the human and the inhuman, of good and evil, leaking out from in between the broken words and gestures of the victims, continues unperceived.

The sadism of the camp guards on trial was the image projected by the media to the German public. As Wittmann points out, this resulted not merely from the nature of the media to project the most gruesome headlines in order to appeal to consumers’ perverted fascination with death, but because it was actually the dominant image expressed by the trial, and in many ways the media, despite some of its rather tasteless and sensationalist headlines, accurately reproduced it. Thus the trial contributed to many Germans’ ability to distance themselves from Nazi criminality because the individual-sadistic expression of violence did not resonate with the most common German experience of the Holocaust. It facilitated their own ease of forgetting – for if they had not been a part of, or even witnessed a breakdown in the general civilized order of society, then they hadn’t really witnessed or been a part of the Holocaust itself. Those were the murderers, they could say to themselves: Not me.

Ultimately, the trial merely reinforced what was otherwise an already developed trend in the memory of a significant portion of the German public.

37 Wittman, Beyond Justice 248
Beginning in the late 1950’s, members of the Hitler Youth generation along with a handful of those who had been adults during the Nazi period had managed to propagate the myth of the ‘silent majority’, the innocent bystander as the passive yet principal core of German society during the war. But this apparent sideways glance did not constitute a full evasion of guilt: guilt, rather, was the motivating feature of their inquiry into the guilt of the perpetrators themselves, even if it was to detract from the more troubling possibilities of the nature of those ‘bystanders,’ modernity and the continuities in German history. It would not be until the first post-war generation that comprised the famed student movement of the later 60’s came of age that the fixation with juridical or criminal guilt was to be significantly challenged in favor of a more direct engagement with the possibility and implications of one’s own moral guilt. The Frankfurt trial stands on the precipice between these two eras; but many of its potentially explosive effects seem to have been contained by the popular bystander consensus, and in the historiographical realm, by the seniority of the members of the Hitler Youth generation.38

History and justice were also never so closely allied in their approach to the Nazi era as they were during these years. Much of the earliest research was facilitated by the needs of the court in numerous trials, not just the Auschwitz trial. The latter merely produced the most comprehensive and detailed account of the functioning of the mechanisms of power in the hands of the highest echelons of the National Socialist regime. Though in some ways these historians helped establish Auschwitz as the central symbol of the Nazi genocide, it was really through the visibility of the

38 Kansteiner *In Pursuit of German Memory* 218-220
court proceedings that these symbols were disseminated, as “the scholars of the 1960’s communicated largely amongst themselves and the courts.”

The significance of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial should not be overstated, especially with regard to its testimonial component and for any strong effect it might have had on memory more broadly. If anything, it provides but a case study of the awkward balance of attitudes at work during a pivotal shift in memory across the 60’s – facilitated largely by the rising maturity of the Hitler Youth generation – which had already been underway for several years. Furthermore, the trial was not all that unique in its particularly heavy reliance on testimony: not only did a number of Nazi trials beginning after the founding of the Ludwigsburg commission have to rely on testimony for lack of documentary evidence, but the very decision to prosecute often arose at a grassroots level from witnesses who recognized former prominent Nazis on the street. Perhaps for this reason the Auschwitz trial has been incorporated only very sparingly into historical narratives about German memory during this period. It has not enjoyed the seminal status accorded to the Eichmann trial.

However, the very way it failed to adequately represent the nature of the Holocaust to the German public elucidates the structure of the public’s potential for meaningfully perceiving or integrating the past. This will shed light also on the conceptual and emotional difficulties historians at the time were to face, difficulties with guilt that would orient their entire interpretive projects towards grappling with the appropriate way to assign guilt to the perpetrators. Ultimately, the Hitler Youth generation would have trouble breaking free of the ‘criminal’ or juridical guilt paradigm that only sought out those with the most blood on their hands.

39 ibid. 39
Both the Eichmann and the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials demonstrate the particularly fragile and precarious possibilities inherent in bearing witness to the Holocaust in public. While at the center of my thesis is a recognition of the inherent historical potential of witness testimony, it should be clear that this does not lead me to voice an uncritical receptiveness. Because of the centrality of emotion, testimony can be more easily appropriated into instrumental contexts by politicized narratives than by a historiographical tradition of ‘sobriety’ that stands for detached, scholarly objectivity. Thus we are faced with a strangely ironic story of testimonial production: while the historical profession found itself especially unable to grapple with testimony because of what, at least in structure, can be called a commitment to a juridical notion of veracity and objectivity, the courts became the first prominent forum for both producing testimony and transmitting that testimony to the collective memory and to a younger generation. Even if these sites of production turned out to be flawed because of the inappropriateness of the traditional juridical registers to provide an adequate medium for their transmission into the public sphere, they initially proved more flexible than the historiography by their very use of testimony.

Meanwhile, the historians did not seem to be able to escape a juridical epistemology that sought historical closure by attributing criminal guilt, and no doubt the failure of the courts to adequately generate restorative closure and deal with testimony only reinforced their aversion. Given the popularity of Hannah Arendt’s interpretation of the Eichmann trial, especially within intellectual circles, should we really be surprised that professional historians remained skeptical?
III

THE JURIDICAL QUAGMIRE OF THE INTENTIONALIST-FUNCTIONALIST DEBATE
AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL LENS ON THE PLAY OF GENERATIONAL GUILT IN GERMAN AND JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

There can be no radical separation of political and criminal guilt...

We feel something like a co-responsibility for the acts of members of our families. This co-responsibility cannot be objectivized. We should reject any manner of tribal liability. And yet, because of our consanguinity we are inclined to feel concerned whenever wrong is done by someone in the family... We further feel that we not only share what is done at present—thus being co-responsible for the deeds of our contemporaries—but in the links of tradition. We have to bear the guilt of our fathers.¹

Karl Jaspers, On the Question of German Guilt

* * *

Holocaust historiography, in the wake of the Eichmann and Frankfurt Auschwitz trials, proliferated both in terms of the sheer number of monographs produced and varieties of research undertaken. Nonetheless, at the heart of the development, what we might call the ubiquitous question in Holocaust research at the time – especially in Germany – was the question of the allocation of guilt. As we saw already in the narratives produced by non-German scholars in Chapter One, the juridical imperative reigned in a way that roughly corresponded to what later emerged as the ‘intentionalist’ interpretation of the Holocaust. In Germany the debate over this interpretation took on these parameters most decisively in the wake of the functionalist turn signaled by the publication in 1970 of Karl Schleunes’ The Twisted

Road to Auschwitz,² followed two years later by Uwe Dietrich Adam’s Judenpolitik im dritten Reich,³ both of which asserted a lack of clarity in Nazi anti-Jewish policies before the war and called into question the intentionalist position that Hitler had strove to implement the Final Solution since before 1933. The research published across the next decade would be largely structured around staking out a position with regards to this question, which at root was one of guilt – both in object and in motivation – cast in terms of a juridical notion of criminal responsibility. Even the functionalist arguments were still framed in terms of the parameters of the question of criminal guilt, though their analyses began to implicitly question the range of its potential attribution. I will address the major arguments put forward by the functionalists, though because the very nature of the functionalist stance largely precludes seeing the ‘Final Solution’ as a coherent entity, no parallel ‘functionalist’ narrative exists for direct comparison with the intentionalist narratives.

Parallel to the stumbling advance of German Holocaust history, Israeli and Jewish historiography only really began to come into its own in the wake of the Eichmann trial, in particular in response to the theses put forward in Hannah Arendt’s Eichmann in Jerusalem and Raul Hilberg’s The Destruction of the European Jews.

Though Israeli scholars only belatedly commented on the intentionalist-functionalist

² Karl Schleunes, The Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy Towards German Jews 1933-1939 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990). Schleunes, though an American historian, had a profound and immediate immediate effect on German historiography – and is thus considered as central to this development. All major German historians of the subject were familiar with his work, and some were highly influenced by it. Of course, this receptivity was determined by a series of previous developments in German historiography that prefigured this functionalist turn. But the explicitness of Schleunes’s statement against the intentionalist position made the contours of the debate sharper and more definable.
³ Uwe Dietrich Adam Judenpolitik im dritten Reich (Düsseldorf, 1972)
debate, in large part because the history of anti-semitism had been considered to be part and parcel of the condition of Jews in the Diaspora, from the mid-sixties an important strand of scholarship was directed towards the lives of Jews in Eastern Europe in order to largely refute the thesis of Jewish passivity in the face of annihilation. It extended in particular to the question of the supposed collaboration of the Judenräte in Eastern European ghettos, and the degree of their complicity. Once again, at the heart of this point of contention is the problem of guilt. It was the affective mode through which Jews most vividly expressed their investment, their debt to that past, and what seemed like the most salient and disturbing features of the event known as the Holocaust. But this was also part of the process of overcoming the political meta-narratives that had cast the Holocaust in terms of the legitimacy of the Israeli state. Though the political function of the history of the Holocaust would continue – the legacy of the Six Days and Yom Kippur wars galvanized a turn to more comprehensive approaches to the Holocaust, including the entry of Jewish historians into the intentionalist-functionalist debate – it would not affect the academic historiography as greatly.

Increasingly, comprehensive narratives during this period addressed the issues concerning both the perpetrators and their victims, integrating the story of the Jews alongside an account of the Nazis, articulated from some position within the intentionalist-functionalist debate. Thus in this chapter we will interrogate two of these narratives, Lucy Dawidowicz’s *The War Against the Jews* and Yehuda Bauer’s *A History of the Holocaust*. The former, perhaps the paradigmatic account of the intentionalist position, was the first to combine a Jewish perspective with an account
of the Final Solution, though the two sides each occupy discrete and autonomous halves of the book. Bauer’s book, coming a few years later at the tail end of the intentionalist-functionalist debate, is the first synthesis of the two interpretive positions offered in a comprehensive narrative. It is also notable for its novel use of witness testimony throughout a narrative that also does not compartmentalize the representations of the perpetrator and the victim as rigidly as had *The War Against the Jews*.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate the passage through these phases of historiography – both in and out of the intentionalist-functionalist debate – and how this debate implied a changing relationship with testimony. The intentionalist-functionalist debate took place at the level of ‘explanation/understanding’ (distinguished from the stages of ‘documentary proof’ and ‘representation’), ultimately figuring as a competition between scales of historical time with their corollary modes of explanation and historical objects, events and actors. But in the tension at the heart of this debate is a unity in physical documentation. For the most part, the two sides of the debate did not disagree about ‘matters of fact’, by which I understand the propositional statements expressed by the documents. But documents, despite their material fixity as traces or as archived ‘testimonies’, only become ‘historical proof’ according to the questions being asked of them – questions asked from an interpretive position that already bears explanatory and representational

---

modes in mind. And an interpretation is always offered from a subject position that is articulated beyond its purely epistemological character.

The historian’s interpretive gaze, ubiquitous across these different stages of the historiographical operation, is inflected by the moral and emotional imperatives that bear on the particular historian. In the case of Holocaust historiography, the imperative to determine guilt in the manner of the judge, and thus to remain firmly detached emotionally and adhere to a rigorously positivistic standard of evidentiary epistemology was ubiquitous. But this imperative itself derived from an emotion, or perhaps better put, a psychological ‘investment’ in the event itself, that made the imperative significant and thus binding on the individual. The feeling of guilt for one’s being imbedded in a genealogy or a tradition responsible was a primary source of this affective relationship. For those historians who were at least generational contemporaries of the Holocaust, a sense of debt to the past overflowed itself and became a manifestation of searing guilt, reflecting itself in the literalism – the ‘sobriety’ guiding their mode of representation – that further reinforced their juridical evidentiary epistemology (which had otherwise become somewhat outdated). Though the debate was articulated in terms of differences in explanation, it arose primarily out of the perceived imperatives arising from divergent affective positions, different investments in the event and its actors, which gave rise to conflicting interpretive decisions that inflected every stage of the operation. Significantly, it effaced the

5 Though importantly, this is not to say the documents have no bearing on the interpretive position themselves – indeed part of my argument will be that one external limit on historians’ ability to appropriate testimony was its kind of availability, or perhaps ‘visibility’ as being within the archive. I will have more to say on this interpretation of testimony in the following chapters – testimony in its production and in its resistance to being figured as a ‘document’ in historiography (Chapters 4 & 5).
memory of the victims by discounting their testimony as legitimate historical evidence.

Thus, though the synthesis can be discussed at the explanation/understanding phase of the historiographical operation, the explicit verbal site of the debate, the shift itself required something deeper to change: the position of the historian vis-à-vis the Holocaust, as a citizen to whom the Holocaust is something with both emotional and moral importance, for whom the collective memory of the event matters. This turn to being active as a citizen required relinquishing the position of the judge. For historians to make this new kind of commitment also required a change in the collective memory with regards to which they are citizens. There was clearly an emotional resistance to accepting the synthesis by the Hitler Youth generation, evidenced by the resistance British historian Ian Kershaw encountered when he attempted to introduce his own early formulations of a synthesis to German historians in the early 1980’s. The Hitler Youth generation never really transcended the debate. The Historikerstreit of the late 1980’s was merely the last gasp of an aging generation, a debate over the centrality of guilt, empathy and identification in historical interpretation finally made explicit, though tragically, to no productive end.

This chapter will document this transition from the historian as judge to the historian as citizen, which reconfigured the possibilities for appropriating testimony in the documentary phase, while simultaneously altering the problematics and possibilities of the representational phase. I will thus be tracing these

---

6 Ian Kershaw, Hitler, the Germans and the Final Solution (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008)
12. Kershaw writes that, “and when, plucking up the courage, I tentatively suggested, as a newcomer and outsider, that there were fairly obvious ways of bridging the gap between the interpretations, I was gently and humorously put down by one of the luminaries present, who informed me that I was a ‘Doppelganger’ who wanted it both ways.”
historiographical developments, in particular the synthesis, in terms of the development of new modes of inquiry, which permitted new questions to be asked of evidence, thereby in effect ‘creating’ new documents; and the generational shifts that introduced new transferential subject positions from which historians would begin to engage the Holocaust.

* * *

_Vergangenheitsbewältigung_ (grappling with the past) in German historiography was branded by an internal struggle to even acknowledge that such a grappling _had been evaded in the first place_. The question of how German historiography interacted with the problem of its own guilt has been well studied and has been no small controversy, to which I cannot do justice in this brief work. Nonetheless, as a fundamental point of departure for analyzing the transferential position of these historians with regard to the Nazi era, and because of its resonance with the juridical categories out of which it gained its first systematic conceptual articulation, the notion of guilt will occupy a central role in the present analysis of the evolution of German historiography within the parameters of the intentionalist-functionalist debate.

German historiography first had to advance beyond the hegemony of historicism before it could really become entrenched in a real and sincere debate about guilt and responsibility.\(^7\) This implied a dramatic recognition as well of the

---

\(^7\) Though the Weimar era did begin to see the opening up of social and economic modes of research outside of the prevailing political emphasis of historicism, such work was not tolerated under the Nazi
limits of the documentary evidential paradigm that had predominated under historicism’s hegemony within the German academic discipline.

The shift corresponded largely to a generational change, both in society at large and within the historical profession. The work of historians of the Hitler Youth generation was the defining mark of this multifaceted development across the sixties and seventies. These developments can be roughly traced along two particularly salient lines of work, which overlapped, interacted and mutually reinforce one another: The work of the new Munich Institut für Zeitgeschichte, on the one hand, and the proponents of Strukturgeschichte following Hans-Ulrich Wehler in the wake of the Fischer controversy, on the other. Both strands carried historical research into Germany’s recent troubled past in directions that had been clearly displaced by traditional historicists like Friedrich Meinecke and Gerhard Ritter, though they ultimately became ensnared in the intentionalist-functionalist quagmire.8

The Frankfurt Auschwitz trial was the first attempt at a publicly-rendered dramatization in post-war Germany of the centrality of Jewish persecution under National Socialism. Later published as The Anatomy of the SS State, the historical background gathered for the trials by historians at the München Institut für Zeitgeschichte, was the first comprehensive account of the structure and history of the Nazi regime. Each historian wrote separate sections that approached the regime from different constitutive aspects. Comprised predominantly of a group of young

---

8 Whereas functionalists historians worked in both ‘strands’, the intentionalists were either in the Munich Institute (i.e. Helmut Krausnick) or were conservative descendants of historicism (i.e. Andreas Hilgruber).
historians of the Hitler Youth generation, the Institute was founded in 1949 for the purpose of researching National Socialism – it was originally titled Deutsches Institut für Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Zeit, (German Institute for the History of the National Socialist Era).

Their work in the 1950’s and early sixties looked at more traditional aspects of the Nazis ascendance to power and the mechanism through which it developed and was exercised. Martin Brozsat, later to figure in debates about the historicization of the Nazi period and in the development of Alltagsgeschichte, published some of the more important research into these aspects, but rarely did he touch on the extermination of Jews. Significantly though, his work, especially Der Hitler Staat in 1969, began to outline the polycratic features of the Nazi leadership, fundamentally calling into question the identification of every decision of the state with Hitler, and thus contributing to the developing contours of the functionalist position. At this point in time though, the Holocaust or the ‘Final Solution’ did not figure centrally in the work.9

Most of the Institute’s initial research did not really address the Jewish question until Helmut Krausnick’ “The Persecution of the Jews,” the first section in the historical analysis given at the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial, which traced the roots and development of the Nazi anti-Semitic ideology through its intentional and opportunistic application from the top down. But on the whole, the Holocaust did not figure prominently in the mainstream historical discourse.10

9 This was published in English as The Hitler State: The Foundation and Development of the Internal Structure of the Third Reich John W. Hiden, tr. (London: Longman, 1981).
10 Though a few exceptions existed, they were highly marginal. The only such work I have come across is Wolfgang Scheffler’s Judenverfolgung im dritten Reich 1933-1945, published in 1960.
The historians writing Anatomy of the SS State were explicit about their traditional, dispassionate approach as historians to representation, both in the particular case of writing for a trial where the information presented has a bearing on the verdict, but also in writing on something so topical and inherently emotional. For these historians, the emotional and moral nature of the Nazi era were such that they require a deliberate attempt on the part of historians to avoid painting a highly emotional picture of the past in order to highlight certain major truths, but at the price of historical exactitude regarding facts and circumstances… people prefer vivid writing (and it is difficult not to write vividly about Auschwitz); people try to evade the rationalism of the historian and prefer moralistic emotional theorizing… So in order to come to terms intellectually with National Socialism and its era, the Germans have need not of emotionalism or some moral evangelistic movement but of sober work combined with intelligence and common sense. Otherwise we run the risk of drawing the wrong lessons from the past. The strict rules of the judicial proceeding point the way to a standard of rationalism of which we are in dire need.¹¹

Thus there is a rigid separation of the emotional from the moral sphere, an invocation of a formal rationalism at the heart of moral reflection that is required to establish objective facts, of which the latter is best achieved by formal rules of judicial procedure. The authors recognize the moral magnitude of the topic at hand; but for them, this requires one to bracket out all emotional content and fixate on the brute ‘facts’ of the past as largely unmediated representations of the events themselves. This juridical standpoint also leads to the same difficulties around rationalism we keep encountering: Krausnick seems unable to decide where to fit Jewish persecution into the civilization-barbarism dichotomy. Dan Stone has commented on this ambivalence, writing that,

There is thus a sort of dialectic in the book between the desire to find a rational explanation and the need to condemn the Holocaust as irrational. The clash of principles is epitomized by Krausnick’s devotion to cataloguing the moments at which the Nazi regime broke with the rule of law… as if legal positivism would have rendered these matters acceptable.\(^\text{12}\)

Let us not forget that this book was written with a juridical end in sight: the Frankfurt-Auschwitz trials took the rule of law very seriously – recall from Chapter Two that the \textit{Befehlnotstand} defense carried significant weight in the West German legal system, with the heaviest charges falling on unrepentant brutes rather than desk murderers ‘just doing their job’.\(^\text{13}\) The burden of proof for murder had been set very high, a burden from which the historians were not exempt.

We should not be surprised then that the evidence adduced, even in Krausnick’s narrative of Jewish persecution, is \textit{entirely} based on official documentation, thought to be less subject to emotional arousal, both in the reader and the original author of the document.\(^\text{14}\) Emotion (including the empathy under its purview), according to this interpretation, thus inserts itself as a mediator between the historical event and interpretation in the present, sullying the transparent meaning supposedly effused by the document. This rejection of emotion as antithetical to historical veracity must thus also posit the document as something composed by historical actors relating ‘objective knowledge’ about their conditions, thus preserving their historical ‘truth’ through the document’s transmission. This approach to history, practiced by the first wave of the Hitler Youth generation, has been referred to as exhibiting a “pathos of sobriety,” which because of its disavowal of emotional

\(^{12}\) Stone \textit{Constructing the Holocaust} 160
\(^{13}\) See page 76-77 in Chapter Two.
\(^{14}\) Unlike the others, Krausnick was not actually a member of the Hitler Youth generation – he was born in 1905 – which may also explain his more old-fashioned brand of intentionalism in contrast to his younger colleagues, just then opening themselves up to the tools of structural history.
content failed to contribute to Germany’s ‘historical culture’. As scholarly works the writings of these historians remained a predominantly academic affair that failed to represent the enormity, singularity, or significance of the event, and thus failed to arouse public interest, which continued to adhere to the comfort of the ‘myth of innocence’. Rather, their obsession with juridical mode of inquiry permitted them to investigate only the development and operation of the mechanisms of power, leaving the explosive implications of the guilt of German society in the darkness.

Even as the Holocaust slowly emerged as a discrete topic in the early 1970’s, it was produced from within this mode of ‘sober’ scholarship, perpetuated by the debates that ensued from the intentionalist-functionalist debate. If anything, the gradual repositioning of the Holocaust to the center of the debate – displacing the earlier primacy of the concern with the broad contours of the functioning of the Nazi dictatorship – merely expanded and deepened the intensity of the debate as the role of guilt became explicit.

The publication of Fritz Fischer’s *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (translated in English as *Germany’s Aims in the First World War*) in 1961 sparked off what quickly became known as the ‘Fischer controversy’. A work that sought to revise the status quo understanding of Nazi Germany as an historical aberration, as a deviation from an otherwise ‘normal’ path of development, it encountered sharp reprisals from one of Germany’s preeminent historians, Gerhard Ritter. Along with Friedrich Meinecke, who having died in 1954 was not privy to the Fischer controversy, Ritter’s postwar writings on Nazi Germany had emphasized the accidental character of the Nazi

---

15 Kansteiner, *In Pursuit of German Memory* 39.
deviation. As both scholars were historicists in the classical Rankean tradition that had predominated German historiography for over a century, they saw Nazism in terms of its political figures and policies. In their interpretation, the weakening of ‘tradition’ resulting from the onset of modernity had caused the German state to become a *Machtstaat* governed by power rather than morality. Thus, according to this scheme, Hitler more or less duped German society into pursuing ends that did not resonate with its ‘true’ aims or beliefs – though neither society nor its beliefs were ever investigated, due to the methodological presumption in favor of official documentation.

German historicism since Ranke had asserted its claims to veracity upon a particularly strong attachment to official documentation for its archival source material. This is not to say that these historians approached these materials without a critical eye, for Ranke had been one of the first to carefully delineate the procedures for critically assessing evidence.\(^\text{16}\) Rather, in constructing agential political narratives focusing on domestic and foreign policy concerns, these historians relied almost exclusively on the materials created by those who made such decisions. Even after the decline of official historicism, such traditions were carried on, albeit in different form, by other influential scholars, such as Ernst Nolte, who in his *Faschismus in seiner Epoche* (1963)\(^\text{17}\) propounded a general theory of fascism based on a ‘phenomenological’ method of interpretation that sought to discover the essence of fascism from within the lived experience expressed in the words of fascist leaders,


\(^{17}\)Translated into English as *The Three Faces of Fascism*, Leila Vennewitz tr. (New York: Holt, Reinhart, Winston 1965).
which in practice amounted to little more than taking their own words at face value.\textsuperscript{18} He ultimately concluded that fascism was both anti-modern and, in historicist fashion, ultimately bound by its particular historical emergence because of its reciprocal relationship to Marxism - and thus a kind of aberration not repeatable in the future.\textsuperscript{19}

By contrast, Fischer challenged the generally accepted tenets of Nazism as historical accident by demonstrating that the very aspects of expansionism and militarism that had characterized the Nazi regime had their basis in the German Imperial political culture of the Second Reich. Known as the German Sonderweg thesis, it asserted that Germany had taken a ‘special path’ to modernity, which had more or less led directly to National Socialism. Rather than fixating on the movement of autonomously conceived ideas and the actions of statesmen, Fischer interrogated the nationalistic and expansionistic political culture of the Second Reich and demonstrated how its influence on Germany’s foreign policy aims provided the ultimate cause of the First World War. The controversy generated by Fischer’s thesis engaged the most prominent historical scholars of the day – including, remarkably, 

\textsuperscript{19} Nolte’s theory emerged out of the debates during the 50’s and 60’s over the totalitarianism concept that had begun to gain traction during the early stages of the Cold War and under the influence of Hannah Arendt’s \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism}. Supported not only by the official rhetoric of the Adenauer years, the totalitarianism concept was articulated most prominently by the 1970’s in the scholarly community by Karl Dietrich Bracher, whose traditional liberal historiographical approach linked up with the legitimization of the liberal-democratic project in West Germany. Such a transposable structural approach was certainly novel within German historiography, but at least insofar as it was articulated by Bracher, it remained a relatively conventional account that delineated the observable similarities in the political modes of domination expressed by Stalinism and National Socialism. For Bracher, Nazism was essentially identified with Hitler; as such it could not be reduced to an expression of a set of essential features called ‘fascism’. Hitlerism was its ‘essence’ of Nazism, which merely deployed totalitarian modes or \textit{techniques} of domination. Thus Bracher’s methods remained ultimately traditional; he looked primarily to the political-ideological sphere to explain the essence of Nazism, and thus relied, like his more conservative counterparts, on archived ‘official’ documentation. Totalitarianism was thus a political category for describing features of a state’s claims on society, rather than a description of what Nazism was. These debates factor into the contours of the intentionalist-functionalist debate, but their range extends beyond the scope of the present work.
non-German historians, signaling the remarkable changes occurring in Germany’s historical discipline, which had otherwise been engaged predominantly in an internal dialogue with itself. The burgeoning Sonderweg thesis had already been acknowledged in some form or other by British and American historians, for whom social scientific methodologies were already far more familiar (and who unsurprisingly, furthermore, did not find it difficult to blame Germany for causing World War I).

Though Fischer did not really utilize new methods or documents, offering a new interpretation of the same documentary ‘facts,’ the controversy it initiated opened up the door not only to new inquiries about the past, but also to a rethinking of the theoretical modes of inquiry most appropriate to the study of history. One of the new trends in this historiography, exemplified in particular by Hans-Ulrich Wehler’s The German Empire, was Strukturgeschichte, the application of social scientific models of political and economic development, largely imported (or re-imported, as the case may be with regard to Wehler’s heavy debt to Weberian sociology) from American 1950’s sociological work in the vein of Talcott Parsons, eventually finding its center at Bielefeld around Wehler and Jürgen Kocka in the early 1970’s. The development of social history, insofar as it opened up new objects for historical inquiry, was no doubt integral to the subsequent development of expanded explanatory frameworks for German histories of National Socialism, frameworks bearing significant implications for channeling relationships with guilt – which is why the historical continuity proposed by the Sonderweg thesis was so

---

controversial. But the theoretical implications of social history were significant: There was an implicit challenge to the evidentiary standards employed by more traditional historians made by the proponents of the new structural revisionism.

Wehler, in his replies to attacks against theoretical models of social history made by more conservative intentionalist historians Andreas Hilgruber and Klaus Hildebrand in the 1970’s, criticized the latter’s exclusive dependence on archived official documentation. But this difference in documentation relied on difference in method; the ‘traces’ used by the social historians did not by themselves contradict the positions of the more traditional political historians; they simply opened up fields of investigation which the latter simply dismissed.

Indeed, the developing intentionalist-functionalist debate over the role of Hitler in the Nazi State would founder precisely on these theoretical and methodological issues because the archival source materials – the testimonies, in the broad sense of the term – were ultimately the same for both sides of the debate; interpretations of these documents depended heavily upon the historical knowledge and models brought to bear on them, especially since Hitler was particularly elusive in the documentary record. The structuralist-functionalist historians did not adduce documentary evidence that contradicted the material used by more traditional-liberal

---

21 Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship 9-11
22 This is discussed further in chapters 4 and 5, where according to the distinction by Marc Bloch, traces are the broad paradigm of available evidence – economic data, archaeological remains, testimony is inscribed witnessing, an witness cataloguing some event, even when not designed for posterity’s sake – such as official documents, letters, memoranda and correspondences.
23 Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship 10-12. Many of the debates over the limits of representation would erupt over precisely this problem, that so many ‘emptoments’ – in Hayden White terminology – could be established on the same documentary record, calling into question our access to the ‘truth’ of the event. The discursus on the existential foundation for the possibility of historical practice and the role of testimony in Chapter Five is designed in part to address this concern. For summary positions of this debate see Christopher Browning’s, Hayden White’s, Carlo Ginzburg’s and Martin Jay’s contributions to Saul Friedländer’s Probing the Limits of Representation.
political historians, but they rather chose different time scales for their inquiry—economic and social shifts that spelled out larger movements, relying on documents that served more as ‘traces’ (that is, archived materials that were not created in the interest of posterity—economic records, for example) than documented ‘testimony’ in the sense of a written account of a perceived event.

Though the documentary aspect of the challenge of social history may not have had immediate repercussions on Holocaust historiography (in large part because in Germany at the time there was no discrete Holocaust historiography, but also, as I am arguing, because of the intentionalist-functionalist cul-de-sac to which social/structural historical methods contributed), the undermining of the authority of the official document that had reigned since Ranke would open up the discursive space within which qualitatively different modes of research would eventually be produced—notably the development of Alltagsgeschichte in the 1970’s and 80’s and a massive shift towards cultural history and the history of memory. But these transitions would depend on a set of other developments, such as the emergence of the Victim as a category of inquiry in studies in historiography in general and subsequently in German research on Nazism (that is, the development of Holocaust as a discrete event or as a constitutive component of any understanding of Nazism). However, that generation’s need to grapple historico-juridically the distribution of guilt ultimately clouded the gates to that path.

The Intentionalist-Functionalist debate began to assume full form with the 1970 publication of Karl A. Schleunes’ *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz*, a work that
sought not to uncover the machinery of destruction à la Hilberg, but rather to
scrutinize the slow and contingent nature of the emergence of Nazi anti-Jewish policy
before the outbreak of war in 1939. He observed how this ‘road’ resulted from the
dynamic interaction and competition between various agencies, bureaucracies and
power blocs within German state and society, each of which often pursued ends that
were not explicitly ideological, though their integration under the leadership principle
(\textit{Führerprinzip}) led to the uneven development of persecution in line with aspects of
the general program of National Socialist ideology.\textsuperscript{24} Though written by an
American, \textit{The Twisted Road}, along with the social history movement behind Wehler
and Kocka was to exert an enormous influence on the burgeoning German
functionalist historians such as Hans Mommsen (who wrote the preface to the 2\textsuperscript{nd}
edition of the book in 1990) and Martin Broszat.\textsuperscript{25} Before these historians had fully
articulated their versions of the functionalist thesis, Uwe Dietrich Adam published
\textit{Judenpolitik im Dritten Reich} in 1972, extending Schleunes’ analyses to include the
wartime decisions behind the implementation of the extermination policies. Both
works sought to revise the intentionalist thesis that Auschwitz could be read back
teleologically to Hitler’s words in \textit{Mein Kampf}. Although not denying Hitler’s
unparalleled role and radicalism, they sought to establish the responsibility of the
bureaucrats and the exogenous or structural forces that committed leaders to
increasingly radical moves independent of Hitler’s will, what Hans Mommsen would

\textsuperscript{24} Karl A. Schleunes, \textit{The Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy Towards German Jews 1933-1939}
\textsuperscript{25} Eley, \textit{The Crooked Line} 72. Note that Mommsen was skeptical of the \textit{Sonderweg} thesis offered by
Wehler and his cohort.
later refer to as “cumulative radicalization.” According to this interpretation, each progressive stage in what would be termed the ‘Final Solution’ was improvised and the result of a constellation of imperatives acting on agents at different levels of authority.

Recognizing that the ‘realization of the unthinkable’ was only achieved through a slow evolutionary process, functionalist historians turned their attention to the process of moral conditioning required for the Final Solution to take its ultimate form in the ‘orderly’ industrial process of gassing Jews. Mommsen thus speaks of the “pseudo-moral justification” which “was needed as a precondition for the systematic implementation of the Final Solution.”

Many Nazis found the horrible and repulsive conditions they saw in the ghettos profoundly disturbing, and the massacres of entire communities of Jews by Police Battalions and SS Einsatzgruppen in the East also took their psychological toll. An efficient and orderly manner of execution thus helped ease the Germans’ more ‘civilized’ inhibitions. The Euthanasia program further facilitated the process, as its functionaries working in the name of ‘humanity’ would become the doctors and commandants of the Aktion Reinhardt camps.

“Inhumanity had first to be declared as ‘humanity’ before it could be put into technocratic practice, with moral inhibitions thereafter reduced to a minimum.” Far from neglecting the ‘intentions’ of actors by focusing on impersonal forces, the functionalists began to demonstrate the frailty of a liberal humanism by showing how even civilized notions of ‘humanity’ could be used to justify ‘barbaric’ ends in the

---

26 From Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship 264.
28 ibid. 247
minds of individual actors. The rhetoric of civilization could not comfort itself with the juridical antithesis of civilization and barbarism. The contours of guilt were, perhaps, more insidious than could be comprehended by traditional criminal categories.

A number of commentators, among them Ian Kershaw, have noted that the strength of the functionalist interpretation lies in its emphasis on the ‘how’ of the Final Solution rather than on locating responsibility for it. Kershaw writes that, “concentrating on the historical question of how ‘the Holocaust’ happened rather than, implicitly or explicitly, seeking to allocate guilt makes the issue of whether Hitler took the initiative at every turn, or whether a particular decision was his alone, seem less relevant and important.”

I would agree with Kershaw in theory, except for the fact that many of the functionalist historians voiced their most cogent articulations of the functionalist position as an explicit refutation of the intentionalist position. Their writing was thus framed in reference to the intentionalist questions of guilt. Guilt was not effaced; it was simply displaced. Thus even Kershaw, in defending the functionalist position (and Mommsen in particular) is compelled to argue that “if anything it is the apparent need to find a supreme culprit which comes close to trivializing in terms of historical explanation by diverting attention from the active forces in German society which did not have to be given a ‘Führer Order.’”

On the other hand, the functionalist position gains moral credibility because it broadens “that culpability to implicate directly and as active and willing agents large sections of the non-Nazi elites in the army, industry, and bureaucracy alongside the Nazi leadership.

29 Kershaw, Hitler, the Germans and the Final Solution 247.
30 ibid. 246.
and Party organization.” Even though they discerned the haphazard nature of the forces leading to Auschwitz, precisely the same historical agents were being implicated as in the intentionalist interpretation. The primary concern of the functionalist reconstructions was still the question of the nature of the guilt of the Nazi elites.32

Though I am not convinced that the evasion of the Holocaust, nor the revision implied by functionalism, stemmed from an ‘evasion’ of guilt through repression (appropriated as an analogy to evasion by the former perpetrators themselves), the exculpatory appearance of the functionalist challenge seemed illegitimate to those who had witnessed the complete lack of an admission of guilt by those perpetrators, shielded as they had been by the bureaucratic apparatus from having to fully grapple with that guilt.33 The Hitler Youth generation by contrast – functionalists and intentionalists alike – did begin to pursue the Holocaust, but only in its totalized political and social features. It was not through some generalized repression, but the particular way in which the implication of guilt was handled: In many ways, these historians were possessed by an engagement with the possibility of their own guilt, with a recognition of their implicit connection and debt to a generation that had allowed or caused it to happen – with just enough distance to write about it, but not

31 ibid. 245
32 Thus Saul Friedländer writes that, “if one focuses on the problem of historical responsibility, the structural approach is not essentially different from the liberal one… The same three collective actors we encountered in [the liberal approach] interact equally within the structuralist view of the Nazi epoch.” In “A Conflict of Memories? The New German Debates about the ‘Final Solution’,” Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe, 27.
33 Robert Jay Lifton thus writes “And where mass death is caused by human beings, the technological and bureaucratic distancing of the victimizer can protect him all too well from guilt.” In The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life (New York: Simon and Schuster 1979). 145
enough distance to preclude a self-reassuring moralizing tone. We would be well
served to review Karl Jasper’s words from the beginning of this chapter to elucidate
this confusion: “We further feel that we not only share in what is done at present—
thus being co-responsible for the deeds of our contemporaries—but in the links of
tradition. We have to bear the guilt of our fathers.”34 But this kind of moral collective
guilt is not “tangible” according to Jaspers; it is not as easy as criminal guilt to
distribute, which through the verdict restricts the legal range of the guilt to the
individual bearing a proper name. But it was also the most troubling guilt to engage in
dealing with the Holocaust – the excess that just would not go away.35

The Hitler Youth generation’s obsession with the question of perpetrator guilt
thus appears far more legitimate in this light, though they may have confused moral
and criminal types of guilt. Unlike Saul Friedländer, who believes this generation of
historians was sidestepping its responsibility to represent the victims by ‘splitting-off’
their feelings of guilt, I rather see the response of these historians as an attempt, albeit
imperfect, to engage their sense of guilt where it hit home – to discuss the nature of
responsibility of their family, community and nation.36 They may have been unable to
engage the bystander and the ‘myth of innocence’ head-on. But their focus on the
question of historical guilt and responsibility should in no way indicate an evasion of
subjects over which they felt ‘guilty’. Their interest in the past, with perhaps the
exception of the more conservative revisionist historians such as Nolte and

---
34 Karl Jaspers, On the Question of German Guilt 79
35 This notion of ‘excess’ comes from Saul Friedländer, in “On the Unease of Historical
Interpretation,” Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe.
36 Saul Friedländer, “German Struggles with Memory,” and “A Conflict of Memories? The New
German Debates about the ‘Final Solution’” in Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of
Europe.
Hillgruber,\textsuperscript{37} was an expression of the need to resist an easy exculpation. However, given that the bar for murder had been set so high in the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial, (among others), any deviation from the juridical case might have appeared as an attempt at exculpation.

Ricoeur, in this vein, asks if there “is some margin left, on the historiographical plane, for a \textit{dissensus} that would not be perceived as exculpatory” in the case of criminal events of the magnitude of the Holocaust?\textsuperscript{38} But given the potentially explosive nature of engaging the guilt of one’s society and of one’s parents, how could such a dissensus be escaped? The functionalists \textit{had} to voice their work in terms of responsibility, for fear of being perceived as exculpatory ‘revisionists’. The \textit{Historikerstreit} was this final expression of the dissensus at the heart of the aging Hitler Youth generation; its very occurrence denied the possibility of an easy exculpation.

This might help to explain the absence of research into the social ‘how’ of the Final Solution parallel to the intentionalist-functionalist debate, given that both concern themselves with guilt. The structuralist-functionalists, though self-proclaimed ‘social historians’ contributed primarily to deepening our understanding of the functioning of political structures, power blocs, parties and classes. Though avowedly non-Marxist, unlike their British cousins, they still remained vehemently

\textsuperscript{37} These two historians achieved new public prominence as instigators of the German \textit{Historikerstreit}. Nolte, by making explicit the need to contextualize and de-exceptionalize Nazi crimes in order to displaced the focus of historical guilt onto the Bolsheviks, whom he depicted as the ‘active’ force behind the excesses of Nazism. Hillgruber, on the other hand, in his \textit{Zweierlei Untergang} wanted to look past guilt and persuade contemporary Germans to identify with the soldiers of the \textit{Wehrmacht}, who were undergoing the extremely brutalized conditions of the war on the Eastern Front – even though their efforts prolonged the extermination of the Jews behind the frontlines. Saul Friedländer, and “A Conflict of Memories? The New German Debates about the ‘Final Solution’” in \textit{Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe} 32-3.

\textsuperscript{38} Ricoeur \textit{Memory, History, Forgetting} 326
materialist through most of the 1980’s, strongly resisting the cultural and linguistic turn infecting the social sciences at the time. The functionalists generally refrained from investigating the social contours of life within Nazi Germany, the gray zone between bystander and perpetrator. The evidentiary basis for these investigations clearly reflected and contributed to these patterns of investigation. It was not until the 1980’s that new paradigms of inquiry began to materialize, heralded largely by the rise of a new generation of post-war historians, practicing Alltagsgeschichte, which had emerged at a grassroots level out of History Workshops outside of the academic university system. More open to the new methods and questions being asked by cultural historians, the predominant notions of evidence, of the ‘archive’ and ‘testimony’ would be challenged. And in this movement the intentionalist-functionalist debate was largely transcended as their object – juridical guilt – was displaced, though not ignored. For the Hitler Youth generation never really solved the intentionalist-functionalist debate. Their methods and their corollary subjective relation to the nature of German guilt, what Jeffrey Olick has referred to as the “politics of regret,” largely precluded the possibility of their engagement with questions beyond the paradigm of guilt in its criminal-juridical contours.

Even in 1991 Hans Mommsen could not help but structure his sole chapter on the Holocaust in From Weimar to Auschwitz around a refutation of the intentionalist position, while researchers from a younger post-war generation were making strong headway into focusing their work on the more challenging aspects of the relationship between the past and the present.

---

between German state and society during the Nazi period. Guilt in these matters is always at play; but as long as it was constrained within the contours of the juridical schema, the range of its inquiry – and thus also the possibility for engaging and ‘working-through’ the more difficult aspects of the past - was limited.

* * *

Early forms of Israeli Holocaust memory were patterned according to the meta-narratives of “Catastrophe and Redemption” and “Catastrophe and Heroism” identified by Saul Friedländer. Though the two were tightly linked, especially in the fifteen years before the Eichmann trial, the former was bound to an understanding of the existence of the state of Israel as owing to the Holocaust, an interpretation which persisted well beyond the Eichmann trial, when the explicit emphasis on Heroism and resistance – as against general passivity – began to decline sharply. Many survivors had already questioned this meta-narrative as it was offensively reductionistic to the vast array of experiences of persecution, and originated from prejudices and beliefs carried over from the Yishuv era. Before the Eichmann trial though, there was little public voicing of these concerns, given the social status of the survivor as witness.

---

41 Hans Mommsen “The Realization of the Unthinkable: The ‘Final Solution of the Jewish Question’ in the Third Reich,” From Weimar to Auschwitz, 1991. This critique of Mommsen only goes so far. Not only is this chapter an expanded version of an earlier essay, “Die Realisierung des Utopischen: Die ‘Endlösung der Judenfrage’ im ‘Dritten Reich’,” originally published in 1983. This book still pushes a ways towards looking at the conditions under which individuals involved in the extermination process had to be convinced of the necessity of ‘humane’ murder, and describes the process by which banalized moral values were invoked to justify the Final Solution – challenging the image of barbarity evoked by the trials and the intentionalists. Nonetheless, it is still concerned not with German society itself, but rather with the party and state bureaucrats making the decisions.

But with the Eichmann trial, the monolithic ubiquity of this narrative fragmented – although it certainly persisted in various forms. Though the issues of passivity and collaboration were quickly reconstituted, it was challenged and deepened by research into the experience of those accused of passivity and collaboration. But the main focus of Jewish research into the Holocaust, once it actually achieved a certain scholarly status, still focused predominantly on resistance and rescue efforts. Jews were for the most part very hesitant to address the perpetrators or their ‘Solution’.

The strong reaction engendered by *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and *The Destruction of the European Jews* was the starting point for much of the renewed research beginning in the 1960’s, and would frame much of the Jewish – not just Israeli – interest in Holocaust history. But as one historian has pointed out, the claims made by Arendt and Hilberg would not have been out of place ten years earlier when such harsh judgments on Jewish behavior during the Holocaust had been the norm. It was only because their accounts were published during or after the Eichmann trial, at a moment of generational change, that such a backlash occurred.43

The challenge to the previous evidentiary paradigm of Nuremberg and the narratives following in its wake was also quite marked in post-Eichmann Jewish historiography, given the predictable interest of Jewish historians in the fate of the Jewish communities. Hilberg was challenged for his reliance on German documents, from which many accused him of adopting the Nazi stereotype of the passive Jew. The status accorded to alternative documentation – to testimony – by its use at the Eichmann trial thus had a significant impact on Jewish historians.

This period also saw the increased publication of ghetto diaries, testimonies, and even public appearances by survivors, who reflected on their experience of Jewish behavior during this period – another legacy of the Eichmann trial. The new investigations tended to emphasize the diversity of responses of Jewish communities, especially at the institutional level of the Judenräte, exemplified by a paper delivered by Nathan Eck in 1967 in New York. But the most comprehensive and well-known statement of this position was Isaiah Trunk’s Judenrat, published in 1972.

As with a number of the other narratives interrogated we have looked at, Trunk offers an explicit discussion of his sources in the preface. What is unusual is his more even-handed acknowledgement of the need to be critical of all kinds of sources, even though different critical considerations apply to each source: although his main documentary sources are still official documents (Gestapo as well as council members), Trunk voices the opinion that they must also be questioned as to their absences in particular, given the atmosphere of violence and the pervasive presence of the Gestapo. But what he has to say about both contemporaneous sources (i.e. diaries and underground articles) and post-war memoirs and interviews is especially startling: while recognizing their vulnerability to subjective distortions – “A fact described years after the event is inevitably liable to the inadequacy of human memory and may be influenced by what the witness has heard or read since the end of the war” – he also precociously recognizes their alternative value:

The witness may, and often does, err as to the date, the name, the numbers involved, and similar formal elements of the events, as well as in its evaluation; but his reliability as to the event itself, provided he is mentally sound and honest in his

---

44 Kenan, *Between Memory and History* 81.
approach to the testimony, is beyond doubt… what the witness may presently tell
about his experiences and the whole era may, from the distance of time, help in his
being more objective in the evaluation of events than would have been possible for
him right after the liberation.46

Few narratives at this time would have admitted that testimony could be trusted, and
perhaps only Christopher Browning’s work two decades later would voice so
explicitly how such testimony could be useful in historical reconstruction. Trunk’s
realization that the passage of time in some cases can have a beneficial effect on the
recall of a witness is also startling, given the assumptions we have usually
encountered. Even Saul Friedländer, who in his latest narrative *The Years of
Extermination* uses extensive testimony beyond it role in filling in gaps about the
‘facts’ of the past, does not trust testimony given after the war because of the
extensive distortions he believes accrue to memory with the passage of time.47

However, Trunk’s narrative has its limits as well. Like most Jewish
historiography during these years, *Judenrat* focused only on the experience of Eastern
Europe, even though Jewish councils were established in every Nazi-occupied
territory where there were Jews. Most importantly, Trunk does not deploy the
testimony in any capacity other than to elucidate specific matters-of-fact. Though I by

---

46 Trunk continues, “Life during the Nazi years was permeated with such severa strain that it left a
deep, permanent impression on the mentality of the surviving victims. Even now they are still unable
to shake off the ferocious memories. Many still have most torturing nightmares, again and again living
through the ghetto and camp afflictions. However, no conclusion should be drawn that the researcher
has to accept all related facts and their evaluation without critical analysis. The reliability of the
accounts is increased if and when they are confirmed by other testimonies relating to the same fact. As
always in the writing of history, each source has to be juxtaposed with another one about the same
event. Where this is impossible, and where there is only a single account concerning a given fact, it
must be analyzed even more critically.” Trunk, *Judenrat* xiv.

47 Saul Friedländer, “The Years of Extermination: A Plea for an Integrated History of the Holocaust,”
(presentation of the Hallie Lecture at Memorial Chapel, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, 23
October 2008.)
no means intend to impugn or belittle Trunk’s progressive move, it is significant that he is concerned only with rehabilitating the ‘objective’ capacity of the witness.

* * *

Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945*

“The nexus between idea and act has seldom been as evident in human history with such manifest consistency as in the history of anti-Semitism.”

Lucy Dawidowicz’s *The War Against the Jews*, in addition to presenting one of the first comprehensive accounts of the Holocaust that combines a narrative of the perpetrators with a narrative of the victims, has become the paradigmatic emblem of the intentionalist interpretation of the Holocaust. Unlike its predecessors, this book was written in the wake of the major functionalist turn, prompted by works such as Karl Schleunes’ *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz* and the increasingly functionalist work done by the Munich historians, which as we have seen, emphasized the role played by the dynamics of competition between party leaders and various bureaucrats within an evolving Nazi power structure in the genocidal outcome. Dawidowicz sought to reassert the primacy of Hitler’s intention to annihilate European Jewry as far back as *Mein Kampf* against these contingent and structural positions, imbuing her narrative with the most self-conscious and vehement assertion of the intentionalist position. At the same time, her work must also be situated within the emergence of the Jewish history of the Holocaust following the controversies in the wake of the

Eichmann trial over collaboration and passivity, providing first step, albeit limited because of its segregated structure, towards more integrated approaches.

*The War Against the Jews* is divided into two halves, each narrated according to different modes of investigation, coloring each respective stage of the historiographical operation. The first, “The Final Solution,” documents the implementation of Hitler’s plan from *Mein Kampf* through to the extermination camps, as one continuous epoch of successive phases of Jewish persecution, all progressing with an eye towards the final phase of extermination. The second half, “The Holocaust,” is primarily an account of the destruction of Eastern European Jewry constituted as a community. This second narrative is not particularly concerned with explaining how the Holocaust happened, or why, or what the meaning of it was to those who watched it happen. Rather, it seeks to document the variety of responses of the organized Jewish community, for the most part the *Judenräte*, to the unified unfolding operation described in the previous section. Each half of the book thus finds its project largely confined within the dual paradigm established by the controversies surrounding the Eichmann and Frankfurt-Auschwitz trials.

The play of guilt is crucial here as well, and manifests itself in the divergent interpretive stances taken in each half of the book. Her moral and epistemological assumptions take radically different forms. The rhetorical tone, affective relationship, types of documents appropriated, and explanatory modes deployed across time scales vary so considerably between these two halves that they resemble two entirely different works. At the end of the preface she makes this distinction abundantly clear,
though perhaps not consciously realizing the awkward double standard it establishes at an epistemological level:

This is not a value-free book. The very subject matter of the Final Solution precludes neutrality. In writing about a nation that transgressed the commandment ‘Though shalt not murder,’ it is impossible to be what Charles Beard characterized as ‘a neutral mirror.’

Whereas the Germans, in planning and executing the Final Solution, played the role of the Devil and his hosts, the Jews during the Holocaust were, alas, merely human, saints and sinners, imperfect earthlings. In writing about the Holocaust I have tried to avoid moral judgments, though I have not hesitated to describe demoralization. In discussing the deeds of a handful of Jewish leaders who have been charged by survivors and scholars with criminal behavior, I have been persuaded by Professor Herbert Butterfield’s view that the historians can never quite know men from the inside, because he can never carry his investigation into the interiority of their minds and hearts, where ‘the final play of motive and the point of responsibility’ are decided.

As best I could I have tried to present what actually happened. I strove to follow the two methods that Wilhelm von Humboldt perceived to be the historian’s task in the approach to historical truth: “The first is the exact, impartial, critical investigation of the events; the second is the connecting of the events explored and the intuitive understanding of them which could not be reached by the first means.”

Notice that her language is carefully articulated to correspond to the different nominal events she subordinates to the broader event designated by the title of her book “The War Against the Jews.” Where she uses “Final Solution,” her domain of reference solely concerns the German perspective, while any reference to the Jewish event is designated by “the Holocaust.” Though she claims that, “the very subject matter of the Final Solution precludes neutrality,” thus giving her moral permission to characterize “the Germans” as “the Devil,” on the other hand, “in writing about the Holocaust” she “tried to avoid moral judgments,” so as to avoid the problematic condemnations of Jewish passivity and collaboration. But while she does not judge

49 ibid. xviii.
Jewish reactions, giving an epistemological justification to what is clearly a moral decision, she does not hesitate to “carry [her] investigation into the interiority” of the “minds and hearts” of Hitler, Göring, Himmler and Heydrich. For the singular purpose of the first half of the book is just that: to establish “where ‘the final play of motive and the point of responsibility’ are decided” in the development of the Final Solution.

The psychological commitments expressed in these divergences reflect a certain guilt formation; two different subjects express themselves in this book, constituted as they are by their respective affective investments in the ‘perpetrators’ and the ‘victims’. But the distribution of these roles does not fit the juridical paradigm perfectly; it is not the case that the Jews are not judged while the Germans are, for her avowed lack of partiality towards the Germans precludes her ability to genuinely adopt the role of the judge; her interpretation of Jewish behavior, established as a retort to those who would judge them, is written with the dry, sober impartiality we have seen play out in previous narratives of the Final Solution.

This inversion thus denies a simplistic explanation which would claim that the interpretations of The War Against the Jews fits within a juridical paradigm: she is impartial to the Jews, but does not judge them: she is completely partial towards the Germans, who have been judged in advance, even though the structure of the narrative reads like an indictment. Perhaps it might be better to say that, with regards to the Germans, she speaks as the prosecutor, though one who believes that the case has already been closed. The explanatory structure, the organization of the unfolding of the Final Solution, is determined at the core by an imperative to make visible those
actors who can be attributed responsibility for what happened. This is the paradigm established in penal judgment, which “governed by principles of individual guilt, by nature recognizes only defendants who have proper names, and who, moreover, are asked to state their identity at the opening of the trial.” Of all the questions Dawidowicz could ask, she chooses only those centered around the question of Hitler’s singular responsibility. Distributing guilt in terms of intent (which is of singular importance in attributions of criminal guilt), if spread around, would then deny the possibility of ascribing responsibility to a juridical subject for the whole of the Final Solution – which is why, for example, Hausner indicted Eichmann for the entire Final Solution despite his adjunct and subordinate role. Dawidowicz thus responds decisively to Ricoeur’s question: dissensus does imply exculpation especially if it challenges an easy ascription of guilt to a subject capable of unambiguously bearing it.

This quasi-juridical drama plays out revealingly at the evidentiary phase as well. Dawidowicz privileges documents like Mein Kampf, imbuing these very documents with an historical reality that traditionally accrues to only actors, and a transparency announcing a will, an experience, exactly as its words appear to intend; the name of Hitler is the subject around which a particularly German anti-Semitic, anti-Enlightenment ideology accrues. Mein Kampf is the nexus of this ideology and

---

50 Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting 321
51 Dawidowicz, in generating the historical background of Hitler’s anti-Semitism, develops a ‘cultural’ variant of the Sonderweg thesis that identifies anti-Semitism with the special path of the German rejection of an Enlightenment conception of civilization; In the wake of the Enlightenment, Germans preferred an organic notion of Kultur to a rationalized Zivilization, paving the way for the anti-modernist strand of thought leading to the Nazi worldview. Thus, her interpretation resonates with that of Nolte’s in a key way – anti-Semitism and anti-modernism are tightly linked in the historical progression of disembodied ideas. Additionally, anti-Semitism in its European context is never examined, and neither is the social-Darwinist racial science that she links to the Nazi Weltanschauung.
its embodiment in a defendant with a proper name. She only does this insofar as it builds the tightest case around the personal responsibility of Hitler and his closest cadres. Embodied anti-Semitism is given causal primacy in the explanation, one best suited to the work of the prosecutor.

Though she had the same documents available as Schleunes, she did not actually use them. Most of the substantive work done in “The Final Solution” is an amalgamation of previous historical narratives and Hitler’s speeches and writings; but she develops a singularly antithetical interpretation to Schleunes. Referring to The Twisted Road in an endnote, she writes that, “Schleunes found much interesting archival material, but failed to place it in any intelligible framework. His only reference to Mein Kampf is to dismiss it is an inadequate ‘reflection’ of German Jewish relations.” Yet contrariwise, does her privileging of the German document permit her to see Mein Kampf as an ‘adequate’ reflection of German Jewish relations? Her uncritical application of these documents is puzzling when contrasted with her critical engagement with Jewish testimonial evidence: For example, in an endnote she states of one Judenrat member that, “His memoirs… record alleged conversations

---

Europe only impinges on ‘Germany’ (which she conceives as a cultural totality prior to its political unity, echoing the claims of 19th century grossdeutsch nationalists) through military conquest: Germany’s defeat at the hands of Napoleon left its scars in a kind of ressentiment that happened to find its scapegoat in the Jews: “Out of the defeat inflicted upon them by the French, the Germans devised a notion of national, Volkist superiority to redeem their self-image. That self-image could not have been drawn without the Jew as antagonist.” But not only does her history of ideas apply to ‘the Germans’ as represented by their leaders, it is also teleological: “The Germans were in search of a mysterious wholeness that would restore them to primeval happiness, destroying the hostile milieu of urban industrial civilization that the Jewish conspiracy had foisted on them… National Socialism was the consummation towards which the omnifarious anti-Semitic movements had striven for 150 years.”

Dawidowicz, on the other hand, sets up a rigid dichotomy between the German and the Jew, and the German image of the Jew is portrayed as completely autonomous from the actual place of Jews in German society.
verbatim at which he was not present, and whose contents he could not possibly have known. At best his evidence is hearsay; it is probably highly colored.” Nazi official documents are rarely used (though the historical narratives she draws from are based on them), but the testimonies given by leading Nazis, such as Rudolf Höss and Otto Ohlendorf at their war crimes trials, are used and not subjected to the same critical gaze as the Jewish witness testimony.” Of course, she does not have to accept their exculpatory claims in accordance with the usual Befehlnotstand defense – but she does not challenge them either. However, because these claims are completely ignored, in the rigid totalitarian framework used in The War Against the Jews, this ultimately serves to affirm them. Dawidowicz doesn’t necessarily make any false claims as a result, but her narrative, whenever it does not involve Hitler, often reads like a chronicle: quite a few of her ‘explanations’ are not given within the space of reasons, which one would normally come to expect from such a histoire événementielle; so-and-so simply gave an order, so-and-so transmitted it to another. Thus explanation itself is merely displaced to the larger operative framework as Hitler as absolute master of a totalitarian regime completely at his bidding. Within this totalitarian interpretation of the National Socialist state, any explanation of the development of the Final Solution requires recourse only to the mind of Hitler.

The second half of the book, “The Holocaust,” though it is designed in part to give visibility to the victims doe not treat them as such, but rather as collective actors, noting the reactions of “organized Jewry” to Nazi persecution, and not the individual

---

54 ibid. 410 7 n. 1-2.
voice, the individual experience of “the Holocaust.” In part due to her epistemological emphasis on actors – where individual persons could not be found, she emphasized the “organized community” as an actor – she makes epistemological justifications for this stance that reveal the narrowly positivistic aims of her reconstruction: the impossibility of judging what they really thought leads her away from the necessity of a speculative reconstruction of what they might have thought – or for that matter, letting their voices speak for themselves. In the preface she gives further weight to this narrow conception of the Jewish experience of the Holocaust that furthers her limited recourse to Jewish documents:

Jewish official documents that have survived reflect the writers’ awareness of the omnipresent Germans and their all-seeing eyes… the terror was so great that even private personal diaries, composed in Yiddish or Hebrew, were written circumspectly, with recourse to Scripture and the Talmud as a form of esoteric expression and self-imposed reticence.

Survivor documentation on the other hand, frequently suffers from subjectivity, bitterness, and partisanship—commonplace and habitual defects of most historical records. These documents have a further shortcoming… they are never quite certain what great events they are witness to… they have been too distant from communal responsibility to be able to describe with any authority those critical situations at which significant decisions were made and policies framed for the Jewish community.\(^5^5\)

Though “The Holocaust” is a narrative designed to raise the Jews as victims to a new level of visibility, it is not their experience as victims – individuals or community members – which is interrogated or transmitted. Rather, the whole of the narrative seeks to document how the \textit{organized} community understood and responded to German initiatives, though on one occasion she does give us a glimpse of the attempt to revive cultural activities – to create a ghetto culture despite the grim and deathly

\(^{55}\) ibid. xvii.
situation around them – but it is only dealt with in passing, and largely in its dimensions as a form of resistance. Only those agents with “communal responsibility” who were present at “those critical situations at which significant decisions were made” can be located within the space of reasons. Therefore the experience of the death camps are excluded, because “with the liquidation of the ghettos, Jewish communal existence came to an end… their story [survivors of the camps] is not the history of the Jewish community.”

To a degree, these decisions can be situated within the post-Eichmann conceptual space of the controversies over passivity and collaboration. The narrative is formulated as a response to the question of communal passivity and institutional collaboration. But this explanation by itself is insufficient, given her deep investment in giving the Jews visibility in a comprehensive narrative of the Holocaust. Guilt, perhaps, plays a role here too, much like it did for the German historians of the Hitler Youth generation. Though not a survivor herself, it is not uncommon for those who feel enough responsibility for their kin – Dawidowicz visited Eastern European communities during their last days of existence – to adopt a kind of survivor’s guilt, an increased sense of debt to those close to them who have died. Robert Jay Lifton has noted how this debt to the dead often manifests itself in overly literal writing that occludes the visceral experience of death witnessed, the result of a psychological numbing process that is activated when one’s protective shield is threatened. We will touch upon this topic further in the subsequent chapters.

56 ibid. xvii.
57 Lifton, The Broken Connection 177-8: He writes that, “A major difficulty here is the literalism the survivor imposes upon himself in viewing his death encounter. So terrifying and awesome does he find it, so demanding are his requirements of fidelity to it, that he may bind himself to what he takes to be
Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust*

*A History of the Holocaust* is not usually included among the comprehensive narratives addressed in most historiographical works because it does not represent a landmark in the inclusion of new research within the comprehensive literature – at least one historian even thinks it is not particularly representative of his larger body of work because of its didactic nature. But it is precisely this didactic intention – inserting itself both in the ongoing intentionalist-functionalist debate – that makes *A History of the Holocaust* of interest in this discussion. It must be read as a synthesis of much of the research that had been accomplished in English, German and Hebrew over the previous several decades, including some of Bauer’s own pathbreaking research on the collaboration-passivity-resistance paradigm and the failure of the rescue operations, which astoundingly occupies over a quarter of the book. Most

---

58 Michael Marrus *The Holocaust in History*, Lucy Dawidowicz *The Holocaust and the Historians*, Dan Stone *Constructing the Holocaust*, Dan Michman, *Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective*. Though he includes Bauer’s *A History of the Holocaust* within the ranks of the narratives discussed here, Michman chose not to analyze it “since it is a synthesis intended mainly for didactic purposes and does not… clearly represent a summation of Bauer’s views as found in his extensive publications.” 37 n4.

importantly, it is the first comprehensive narrative of the Holocaust to consciously synthesize the intentionalist and functionalist interpretations.

Though of Zionist inclinations, Bauer was by no means an unabashed proponent of the outmoded “Heroism and Redemption” meta-narrative that dominated early Israeli myths about the Holocaust – though he does succumb to it at times in the narrative. Like Trunk and Dawidowicz, he was responding to the negative portrait of Diaspora Jews, in his reformulation of the problematic of resistance. Unlike Dawidowicz though, he does not seek to abstain from judgment a priori because of what she had identified as an epistemological limit of inquiry into individual subjective decisions (something historians do all the time – and she does uncritically with regards to Germans), but rather he noted the problematic nature of the analytical categories deployed to judge individuals for their actions. In the vein of what Primo Levi would designate “the Gray Zone,” Bauer expressed his belief that the conditions in the ghettos were such that the nature of the choices made could not correspond to the ‘either…or’ imposed on them by the resistance/collaboration dichotomy.60

The most important aspect of A History of the Holocaust, however, is its extensive inclusion of witness testimony in the sections of the book addressing ghetto life and the experience of the death camps, where at times Bauer devotes several pages to the voices, both contemporary and postwar, of Jewish witnesses. This inclusion marks the first serious attempt (with a partial exception of Leon Poliakov)61

---


61 See the discussion of his narrative Harvest of Hate in Chapter One.
to give uninterrupted space to testimony within a comprehensive narrative about the Holocaust.

There are nevertheless some serious shortcomings with the effect to which these testimonies are used, some of which derive from explanatory deficiencies across the whole of the narrative. Though at the level of explanation/understanding Bauer fused the intentional and functional aspects of the development of the Final Solution, and introduced the victim’s voice into the narrative, in many ways this introduction is performed in a limited manner – it is not used to disrupt the narrative or to evoke disbelief in the reader. In the case of ghetto testimony, Bauer uses some of the tamer, ‘factually’-oriented testimony to describe the conditions experienced, conveyed in a dry, informative manner that dulls the impact of the experience being conveyed.

He comes much closer to achieving something more powerful in his descriptions of the concentration and death camps, in which he uses postwar written testimony to elucidate the features of camp ‘life’. He devotes three pages to the testimony of a Majdanek survivor, who gives a step-by-step description of life in the camp. It is useful in the context of Bauer’s narrative because it gives a quick overview of basic features of a ‘typical’ day in Majdanek. But for this reason in is strikingly inert; it doesn’t tell a story or narrate experience. Instead it is a descriptive summary that could easily have been written by a historian of the camps. That it was written by a survivor is only indicated by the use of the first-person plural throughout the text.  

Bauer’s use of testimony in describing Auschwitz is more sensitive to the texture of its experience, although he falls victim to the impulse of redemption, both

---

in his own narration as well as in his selection of testimony – all of which is
ultimately redemptive. Perhaps to avoid depressing the reader after describing
Auschwitz as “an industrial machine designed to produce corpses,” Bauer makes the
astounding claim that, “had only a few individuals kept their backbone, the whole
system would have been a failure. What is amazing is that despite everything there
were so many who were not broken.”63 The first testimony invoked immediately after
this passage then goes on to describe how a few Dutch Jews valiantly persevered in
wearing their kippot (skullcaps) and who had managed to smuggle in Torahs from
which to read, even though they would be severely punished or killed for it. The
witness ends by admonishing that, “you were sorry you had no such worry, that you
had no God in your heart to think about during your last hours. That you had no such
holy concern for a book, while so many human beings were dying like candles.”64
Religion, the reader comprehends, was thus able to provide men with sanctuary from
the dehumanization inside the camps, which allowed them to preserve their dignity.

The next testimony is a selection from Viktor Frankl’s Man’s Search for
Meaning in which Frankl come to the epiphany that, “all that oppressed me at that
moment became objective, seen and described from the remote point of view of
science. By this method I succeeded somehow in rising above the situation, above the
suffering of the moment, and I observed them as if they were already of the past.”65
To which Bauer then immediately concludes, “Not everyone became

63 ibid. 222.
64 ibid. 222-3
65 ibid. 224
dehumanized."\(^{66}\) But he has yet to offer the reader any testimony that describes the experience of dehumanization.

Finally, Bauer introduces the last of his Auschwitz testimonies, a selection from Filip Müller’s *Eyewitness Auschwitz*. Upon encountering this, the reader might expect to encounter something about this ‘dehumanization’, for Müller was a member of the *Sonderkommando*, those unfortunate groups of Jews whose lives were only spared so that they could remove the corpses of their brethren from the gas chambers before cremating them. The testimony begins with Müller’s decision and attempt to commit suicide – to go into the gas chambers with the next selection. He watches parents hugging their children, contemplating their last moments on earth: “no memory, no trace of any of us would remain,” he thinks to himself. Then a young girl, “in the full bloom of youth” walks up to him and tells him, as if she were a manifestation of his conscience or an angel:

> We understand you have chosen to die with us of your own free will… We must die, but you still have a chance to save your life. You have to return to the camp, and tell everybody about our last hours… You have to explain that they must fight to free themselves from any illusions… As for you, perhaps you’ll survive this terrible tragedy and then you must tell everybody what happened to you.\(^{67}\)

She then gives him a gold chain and tells him to deliver it to her lover back in the camp: “Say ‘love from Yana’… those were her last words.”

Even Filip Müller, who endured 2½ years of the *Sonderkommando*, is transformed into a paragon of redemptive survival. This strange and dreamlike passage is the only of its kind in the entire 171 pages of *Eyewitness Auschwitz*. Of all the passages that could have been cited, Bauer picked the single exception. And of all

\(^{66}\) ibid. 224  
\(^{67}\) ibid. 225
the testimonies available on the experience of Auschwitz, Bauer picks the three most redemptive and uplifting passages, none of which testify to horror or ‘dehumanization’ except insofar as they are overcome through religion, science, or love – Müller is redeemed from suicide, persuaded by the need to tell his story and encourage resistance.

Bauer’s redemptive theme, which denies the existence of a “Gray Zone,” follows the lead of the Eichmann trial in its pedagogical, emotional, heart-wrenching, but ultimately life-affirming use of testimony. Thus it is important to note that, in addition to the fact that this was the first attempt at a comprehensive narrative by an Israeli historian, it would also be one of the first comprehensive Holocaust narratives available in Hebrew. Thus it sought to exhibit some of the basic features of the Holocaust in an invigorating although not too depressing narrative for consumption by a younger generation of Israelis that had been too young to experience the Eichmann trial first-hand.

This pedagogical strategy encounters a further problem if we reconsider the lack of explicit explanatory guidance offered throughout the text; for those unaware of the debates underpinning much of this work, it presents itself as a transparent text offering an authoritative account, representative of the reality that was the Holocaust. The use of testimony only exacerbates this construal of a ‘reality effect’ that gives primacy to a description of the past that does not signal its own artifice in the moment of reconstruction. It brings the reader into the false sense of encountering the past as it really was – but in a digestible manner that hesitates before challenging the
empathetic and conceptual capacities of the reader; it does not engender an arduous work of understanding that makes the atrocity an issue for the reader.

* * *

Though Lucy Dawidowicz’s “The Holocaust” was not really microhistory, it did rely on scholarship that, in a limited sense, was (Trunk’s Judenrat, which she cites, explored this level in some places, but even that work still focused largely on the large scale political and economic decisions of ghetto life). But for those interested in the Jewish perspective of the Holocaust, memoirs and testimonies were becoming increasingly available by the end of the 1970’s – though their impact on comprehensive narratives was diminished by the inherent tension between microhistory and the totalizing impulse of comprehensive narratives. The difficulty in reconciling this tension is evident in Martin Gilbert’s The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War, which sought to chronicle the variety of experiences through the testimony of its victims.68 Published in 1987, this noble attempt was hindered, on the one hand, by its redemptive conclusion – a gesture that finalized its totalizing approach to history – and on the other hand, by its lack of explanatory structure in the pursuit of chronicling experience. In the case of the former, the almost 900 pages of relentless testimony is asserted without making visible the artifice of the narrative’s construction; the experience of witnesses are privileged as transparent windows into the past. The sheer size of the narrative

buttresses its mimetic pretension to become a mirror to reality, aiding the reader in forgetting the momentous exclusions that must still take place, even in a book of this size.  

Gilbert’s work then ends with the moralistic admonition that, “Simply to survive was a victory of the human spirit,” paving a singular moral force over the more textured thrust of the rest of the book.  

Despite his privileging of testimony, Gilbert’s book does not fall within the ‘cultural turn’ that prompted the elevation of its evidentiary basis: its conceptual format is rather that of a naïve chronicle.  

Engaging testimony honestly also led to a greater hesitation among Jewish historians to judge Jewish victims for their behavior during the Holocaust. Historians thus began to be more sensitive to the “Gray Zone.” The categories of victim, bystander and perpetrator are inflected through and through with the criminal notion of guilt. Primo Levi’s concept of the “Gray Zone” challenges these distinctions by articulating that range of behaviors which, under normal circumstances would be morally, if not criminally reprehensible, but that given the extraordinary conditions imposed by Nazi persecution, cannot be judged within the same everyday register. The paradigm cases are of course the Judenräte that had been accused of collaborating with the Nazis, the Sonderkommandos who were forced to bury or cremate the bodies of their gassed brethren, and the Jewish Kapos who beat their fellow prisoners in the camps. But as Levi points out, all sorts of conventionally reprehensible behavior occurred as a way of life in the Lager, where the dessication of the social bond among prisoners made any notion of altruism seem as nothing but

---

69 Stone, Constructing the Holocaust 153-7  
70 Gilbert, The Holocaust 828.
sheer vacuity, where people stole food from others even when it might cause them to starve to death.\textsuperscript{71}

The German counterpart to the cultural turn, \textit{Alltagsgeschichte}, ascended only very slowly into academic legitimacy, especially with regard to the Holocaust. It problematized the ascription of juridical responsibility by extending the reach of guilt beyond those who could justifiably be considered criminally responsible. As we have shown with the intentionalist accounts, any complication of juridical or criminal responsibility seemed to imply exculpation, and even the functionalists still generally wrote about the interaction of the upper echelons of German society, those in control of bureaucracies and governmental or party agencies. But once the synthesis occurred, and another generation of historians began their investigations, a new space was opened up for \textit{Alltagsgeschichte} insofar as it was concerned with how ordinary Germans had lived and acted during this period. These historians perceived that such inquiries shed light on the problematic of the growth and functioning of Nazism – something a debate at the level of intentional agents vs. functional structures had failed to grasp.\textsuperscript{72} At the epistemological level, the Hitler Youth generation debated about the primacy of different time scales, each of which remained firmly attached to certain fundamental objects of inquiry – either political actors or the political-

\textsuperscript{71} Levi, \textit{The Drowned and the Saved} and \textit{Survival in Auschwitz} repeatedly stress this point throughout.

\textsuperscript{72} At the heart of the debate of the problem of the historicization of National Socialism raised in Germany during the \textit{Historikerstreit} was whether or not studies of the continuities passing through the National Socialist period would work to distract from the central problematic of Nazism, or whether it would generate productive research into the functioning of that regime. Many were concerned that the former would occur, especially after German Unification, where it would be all the easier to evade guilt and assert a continuity of proud German nationality through the period. It turned out, rather, that research continued to emphasize and elucidate the social underside of National Socialism, as German collective memory of that period increased after unification. But much of the research into this area in the 1980’s, beginning with the Bavaria project, were also just as concerned with the Nazi past, with the exception of the handful of conservative revisionist historians, who were \textit{not} practicing \textit{alltagsgeschichte} but rather providing reinterpretations of Nazism that displaced the burden of guilt.
economic structural imperatives bearing on these very same actors with proper names. An entire panoply of historical subjects and potential documents were thus simply excluded from the discussion. The widespread acceptance of the turn to the everyday, the average, and the subaltern required a passing of the historical torch to a younger generation.  

One of the most insightful and penetrating practitioners of Alltagsgeschichte of the younger postwar generation, Detlev Peukert, has provided us with some of the most incisive analyses of the pathologies of modernity during the Nazi era. He looks at the possibilities for individual behavior under National Socialism, and the nature of political behavior in particular – where was resistance possible? What forms did it take, and why? Peukert’s goal in studying ‘ordinary people’ was intended to give a better analysis of how Auschwitz was possible, to inquire into the degree to which modernization was complicit in the guilt of the Nazi regime, and in particular to “understand better a generation which it would be unjust (and unhelpful for learning lessons for the future) to condemn globally – even though this generation was undoubtedly implicated in guilt, either through participation or, at least, through failure to offer resistance.” Another significant contribution was his identification of the complicity of the “racial-hygienic” notion in the human sciences, which, deriving from the ‘modern’ medical scientific discourse, facilitated the kind of thinking behind the Final Solution. Thus, rather than reducing the ‘Final Solution’ to a monocausal explanation like anti-Semitism – which still plays a crucial role in his account – Peukert looks closely at the ways various discourses and practices operated on

---

73 There were those of the older generation, such as Martin Broszat, whose prominent role in the Bavaria Project made him a significant proponent of this level of analysis. But he was an exception rather than the rule.
different sectors of German society in contributing to Nazi persecution. These features would presage the changes in German Holocaust historiography in the following two decades.

Holocaust research in Germany since the 1990’s has thus seen the eclipse of the intentionalist-functionalist debate. It was not replaced by Alltagsgeschichte, but has rather witnessed a fragmentation of research perspectives, with a greater emphasis, for example, on differences between different regions under Nazi occupation and the role of intellectuals and the social sciences more broadly in the National Socialist Weltanschauung and the Final Solution – for example, Götz Aly’s Final Solution which situated the Holocaust within the Nazis broader racialized population policy in the war and reconstruction of the East. But there has been little interest in generating comprehensive accounts. Only one really comprehensive narrative, Peter Longerich’s Politik der Vernichtung, has been written in German since Uwe-Dietrich Adam’s Judenverfolgung in 1972. Furthermore, the victim has still not appeared as the central object of inquiry in any major German historical narrative. Though Alltagsgeschichte opened up testimony as a legitimate form of historical evidence, Jewish testimony has still not been addressed with any thoroughness.

Of course, Alltagsgeschichte was not an autonomous development within Germany, and had its roots in the worldwide turn to cultural history and the history of

---

74 In this way he was also able to articulate a more nuanced understanding of the role of ‘modernity’ in the Holocaust that did not collapse into a polarization between barbarism and civilization once more, but rather articulated the ‘pathologies’ of modernity, that is, the inherent although contingent possibilities of modernization, that could co-exist with its potentiality for effecting human liberation.
memory – which in other countries would ultimately provide Jewish survivor testimony with greater outlets for use as historical documents. But in West Germany these kinds of studies were initially performed by a marginalized Left intelligentsia outside the academic mainstream concerned with documenting the everyday lives of the German subaltern. At a less professional level, a kind of everyday history was also being disseminated through more popular media – film, television and books. Edgar Reitz’s *Heimat*, a response to the German broadcasting of NBC’s *The Holocaust* – which by its success had by embarrassed German historians for their lack of engagement with the victims of Nazi persecution – was one prominent instance of the swelling interest in everyday history. The Bavaria project under Martin Broszat from 1977-1983 was the pioneering attempt by mainstream academic historians to engage in *Alltagsgeschichte* on the Nazi period, in order to better understand the popular perceptions of the regime and the Final Solution. Notably, it was the first entry of Ian Kershaw into Nazi historiography, where he conducted an important study of Bavarian popular opinion on Nazi propaganda and anti-Semitism, though it was based predominantly on Gestapo reports and documents rather than testimony.\(^77\)

Christopher Browning’ work has continued this line of investigation but delves particularly into the possibilities of testimony in helping to create an accurate factual reconstruction of the Holocaust. His most famous work *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, a micro-historical inquiry that depends almost entirely on the depositions in postwar trials given by individual men from the Battalion for its reconstruction, provides insightful

conclusions about the ordinariness of the functionaries of the Final Solution. These conclusions thus go a long way towards explaining the social and psychological ‘how’ of the Final Solution beyond the high level decision-making process that was the fetishized object of most historians of the Hitler-Youth generation.

Browning, of course, is no naïve advocate for privileging the ‘truth’ or unmediated ‘authenticity’ of testimonial evidence. In his essay in Saul Friedländer’s *Probing the Limits of Representation* and a more recent book, *Collected Memories*, Browning carefully delineates the types of information that can be more or less trustily extracted from testimony in general, and the procedures that should be used in any micro-historical reconstruction based on these sources. This discussion of the potential evidentiary uses of testimony is then expanded in the latter book into a replication of his work with perpetrator testimony in *Ordinary Men*, except that it uses survivor testimony to reconstruct the history of the Starachowice slave labor camp in the Lublin district in Poland.

Witness testimony then, at least on an epistemological level, has gained new recognition since the late 1970’s. However, the *choice* to take it up in Holocaust historiography, and the particular difficulties that would be encountered in this interaction – how to best express and deploy testimony in these reconstructions – would be played out on a different field, one which has startling implications for the very purpose with which Holocaust historiography *performs* its function.

---

IV

BEARING WITNESS TO ABSENT HISTORY
DIFFICULT LISTENING, GUILT, AND HISTORICAL TRANSMISSION IN HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

* * *

The history of bearing witness to the Holocaust began in the experience of the event itself. But the conditions and sites of this act have evolved, taking different forms, being expressed through different media, and often requiring decades for most survivors to truly bear witness for the first time. Testimony changed with the conditions of its production, from the juridical space of the courtroom to the therapeutic and moral space of contemporary oral history projects that seek to preserve and make visible a memory; from the early ‘memory books’ written immediately after the war for survivor communities, to the memoirs written by aging survivors in the face of natural death. Holocaust testimony changed according to its

---

2 ibid. 41
3 Dori Laub, interview by author, Middletown, Ct., 26 January 2009.
own internal patterns, in terms of the aging of witnesses, the coming of age of their children, and the specter of death looming before both. This testimony has also changed as its spaces – practical and discursive – changed, as an external social desire for its production emerged. Integral to this process – as it was for historiographical change – was the turnover of generations. The first part of this chapter will summarize the research on the basic contours of the emergence of testimony, and narrate it as a function of generational change. I will thus be able to illustrate how testimony’s broader social acceptance on a universal plane has witnessed a developing tension between the filial and universal claims and demands on its legacy. For the guilt testimony can evoke makes different demands on different individuals, given their familial or ‘moral’ relationship to the Holocaust and to its survivors.

After tracing this passage I will find a moment to reflect on the nature of this testimony and its mode of representation, its role in collective memory and its relation of truth vis-à-vis the event to which it attests, and look at how it has challenged but also been understood more recently by historians, before engaging the normative dimensions of its role in historiography in the next chapter. It is not just memory in the abstract we talk about when considering testimony, but an act somewhere between history and memory, art and reality, *storytelling and therapy*. Its very structure is rooted in its relationship to communities of trust and to filial generational change – the genealogical link. But the very universal human significance of the Holocaust makes immediate claims on everyone insofar as it shocks their personal consciences. Thus, at the very core of what testimony *is* – how it is produced and what it does – are situated those differences in the affection with which they are
received, which stem from the very transferential positions of testimony’s recipients and give rise to our difficulties in appropriating that past. We have seen how historians have been affected by the Holocaust and how that has related to the use of testimony. But these problems with testimonial engagement also point the way to their more appropriate use by the historian. They point the way their own solution, which will only be worked out completely in Chapter Five.

* * *

The divergences between testimony, generated by their dispersion across types of experience, personality, origin, medium of expression and distance from the event are significant, and have had a major impact on historiography and collective memory – as well as having been a function of them. Annette Wieviorka has evaluated the evolution of testimonial production from the Holocaust to the present, in one case chronicling the significant differences between the testimony of Eastern and Western Jews, between the languages in which the testimony was given – even by the same individual⁴ – and the political aspects of narratives as they were given in different countries and at different times in their own life-stories: “Every testimony is recorded at a precise moment in time, and as such may be instrumentalized in political and ideological contexts, that like all such contexts, are bound to change.

⁴ This linguistic split has been carefully analyzed by Naomi Seidman in the case of Elie Wiesel. Her exegetical analysis compares numerous passages from the French and Yiddish versions of Night (Un di velt hat geschwigen – ‘And the World was Silent’ – in Yiddish) and demonstrates how this affected the conclusions, tone, and collective nature of the narrator’s voice in each case. Wieviorka gives a discussion of Siedman’s work on pages 33-40 of the English translation of her book The Era of the Witness Jared Stark tr. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2006).
The moment when a testimony is delivered tells us a great deal about the society in which the witness lives." The testimony then, though it expresses an individual voice, is caught in between the collective and the individual trauma. Eastern European Jews witnessed the destruction of Yiddish culture, and thus their testimonies are inflected with the collective nature of this destruction, ridden with apocalyptic tones issuing from a sense of the impending end of the world. These testimonies are also couched in more religious frameworks of meaning, and often take on a mystical character. The more assimilated Western Jews, on the other hand, in many cases discovered their Jewish identity only through the experience of persecution for being Jewish, expressed paradoxically by Jean Améry as the ‘necessity and impossibility of being a Jew’. Wieviorka has noted that their testimony depicts the sense of being expelled from a community, becoming an outcast, rather than the apocalyptic feeling of witnessing the destruction of one’s world.

The question of whether or not survivor testimony changes significantly with the passage of time is difficult to isolate because it is so dependent on the conditions found at the site of witnessing. But most scholars agree that, given similar conditions, the stability of testimony in the preservation of factual content over decades is quite

---

5 Wieviorka, Era 137. Wieviorka then goes on to demonstrate how French testimony in particular changed from recounting a sense of happiness upon returning to France, kissing the ground and rejoicing at the sound of the Marseillaise in the immediate postwar period, to a skepticism evoked in current testimony towards a France which did not help them reintegrate, as well as anger towards the collaborationist Vichy regime.

6 Jean Améry, At the Mind’s Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld, trs. (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press 1980).

7 Wieviorka, Era 26, 32-3. But at a more fundamental level there is a repetition in the narratives which signal the collective nature of this witnessing: “Nor can we rejoice, as the modernists have done, in the perspectivism of these witness-accounts: that is, in the interesting difference marking each story off through point of view and resonant detail. For the stories are also disastrously alike, repeating the same trauma, the same catastrophes.” Hartman, The Longest Shadow 134.
demonstrable. The tendency to adopt false memories from postwar stories and books is actually fairly rare, and tends to be the exception rather than the rule. On the other hand the breadth of the facts given and the voice of the testimony does change, though this again seems to have more to do with social conditions – the person being addressed by the testimony – than any a priori nature of traumatic memory over time. In this way, Christopher Browning refutes the “general rule” deployed by most historians when they privilege that testimony with the greatest proximity to the event. Recognizing that the testimony from the 1960’s was produced largely in the context of criminal trials, which subjected witnesses to specific interrogations about other people’s actions, Browning believes that there is less historically relevant factual content in those narratives than in ones given in the 1990’s. Thus he asserts that the testimony from Starachowice factory-camp survivors disproves “yet another disparaging cliché about Holocaust survivor testimony – that as time passes it becomes more simplified and sanitized and divorced from the perplexing ambiguities and terrifying complexities of an increasingly distant time and place.”

Some of what had appeared to constitute differences in testimony across time had much to do with the changing social selection process for certain kinds of narratives. The content of witnesses’ account was often determined externally by collective memory, even when the testimony may have expressed features not readily

---


9 Lawrence Langer gives some examples of this tendency among survivors in his chapter, “Witnessing Atrocity: The Testimonial Evidence” in *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2006). He discusses the example of one woman who, upon entering the gas chambers at Auschwitz was relieved to find out that “the Germans decided to turn on the water instead of the gas” – which could not possibly have occurred because gas was never introduced through showerheads.

10 Browning, *Collected Memories* 81
assimilable by the public. On the one hand, we have already spent some time in Chapter Two looking at how the structure of judicial interrogation provided a particularly inadequate site of production. But once testimony became an object of public consumption, social processes often selected for the narratives that would become more ‘popular’. These more redemptive narratives designated the victim only in her capacity as a survivor, as one who had the skills necessary to persevere, one who the courage to remain steadfast against adversity, to come back from hell and flourish because of the ‘lessons learned’ from that experience.¹¹ Viktor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*, which, contrary to most testimony, offers a vision in which the conditions experienced in the camp reveal our innermost existential possibilities, is only the most well-known of these. Even in the diaries of those who did not survive, the narrative often evoked, especially in the United States, implied a continuity of hope, of vision of the indestructible qualities of liberal humanism—witness the success of the Anne Frank diary/play/movie franchise.¹²

Often the social selection process has operated *through* the survivor, causing him or her to rush to redemptive conclusions that appear contrary to the content of the rest of the narrative, or that speak of their will to testify, their decision to transmit their new ‘wisdom’, as helping them to survive. “I shall keep firmly in my mind everything I have seen, everything that I have experienced and learnt, everything that human nature has revealed to me… I shall judge each man according to the way he has behaved,” writes Hannah Lévy-Hass, a survivor of Bergen-Belsen. Zoë Waxman

---

¹¹ For a full discussion of the redemptive nature of the public appropriation of earlier narratives, see Chapter One.
has persuasively analyzed this attitude as a response to the anticipated desire of the rest of society to see the witness focus on the moral courage that allowed them to survive, to reinforce the easy and reassuring dichotomy of good and evil that Primo Levi’s “Gray Zone” so vehemently denies.\textsuperscript{13} In many cases though, this had to do with the particular way these narratives were \textit{read}, even when no obvious trace of this kind of redemptive pandering appears. This was the purpose of Lawrence Langer’s \textit{Holocaust Testimonies} – to teach us how to read or listen to testimony without imposing the story about survival we want to hear, how to engage testimony precisely \textit{because} it challenges our ability to assimilate it.

Diaries, for some time, also enjoyed a certain kind of privileged status amongst both the general public and among professional historians for this very reason. While for the public this often had to do with the more redemptive and hopeful perspective of the diary narrative, historians preferred the diary because of the epistemological primacy accorded to contemporaneous documents. However a deeper aversion also existed for some that stems back to the barbarism-civilization polarity promulgated at the trials investigated in the first two chapters. Oral testimony in particular, it has been noted by one scholar, often “discredits ‘civilization’ and ‘culture’” in part because of survivor’s retrospective view on the whole of their experience, their time in the \textit{Lager}, and the persistence of the past on their inability to live normally in the supposedly ‘normal’ and ‘civilized’ present.\textsuperscript{14} Ghetto diaries establish a largely alternative picture, insofar as they were written as a form of


resistance in the face of death, which helped to reserve the sense of the continuity of self, itself facilitated by the continuing existence of a kind of community, emaciated as it may have been.\textsuperscript{15}

The difference between oral and written narratives has also preoccupied scholars since Langer’s\textit{Holocaust Testimonies}. Langer has been recently criticized by a number of scholars for his privileging of oral testimony’s unmediated access to truth, insofar as it is not distorted by having universalized literary tropes imposed on it. We will not fixate on this debate here.\textsuperscript{16} But it will suffice to say that, in whatever realm its difference lies, there is certainly a difference in how oral and written testimony affects us – the confrontation of a face, the gestures and expressions, the breakdowns in language yield a disturbed, yet human visibility not achievable through writing. But given the range of literary modes that have been deployed in written testimony – from Charlotte Delbo’s and Tadeusz Borowski’s more disruptive, and perhaps ironic poetic vignettes, through Primo Levi’s more meditative and philosophical ruminations, even the heroic all the way to the literal and dry recounting by Filip Müller of his time in the\textit{Sonderkommandos} – it is hard to say exactly what ‘logic’ governs written testimony, or how it affects us universally.

Observing the diverse social reception of types of testimony, on the other hand,\textit{can} tell us something about the function of testimony and the changing contexts in which it has affected people’s imagination. Most of these so-called ‘authentic’

\textsuperscript{15}Zoë Waxman’s first chapter in\textit{Writing the Holocaust} gives a fine account of this notion of “Writing as Resistance”.

narratives did exist in the first few decades after the war, though the ones published did not garner much interest, and for those with the will to write them, were hard to publish.\textsuperscript{17} Certainly, their heightened visibility in later years stemmed from an increased historical consciousness of the Holocaust in the United States, beginning in the late 70’s and in many ways connected to the media event of NBC’s airing of \textit{The Holocaust} miniseries in 1978. But even for American Jews, the Holocaust only gained a sort of prominence in collective memory after the Yom Kippur War in 1973, when a renewed sense of Israeli vulnerability opened the space for an increasingly politicized Holocaust discourse, which was taken up by Jews from families that had previously little interest in or connection to the Holocaust. The reasons for the ‘surfeit’ of memory in the United States and whether or not it is disproportionate is still contested. But that debate won’t concern us here.\textsuperscript{18}

All too often the inclination among many individuals with no personal link to the Holocaust has been to protectively over-identify with the witness, thereby inhibiting the potential of aiding in the voicing of an unobstructed testimony and a committed, engaged listening. Geoffrey Hartman notes that,

\textsuperscript{17} See Chapter One, p. 42
\textsuperscript{18} Peter Novick’s \textit{The Holocaust in American Life} and Norman Finkelstein’s \textit{The Holocaust Industry} are both highly critical of what they see as an artificially produced collective memory of the Holocaust for personal or parochial reasons, not justified by the apolitical relationship of the Holocaust to American Life. Finkelstein is far more critical, indicting individuals such as Elie Wiesel for their abuse of Holocaust memory for personal gain. Jeffrey Herf, on the other hand, has persuasively argued that the Novick disregards the positive and sympathetic aspects of the development of this memory. Novick, Herf points out, neglects the increased role of survivors and their children, and the legitimate assertion by a formerly subaltern minority of a communal identity through a vocal investigation of their shared past. See Jeffrey Herf, “How and Why Did Holocaust Memory Come to the United States? A Response to Peter Novick’s Challenge, in \textit{Lessons and Legacies Volume VI: New Currents in Holocaust Research}. Jeffrey F. Diefendorf ed. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006).
While interviewers acknowledge, of course, the terrible things that happened during the time of victimization, they often balance that by the fact of survival, which is then represented as more than accidental, indeed as a heroic outcome. There is nothing worse in this respect than talk shows where the host ‘oohs’ and ‘aahs’ over the terrible past and the brave, so remarkable person who can chat about it here on the show.\(^\text{19}\)

On the other hand, since the publication of Lawrence Langer’s *Holocaust Testimony* in 1991, there has been a gradual recognition of the issues associated with this uplifting theme, even within mainstream non-professional writing about the Holocaust. A number of newspaper movie reviews of the onslaught of Holocaust films in 2008 appropriated Langer’s idiom in their critique of Hollywood’s version of the Holocaust.\(^\text{20}\) Yet for the most part this image of the Holocaust is still uncommon. Images which feed our desire for redemptive tragedy are ubiquitous: *Schindler’s List* and NBC’s *The Holocaust* are still the two most significant moments in the cinematic determination of American collective memory of the Holocaust. Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* is only viewed by those with a previously strong attachment to the history of the Holocaust.

I cannot write purely about the history of testimony and the figure of ‘the Witness’ within contemporary discourse without some recourse to its mutual evolution with history – that is, testimony insofar as it becomes ‘documentary proof,’ though the specific nature of this operation will be considered in detail in the next

\(^{19}\) Hartman, *The Longest Shadow* 142  
\(^{20}\) See A.O. Scott “Never Forget. You’re Reminded,” *New York Times*, 23 November 2008. Accessed at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/23/movies/23scot.html. On the other hand, it was also interesting to note how these films also made a nod towards avoiding the redemptive trend – although being Hollywood films, they were nothing more than momentary vacillations that could equally well be interpreted as part of a new trend in Hollywood to create darker and less obviously redemptive films in which the protagonist is a kind of ‘anti-hero’: recent Hollywood films betray a lack of trust in old-fashioned altruistic heroes – 2008’s *Defiance*, for example, takes this path, depicting its ‘heroes,’ the Bielsky brothers, in a less than flattering light. Interestingly enough, the affinities between Daniel Craig’s Tuvia Bielsky and his role as the new anti-heroic James Bond are strong.
chapter. By becoming documentary proof Holocaust testimony found its social place renewed, its trustworthiness reaffirmed. The status, moral, epistemological, even ontological, of the Witness in academic discourse was elevated, specifically in oral history, but also through the opening up of a new field of objects by ‘social’ history in any of its micro-historical, ‘thick-descriptive’ variants, wherein the self-interpretation (or self-representation) of cultural actors engaged in social practice is taken seriously as a mode of entry to an understanding of the dynamic of that social bond. The reasons and results of this shift are too vast and varied to discuss here. But we saw at the end of the previous chapter the directions that Alltagsgeschichte opened to German research on the Holocaust and Nazi Germany – even though to this date there have been few comprehensive narratives written by Germans on the Holocaust. But there was generally a more pervasive interest in personal narratives about the Holocaust, reinforced within the secular public by a trend towards ‘history from below’ just gaining traction in these years, especially among those with leftist inclinations, though it has only reached its peak during the last two decades.

The waxing universal appeal of Holocaust testimony was matched – albeit expressed through different mediums – in the filial realm, among the descendents of survivors, whose efforts at reckoning with their parents’ pasts gave them a central

---

21 E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm in England, or Howard Zinn in the United States, as a result of their political convictions all began writing from the perspective of those not traditionally given a voice in mainstream historiography, also influencing the work of later politically-engaged historians such as Tim Mason – a notable British scholar of National Socialism who coined the term ‘intentionalist-functionalist’ to describe that ongoing debate (though at this point ‘social history,’ especially in Germany, probably contributed more to the intentionalist-functionalist debate on the functionalist side, rather than transcending it). But the move from social history to cultural history in the 1980’s and 1990’s probably was the more significant shift in this respect, although the latter owed its existence to a critique of the former. See Geoff Eley, A Crooked Line: From Cultural History to the History of Society.
role in furthering the prominence accorded to testimony. Just as we saw with the advancement in historiographical writing in Chapter Three, there was similarly a generational basis for the shift in the prominence of the witnesses, and the place accorded to their voices in the public domain. Many children of survivors have taken it upon themselves to use the Holocaust as a means of reasserting Jewish identity – and their own personal identity – in part out of a fear of the death of their parents, their memories and their generation.

For the emergence of testimony in the late 1970’s and 1980’s coincided precisely with the coming of age of those children born to survivors in the postwar decades, now giving birth to a third generation, as well as with the looming anxiety over their parents’ death. One child of survivors, Abraham Peck, has thus called the 1980’s “the decade of the second generation.”

The anxiety and guilt among the second generation has been documented both by clinical psychiatrists working with the children of survivors, who experienced their own trauma as a result of the peculiarities of family life with survivor parents, as well as in more conventional writings and dialogues among the children of survivors themselves. Alan Berger writes that, “the second generation has a double burden of mourning a past that they never knew but which shapes their lives while, at the same time, seeking to shape this elusive memory for their own children and future generations. The indelible stain on the soul of history is felt in an intensely personal

---

way by the second generation.” Helen Epstein in *Children of the Holocaust*, a book written in 1979 by a daughter of survivors, which opened up an academic discourse around the children of survivors, speaks of her own previous repression of her parent’s past for the bulk of her childhood: how it had been placed in an “iron box” that “became a vault, collecting in darkness,” that “sank deeper” as she grew older, “so packed with undigested things that finally it became impossible to ignore.” This dawning realization catalyzed her writing, inspiring her to seek out other children of survivors, “an invisible, silent family scattered about the world… possessed by a history they had never lived.” Gary Weissman has argued in *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust* that many have developed a futile belief that to fully understand the Holocaust we must actually re-experience it in some mythical kind of memory, rather than through our more mundane imaginative faculties. He notes how it was members of the second generation that developed terms such as ‘postmemory,’ designed to imply that the children of survivors had somehow inherited a memory of their parents’ experiences, which he analyzes as an attempt to recover a “history they never lived.” At the other end of the spectrum from the universal banalization of Holocaust memory, there is the guilt-induced and obsessive filial desire to do the impossible: to re-experience a past, to resurrect the dead.

---

24 Alan Berger “Second Generation Jewish Identity and ‘Working Through’ the Shoah: Helen Epstein’s Journey from Children of the Holocaust to Where She Came From” *Lessons and Legacies*, vol. 5. 343.
26 ibid. 13, 14
As a step towards the recovery of the past – whether obsessive or healthy – many members of the second generation visited their parents’ former homes and sites of persecution during this period, in some cases making the journey with their parents as means of confronting this past, their European roots and heritage, and affirming – repairing – their connection to it. Many, importantly, also tended to their parents’ memoirs, reconstructing the personal history of their parents and their lost families, rewriting – in effect coauthoring – their parents’ histories.

The straightforward ubiquity of the second generation’s desire to preserve the legacy of their parents should not be overstated: the opposite tendency – to reject what is perceived as a parent’s fixation on the Holocaust – has also been expressed with some frequency.²⁷ But this turn away from the past can also be interpreted in multiple ways – as a failure to mourn, an expression of resistance to a past that their parents could not adequately ‘work through,’ culminating is a denial by the child to mourn as well. Even those who were more animated in their search for their parents’ history in the 1980’s, who were expressing the desire to mourn, in some cases ‘failed’ to do so. Peck thus describes how, after a decade of feverish activity, many of the second generation regressed into silence again, overwhelmed by the burden of the imminence of their parents’ death and its implications for their identities as children of survivors.²⁸ He laments the inability of the second generation to fully mourn the loss produced by the Holocaust, making a plea to them to resume that engagement, in part through dialogue with the German second generation. But even if the Holocaust’s second generation never fully ‘worked through’ that past, their efforts

²⁸ Abraham Peck, “Taking Leave” 355
helped to preserve their parents’ legacy for future generations, so that the stories that they could not tell alone could be transmitted to be encountered by their children. The 1980’s thus exhibited the dawning of the realization among these children – quite often expressed in generational, and not just individualistic terms – of their responsibility to listen to their parent’s stories, so they could be passed on to the next generation, just in case they could not forge that link directly themselves. “They would become my legacy and my mission,” writes Peck. “It was not an easy legacy.”

The creation of testimonial archives in preserving these memories has thus been of central importance to retaining the possibility of their continued encounter. The Fortunoff Video Archive at Yale in particular (along with the theoretical work expounded by its founders) has profoundly changed the conditions for the production and understanding of Holocaust testimony by giving highly personal and deeply buried selves and pasts not only a chance to be re-encountered, but also to be immortalized for innumerable generations. Indeed, the increased conspicuity of testimonial projects such as the Yale archive also coincided precisely with the generational shift associated with the coming of age of the baby boomers. Henry Greenspan has noted that 37 of the 43 existing testimony projects have been created since 1977, most of them by the mid-1980’s.

“Testimony, then, has changed. Survivors are no longer motivated to tell their stories before the camera purely by an internal necessity, though this necessity still

29 ibid. 357. Earlier he writes that, “deep down I knew that it was my duty to listen to Holocaust stories, not only because it allowed my father to fulfill a desperate need to tell them, but also because they would become my stories to pass on to the next generation. They would become my legacy and my mission.” 357
30 Greenspan, Listening 46
exists. A veritable social imperative now transforms the witness into an apostle and a prophet,“31 writes Wieviorka. The Archive has been one stage in the process of elevating the position of the Witness beyond mere social acceptance into a place of social desire. But there are clear limits to this approach, indicated by Wieviorka’s mocking use of the words ‘apostle’ and ‘prophet’. Steven Spielberg’s Shoah Visual History Foundation has embarked on its own version of the Yale project, though its approach to testimonial production and preservation is far more industrial than it is therapeutic and individualized. Boasting of the sheer number of testimonies collected for posterity, the Shoah Foundation is a metonym for the universalized discourse that has focused social desire around the venerated figure of the survivor: thus “the interest in testimony… has continued to accelerate, and its collection and distribution—in the greatest possible quantity, through the most contemporary possible means—have become a modern crusade.”32 We are thus confronted with the potential that testimony will be turned into kitsch.

There is a sort of artificial quality to the interviews produced by the Shoah Foundation; the interviews last a predetermined length of time, are guided by largely predetermined questions that emphasize a narrative arc of continuity from their childhood through the event to their redemption in their post war lives, are often filmed in the witness’s home, and end by asking the survivor to give a “message expressing ‘what he or she would hope to leave as a legacy for future generations,’” at which point the witness is reunited with his or her family.33 Though the legacy across generations is a key moment in the operation I detail in this work, what is

31 Wieviorka Era of the Witness 135-6
32 Greenspan, Listening to Survivors 48
33 Wieviorka Era of the Witness 114.
problematic about this procedure is its lack of spontaneity and its naïve affirmation of life given by the heroic act of testifying, which is posited through an ignorance, a turning away from death.

At the same time this critique reaches a limit: these testimonies are still being produced. The potential harm that these testimonies might be appropriate as kitsch is limited to their potential to serve a social desire for easy-consumption of sentimental life-lessons and ultimately distract from a deeper engagement and remembrance. Yet the possibilities they leave open to future generations through their very preservation cannot be discounted if we are to recall the difficulties the second generation had with mourning, remembering and repeating the stories of their parents. Huddled in the archive, these testimonies may become latent sources for future ‘redemption’.

* * *

The witness, the survivor, the venerated paragon of humanity: Now seen as a figure of authority, as a source of authenticity, today the survivor has been given a certain privilege, perhaps excessively so by some, with respect to historical truth. Yet historians have been much slower to recognize their use, for only in the last couple of decades have professional historical reconstructions based on survivor testimony proliferated. The nature of this ‘authenticity’ many attribute to testimony is difficult to grapple with because it pulls in opposite directions – on the one hand, to a popularized, banal veneration, and on the other, to a kind of provincial mourning that issues from a moral and emotional axis concerned with the potential violence done to
the memory of survivors. If there is to be a critique of ‘redemptive’ narratives à la Langer, then it must depend on privileging the authenticity of certain forms of Holocaust testimony in terms of the latter axis. Otherwise this critique reaches its limit in the dispersion of testimonies: what lends itself support to the privileging of the limit-experience of the death camp? For those who experienced the Holocaust in hiding, where individual decisions could and did have a profound effect on survival, are we to discount their narratives if we deem them too redemptive? This is a question of external limits, and can only be judged from the particular operation that uses these testimonies. From the historiographical perspective our interest is not so much in finding the demarcation line between what was really an experience of the Holocaust and what was not, but rather finding the point within Holocaust testimony that makes its production and its encounter so radically difficult, so as to better prepare the site for our discussion of the encounter of testimony and historiography in the next chapter.

Thus with the historiographical operation in mind, we will pursue what authenticity and authority – truth – might mean in testimony. First we must break down what we actually mean by testimony to an abstract level in order to clarify the particular level of speaking that constitutes testimony to which the difficulties associated with Holocaust witnessing accrue. This is necessary because all too often debates about the comprehensibility of testimony and representations of the Holocaust are not precise with regards to the point of difficulty in this engagement, reducing either history or testimony to mutually incompatible essential ‘logics’.34

34 Annette Wieviorka’s analysis, for example, does just this by positing “universally agreed-upon rules” of the historical profession. Era of the Witness 90.
Testimony in the most abstract sense – as someone making a claim about the past – is, according to Paul Ricoeur, a “formal condition of the ‘things of the past’ (praeterita), the conditions of possibility of the actual process of the historiographical operation,” something that can be understood in its essential dimensions, best preserved in everyday conversation before its particular adaptation for a historiographical or judicial operation, before its placement in an archive or expression in a court deposition. Ricoeur abstracts six “essential components” of testimony: 1) The assertion of a factual reality taken to be significant, which is given an implicit certification of trustworthiness by the witness; 2) a self-designation of the testifying subject containing the proposition “I was there” inseparable from the assertion of reality; 3) the self-designation takes place in a dialogic situation in which the subject asks a suspicious Other to be believed; 4) this suspicion opens a public space of controversy within which testimonies may be confronted with mutually contradictory testimonies, to which the witness must be able to reply; 5) testimony is akin to promise making in that asserts its availability to be repeated, and to remain ‘steadfast’ over time, a “stable structure of the willingness to testify”; 6) Testimony is in a sense a “natural institution” insofar as its reliance on trustworthiness contributes “to the security of the social bond inasmuch as this rests on confidence in what other people say.” The general operation can be best summarized by a series

---

35 Ricoeur Memory, History, Forgetting 162
36 ibid. 165
37 ibid. 165. The notion of the “social bond” is, for Ricoeur, the crucial subject of social inquiry. It is the feeling of a shared common humanity – the functioning of reciprocity – which he feels is necessary to “compensate for the excessive accent placed on the theme of difference in many contemporary theories of the social bond.” Ricoeur Memory, History, Forgetting 166.
of assertions made by the witness: “I was there,” “believe me,” and “if you don’t believe me, then go ask someone else.”

This notion of trustworthiness is constitutive of the social bond and testimony alike, demonstrating the impossibility of an absolute crisis of testimony engendered by absolute doubt of the trustworthiness of testimony: to doubt a testimony requires trust in another, whereas absolute suspicion entails the slippage or fragmentation of the social bond. The difference here lies in where and by what criteria that doubt is distributed across the field of subjectively articulated statements by the listener – not in their pure exteriority as statements, a la Foucault, but precisely insofar as the declarative statement of testimony is a performative act of language constitutive of a transient, testifying subject who declares itself as ‘subject-to-the-event’. In looking at the ‘subject-to-the-event’ I do not efface the speaking subject, but rather seek the site of its production. Holocaust survivors testify to the annihilation of the social bond as co-terminus with the annihilation of their ability to speak; their sense of self is denied by the lack of an ‘Other’ to engage; thus that site of absence is the ground for the later constitution of what I call the subject-to-the-event.

---

38 ibid. 164-5.
39 Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge A.M. Sheridan Smith tr. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) Agamben, in Remnants of Auschwitz, takes the operation that for Foucault placed the archive as a relation to parole, as the condition for the enunciation of meaningful units of discourse, and transcribes it into a similar relation to langue, generating the place of the enunciative subject, constituted at the site of the contingency of language. I refer to this transient enunciative subject as the ‘subject-to-the-event’; it is the voice speaking from the absent place of the trauma, constitutively fragmented insofar as it was born out of the experience of death within life. It relays itself in the dual nature of the term ‘subject’, expressing both its position as a site of an enunciative act as well as in the bio-political sense of a body subordinated to the quasi-sovereign limit-event through its very subjectification at the site of that event.
For what I am getting at is not the constitution of a subject by a particular *discourse*, but rather the laying down of the possibility of the speaking subject itself, which in the limit-situations of the Holocaust was denied, thus making the production of a speaking subject at the site of that denial of particular interest. This is not to say that the discursive production of subjects in and through oral testimony does not concern us in the sense advocated by proponents of the linguistic turn in historiography; for most testimony this discursive determinant is an ineradicable component of the interpretation of testimony – both in terms of the act of discourse on identity formation during the Holocaust (e.g. Jean Améry’s ‘necessity and impossibility of being a Jew’), but also through the particular historical language in which that testimony is produced, which we have already observed in the case of differences expressed in testimony given at different points in a witness’s life, or in testimonies with different cultural origins.

This subject-to-the-event only exists in and through the enunciative act of giving testimony, but simultaneously perishes because it is nothing other than a witnessing – attesting through an act of language – of the impossibility of witnessing. This absent subject of testimony, the subject-to-the-event, is produced through opening the scars on an individual body – the physical traces of the trauma of living through a “death immersion”, of absolute desubjectification, the loss of speech, *congealed historical reality carved into flesh*. Here the borders between the world of the living and the world of the dead collapse. As former *Sonderkommando* Filip
Müller recounts, “because of our constant handling of the dead we seemed to forget they were corpses. We would talk to them as if they were still alive.”

The witness’s attestation in the present discloses this speaking subject, speaking from death, as one who articulates that past by tearing open their scars and letting them bleed history. However, this can only occur insofar as a collapse and exclusion of normalcy takes place, only when the bracketing of the fragile subject of the before-and-after-the-event that we encounter in everyday conversation transpires. This subject is at once the condition of the subject-to-the-event’s enunciation – for the very reason that the witness must have an ‘after’ to be a survivor, and thus to bear witness after the event in a dialogical situation with a listener – but is also utterly heterogeneous from it. In watching and listening to oral testimonies we can see this shifting between subjects occur in the gestures and expressions, the cracking of a voice, the change in diction and annunciation as horror is relived. When I speak of the ‘scars’ of the past carved in the flesh of survivors I

---

41 Filip Müller, Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers (New York: Stein and Day, 1979) 100.
42 The very inversion of the term ‘normal’ by survivors in their testimony elucidates this discontinuity, where death became the norm: Simon Srebnik thus recounts in Shoah: “all I’d ever seen until then were dead bodies. Maybe I didn’t understand… I’d never seen anything else. In the ghetto in Lodz I saw that as soon as anyone took a step, he fell dead. I thought that’s the way things had to be, that it was normal.” In Claude Lanzmann, Shoah: The Complete Text of the Acclaimed Holocaust Film (New York: De Capo Press, 1995) 91-2.
43 Like Primo Levi, Giorgio Agamben has thus privileged the Mussulmänner, the living corpses of the camps, as the bearer of historical ‘truth’. Agamben founds the possibility of witnessing upon the very impossibility of speaking given by the ‘constitutive lacuna’ of language itself, manifested in the form of the non-human, the Mussulmann. That we bear witness to the non-human without denying them the humanity that the Nazis wanted to deprive them depends on this constitutive lacuna, wherein to be human is to bear witness to the non-human, the negation of humanity given by the possibility of the impossibility – the contingency – of speaking a language. For Agamben, “Auschwitz is the existence of the impossible, the most radical negation of contingency; it is, therefore, absolute necessity. The Mussulmann produced by Auschwitz is the catastrophe of the subject that then follows, the subject’s effacement as the place of contingency and its maintenance as existence of the impossible.” Agamben 148. I try to reformulate this just in terms of the individual witness as given by the continuity of their existence before-and-after-the-event, with the empty place of the subject-to-the-event occupying the same space as the Mussulmann – a move I believe Agamben was implying anyways.
therefore mean something quite literal, that can – though does not necessarily – correspond to the permanent marks we normally think of as scars. These scars may be transient in that they only emerge before our gaze when the survivor recalls that past and revisits the site of absence; but the winces and tarnished gazes that peer out from beneath eyes that have lost their everyday familiarity are scars every bit as real as the skin blemishes from former flesh wounds.

Now that I have pursued testimony down to its linguistic-ontological core, how is the historian’s ordinary doubt challenged by Holocaust testimony?

In order to discuss the play of trust and doubt in a witness’s attesting to the social bond – or to its very destruction – we need to bring this act of witnessing into a communal, or at least dialogic situation. Up to this point I have only discussed the conditions of the production of an individual testimony at the limits with reference to the site of its individual enunciation. But the attribution of trustworthiness is not only the affirmation of the existence of the subject-to-the-event, the conferral of a status of subject on the witness insofar as that subject is transiently produced inside their testimony, but also an openness to the ‘what’, to the text of the speech that refers to the historical event – what interests us as historians. This trustworthiness, which enables the production and secures the transmission of this truth, is conferred by a promise.

“The remedy for unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future, is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises… Without being bound to the fulfillment of promises, we would never be able to keep our identities”44

The promise of testimony, in the therapeutic sense, is the promise to restore the self, to integrate the subject-to-the-event with the subject of the before-and-after; but this promise is denied by the impossibility of any such restoration.\(^45\) Langer tells us how

An underlying discontinuity assaults the integrity of the self and threatens the very continuity of the oral narrative. Perceiving the imbalance is more than just a passive critical reaction to a text. As we listen to the shifting idioms of the multiple voices emerging from the same person, we are present at the birth of a self made permanently provisional as a result of fragmentary excavations that never coalesce into a single, recognizable monument to the past.\(^46\)

Hence the trust we put in the promise of a testimony as a production of a subject-to-an-event is confronted by a resistance to the conferral of a stable subject, without which it is hard to place trust in the text of the testimony. Jean Améry has eloquently stated to this effect that, “I was no longer an I and did not live within a We.”\(^47\) At best we can point to a stable site of ‘subjectivity’ that consists in a possibility of speaking. But this does not enable the ‘stable structure’ of testimony described by Ricoeur; it does not even permit an easy self-ascription of an “I was there,” or a “believe me,” since many of these witnesses, so alienated from the non-subject at the heart of that testimony, hardly believe what they say themselves.\(^48\) Henry Greenspan has also argued that witnessing does not take place all at once – it is a process of “recounting”

\(^{45}\) Dori Laub, cofounder of the Yale Video Archive has written that, “the act of bearing witness at the same time makes and breaks a promise: the promise of the testimony as a realization of the truth. On the one hand, the process of the testimony does in fact hold out the promise of truth as the return of a sane, normal and connected world. On the other hand, because of its very commitment to truth, the testimony enforces at least a partial breach… the realization of testimony is not the fulfillment of this promise.” Dori Laub, “An Event Without A Witness” 91.


\(^{47}\) Jean Améry At the Mind’s Limits 44

\(^{48}\) Giving trust to the survivor insofar as it is a conferral of dignity is not a restoration of the dignity that was lost in their traumatic experience. Though there are therapeutic contours to the testimonial situation, it seems clear that some ‘redemptive’ therapeutic power of the testimonial space has not been borne out, and is contradicted by the rather tragic track record of some of the most prominent witnesses – Paul Celan, Jean Améry, Primo Levi, Tadeusz Borowski. The impossible subject-to-the-event, a rupture, cannot be mended.
that can only take place through multiple interactions and interviews with the same careful listeners. In this case, the structure exists in a form that is in no way communicable beyond the closed circle constituted by this group of listeners.\footnote{This indicates once more the problem with Greenspan’s framework – it is unclear what the value of testimony could be for him beyond listening itself.}

However, before even this promise can be attempted, another promise must coexist with it: The promise of an active listener that will invest and evoke trust from the witness. Before the witness can ask to be trusted, the interviewer must make a similar promise, because according to Laub, “to a certain extent, the interviewer-listener takes on the responsibility for bearing witness that previously the narrator felt he bore alone, and therefore could not carry out.”\footnote{Laub “An Event Without a Witness” 85} Yet this very trust is hampered by a difficulty in comprehension, deriving from the very same disjuncture that separates the subject-to-the-event and the subject of the before-and-after: how to communicate the experience of the impossibility of human speech, living through death. Both cognitive and emotional barriers obstruct the possibility of an active listener who can engage in this space of mutual trust; to produce the subject-to-the-event, there must be some listening ‘Other’ to comprehend this absent place of the subject that paradoxically produces the testimonial subject, requiring a promise of trust from that listener before the testimony can even emerge.

The impossibility of the promise of testimony thus also operates at the level of the dialogical, communicative structure of the testimonial situation; the difficulty in transmitting a comprehensible experience through the subject-to-the-event challenges our very trust in the truth of the text of the witness’s speech: Holocaust testimony is thus confronted by a dual obstruction; unlike everyday testimony which encounters
some resistance to comprehension in its historical opacity, requiring an inquiring
mind to modify it into a comprehensible document situated within an explanatory
framework, Holocaust testimony, even to be *produced*, requires an active listener that
struggles with the witness to produce a truth through a mutual comprehension, an
empathetic level of understanding that does not require recourse to a grand rational
explanation.

Ricoeur identifies the specific challenge to our understanding of testimony
from an event at the limits such as the Holocaust:

The middle level of security of a language depends on the trustworthiness, hence
on the biographical attestation, of each witness taken one by one. It is against
this background of assumed confidence that tragically stands out the solitude of
those ‘historical witnesses’ whose extraordinary experiences stymies the
capacity for average, ordinary understanding.\(^{51}\) But this does not mean they are *impenetrable* to a sensitized, empathetic and
discriminating understanding. Rather with Hartman we should say that they are
“eminently interpretable,” and “made possible when representatives of an ‘affective
community’ create a testimonial alliance between survivor and interviewer.”\(^{52}\) How
might this ‘affective community’ create such an ‘alliance of trust’, and how would
this affect the status of the promise of the testimony?

At this point, the mutual promise of trust has already produced the testimony;
the ‘text,’ the historical referent of the enunciative act to which the witness attests,
has already been invested by someone – the interviewer – with trust. But how do we
break beyond this dialogical situation and open up this trust to an entire “affective
community”? In what sense does the witness consent to the public space of their

\(^{51}\) Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* 166.
\(^{52}\) Hartman, *Scars of the Spirit* 88
witnessing – the recording, the writing down of their testimony that exposes it to public doubt – and how can this community give rise to the general conditions of trust necessary to withstand this doubt?

It is in response to these questions that Ricoeur’s third hypothetical assertion by the witness gains in importance and expresses its force; “if you cannot trust me – if I cannot trust myself – perhaps another can confirm what I have seen.” This other witness – appropriately playing the part of the testes, the etymological ancestor of ‘testimony’ that denotes the third party witness to a suit – intervenes by her very availability to speak. That these witnesses testify to a shared, collective fate simultaneously preserves the necessity of trust, as well as the possibility for doubting the individual testimonies, allowing the historian to step in and remain suspicious of the facts, but only after that founding trust has been given.

Perhaps most significantly in this respect is that the range of this affective community extends beyond the circle of witnesses to their families and close-relations, groups that have a stake in their past, whose lives have been affected by the Holocaust by proxy, thereby annulling the burden and exclusive domain of the Geheimnisträger. Hartman has thus suggested that this community secures the possibility of making and preserving a new promise:

The promise of extending experience from past to future via the coherence of the stories we tell each other, stories that gather as a tradition—that promise was shattered. To remember forward—to transmit a personal story to children and grandchildren and all who should hear it—affirms a desegregation and the survivors’ reentry into the human family. The story that links us to their past also links them to our future.53

---

Thus the social bond required to produce a testimony, which in a certain way attests to the nature of a past social bond, is predicated on this narrowed intergenerational affective community, which can support and invest these individuals with this kind of empathetic understanding and trust necessary to open the space for a storytelling.

*Debt or guilt* is the constitutive link in the process of intergenerational transmission; the debt of one generation to its predecessors for its existence, which really only comes into being with the death of the ancestor, when the constitutive debt of the young is transformed into a guilt for the death of the other. This makes their story finally transmissible; and such transmissibility is coded into its ability to be repeated, for it to engender further repetitions, the creation of new possibilities and the necessity of their difficult engagement, even if, as we have seen, these stories could not be fully engaged – or were over-engaged – by the children of survivors.

However, the “vicissitudes of listening” which facilitate an empathetic understanding do not come from the promise of filial trust alone: Dr. Laub has delineated six key “Hazards of Listening” to which everyone, not only family members and those with previously strong affective investments in the stories of the witnesses, are vulnerable; hazards which, because they prevent the listener from active listening, inhibit the production of the testimony as well: 1) Paralysis through overidentification, a fear of being flooded by the atrocity; 2) A sense of fear or anger directed at the witness, emerging from our own impotency to do anything; 3) “A sense of total withdrawal and numbness;” 4) “A flood of awe and fear; we endow the survivor with a kind of sanctity, both to pay tribute to him and to keep him at a distance, to avoid the intimacy entailed in knowing;” 5) An obsession with ‘fact-
finding,’ from the listener that think he knows everything, leaving little room for
listening to the particularity of the testimony before him; 6) A “hyperemotionality
which superficially looks like compassion and caring.’’

These risks do not only confront the interviewer, the witness to the witness,
but also the secondary listener, for example the historian or the child, who encounters
the testimony after it has already been spoken. At this point I need to discuss
testimony in its representational value, in its potential for becoming a document, and
not only in its production. Once it is produced it leaves the space of its affective
community and becomes open to anyone with the ability to understand their
language, or if written down, anyone who can read. It enters the domain of universal
public consumption – where, as I demonstrated earlier, it can entertain rather diverse
receptions.

Thus we move beyond the level of the production of testimony to its reception
by a listening public, which includes the suspicious gaze of the historian. As we have
seen, listening is constitutive of production. Therefore similar considerations apply to
both stages. What I want to isolate here is this particular relationship between the
witness and the secondary listener, the witness to the witnessing, and the
communicative and imaginative problems associated at the cognitive and emotional
level with the representation offered by the testimony once it has already been
produced, archived and documented. How does and should testimony make us
understand and feel? How does it force an engagement with guilt? And by doing so,
what does it offer? These questions, for they depend on the position of subject

---

54 Laub “Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening” Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub M.D. 
Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (New York: Routledge, 1991)72-3
engaging the testimony in their transferenceal ‘affective’ role, their institutional or professional role, or in their political role, cannot be answered *a priori* except in terms of the most basic problems and questions confronting a listener – and asked by the listener – of these stories insofar as she is human. Thus this baseline investigation of the strange communicative potential of Holocaust testimony will take us up to the precipice of the interaction between testimony and historiography, where we can identify the various possible roles of the historian and the community of readers of history and thus also the kinds of ‘historical sensation’ that this interaction might offer after its inscription.55

Historians in their capacity as citizens resemble any other individual interacting with testimony, and are subject to the same ‘hazards of listening’ as the public, which their narratives address. Thus historians have sometimes replicated the redemptive desires of their audience in their use of testimony - Yehuda Bauer and Martin Gilbert were two such example encountered in the previous chapter. The desire to elicit redemptive stories, even from the darkest of testimonies (like Yehuda Bauer with Filip Müller’s account), corresponds to the fourth hazard of listening, the tendency endow the survivor with a kind of sanctity and authority that allows the listener to establish a protective distance between themselves and the witness. However, in their specific function as historians, scholars are particularly susceptible to Laub’s fifth hazard, “an obsession with ‘fact-finding’ that distracts from the experience and thus the visibility of the particular humanity of the witness. This

55 I owe this use of Johann Huizinga’s ‘historical sensation’ to Alon Confino, who applies it to a reading of Saul Friedländer’s second volume of *Nazi Germany and the Jews* in a forthcoming essay for *History and Theory*, “Narrative Form and Historical Sensation: On Saul Friedländer’s *The Years of Extermination*."

constituted part of the reason for some historians’ objection to the use of any testimony (which as I claimed in Chapter Three, must also be understood as an aversion related to guilt, which might be explained in terms of Laub’s second hazard – fear or anger towards the survivor because of the historian’s own guilt), but it also accounts for the limited and ‘factual’ use that historians like Isaiah Trunk were able to cull from it. But historians are by no means limited to this documentary use of testimony, and their narratives have the potential to foster a more difficult, intimate, and critical engagement with the past.

Along these lines, Shoshana Felman uses the potential impact of an intensive encounter with testimony as a model for teaching, as a mode for engendering crisis in the recipient, the student, in order to replicate the performative and not just the cognitive aspect of testimony. What interests me here is how this example sheds light on the pedagogical value of testimony – not in the sense that it carries some moral ‘message’ we should listen to, but how the very structure of testimonial engagement commits its recipients, even those with little prior affective investment in the memory of the Holocaust, to living through a crisis of encounter in such a way that they must “transform themselves in function of the newness of that information.”56 This kind of engagement has the potential to foster “the capacity to witness something that may be surprising, cognitively dissonant. The surprise implies the crisis. Testimony cannot be authentic without that crisis, which has to break and transvaluate previous categories and previous frames of reference.”57 Through this crisis testimonial witnessing might

---

57 ibid. 53
thus impart what Maurice Blanchot has called “knowledge as disaster,” distinguished from the “knowledge of the disaster” through which propositionally-articulated and ‘objective facts’ about the event are transmitted. The former makes affective demands on the recipient to confront possibilities (and guilt) that can only be considered through undergoing a crisis of the self, an engaged recognition of the demands made by a debt the past, followed by a resumption not of a mythical ‘normality,’ but of a dynamic tension between wholeness and fragmentation in fostering the integrity of a vital identity.

In order to experience ‘knowledge as disaster’ as the tension inherent to enduring and moving through crisis, the recipient of the testimony must still remain cognizant of Laub’s ‘hazards of listening’. I want to draw attention to the fact that these hazards operate differentially depending on the particular affective link between the recipient of testimony and the referent of the testimony, between the listener and the Holocaust. And this includes all forms of testimony to atrocity – not just the limit cases we have just been examining – insofar as they contain the potential to rupture these frames of reference, of the everyday understanding of the world, and therefore also the possibility of shocking the listener into numbness. Part of the efficacy of testimony is that it always contains something of the familiar, the recognizable everyday experience, which must be there in order to facilitate this breakage. Otherwise the recipient merely becomes numb and withdrawn in the face of something utterly incomprehensible, something that breaks the recipient’s ‘protective shield’. Often the most effective forms of representation juxtapose the quotidian with its violent corruption along the vectors of the epic event that, though it was beyond
the perception of the witness, is alluded to through the limited but all-too-human frame of reference it offers.

On the other hand, there is the corollary problem of a representation that overwhelms its recipient with a familiar form – say violence – and merely extends its reach in an effort to provide a pure mimesis of horror – in atrocity photography or cinematic recreations that are, in a broad sense, testimony. These images do not facilitate a crisis in understanding: rather, “seeing atrocity images in ignorance only shocks the senses; it does not teach meaning-making or historical truthfulness, and it risks kitsch.”58 This is especially true of cinematic or visual representations, but also some of the more ‘pornographic’ literature that fetishizes puerile imagery to an extreme such that it loses its potency and distracts from the particular textures of the episode being represented, leaving the viewer in a wash of inarticulate emotion.59

It is therefore unsurprising that we find in Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* a display of atrocity photography, designed to enhance not only the sense of reality conveyed by his text, but more specifically, to evoke bitter reactions of horror attaching to the figure of ‘the German’ he portrays, manipulating the reader into an unreflective attribution of guilt on the universal German at a time when the vast majority of culprits were already dead. There is no informative value to these photographs and his use of witness testimony. Their presence is simply to ‘move’ the reader into a state of shock and to emphasize the reality of death. While making the connection to the past visceral – and death was the pervasive feature of

59 For the latter, see some of the writings of Ka-tzetnik, such as *House of Dolls*, Moshe M Kahn tr. (Granada 1973).
that past – is certainly an important function of the historical work, his polemical use of photography and testimony simply assaults the reader, rather than inviting them into a thoughtful engagement with the past. Goldhagen’s use of Jewish witness testimony within the text is thus limited only to eyewitness descriptions of individual Nazi brutality, and is never used to give a voice or a face to a human individual, to force a recognition of the encounter of a real person with the experience of apocalypse.\(^6^0\) The Jew thus merely becomes the passive, helpless victim, the German the personification of evil. It closes off dialogue, makes for an easy digestion and aversion of one’s own sense of guilt, and reinforces the most basic categories of judgment we saw in the earliest narratives emerging in the wake of Nuremberg.

Testimony’s ability to break these frameworks of understanding is thus threatened by the easy possibilities for the satisfaction of our common desire for drama. The Holocaust then becomes just one more tragedy – indeed it becomes simply an abstract symbol for the extreme case of tragedy, one that can be packaged and sold, tagged with gratuitous praise from Oprah or the New York Times Book Review: the more gruesome, the more heart-wrenching, the more appealing. Hence, we might with Hartman be concerned that “in an era of simulacra, of increasing saturation by the media and new, vast sources of information or disinformation, the critical faculty, always at risk, can turn desperate and feel adrift in a demimonde of

\(^6^0\) Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*. Goldhagen himself seems to have fallen victim of the hazards of listening, primed as he was by anger caused by his parent’s own victimization during the Holocaust. Rather than obsessive factfinding, he seems to have been overwhelmed by a superficial empathy with the brutality encountered in some testimony. It is interesting that he neglects a very common tendency in survivor testimony to compare the perceived brutality of the locals doing the German’s dirty work – Poles or Ukrainians for example – with the apparent decency and civility of the Germans.
tendentious, superficial, or manipulative images.\textsuperscript{61} But the conditions for what appears as a simulacra have changed; testimony at the Eichmann trial, through the vividness of the language deployed by survivors in contrast to the documents that had previously informed the imagination, functioned in much the same way that mimetic representations or atrocity photography functions today – especially since those in the audience, affectively primed, shared in the collective cathartic experience.

This was the brilliance of Claude Lanzmann’s \textit{Shoah}: it did not use archived footage or manipulative imagery to force the reader to a superficial moralistic conclusion, or to some base, undifferentiated emotional howl proceeding without the least cognitive recognition or development. These things are all well and good for selling movie tickets; but they do not make good memory or history. \textit{Shoah} testifies to the possibility of art after Auschwitz, to what Lyotard has presented as an inverted aesthetics of the sublime, in which the absolute simplicity on display in some recognizable action, bringing the present in contact with the past – Abraham Bomba cutting hair while recounting – reliving – his time as a ‘barber’ at Treblinka – is the very means of prompting a profound and difficult engagement. It keeps the present firmly before our eyes, not to make the absent of the past present, but to disclose within the present the hidden features of a history buried beneath the phenomenal forms captured by the camera. This is a characteristic of survivor testimony not encapsulated in the contemporaneous writings of the ghetto diarists and historians.

By revisiting the former sites of extermination camps and ghettos \textit{Shoah} evokes the material link between past and present through a memory etched into the

topographic features of the landscape. It illustrates the harsh dialectic of the intimacy and the absolute heterogeneity between the ‘other world’ of the camps and their everyday surroundings. For the sites Claude Lanzmann visits are still inhabited by former bystanders and their descendants. Gordon Horowitz reflects on the impact *Shoah* had on his own development as an historian. Watching Simon Srebnik singing the songs of the executioners once more as he is rowed down a river past the former foundations of Chelmno where a thriving village still stands, Horowitz realized that,

This place far away is not deserted. The villagers of what seem to many of us a place remote in time as well as space are still here, just as they had been when Chelmno was the site of a death camp. We learn that Chelmno was, and that it is a still a place on earth, locatable on the map, a place populated by the living as well as the by the dead.\(^{62}\)

Yehuda Bauer has also recounted the decisive impact of *Shoah* on dispelling the myth of redemptive and kitschy ‘happy endings’ in testimony through its emphasis on the enduring legacy of the Holocaust. Referring to the end of the film, where Lanzmann interviews Simcha ‘Kajik’ Rotem, a ‘hero’ of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, Bauer tells us how,

It is most authentic, because we know instinctively that the feeling expressed by Kajik reflects what he felt then, and the destruction of European Jewry is an overwhelming fact that the survival of tens of thousands in Poland does not contradict but on the contrary emphasizes. The Holocaust had no end. We still live in a world in which the Holocaust took place. We do not deal with a past, but a present.\(^{63}\)

This is especially startling if we recall from Chapter Three that Bauer’s own narrative fell victim to this very same impulse only a few years before *Shoah* was released.\(^{64}\) It

---


\(^{63}\) Yehuda Bauer *A History of the Holocaust* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1982), 308

\(^{64}\) *A History of the Holocaust* was published in 1982, *Shoah* was released in 1985.
is significant that Bauer chose this example: where he imposed a redemptive reading on Filip Müller’s testimony – which we would expect to be the most resistant to a redemptive appropriation – the scene he cites rather inverts the traditional story of resistance and uses survivor testimony to read a sense of hopelessness back into it.

* * *

The difficulties of listening confronted historians with what may have appeared to be intractable problems due to its emotional resonance. The difficult language of this testimony, and the frequent errors as to dates and names also presented historians that had been trained to work with more precise official documents with what appeared to be constitutively flawed evidence. Furthermore, the feelings of guilt detected in Chapter Three among many historians who lived through or were directly connected to the event also help to explain some of this difficulty as well. Those with previously strong affective connections to the Holocaust are rather more likely to experience some of the hazards of listening for the very reason that they are emotionally primed to over-identify with the witness. Just as for many years a number of children of survivors had difficulty recovering their parents’ past directly, so I suspect that many historians could not deal with the emotional content experienced in the encounter with testimony. Thus they erected those extreme juridical dichotomies between reason and emotion that otherwise would have seemed so outdated in historiography.
Yet it would be unfair to blame them unreservedly for this desire to avoid emotionalism, for an inability to control that emotional connection can equally lead to a complete analytic breakdown, as witnessed by Goldhagen’s startlingly prejudiced and violent account in *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*. Hence historians with more distance from the event, either non-Jews or those of a younger generation, have had an easier time culling detailed informational content from survivor narratives. Thus Christopher Browning’s *Collected Memories*, which we saw at the end of Chapter Three, productively discusses how Jewish survivor testimony can be used in writing micro-historical accounts – though purely in terms of their potential value in serving factual reconstruction.

However as this chapter has elucidated, testimony both offers the ability and demands the necessity of historians’ accomplishing something more with history than merely conveying a set of facts about the past. But only when this demand can be met without incurring a complete analytic failure can it productively engage the past in its continuing legacy in the present. This is the power that *Shoah* demonstrated to a new generation of historians. It is also the profound strength of Saul Friedländer’s recently completed two-volume *Nazi Germany and the Jews*.

Like Yehuda Bauer’s *A History of the Holocaust*, Friedländer’s narrative includes significant passages of witness testimony – although virtually all of it is contemporaneous. Yet Friedländer uses this testimony to a very different end and thus evokes something far more powerful from these passages than had any previous narrative. Unlike Bauer, Friedländer has selected a handful of witnesses whose voices he distributes throughout his narrative, invoking pieces of their stories whenever his
omniscient gaze crosses their path, whenever the history of epic events intersects their stories, reminding the reader that these events of world-historical importance affected individual lives. Thus every time testimony is used it invokes the fate of an individual life story and not just some anonymous and forgettable witness. They are thus invoked not only to provide a window into realms of experience – such as the camps or ghettos – which would otherwise remain inaccessible. Rather, these witnesses speak about themselves in their experience of persecution, demanding that the reader become invested in their fate. Their stories disclose a life, and not just a past. It makes their life visible to the reader, whoever that might be, as having-onced-lived, and avoids ‘domesticating’ history, forcing the reader to engage that history in a way we might only expect of a filial relation to the Holocaust: “an individual voice,” Friedländer tells us,

Suddenly arising in the course of an ordinary historical narrative of events such as those presented here can tear through seamless interpretation an pierce the (mostly involuntary) smugness of scholarly detachment and ‘objectivity’… Each of us perceives the impact of the individual voice differently, and each person is differently challenged by the unexpected cries and whispers that time and again compel us to stop in our tracks.65

* * *

Between the universal pedagogical imperative, so susceptible to the ‘hazards of listening,’ and the psychological ambivalence of the second generation towards a resolute or explicit engagement with the burden of their parents’ past there is an acute

tension, reflected in the strain between the demands of the filial relation and the demands of the average citizen on the memory of the past, each constituted by their particular relationship of debt to the Holocaust. One daughter of survivors, upon being approached by Helen Epstein to talk about her relationship with her parents expressed this feeling thus: “I was suspicious of your motives,” she later told Epstein, “It seemed to me there were people trying to capitalize on the Holocaust and I object to seeing the memory of my family sensationalized.”

Situated in between these dual imperatives, at the heart of this tension, is the work of the historian. Insofar as both the readers and the writers of history find themselves embedded in this web of demands, there can be no easy solution, no irreducible normative prescription for the historian. Historiography, in order to serve its full function, can never stand alone, as no narrative will be complete. But the ‘function’ of historiography, just like its object – history itself – is never static. It must still be situated in its role within an evolving historical practice, if we are to understand both where Holocaust historiography had gone, and where it is to go.

---

66 Helen Epstein, *Children* 21
Gloss

* * *

Walter Benjamin’s “The Storyteller”

“This process of assimilation, which takes place in the depths, requires a state of relaxation which is becoming rarer and rarer. If sleep is the apogee of physical relaxation, boredom is the apogee of mental relaxation. Boredom is the dream bird which hatches the egg of experience. A rustling in the leaves drives him away. His nesting places—the activities that are intimately associated with boredom—are already extinct in the cities and are declining in the country as well. With this, the gift for listening is lost and the community of listeners disappears. For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to. The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply what he listens to is impressed upon his memory.”

“Characteristically, it is not only a man’s knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life—and this is the stuff stories are made of—which first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death. Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end—unfolding the views of himself in which he has encountered himself without being aware of it—suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges, and it imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in the act of dying possesses for the living around him. This authority lies at the very origin of the story.

Death is the sanction for everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death.”

Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller”

For Benjamin, death, not the unimaginable that inhibits the communicability of experience, is rather the source for both the authenticity of the experience captured in the story, as well as the condition of its transmissibility. The death of the witness is completed only by the transmission of his story to the recipients, the storyteller’s filial

---

heirs, whether figurative or real. But the listening to which the children, the
grandchildren, must submit differs from the inquiring mind of the historian; its
passivity, its openness is the condition for the story’s transmission. Whereas the
document is constituted by what the historian can bring to the trace, the testimony or
the story requires a passive sincerity, a submission to the “expressions and looks” of
the storyteller through which “the unforgettable emerges.” Only in such a way can
his real life – not in the sense of some unmediated experience, but the particularity
that was the life of an individual – become impressed upon his descendents, a life that
only gains its wholeness through death. This passivity is not the same as a lack of
affective investment, which is required to even motivate such a relaxed kind of
listening. Such an investment is rather its precondition.

The story bears witness to a life only through the authority – a kind of
completion – bestowed on it by death: but it must be repeated. And the story only
gains its partial independence as a discrete life story through the death of the
storyteller, after which it becomes fully transmissible. As Arendt tells us, this is due to
the nature of human action, which through storytelling discloses the subject, the
actor, but only once his acting has concluded. The subject only emerges in the
wholeness of its action. But even the storyteller is not the origin or author of the
story; it is also about others, insofar as human action exists only within the web of
human relations. The debt owed, the guilt concerning their death, then becomes a
source for engaging the possibilities for action that have been passed down in the
story – stories engaging an entire community. Storytelling, as the repetitive
performance of the story, becomes an act of burial.
At the same time, re-telling is an invocation of former presence and is not a kind of exhumation. It is not an act of absolute closure either, but an act of preservation through mourning, a recognition of debt – debt for the ability to experience life through an appropriation of the possibilities offered by the life of the storyteller, a life only completed in death. The practice of storytelling, the repetition of stories, thus becomes a manner of authentically engaging the possibilities that have been handed down from before. The repetition of another’s life story must make visible the artifice of its re-petitioning of the receiver so as not to confuse the visibility given to a life through the wholeness bestowed on it by death with a denial of death. But it is not about death, melancholia, about perseverating on the absence of the deceased, desperately and painfully trying to resurrect the dead in a work of a futile nostalgia: the authority the storyteller possesses is “for the living around him” who must make the choice, the promise, to listen. Every repetition is authored; but the act of repetition owes its possibility to a previous real life-story that, in its worldly emergence, was not authored by its subject, except insofar as that subject was provided with the possibility of his life by authoring the life-story – through a previous repetition – of those of the older generation who repeated their stories to him. The performative reenactment of the repeated story merges with the activity of the human being in his own real life-story.

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendents.”

Netzavim, Dvarim 30:19
V

THEREFORE CHOOSE LIFE
HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE ENCOUNTER OF HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY:
TOWARDS A REDEMPTIVE HISTORICAL PRACTICE

We have to bear the guilt of our fathers... By our feeling of collective guilt we feel the
entire task of renewing human existence from its origin—the task which is given to all
men on earth but which appears more urgently, more perceptibly, as decisively as all
existence when its own guilt brings a people face to face with nothingness.¹

Karl Jaspers, On the Question of German Guilt

The promise of extending experience from past to future via the coherence of the
stories we tell each other, stories that gather as a tradition—that promise was
shattered. To remember forward—to transmit a personal story to children and
grandchildren and all who should hear it—affirms a desegregation and the survivors’
reentry into the human family. The story that links us to their past also links them to
our future.²

Geoffrey Hartman, The Longest Shadow

The task and potential greatness of mortals lies in their ability to produce things—
works and deed and words—which would deserve to be and, at least to a degree, are
at home in everlastingness, so that through them mortals could find their place in a
cosmos where everything is immortal except themselves. By their capacity for the
immortal deed, by their ability to leave non-perishable traces behind, men, their
individual mortality notwithstanding, attain an immortality of their own and prove
themselves to be of a ‘divine’ nature.³

Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition

* * *

Holocaust testimony that attests to the limits of humanity resists
historiographical assimilation because of its challenge to the traditional structure of
trust through which testimony is typically offered to the historian. The cognitive and
emotional difficulties inhering in its transmissibility only compound this resistance.

¹ Karl Jaspers, On the Question of German Guilt E.B. Ashton tr. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press,
² Hartman, “The Book of Destruction,” in The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust
(Bloomington IN: University of Indiana Press, 1996). 122.
³ Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958) 19
But if we take Benjamin seriously, the death inhering in such testimony as it is given through a subject-to-the-event, the absent site of the subject, may be the very source of its authority, a source that both assures and preserves its transmissibility. But only by becoming the responsibility of the recipient, across a generational divide, to transmit it can this authority – as a kind of authoring – be established. It is at this level of filial trust and responsibility – indebtedness to one’s ancestors, to the community that proffers the possibilities of life – that testimony’s emergence and the possibility of its transmission is assured.

Where does the historian fit into this structure of testimonial storytelling? And what does testimony do for historians? Historians do not interrogate and reconstruct the past through testimony alone. Their documentary proof is constructed out of the broad domain of ‘traces’ or ‘tracks,’ of which testimony, as the narrativization of a declarative memory, is only one genus. Historians rely on what Marc Bloch called “witnesses in spite of themselves,” any of those written documents that express an event in a form not intended for posterity. But even traditional oral testimony is interpreted through the non-testimonial traces that inhabit it – the gestures, the expressions, the unconscious motivations and discursive and contextual forces that produce the actual contours of the testimony. Far from being an unmediated window even into the ‘experience’ of the individual witness, these traces indicate the ways in which the individual testimony and the ‘experience’ it enunciates were produced by forces beyond the intentions of self-aware subjects. The historian thus moves beyond declarative memory as an object and source for the historical imagination, and constructs the contours of a past that could in no way be seen as such by those who

---

made it: the object of social history.\footnote{Which, with Geoff Eley, I believe is something that should not be instinctively discarded after the turn to cultural history, or the history of memory, as it still is a profitable mode of investigating the (dis)functioning of the social bond. See Geoff Eley, \textit{The Crooked Line}.} It is in this sense that Paul Ricoeur speaks of ‘standing-for’ at the epistemological level as the basis for the legitimacy of the operation of the historical imagination.\footnote{Paul Ricoeur, \textit{Memory, History, Forgetting} Kathleen Plamey and David Pellauer trs. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).}

However, we cannot remain just at the epistemological level. The use of testimony as evidence – as \textit{documentary proof} – is perfectly legitimate: although a generation of Holocaust historians evaded this possibility, it was in large part because of the various ways in which their guilt concerning the Holocaust pre-empted or disturbed their ability to confront witness – especially \textit{survivor} – testimony. The resistance of Holocaust testimony to becoming historical evidence is thus located in a realm beyond the epistemological space of a purely ‘rational’ assessment of evidence. It lies in the emotional and existential realm of \textit{guilt or debt}. Testimony, through the link of debt, plays a key role in founding the very possibility of our historicity, our historical being in any case, and not just in Holocaust history. To perceive testimony’s key role in exposing this fundamental component of our historical being, we need to look at how the historian works with evidence and how testimony always plays a critical role in making historiography possible. The peculiar nature of the interaction of Holocaust testimony with historiography will then be situated within this more basic understanding of the fundamentals of historical practice.

We can begin to investigate the nature of our historical being in its relation to testimony, the fundamental root of historical practice, by pursuing the historian’s
relationship to his evidence. Traces, the most basic components of historical
evidence, are material signs that do not themselves express anything except a
testifying to their own endurance and their former presence at the site of their own
constitution. The death which haunts the document, its constitutive incompleteness,
requires interrogation by the historian to fill this lacuna, just as the historian requires
the document to reconstruct the past. However, because the absence inhering in the
document is temporal and thus irreversible, this act of reconstruction is never fulfilled
in its entirety; the historian cannot resurrect the past, just as he cannot destroy its
‘having-been’. The historian asks questions of the document that allow it to speak
through a deictic illumination of the material signs in the trace that depends on an
entire structure of inter-referential traces or testimonies in the archive that can
similarly be ‘activated’ by this inquiry. What is thereby created is the document, or
documentary proof, “for even those texts or archaeological documents which seem
the clearest and most accommodating will speak only when they are properly
questioned.”

The possibility of this activation is partially located in what Ricoeur calls the
“having-been” of the past (which he distinguishes from the past as “being-no-
longer”). Whereas the latter describes the pure negativity of absence, the former is
the fundamental basis for historical reflection insofar as it comprises the recognition
that the past is ineradicable, which grounds the possibility that it can be re-presented.

---

7 Bloch, The Historian’s Craft 53. It is a reciprocal process of ‘cross-examination’ that allows the
professional historian to force the testimony to speak: “Naturally, the method of cross examination
must be very elastic, so that it may change its direction or improvise freely for any contingency, yet be
able, from the outset, to act as a magnet drawing findings out of the document. Even when he has
settled his itinerary, the explorer is well aware that he will not follow it exactly. Without it, however,
he would risk wandering perpetually at random.” Bloch, The Historian’s Craft 54
8 Ricoeur, Memory, History and Forgetting, 280.
True, some may forget what happened here or there, but it is precisely that the historian, or anyone else for that matter, is powerless to undo history, to make it so that the past did not happen – for there is always a trace, a legacy – which preserves its eternal place through a secondary endurance: In reference to the preservation of memories, Walter Benjamin quotes Pascal to this effect, writing that “No one dies so poor that he does not leave something behind.” Nothing that has existed can be consigned to pure absence; everything leaves its trace as it passes into non-existence. It is the condition of eternity of the past beyond non-existence that all that has ever happened will always have-happened, and thus inheres in the eternity of having-been, into which it passes *in toto* only after its eclipse through the absence given by its death: “The idea of eternity has always had its strongest source in death.”9 This ‘death’ is the condition of the trace insofar as its being a trace is predicated on the very absence which haunts it.

Though this ‘eternity’ emerging out of the death of the past is a condition for its enduring within the present, it is not sufficient; it is the work of historians and witnesses – storytellers – to preserve and present the human features of what is absent through the dialectic of presence and absence at the heart of representation. Otherwise, the traces cannot be revived and the meaning which birthed them becomes impenetrable; For history intends living ‘men in time’ and not time itself; that is why, at some level, the social bond as it is constituted in and through the event is the ultimate referent of historical discourse. A sense of the direct human continuity between past and present must persist across the temporal divide through some social

---

relationships – and it must bear on our ability to have a history. Without this connection, historical evidence serving historical reconstruction would be but a seed planted in infertile ground. But living testimony provides us with the possibility of this link.

However, we should be particularly aware not to privilege the experience imparted by testimony as a kind of ‘foundational’ category for the creation or preservation of historical authority or truth about the past in the sense of a transparent vehicle for the transmission of a past reality.\(^{10}\) It does not provide an unmediated window to some ‘Real’ past that can then be assembled by the historian like pieces in a puzzle depicting that past in its factual content. It “is not a Holocaust historian’s ‘silver bullet’.”\(^{11}\) As always, testimony is circumscribed by the very limited angle any individual can have on events as they unfold. Furthermore, its silences and omissions, its unconscious slips and diction, revealed by recourse to other testimonies and traces, often reveal more than they conceal.

Christopher Browning has demonstrated in detail the ways that individual survivor memories can be patched together in reference to one another, and has located the epistemological spaces in which such testimony is most useful as evidence for a rational historiography. Yet considering testimony only in this regard as ‘evidence’ for reconstructing the factual contours of the past, as most historians do today, only takes us so far. Testimony, as a living rejoinder of the past to the present,

---

\(^{10}\) This in the sense of Joan Scott’s plea against the privileging of raw ‘experience’ that occurred after the linguistic turn, which gave authority to the ‘experience’ of certain subaltern categories – gender, race, class etc. – in order to rescue the possibility of their articulation against narrative hegemonization. See Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” in *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn* Gabrielle Spiegel, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005).

\(^{11}\) Christopher Browning, *Collected Memories. : Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003). 43
has a special place within the possibility and purpose of doing history, grounding what Ricoeur calls our ‘historical condition’. It is what permits and motivates us to intend the past as ‘having-been,’ and not as something completely absent; it offers us with a reason to do history. The epistemological nature of the historiographical operation is thus incomplete with regard to testimony and its interpretation unless we venture further into the existential foundations of history itself.

The structure of testimony assures a certain kind of link through its relationship to storytelling, genealogy and repetition at the heart of historical practice; and in the case of an event such as the Holocaust, where the experience transmitted is not only preserved by bridges over against death, but about and constituted by a specific kind of witnessing of death, testimony then demands a certain kind of recognition. The generational institution of storytelling, structured by our personal relationships with guilt and death, provides the basis for this encounter with our historical condition, and opens up the horizon for redemptive historical practice.

* * *

The fundamental condition of the past is its absence, the moment of something’s being-no-longer – its death. But history is concerned not with the fact of this death itself, but the having-been, the having-lived of someone, of some functioning, dynamic community. Our very historical condition, Ricoeur tells us, is constituted by a certain relationship to the past as having-been, something intimately connected to our very experience of temporal flow itself. For just as history is not
strictly concerned with the fact of death itself, neither does it endeavor to resurrect the
dead and thereby deny death. The present, understood as a dynamic moment between
the anticipation of future possibilities and their grounding in the past, is always the
window into history. We owe something to the past, a debt for what it has delivered;
but also a guilt over its death, its passing into having-been. In it we confront the death
of others and our own death. We learn to cope with our own mortality, to anticipate it,
to live towards it or against it, by means of re-petitioning a history that is only
possible because of the death of the past.

What I am alluding to, and which was sketched out in the gloss on Benjamin’s
“The Storyteller,” is the existential link that preserves the possibility of intending the
past as having-been. Testimony, taken in the dimensions of our being-in-debt through
the genealogical transmission of storytelling, offers this link; but what is primarily
disclosed in this operation are the possibilities of being – what Heidegger referred to
as our potentiality-for-being-whole – that anticipatory resoluteness encounters in the
possibilities into which we are ‘thrown’. “The resoluteness which comes back to itself
and hands itself down, then becomes the repetition of a possibility of existence that
has come down to us. Repeating is handing down explicitly—that is to say, going
back into the possibilities of the Dasein that has-been-there.”\textsuperscript{12} However, “repetition
does not let itself be persuaded of something by what is ‘past’, just in order that this,
as something which was formerly actual, may recur. Rather, the repetition makes a
reciprocative rejoinder to the possibility of that existence which has-been-there.”\textsuperscript{13}
Anticipatory resoluteness is thus partially constituted through an assumption of a debt

\textsuperscript{12} Martin Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time} John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, trs. (San Francisco:
Harper and Row, 1962) 437
\textsuperscript{13} ibid. 437-8
through attestation – a debt owing to the possibilities that have been handed down by those who ‘have-been’ that is constitutive of our very historical condition, of our very openness towards the future and sensitivity to the present. A sense of wholeness, integrity, vitality, and continuity across and beyond an individual life constitutes one’s sense of the flow of time while aiding in one’s adjusting to the anxiety of loss inherent in that temporal flow. It is the basis of, and is reinforced by, historical practice.

This having-been is assured against pure absence by the very connectivity of repetition – the transmission of a heritage, the repeating of stories that attest to a living past, a conversation with the dead that does not also entail an inauthentic ‘obedience’ to tradition through a blind actualization of the possibilities it hands down. This debt – the glue of the act of repetition – is common to all humanity, and has a fundamental root in death. Robert J. Lifton has described this as a common human survivor’s guilt: “Life consists in a series of survivals, beginning with birth itself… Individuation itself demands that the young organism share that accountability [for surviving these death immersions]—indeed develop a capacity for a debt to the dead in the specific manner available to the child, through taking on some responsibility for the death equivalents.”\textsuperscript{14} This debt is given a role in creating the possibilities open to us which, as part of the process of individuation, we must authentically take-up. Repetition is not the actualization of these possibilities, but rather a way of making them ‘visible’ again, re-presenting them before the gaze so that they can be authentically encountered anew.

Debt or guilt, naturally, makes demands of us at an affective level, as a kind of “anxiety of responsibility.” Lifton has described this anxiety as an “animating relationship to guilt” which “exists when one can derive imagery of self-condemnation energy towards renewal and change.”\textsuperscript{15} The practice of writing history emerges from the responsibility bestowed by this guilt: a responsibility not to “awaken the dead, make whole what has been smashed,”\textsuperscript{16} for \textit{this is not an actualizable possibility}. We cannot awaken the dead, nor make whole what has been smashed; but by resolutely engaging the tragedy of death and the responsibility it engenders, we can constitute a sense of wholeness in the present and assert life’s continuity beyond our own and others’ death by leaving a legacy that makes its own demands on future generations. Just as this debt does not enjoin us to adhere strictly to tradition when the repetition of storytelling makes the possibilities symbolized in those stories recognizable, so it should not force upon us the need to recreate the life of the past in our midst by effacing the mark of its death, for to do so would be more than a mere glance away from the present: it would entail forgetting it altogether. We should do well not to think of the repetition of the story as an attempt to resurrect the storyteller: for even if the storyteller’s story is about herself, until it is told by another it does not become ‘authored’ – for “nobody is the author or producer of his own life story.”\textsuperscript{17} In writing history we don’t deny the death of those in the past, but instead

\textsuperscript{15} ibid. 139  
\textsuperscript{17} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition} 184
we simultaneously give their life a posthumous wholeness through its retelling, and thereby fulfill our own need for a sense of wholeness. This, perhaps, is that weak messianic power of which Benjamin writes, which furnishes history with its very purpose. He opposes the traditional interpretation of the historian as “a prophet facing backward,” – one who merely “prophesies what was future at that time but meanwhile has become past” – to the historian who “turns his back on his own time” so that “his seer’s gaze is kindled by the peaks of earlier generations as they sink further and further into the past. Indeed, the historian’s own time is far more distinctly present to this visionary gaze than it is to the contemporaries who ‘keep step with it’.” The historian becomes both the storyteller and the recipient of a multitude of stories, sitting uneasily at the nexus between her own performative action in the form of writing history, and the possibility of this action in the listening and authoring of the life stories of the dead, repeating the stories in allowing them to re-petition the present. Repetition as an act of re-petitioning thus encompasses both poles of the historian’s activity.

---

18 It is in this sense which I take issue with Henry Greenspan’s disparaging of the importance of legacies and transmission in On Listening to Holocaust Survivors. Insofar as he is bothered by the rhetoric of the ‘legacy’ whenever it serves to lionize the survivor, to learn life lessons from the survivor, to give them their ‘last words, which is the same as forgetting them, ’he is quite justified in his suspicion. But he seems to go too far, and believes that any ‘appropriation’ of testimony is somehow inherently problematic, that transmission for any other end than transmitting itself is troublesome. Thus he states absurdly, after dismissing a number of common reasons for listening to testimony (although reducing them to straw men) that, “the sufficient reason to listen to survivors is to listen to survivors” (171). This phrase seems empty of meaning and despite its well-meaning attempt to rescue testimony from banalization, it ultimately lionizes testimony more than any of its ‘superficial’ appropriators by charging the former as a singularly transcendent ‘end-in-itself’. The necessity of listening becomes simply a brute fact that cannot be explained.

19 In Benjamin’s second thesis on the philosophy of history: “The past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption. Doesn’t a breath of the air that pervaded earlier days caress us as well? In the voices we hear, isn’t there an echo of now silent ones? Don’t the women we court have sisters they no longer recognize? If so, then there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Then our coming was expected on earth. Then, like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak messianic power, a power on which this past has a claim. Such a claim cannot be settled cheaply.” “On the Concept of History,” 390.

20 Benjamin “Paralipomena to ‘On the Concept of History’,” 405.
The storyteller – both the witness giving testimony and the historian authoring the story of the witness – is the link that sustains our connection to the dead and furnishes us with a debt. The debt engendered by their death makes the past incumbent upon its recipients. And it animates the traces of those disappeared by making them available to the gaze, furnishing the desire for their interrogation, giving us the connection with the deceased by making it possible for us to follow the tracks they inadvertently left us, the tracks that indicate a story that as actors they could not narrate themselves.

The messianic time history uncovers by ‘performing the dead’ is mirrored in the rituals of burial and entombment, of the topography of death. Michel de Certeau has written of this ritual nature of historical writing that, on the one hand, “exorcises death by inserting it into discourse,” while simultaneously allowing “society to situate itself by giving itself a past through language, and it thus opens to the present a space of its own. ‘To mark’ a past is to make a place for the dead, but also to redistribute the space of possibility, to determine negatively what must be done, and consequently to use the narrativity that buries the dead as a way of establishing a place for the living.”21 This does not mean that history is thereby trying to resurrect the dead, reanimate its corpses. Rather, “the dead… become the vocabulary of a task to be undertaken.”22 The analogue of the link between discourse and action in storytelling – namely, burial – should not be understated. It emphasizes the active nature of historiography as a practice that inserts itself into the unwritten narrative of the story of human life and death.

22 ibid. 102. Italics are mine.
Mourning then becomes the appropriate mode of historical practice in its performative aspect. Psychologically, mourning is the mode through which the lost object can be re-appropriated, and a sense of connection to it maintained – not just because of the pain of losing it, but because the very confrontation and appropriation of its death facilitates one’s ability to confront other anxieties about death equivalents – separation from society, the disintegration of the self implied in time’s threat to identity, and ultimately, one’s own death itself. A healthy visibility of the past as dead, both in its current absence as well as in the trauma at the site of its disappearance, enables us to maintain a diachronic identity – at the individual and social levels – insofar as we understand that identity as dynamic and fluid, requiring constant readjustment between ourselves and others – it helps us to “redistribute the space of possibility” into which we project ourselves.

It is immortality that is at stake in this redistribution of our possibilities against the threat of death: “This is the survivor’s ‘work of mourning,’ his struggle to reconstitute his psychic life in a way that can enable him to separate from the dead person while retaining a sense of connection with him, free himself from the deadness of that person and reestablish within himself, sometimes in altered form, whatever modes of immortality have been threatened by death.”

---

23 Dominic LaCapra has wondered if historical writing does not have the possibility of exercising a faculty of mourning with respect to the Holocaust. If we take my position seriously, historiography itself is constitutively a work of mourning. What we have to ask, rather, is if and how the Holocaust might be mourned, and what resistance it offers to traditional mourning. Saul Friedländer has wondered about this therapeutic potential as well, but sees the Holocaust as denying closure.

24 Lifton also writes of this funerary, ritual aspect of mourning: “Funeral ceremonies are rites of passage precisely for this purpose [immortalizing souls]. What is involved is the symbolic transformation of a threatening, inert image (of the corpse) into a vital image of eternal continuity (the soul)—or of death as absolute severance to death as an aspect of continuous life.” Lifton, The Broken Connection, 95.

25 ibid. 96
as the permanence of something’s having once existed thus assures us of the possibility of our own symbolic immortality beyond-death, of fashioning an everlasting name. But the permanence of the past is reciprocally determined by the continuity of the life of our human collectivity, within which a human life is but one link.

Mourning is thus a process of redemptive appropriation – and in a limited sense it is at the heart of every historical enterprise. But for the survivors of events like the Holocaust – and even, in many cases, their children – this appropriation may be impossible; even the history of its historiography bears witness to a generation’s inability to appropriately mourn. The repetition manifested through historical practice may engender this appropriation only across generations, rather than transmitting possibilities through stories to the next generation. In the case of the Holocaust, the act of repetition itself has to be played out, performed and re-written through and across generations for mourning to begin to take place – transgenerational redemption, redemption as process, as historical practice.

* * *

Pondering Walter Benjamin’s redemptive philosophy of history, Saul Friedländer has suggested that, “we may be facing an unredeemable past” because the Holocaust “could remain fundamentally irrelevant for the history of humanity and the understanding of the ‘human condition’.”26 Friedländer, in his essay “Trauma and Transference,” then connects this resistance to the ‘deep memory’ of testimony in its

---

lack of meaning and redemptive possibilities.\textsuperscript{27} If what Friedländer claims is true, then the Holocaust resists the very core of the historical impulse. Friedländer thus proffers a bleak forecast for Holocaust historiography: though he hints at the possibilities of ‘working through’ the trauma of the Holocaust if we were to undergo a new mode of historical understanding, he finds it far more likely that we will witness an impossibility of redemptive closure at the individual level, and the likely erasure of the Holocaust’s ‘excess’ that has stymied historical understanding, leading to closure without resolution.

But isn’t this equation of redemption with closure fundamentally problematic? Can we not imagine a redemptive practice of history that denies the very possibility of closure by maintaining through repetition the visibility and relevance of the living link between the past trauma and the present? A history which forces us to encounter that past and to ‘work through’ it as part of our own learning to live \textit{within} history? For we must, with Habermas, recognize that the Holocaust altered “the conditions for the continuity of life within history,” insofar as the Holocaust forces its relevance onto every generation whose existence is called into question by its enormity, by that laying bear of the possibility of a human will to annihilate.\textsuperscript{28} It is not merely that it was ‘unacceptable’ in a vague moral sense, but that it possesses our guilt at a deeply human level. Closure, as I see it, would be the failure to repeat, to continue the practice of storytelling, to re-petition, which I believe to be fundamentally antithetical to the practice of history. The ‘closure’ constructed in the early narratives would only

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{27} Friedländer, “Trauma and Transference” \textit{Memory, History} \textsuperscript{28} Quoted in Friedländer, “The Shoah in Present Historical Consciousness,” 49.
\end{flushright}
be dangerous if they worked to close-off memory. But they didn’t. A dissensus prevailed in spite of them.

However, redemption is not a necessary feature of the evolving role of historical writing in regards to the Holocaust either: closure, though it has not yet occurred, could very well be achieved by a kind of forgetting that is nothing other than a lack of affective investment through the erasure of guilt – a guilt that might constitute that very ‘excess’ of which Friedländer speaks. For Friedländer seems ambivalent about the nature of this excess, much like the ambivalence we have seen in guilt between its potential for creativity on the one hand, and mimetic death through a depressive stasis on the other. The latter is undesirable because it is a pathos that haunts our identity. Yet it would be disingenuous to let it pass away, disrespectful – neglectful of our debt – to the past and those who lived and died through it. Thus if we think of this ‘excess’ that has resisted interpretation as emanating from feelings of guilt, we might be in a better position to delineate the possibilities of a redemptive historical practice beyond the tragic cul-de-sac prophesied by Friedländer. The active core of this pathology – guilt – would have the potential to become animating once more.

If, with Friedländer we hold open the possibility of historiographical closure – of the banalization of the memory of the Holocaust – then we must ponder what a historiography that resists this possibility, which maintains its redemptive function through history as storytelling, would look like. How should this historiography use testimony, that link that permits the play of debt to suffuse history with its seer’s gaze? What we will eventually encounter is not some hypothetical mode of
historiography that is more ‘redemptive’ than others, but rather we will locate the role of a non-naïve conception of historiography in facilitating a trans-generational process of mourning that involves both close relations and the citizen; a kind of historiography that ultimately performs the same ritual function in reference to death and mourning, but with the care demanded by the ‘unique’ parameters of the Holocaust.

How should the Holocaust be represented historiographically? How should testimony figure into this representation, and to what end? Clearly the transferential subject position of the historian along some axis of guilt or shame, as well as that of the reader, seriously affects any answer to these queries. For this subject must confront the memory of the Holocaust either in its universal aspect – how it has affected everyone insofar as they are human – or at the level of its filial transmission through testimony. There is a dialectical relation, both a tension and a complementarity, between the filial and the universal registers that is always being teased out in the place of testimony within Holocaust historiography; each challenges the perspective of the other, but at the same time also constitutes the possibility and the moral necessity of its partner. Thus Ricoeur has asked, “Must we take one additional step and receive a message of authenticity from the death of all those others who are not close relations?”29 Must the universal relation exist to do some of the work of mourning, even for the family of the survivor? Yet it is the very universal implications of the Holocaust that make its filial trauma so difficult to mourn.

29 Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting, 359.
The human links in our fears of death are positioned in between the particular and universal possibilities that can engender life. Lifton provides us with further insight into this connection that sheds light on its potential implications for a therapeutic historiography:

A sense of connection with the dead is thus felt to protect and nurture the living. It also serves the principle of what Eliade calls “the regeneration of time”: the reenactment of crisis and chaos giving way to resolution… a recovery of an ultimate sense of beginnings (origins) and endings; and a return to a sense of ‘mythical time’ within which there can be periodic death-and-rebirth rituals rather than mere winding down of life. Without some ritualized connection with the dead, man becomes rootless, severed from the great chain of being, vulnerable to the vast variety of human and animal ghosts that populate his imagination and symbolize his dread of total severance from fellow human beings.30

The Holocaust has become the very symbol of this total severance of human beings from one another. The ghost of Auschwitz has become this symbol; and it has resisted integration through mourning insofar as it was the ultimate denial of the possibility of continuity, of immortality. We thus encounter death on a new level, the worst of our existential fears of death actualized by the very civilization we built to assure ourselves of the immortality it denied.31 It makes the ‘re-enactment of crisis and chaos giving way to resolution’ that is part and parcel of the messianic ‘regeneration’ of time at the heart of mourning – a means of staving off the ‘fear of total severance’ – just that much more difficult. But how can mourning cope with the actualization,

---

30 Lifton, *The Broken Connection* 98-99
31 In this regard I follow Lifton over Norman O. Brown. Brown writes that, “civilization is an attempt to overcome death,” which “threw mankind out of the actuality of living.” (284) He is in familiar territory, except for his pejorative tone, when he writes that the individuality of civilized men who have history is nothing “but the life-negating (ascetic) individuality of (Faustian) discontent and guilt.” Rather, I take Lifton’s non-dialectical approach in taking symbolic immortality, combined with maintaining the visibility of the dead, as a means of confronting, rather than negating death – although the desire for immortality has its terrifying possibilities as well – for example in the Nazi ideology of the Thousand Year Reich. Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1959) 286.
the experience, of total severance? Mourning is not closure, but must be performed through engaging crisis and chaos – much like Felman’s pedagogical use of testimonial crisis, or Blanchot’s ‘knowledge as disaster,’ encountered in Chapter Four. But where this encounter with crisis can be productively played out is, at this point, far from clear.

Holocaust testimony from the limits does not immediately offer itself up to redemption – the experience of the Lager and one’s liberation from it, if we take Lawrence Langer’s work seriously, often resists any such re-appropriation of the past into the self of the survivor. But the genealogical transmission of the story through the trust of an affective community, which is constitutive of the act of bearing witness, does itself bear some ‘redemptive’ power insofar as it exercises a hold – in the form of a burden of responsibility – on the heirs of the story who take up the existential possibilities it has handed down. They are thereby enabled to resolutely choose life – not, with Heidegger, towards death, but with Levinas, against it – reasserting the continuity in the chain of life, making a promise to stabilize the chaotic unpredictability of the future, and anticipate collective immortality.

Holocaust testimony challenges the redemptive notion because of the strange place and implications of the death-immersion located at its core, an immersion that challenges the ability of the next generation, at least in the filial sense, to take up that burden. What kind of possibilities would the denial of possibility leave for the next generation? Resoluteness-against-death encounters the problem of the violent mass death of others, the existential void voiced in and through witnessing, which was a living through the experience of the eradication of all possibilities and projects and
the possibility of being inscribed into the continuity of life after death. It attests to the impossibility of human possibilities, the will to annihilation. It is a story that resists repetition, but demands to continually re-petition its recipient. Insofar as this re-petitioning is successful, the repetition of the story will continue. But what is the petition that is being repeated?

The fractured time expressed at the heart of the testimony that arises out of this experience of mass-death challenges the completeness, the authority bestowed on the story given by Benjamin’s storyteller, because it issues from a survivor who has experienced the death of possibility itself. The storyteller produced in the ‘subject-to-the-event’ is predicated on the experience of the eradication of all possibilities, but cannot exist without the parallel existence of the subject of the before-and-after that we engage in everyday conversation, even though it is fractured by the lacuna out of which the subject-to-the-event is enunciated. The attestation or petition of a death through this testimony bestows a different kind of authority on the story and a different kind of debt on its recipient because it is so hard to face what looks like a pure void, and thus to confront it authentically – to ‘co-author’ and thus symbolically make whole the witness’s life story. Their experience of death in life denies the wholeness of being figured as a coherent life story; their agency was denied, their humanity murdered. Their children in many cases have thus had difficulties engaging the possibilities of life handed down to them, with authoring their parents’ life story after their death. Without genuine possibilities before them, many members of the second generation could only confront a damaged legacy and affect an only partial repetition. Hence the difficulty this generation has had in overcoming the trauma of
their parents’ generation, of grasping, remembering their stories. They were left with
the sense that theirs was a past that could not fully be mourned. Debt could not
motivate a telling of the story because it had overflowed itself and become a
damaging, static, rather than animating, guilt.

Survivor’s guilt is thus far more manifest in the testimony of Holocaust
survivors than in the ‘everyday’ sense constitutive of historical being – and even in
those secondary witnesses to their testimony, such as their family, where such guilt
begins to subtly adumbrate over time into everyday debt. It appears that with the
passage of generations, the gap between the filial and the universal will eventually
collapse. Yet what challenges the ease of filial mourning of the Holocaust is the very
universally troublesome experience of mass death. For in the case of the Holocaust,
we are all heirs of its denial of all existential possibilities and their transmission in
and through collective immortality. The sheer emptiness of this mass death caused by
a ‘civilized’ nation challenges our confidence in the immortality of the collective, in
civilization itself. It was a will not just to cause death, but permanent death – an
attempt to sever the link in the continuity of life.

Mourning the Holocaust cannot mean leaving it fixed and inert. It is rather
recognizing our guilt as humans for the human failure located in Auschwitz – a
failure that we might never forgive – but not obsessing, not succumbing, to the
‘mimetic’ death of melancholy. By mourning the Holocaust we assert death as
something we must live with – like any other death – except that it has more troubling
universal implications for our guilt as human beings, and not only as direct
descendants of its perpetrators and victims. For a belief in the permanence of the
collective - the public – is required to have sufficient trust in the possibility of having one’s own life and the life of one’s ancestors transmitted through the work of mourning, in the work of living.

However, it is the filial or genealogical link inhering in testimonial storytelling that grounds the possibility that the memory of atrocity will be available to a public that might otherwise forget its guilt. Filial guilt establishes a stronger debt insofar as it is inserted into generational identities through childhood development; it is a constitutive guilt, productive of the developing identity of the next generation, and it attaches directly to the living beings – parents and grandparents – to survivors. Filial grounds the possibility that the petition of testimony will be re-presented to the universal, to the citizen of a public, and not in a banal, instrumentalized form, but rather as a difficult and challenging confrontation.

Survivor testimony forces these difficulties in comprehension on the historian, as a citizen, and sometimes, as kin. This is why I focus on survivor testimony, especially oral testimony, rather than all forms of testimony – including diaries – because of the presentness and the physical role of those survivors and their children in “keeping watch over absent meaning” in the present. Survivor testimonies challenge and make visible; they have the potential to resist closure and kitsch. But this requires an effort; the Shoah Foundation, I argue, by packaging testimony so as to deliberately avoid the painful confrontation engendered by engaging the face of the witness, is seduced by the lure of a universally appropriable, facile sentimentality into banality. Using the materiality of the witnesses’ voices to engender emotion in pursuit

---

32 Friedländer, quoting Maurice Blanchot in “Trauma and Transference” Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe, 134.
33 See Chapter Four.
of political didactics equally falls under this category. Testimony does not offer any necessary resistance to these uses. It is only in the provincial resistance encountered through filial guilt anxiety that the possibility exists to resist the universal banalization of the Holocaust.

Testimony as such is not a mere tool for historiography, it is not just some thing laying around, ready-to-hand, picked up and inserted to lend its authority to a reconstruction, to give voice to facts, or to make the account seem more ‘real’ in some superficial sense. It resists easy digestion, forces the burden of the past onto the shoulders of the present, puts us face to face with the dead. But as their legacy is part of mourning, we cannot perseverate, obsess, or pretend to reanimate their corpses by invoking their voices in the text. Any pretension to resurrection is foiled by the inevitably static nature of any ‘revitalized’ body; it is precisely that they are not vital, not animate, that they can no longer give birth to new possibilities without an act performed by the living in their name. Their voices are there to disrupt the totalizing impulse of the narrative, to maintain a tension between past and present, to evoke disbelief and rekindle our sense of debt through an attestation. Their absence must be preserved to facilitate the distance required to allow the debt of the listener to become productive once more. But the disruptive and emotional thrust of the insertion of this absence into the narrative has the potential to maintain the visibility of the dead but as having-once-lived, as well as to preserve the fact of their death – their absence. The narrative form, which, through its rhetorical strategies draws us into a false sense of identification with a simulation of the past, is pierced by this irruption.
The promise that the survivor will be believed, and the promise given by the survivor to become a witness, to revisit the place of death, explicitly creates a space of trust that transcends any otherwise legitimate historical suspicion of the veracity of the text of their witnessing, grounds the possibility of the ‘authority’ of their story by pledging to repeat it, and in effect, ‘author’ it. A space of trust is forged through the promise of authoring the witness into the human family, into collective immortality. But by ‘authority’ I do not mean anything like a privileging of the matters of fact described in the testimony in aiding historical reconstruction. It is rather the force and vividness of the spoken word, even when impressed upon the page, the attestation from one human to another of the frailty of life and the contingency of human social existence. It forces its recipients to recognize their debt – a debt, not only for their particular worldly existence as construed by the possibilities open to them, but for their bare existence as living beings. It is the authority that is bestowed by being authored by the next generation, asserting the immortality of the human community through the very practice of making visible that past when immortality was itself challenged. And this co-authoring also requires delving into those matters of fact – searching for the traces of that story that the parent could not tell, interpreting the omissions, slips and silences and writing them into their life-story. I do not intend to imply that what is passed down has no bearing on the concrete ‘facts’ about the past; quite the contrary, the very process of engaging and recovering these matters of ‘fact,’ even – and perhaps especially – when they are not articulated by the survivor, is central to the redemptive possibilities of historical practice. The historian performs this work, as citizen, as a descendant of the legacy of the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{34} It is the historian’s responsibility as a citizen to make the effort to resist closure, which testimony
The existential guilt evoked by testimony through its emotional contours, which in one sense can only be experienced at the genealogical level, illuminates one last feature of ‘redemption’ across death. For the descendents of survivors, the testimony of their ancestors evokes not just the debt for the specificity of their own possibilities, but the guilt over their own bare existence, in that their very natality is predicated on the death of others. Redemption – not a momentary discharge of our debt – is thus nothing other than a holding open of its own imminent possibility, the frequent but incomplete expression of a desire for immortality, which, though it can only be transmitted across death, depends for its existence on the renewal of birth – that “miracle that saves the world.” Redemption is thus always a moving towards death, though it is uncovered in our openness to the possibilities of a life placed before us through engaging our debt to those who gave birth to those possibilities. And this debt becomes most clear in their death, in their passing into the ‘having-been’ of the past. This takes place through confronting, creating, and enacting history. Our personal vitality becomes an expression of the redemption of our ghosts in the very act of burying them, in authoring their place in human immortality as having-once-lived in human history.

*My mother’s half-sister that she never knew... My mother and I owe the possibility of our existence to her death. To her mother’s death. To the Holocaust and the dislocations it caused, so that my Oma and Opa could meet and start a new life in Dayton, Ohio.*

both demands and partially provides. But it is also the historian’s responsibility to assert their work in a broader practice that can affect the public while remaining committed to transmitting the relevant factual ‘having-once-lived’ of the past ‘as it really was’. The responsibility to co-author the life-stories of our ancestors comes with a responsibility to do so even when the story may contradict the express memory of their testimony.

35 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* 246-7. birth is “the miracle that saves the world… It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born.” The open-ended possibilities of action that birth allows provide an “ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin.” 246-7.
VI

CONCLUSION
ON THE PAST AND FUTURE OF STORYTELLING

* * *

Saul Friedländer’s *Nazi Germany and the Jews*¹ is an attempt to restore a sensitivity and dignity to the Holocaust, its victims, and its memory while maintaining its visibility, its potential to facilitate a difficult encounter with the past that averts a premature rhetorical closure. He effects this strategy by deploying witness testimony – all of it contemporaneous – in order to evoke disbelief and disrupt the impulse of the narrative to establish closure. This approach is the result of some of Friedländer’s earlier theoretical investigations – which pointed towards the possibility of a redemptive historiography. In “Trauma and Transference,” he attempted to delineate the role of the Holocaust historian as a kind of tightrope walker, whose task is to “keep some measure of balance between the emotion recurrently breaking through the ‘protective shield’ and numbness that protects this very shield.”² To this tension, we might say, corresponds the healthy anxiety of mourning.

Though he employs a narrative style that allows the past to remain “indeterminate, elusive and opaque,” while not eschewing the principles of a ‘rational historiography,’ and while he acknowledges the transferential relationships at work in any historical understanding, Friedländer still operates within a framework that polarizes reason and emotion in historiographical practice, even as he seems to think

that the particularly emotional nature of the Holocaust forces the burden of representation to slide down the continuum towards emotion, thereby compromising its rationality. His appropriation of testimony is thus beset by the ambiguity of reason and emotion in relation to its use as evidence. Hence there is a sense in which Friedländer still adheres to an evidentiary positivism, despite his heavy and deliberate use of testimony. All of the testimonies he cites are contemporaneous (with the sole exception of Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz*) – they are voiced through diaries and reports – and thus they witnessed the shortsightedness, the anticipations, the developing fears and shifting identities, the perspectives of elevating persecution of those who lived through that void. These voices are inserted into the narrative at the ends of a number of chapter sub-sections – conspicuously devoid of commentary by Friedländer – as a means of perforating the narrative, kindling a sense of the reality of the past while simultaneously resisting a mimetic identification. Alon Confino has described this strategy as a means of evoking what Johann Huizinga called “historical sensation,” something intrinsic to all historical understanding insofar as it “requires going beyond the logical association of events into human elements of the period.”³ It both makes manifest the strangeness and distance of the past, while making contact with the thoughts and feelings of those who lived it. It thus corresponds as a representational device to the mournful visibility accorded to the dead that I have been discussing. However, as a narrative device, it does not actually require making the links between past and present visible, except in the actual material practice of the historian. It denies a core link in the transmission of the story.

³ Alon Confino, forthcoming *History and Theory* article, “Narrative Form and Historical Sensation: On Saul Friedländer’s *The Years of Extermination*”
Friedländer *deliberately excludes survivor testimony* from his account, for the very reason that he thinks it cannot be trusted. He has even stated that, as a survivor himself, he does not trust his own memoirs – not in the vein of Primo Levi’s belief in the incompleteness of the testimony of any of the ‘privileged’ who survived, but rather because of the presumed deficiency of survivors’ memory recall, which he believes leads to distortions in the factual content of their testimony. He thus reaffirms the positivistic epistemology of which he has otherwise critiqued for its limits. We must recall that, despite his sensitivity to these issues, Friedländer, a survivor himself, is also subject to the play of guilt, an anxiety that the factual distortions in testimony have the potential to compromise the event and its enormity. He thus excludes an entire realm of ‘evidence’ on the sheer basis of their very mode of transmission. Even given an epistemological bias, what justifies this *a priori* exclusion? Could not the reliability of survivor testimonies, their ‘veracity’ and accuracy, be determined through subjecting individual testimonies to critique and comparison with other testimonies and traces? Is not every other trace and testimony that appears before the historian of any period subject to his critical gaze before being turned into documentary proof? And this is resistance is *still only at the level of the positivistic content of survivor testimony*. Friedländer, like others of his generation, thus cuts himself short before even approaching the redemptive possibilities of testimony by severing the material and existential link between past and present inhering in survivor testimony.

By excluding postwar testimony, Friedländer undermines his own project: he denies the very link - those scars of memory that inhabit transgenerational storytelling
– that can preserve the possibility of an engaged, mournful dissensus in the present by making visible the very material vectors of the past, in a voice, in a face. The past is left in the past; it is granted an artificial closure by its temporal compartmentalization.

* * *

Friedländer’s surprisingly rigid stance with regard to the use of testimony should not come to us as such a great surprise, given his identity as a child survivor and as a member of a generation that had to carry the burden of a past experienced both directly and through the legacy of its parents’ generation. As the particular transferential relation of a historian vis-à-vis the Holocaust delimits the contours of his ability to engage testimony, so Friedländer, much like other historians whose work we have engaged, is still clearly beset by an irrational suspicion of survivor testimony and a fear that the smallest error would collapse the truthfulness of his account – even though such errors are always a possibility in the use of any document to reconstruct the past. His implicit effort to redeem the past failed to avoid the very closure that has tormented him because he fixes the temporal boundary of the Holocaust in 1945. Was Friedländer not also concerned that by publishing an authoritative and comprehensive account of the Holocaust, one likely for years to be unsurpassed in stature, he might be affecting a kind of closure as well?

Though ‘debt’ in its multiple varieties is the sinew of generational transmission, other emotional and cognitive positions accrue to determine the nature
of the particular transferential situation of the historian. These positions intervene at all levels of the historiographical operation. They implicate the historian in her various roles: political – as the citizen or judge; filial; and perhaps even human.\textsuperscript{4}

History has most commonly operated at this political level and has dealt primarily with its implications for the community and its collective memory. In this respect the historian is always a citizen. Their work is always ensnared in the politics of the moment – at least for any history that has anything \textit{at stake}. But by ‘political’ I do not only mean the instrumentalization of history for making claims to political legitimacy – though this possibility can and has emerged from this sphere. It is rather the stage on which a past that has some affective salience for a particular public is contested.

When I speak of the ‘universal’ implication of the Holocaust and the type of guilt at its heart, it is largely within this public, political realm that such connections are made – though I leave open the possibility that a more fundamental humanity is implicated within this universal, that lies beneath the filial and the public.

Something is always at stake, then, for the historian and reader alike; the historian is in a position of responsibility towards the past and to the public for whom that past matters – to \textit{intend} to reconstruct the past faithfully, or in Ranke’s famous dictum, ‘\textit{wie es eigentlich war}.’ In other words, the historian makes a promise to be faithful to the testimony, the documents, and the traces, and to offer a representation of the events that does not conceal some duplicitous agenda through a purely instrumental use of the past.

\textsuperscript{4} Though in the sense that the meaning of and conditions for human solidarity are given by our cultural horizons, the notion of a basic humanity is perhaps more akin to the public realm of the citizen.
We have observed the passage of a generation of historians ensnared by the
necessity and impossibility of being a judge as a function of their generation, of their
particular transferential relation to the Holocaust, as well as the demands of their
readers who were located in the climate of memorial discourse about the Holocaust.
We have witnessed the particular guilt complexes that fastened historians’
interpretations to a juridical epistemology, or one of several variants of it, in which
the assignment of guilt to a proper name became the chief object of inquiry.
Nevertheless, ‘psychological’ or existential explanations of this behavior are only
partial, unless they have direct recourse to the constellation of social and discursive
forces that offer the web of investments and meanings into which the historian’s
practice delves. The direct legacy of the great criminal trials in the form of material
evidence, evidentiary paradigms, and conceptual frameworks weighed heavily on the
attitudes of this generation, yielding concrete avenues for the manifestation of this
guilt through historical practice, even if they were caught in the intentionalist-
functionalist cul-de-sac.

“Robesprierrists! Anti-Robesprierrists! For pity’s sake, simply tell us what
Robespierre was,” pleads Marc Bloch. Yet in considering the Holocaust, the
distinction Bloch wanted to make between understanding and judgment has not been
so simple. The necessity and impossibility of playing the role of the judge emerged
out of conditions where the memorial function appeared less important than attempts
at rectification through closure. For the most decisive difference between the judge
and the historian is the handing-down of the verdict. Ricoeur puts this eloquently
when he writes that, “The potentially unlimited circle of explanation inexorably

closes with the verdict, which in fine can be only conviction or acquittal. The circles that the judge closes after having cautiously opened them, the historian pries open again.”6 But this is not without precedent either; in cases of contested history, where the dead of the past maintain their visibility on the political scene, “the historian has passed for a sort of judge in Hades, charged with meting out praise or blame to dead heroes.”7 Bloch perceived the root of the historian’s judgment in an emotion, for whenever the historian cites the impartiality of the judge, he does so just in order to legitimate his judgment. Without this emotional-political imperative, the historian has little cause to pass judgment. But the fixation on passing judgment gave rise to an attempt to efface the historian’s emotional disposition, which in its connection to the purpose and transmissibility of the story – facilitating understanding – was thus similarly lost.

The Holocaust generated a web of guilt that collapsed the distinction between the judge and the historian because of the enormity of its criminality: not to universally judge and condemn would itself be criminal. But the need to write history according to juridical standards for achieving the ‘tightest case’ stymied understanding – in part because of the denial of the use of emotion in facilitating understanding – and was part of the latency of historiography’s mourning function in the process of transmission. Testimony was asked different questions, constituted differently under the gaze of the intentionalists and functionalists, and lost its singularly historical and redemptive aspect in favor of the restorative function of the courts. For is it not the case that the difference between the gaze of social restitution

7 Bloch, The Historian’s Craft 139
and of historical redemption “affects all the phases of both the judicial operation and
the historiographical operation, so that one can wonder whether the judge and the
historian hear testimony, that initial structure common to both roles, with the same
ear?”

We might also revisit Lifton’s words about the literalism survivors impose on
their experience as a form of numbing in this context. Those historians, who, like
Dawidowicz, ‘survived’ the destruction of their kin, may have found their own
grounding and centering particularly threatened by the atrocity to which they attested
as secondary witnesses. The life stories of survivors appear unauthorable. The
authoring of their death was either avoided or turned into a myth of the redemption of
survival.

The charge of atavism, especially in the early trials, also followed in many
ways from the perceived threat to the cultural identity of the West and its faith in
progress. At the universal level, the historian as citizen – the enunciative subject of
the public realm, identified by its place within the discourse of civility – denied the
dialectic of civilization and barbarism at the heart of the Holocaust and, for a while,
reduced Nazi criminality into the register of the barbaric. The troubling implications
of the Holocaust for modernity’s children were thus resisted – implicitly in the
language of most early historians, but explicitly in the narratives of the intentionalist
camp. Barbarism and emotion constituted a pole apart from the identification of
civilization and reason; this was reflected in the historiography, and continues even
among historians of testimony. Annette Wieviorka, the head of the French division of

---

8 Ricoeur Memory, History, Forgetting 322
9 See Chapter Two, 121, n 57.
the Fortunoff Video Archive and author of a book on testimonial production writes that,

Contrary to what Hausner or Hartman claim, history written in this way is not “in cold storage.” Holding events at a distance does not preclude feelings of empathy with the victims or horror at the complex system that produced mass death. It restores the dignity of the thinking person, a dignity that Nazism had precisely derided by playing on feelings such as hate or on emotions such as those generated at mass rallies.  

And to a limited extent, she is correct. For the opposite pole did have its own problems, as we have seen, in the banalization of testimony’s emotional content to generate a distancing of the other (i.e. Goldhagen’s Hitler’s Willing Executioners) or to further political aims, as in the Eichmann trial. The emotionality of testimony was used in this way to highlight the barbarism of the Nazis, and to avoid the direct confrontation of one’s sense of guilt insofar as one identifies with the same ‘modernity’ that in the Holocaust demonstrated its pathological potentiality. But the question is not simply one of emotion versus sobriety in historical writing – it is about the particular place of emotion, of guilt and the anxiety caused by a relationship to the past, even when disclosed by a text, and the possibility of redemption in its very guilt-laden repetition.

---

10 Annette Wieviorka, The Era of the Witness Jared Stark tr. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006) 90. Interestingly enough, Wieviorka doesn’t consult the meaning of the passage from which she draws the term “cold storage.” Jean Amery wrote these words in the preface to the second edition of At the Minds Limits: “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. Nothing has healed, and what perhaps was already on the point of healing in 1964 is bursting open again as an infected wound. Emotions? For all I care, yes. Where is it decreed that enlightenment must be free of emotion? To me, the opposite seems to be true. Enlightenment can properly fulfill its task only if it sets to work with passion.” (xi). Amery recognized that it is not a question of Enlightenment vs. Emotion, all too easily divided and opposed.

11 Though I do believe Wieviorka grossly misreads Hartman’s work as unreservedly promoting the emotionalism of testimony. But her concern about uncritical endorsements of testimony is valid.
Today the possibility of a redemptive historical practice is challenged by the very ephemeral nature of such representations in public memory. In a world saturated with such varied, colorful, and disingenuously manipulative simulacra, the possibility of inculcating ‘guilt’ at the universal level may seem all but impossible. Books like Goldhagen’s, by their extremity and their appeal to visceral emotions, do ultimately maintain the ‘visibility’ of the Holocaust – but not in the mournfully productive sense that we have been discussing. The possibility of a redemptive history of the Holocaust may be undermined, not by the event itself, but by our own incapacity to tell stories.

Indeed, this was the message behind Benjamin’s “The Storyteller:”\textsuperscript{12} it was meant as a lament for our loss of the art of storytelling. We lose this ability, he tells us, when we can no longer assimilate, understand, and confront these stories. With this failure, we fail to retain them, and fail to give ourselves the opportunity to confront their possibilities. Because the more difficult and complex stories engender the boredom necessary for this assimilation, we now avoid them because we are too anxious, we can no longer find the necessary relaxation in healthy boredom to be sensitive to the balanced tension of life within the stories. We forget our debt.

However, it is too soon to tell. The ‘failure’ of Hitler Youth and second-generation historiography, taken from the vantage point of redemptive historical practice as intergenerational storytelling, was not really a failure, but a moment in the process of mourning and ‘working through’ the Holocaust. But ‘working through’ does not have a definite end. Its function is to hold open and not forget the death that has made its irrevocable mark on history. For by changing the conditions for life within history, the Holocaust thereby changed the conditions for death within history.

\textsuperscript{12} See “Gloss: Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Storyteller’” on page 175.
**EPILOGUE**

* * *

My mother’s half-sister that she never knew... My mother and I owe the possibility of our existence to her death. To her mother’s death. To the Holocaust and the dislocations it caused, so that my Oma and Opa could meet and start a new life in Dayton, Ohio.

Soon nothing will be left but words attached to reconstructed images that are nothing but those very words. Words that become generalized into the talk of everyday life, words that might lose their previous meaning. Meta-memories pile up until the first memory drowns under their accumulated weight. So why do I perseverate now?

Because his words bring me back. These words… this is why they exist. This is why they were recorded, this is how the story survives so that it can be repeated when we are – when I am – ready to listen.

It is difficult. My mom cannot listen to the recordings. *They were too garbled*, she said. *It was hard to hear.*

Yes mom, very hard…

*Besides – I needed to send you the recording right away,* she tells me.

*But it would have taken no more than a minute to put them on your computer*...
She was particularly troubled that the interviewer did not ask about the fate of the Torah her father had protected after his synagogue was sacked. She did not listen to that part of the tape. She had only gleaned as much from the mute transcript.

My mom, aside from being an educator and a tutor for Bar and Bat Mitzvah students, is glass artist. A few months ago she made a glass breastplate for a Torah. A rabbi working for a European Torah reclamation project, impressed by the allure of this particular piece, asked her if it could be donated to a small Schul in Oslo, which had just received its first Torah from the organization. Her breastplate would adorn their very first Torah.

When I called my mom on her birthday, just before I received my Opa’s recording, she told me she had just learned that the Torah, perhaps 200 years old, had survived Kristallnacht. There were still visible footprints on it that could not be eradicated.

She said she wanted to involve herself more in the project. She tells me the cover on the Torah is too ugly. It needs a new one that will match the breastplate. She will commission one to be made for it.

The Torah my Opa had protected – yes, of course, she realized…
I am preparing a tomb now, in a mature way that I could not when he died. When I was eight I threw dirt, as is custom, onto his casket at his funeral, to signify his departure. This then, is a kind of second entombment that reaches into the past of that living being, who carried his own expectations, anticipations, relationships present and past, and a debt, expressed through his humility, to his Jewish home, to the community of his which is not only ‘no longer’, but which was murdered. It is my work of mourning, expressed as a making visible of his death, his absence, itself a metonym, a partial trace, designating the death of European Jewry, of a family I never knew, to which his existence – my existence – testifies. It is my personal assertion of the weak messianic power of history, out of which I strive to redeem his legacy and forcefully assert my debt to him, and engage the present as it has been given to me – to choose to author his story through living my own life story.

It is thus only fitting that in an ironic twist of fate his last name – my middle name – should thus remain Shuldman – debt-man.
I. Primary Sources
   a. Narratives
   Peukert, Detlev J.K., Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition and Racism in


b. Testimony and Representations

Améry, Jean, At the Mind’s Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld, trs. (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press 1980).


Frank, Anne, The Diary of Anne Frank (not sure which edition yet).

Frankl, Viktor Emil, Man’s Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).


-------- I Will Bear Witness 1941-1945: A Diary of the Nazi Years, Martin Chalmers,


*Second Generation Voices: Reflections By Children of Holocaust Survivors & Perpetrators* Alan Berger and Naomi Berger eds. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001)


II. **Secondary Sources**


-------- *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001)


Crane, Susan A., “Choosing Not to Look: Representation, Repatriation, and


Diner, Dan, Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000)


--------- *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Bloomington IN: University of Indiana Press, 1996).


-------- Writing History, Writing Trauma (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001)

-------- Using and Abusing the Holocaust (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2006).


