Trauma, memory, testimony
Phenomenological, psychological, and ethical perspectives

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How can severely traumatized persons re-present the past and its impact on the present if (due to blackout, repression, or dissociation) they could not witness what they went through, or can hardly recall it? Drawing on Holocaust testimonies, this article explores the crisis of witnessing constituted by the Shoah and, more generally, problems of integrating and communicating traumatic experiences. Phenomenological, psychological, and ethical perspectives contribute to a systematic investigation of the relation between trauma, memory and testimony. I will argue that preserving personal continuity across the gap between past and present presupposes not only an 'inner witness' – which can, according to a long philosophical tradition, be identified with a person's conscience – but also a social context in which one is addressed and can respond. An attentive listener can bear witness to the witness by accepting the assignation of responsibility implied in testimonial interaction, and thereby support the dialogic restitution of memory and identity.

How can severely traumatized persons re-present the past and its impact on the present if (due to blackout, repression, or dissociation) they could not witness what they went through, or can hardly recall it? [1] The Greek word τραῦμα means 'wound'. As the embodied minds of survivors of trauma are wounded, it

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1   This text is based on the following four lectures: 'Witnessing self-transformation: conscience, communication, and co-presence' presented at *Witnessing: Cultural Roots, Media-Related Forms and Cultural Memory* (International Symposium) at the Villa Vigoni, Menaggio (Como), organized by the University of Bochum and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (27.–30.4.2008); 'The challenge of witnessing: memory, trauma, and (re)presentation between co-presence and absence' presented at *Cultures of Transition: Presence, Absence, Memory* (16th Biennial Conference of the International Society for Religion, Literature and Culture), which took place at the Faculty of Theology, University of Copenhagen (19.10.2012); 'Trauma, memory and problems of self-recognition' presented at a research seminar at the Center for Subjectivity Research, University of Copenhagen (30.4.2013); 'How to relate to a traumatic past? Language, silence, and hopeful imagination' presented at *Holocaust Memory and Re-Presentations of the Past* (Alumni event) at the University of Copenhagen (13.3.2014).

becomes difficult for them to account for what has happened to them – all the more because ordinary language proves to be inadequate *vis-à-vis* the incomprehensible. 'No one can describe it' and 'no one can understand it' are typical statements from Holocaust survivors (cf. Felman 1992: 244, quoting Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*, 1985: 6). Trauma research confirms that unbearable events tend to be pushed to the margins of consciousness. Yet that which cannot be acknowledged in the first generation of survivors might impose itself on the second in undefined absences or enacted repetitions (cf. Kellermann 2009; Fridman et al. 2011). In what follows, I will explore the crisis of witnessing constituted by the Shoah and, more generally, problems of integrating and communicating traumatic experiences.[2] How can personal continuity be preserved despite massive traumatization?

The first section of the article focuses on the process of witnessing, the second section on the (in)ability to transmit traumatic memories, and the third section on the essential role of dialogue in working through and coping with trauma. While witnessing normally proceeds 'from seeing to saying', this order can be reversed when the witness is traumatized: irretrievable experience is reinvented in recounting. Based on the hypothesis that we need to consider different levels or dimensions of consciousness when determining to what extent traumatic memories can be integrated, known, and communicated, I will show why psychoanalytic and mnemonic models of trauma are not incompatible, but complementary approaches to one and the same problem. Drawing on Holocaust testimonies, philosophical accounts of conscience and dialogue, trauma theory and memory studies, I will combine phenomenological, psychological, and ethical perspectives in a systematic investigation of the relation between trauma, memory and testimony.

Phenomenology describes everything that appears and presents itself to consciousness in the 'how' of its experiential (cognitive, emotional, perceptual, etc.) givenness to someone; that is, as a phenomenon. As human beings do not have any direct access to things, persons or events as they are 'in themselves', but can, as witnesses, only testify to the fact that, and the modality in which, these events, persons, or things were experienced by them, this method seems appropriate. Furthermore, traumatic experiences in the context of the Shoah cannot in any adequate manner be described as being purely 'intra-psychic' because they originate in and have an effect on the realm of intersubjective interaction

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2   This endeavour is part of the research agenda of *CJMC: Center for the Study of Jewish Thought in Modern Culture*, University of Copenhagen. See <http://teol.ku.dk/cjmc/english/research_focus/> (accessed 11.1.2016).

where they are displayed, conveyed, and acted out. This realm 'in-between' us, the social sphere, is also the place where ethical theory and praxis unfold. I will argue that preserving personal continuity across the gap between past and present presupposes not only an 'inner witness' – namely, a person's conscience – but also a social context in which one is addressed and can respond. An attentive listener can bear witness to the witness by accepting the assignation of responsibility implied in testimonial interaction, and thereby support a dialogic restitution of memory and identity. Let me elaborate on how this is possible.

1. Witnessing

In order to describe the process of witnessing performed by individual, mortal eye-witnesses who are personally present in flesh and blood – as opposed to 'media witnessing' that is performed *in*, *by*, and *through* mass media bridging the spatiotemporal distance between events, agents, and an audience watching the events and agents (Frosh and Pinchevski 2009: 1) – I will first try to clarify in what sense the Shoah constitutes a crisis of witnessing, and then zoom in on the *sine qua non* of all forms of witnessing that do not depend on technical devices such as cameras: the human mind's capacity to register what happens.

Holocaust testimonies and the crisis of witnessing

The Shoah has shown the necessity of witnessing, and made it more urgent than ever. Yet it has also made us more aware of its limitations and inherent problems. A witness may be defined as 'an observer or source possessing privileged (raw, authentic) proximity to facts' (Peters 2001: 709). Holocaust testimonies show that such proximity made witnessing impossible in the death camps, since those who were closest to the 'facts' died first, and those who have survived can witness only vicariously with the help of 'fiction'. However, the witnessed events can, of course, not be reduced to fiction and fancy. Their (f)actuality resists any reduction to ideality. Insofar as traumatizing events 'blind' those who have seen too much, witnesses of such events can at best bear witness to the breakdown of witnessing. Since all too many lives, loves, and stories of irreplaceable others are forever lost, the Shoah caused a radical and irresolvable crisis of witnessing. The narrative of the past cannot be told by those whose past it was; the perspectives of those who have lost their lives are forever excluded (cf. Bartov 2000: 3, 229).

While conceding the impossibility of deputizing for the dead, Primo Levi (1988: 64) nonetheless tries to tell some aspects of the (hi)stories of those

who could no longer speak for themselves – aspects that could only be seen by others, from a certain distance: 'Even if they had paper and pen, the submerged would not have testified because their death had begun before that of their body. Weeks and months before being snuffed out, they had already lost the ability to observe, to remember, to compare and express themselves.' Those who have seen the Gorgon have not returned to speak about it. The survivors witness by proxy. The *Muselmänner* – the living dead – became mute long before they died. The others 'had lived for months and years at an animal level' and found that 'a space for reflection, reasoning, experiencing emotions was wiped out' as their days were encumbered by hunger, fatigue, cold, and fear (*ibid.* 56). Levi reports the survivors' feelings of guilt and shame. The survivors accuse themselves of 'having omitted to offer help' and having failed to meet the demand for solidarity, 'for a human word, advice, even only a listening ear' (*ibid.* 59). Levi is not the only survivor who is troubled by the disproportion between the privilege of surviving and the outcome of his testimony.

Even those convinced that testifying to the destruction of the 'true witnesses' of destruction is necessary in order to avoid potential repetitions of the past experience witnessing as a challenge. Lawrence Langer (1991: 183) refers to the 'wounded identity' of the victims and their attempts 'to come to terms with memories of the need to act and the simultaneous inability to do so' which continue to haunt the survivors. Neither their dignity nor their self-esteem could be preserved, for whatever they did or omitted to do, whether they tried to flee or protest, whether they stole bread in order to survive or remained passive, their fate was decided by others, often randomly (cf. *ibid.* 167, 173, 176). This created humiliating, un-heroic memories. As the witness Chaim E. explains, no one had a choice in the death camps, and no one could think over what to do. The prisoners were just driven to do whatever they did. They were like robots rather than human beings (cf. *ibid.* 177–8). Another witness, Luna K., reminds us that under the Nazi system, not even martyrdom was an option, for it was not a question of 'I'm not going to obey it, therefore you can shoot me', but rather 'I'm not going to obey it, you can shoot me and another hundred people' – and she asks: 'who wanted this kind of responsibility?' (*ibid.* 181). The survivors of atrocity were caught in a double bind: if they wanted to take action in order to stop the killing, this would cost their own life and, in addition, many others' lives; yet, not taking action meant that the killing continued unimpeded.

This double bind was designed to ruin interpersonal relations. Moreover, it also compromised the self-relation of the victims: inmates of death camps either lost 'contact' with themselves and their inner lives (by numbing their feelings and trying to ignore their needs) or were, to say the least, alienated from

themselves as they were no longer being treated as human beings. Dori Laub, himself a child survivor, medical doctor, clinical professor of psychiatry at the Yale University of Medicine and co-founder of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, has for years been working with victims of massive psychic trauma. In a chapter with the telling title 'An event without a witness' in *Testimony* (1992), Laub analyses the problem as follows:

> There was no longer an other to which one could say 'Thou' in the hope of being heard, of being recognized as a subject, of being answered. The historical reality of the Holocaust became, thus, a reality which extinguished philosophically the very possibility of address, the possibility of appealing, or of turning to another. But when one cannot turn to a 'you' one cannot say 'thou' even to oneself. The Holocaust created in this way a world in which one *could not bear witness to oneself*. The Nazi system turned out therefore to be fool-proof, not only in the sense that it convinced its victims, the potential witnesses from the inside, that what was affirmed about their 'otherness' and their inhumanity was correct and that their experiences were no longer communicable even to themselves, and therefore perhaps never took place. This loss of the capacity to be witness to oneself and thus to witness from the inside is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, for when one's history is abolished, one's identity ceases to exist as well. (Laub 1992: 82)

If wondering how it could happen that there was not a single person among thousands of camp inmates to whom one could say 'Thou' in the hope of being heard, one ought to take into serious consideration the hindrances to communication: a Babylonian confusion of languages as people arrived from all over Europe; those who did not 'disappear' soon after having arrived had to struggle for survival, which fostered competition rather than solidarity among strangers; most of them were physically and mentally exhausted, separated from their loved ones, and suffering from daily humiliations and bone-grinding slave work.

In reflecting upon the impossibility of saying 'Thou' to another or oneself under such circumstances, Laub makes use of the terminology of Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue. In a footnote, he explicitly refers to Buber's *I and Thou* (1923). However, while Buber has another person in mind who can be addressed as a 'Thou' and, in the Third Part of his book, refers to God as 'the eternal You' (1996: 123) in whom the lines of all other relationships intersect, an 'inner Thou' does not occupy an important place in his thought. By contrast, the notion of an internal or internalized You is central in Dori Laub's writings. For instance, one of his articles is entitled 'Reestablishing the internal "Thou"

in testimony of trauma' (2013). As we can read in the abstract, at the core of extreme traumatic experience is 'the obliteration of the internalized, empathic communicative dyad' (Laub 2013: 184). The internal 'Thou' is here presented as the addressee with whom an inner dialogue takes place. Furthermore, the 'inner Thou' is characterized as a prerequisite to symbolization and internal world representation.

What exactly is the difference between an inner, or mental, and an outer 'Thou' in the external world? In an emailed response to this question, dated 16 September 2015, Dori Laub answered that the internal 'Thou' is 'the internal, mental representation of Buber's external other. One can also call it the internal good object.' Accordingly, in the just-mentioned article, Laub proposes a phenomenological formulation of traumatic memory emanating from psychoanalytic 'object relations theory' as developed by Sigmund Freud, Donald W. Winnicott, Heinz Kohut, and others. The lack of human responsiveness in the death camps and the state of utter loneliness – being abandoned even by oneself – is here regarded as a state of objectlessness in the sense of an 'absence of communicable thought' (Laub 2013: 186). In other words: the camp inmates did not just lose others who would respond to their basic needs, but they also lost themselves as their very last companions and interlocutors in interiority. 'Faith in the possibility of communication died; intrapsychically there was no longer a matrix of two people, a self and a resonating other. This … diminished the victims' ability to be in contact and in tune with themselves and to be able to register their own experience or reflect upon it' (*ibid.*). This description dovetails with Primo Levi's account of the *Muselmänner* who died in apathy. Yet, the (temporary) loss of the 'inner Thou' also affected the survivors: post-traumatic numbness can partly be explained by the fact that some of the horrible events they went through were not fully accessible to themselves.

Once the victims discovered that there was no longer an addressable 'Thou' outside or inside themselves, the intra-psychic matrix, which enables an individual's internal dialogue, was destroyed. Thus the dissolution of personal bonds, which makes it impossible to entrust oneself to another person, eventually leads to the diminution or destruction of the ability to witness oneself. Interestingly, the capacity to witness from the inside concurs with philosophical, theological, and psychological descriptions of conscience as an 'inner witness'. Although the link between the phenomenon and concept of conscience on the one hand and bearing witness on the other hand is largely overlooked in the literature on witnessing, I will argue that it is key to a better understanding of how witnessing works and why it ceases functioning in certain contexts. An exploration of prominent concepts of conscience can open up new avenues in this research

field because it provides us with the 'missing link' between intra- and interpersonal witnessing.

Conscience as 'inner witness'

The Greek and Latin etymologies suggest that conscience is a knowing-with (*syn-eídesis*, *con-scientia*) in a double sense (cf. Reiner 1974: 575–6): First, it can be knowledge shared with another whose action one has watched and witnessed. Second, conscience can be a knowing-with-oneself. As an inner witness of all one's thoughts, decisions, actions and emotions, it is integral to self-awareness – albeit also more than that. That which one experiences in and through one's conscience cannot be reduced to self-monitoring; rather, it could be described as 'experience with experience', which also involves an affective and/or intellectual assessment of that of which one is aware. For this reason, the process of witnessing in and through conscience, which mirrors oneself in one's relations to others, is normatively loaded.

Obviously, physical presence alone is not enough in order to be a witness to oneself or another. Witnessing also requires presence of mind, which is, however, dependent on bodily presence. We cannot bear witness to something that has eluded our attention or slipped our memory. An absent-minded, sleeping or unconscious witness is not a good observer. Yet we have to take into account that most observers do not know that they are witnesses when the event is happening: 'Testifying has the structure of repentance: retroactively caring about what we were once careless of' (Peters 2001: 722). The virtue of the witness is vigilance: watchfulness, wakefulness, or alertness. It is striking that the witnessing function of conscience has been described in exactly these terms. According to Emmanuel Levinas, the state of mind that corresponds to conscientiousness is '*wakefulness* or *keeping watch* [*la veille*], which does not consist in keeping watch *over* [veiller-à] (something)' (Levinas 2002: 208; Levinas 1993: 241); rather, it is an opening prior to intentionality, an awakening on demand of another within oneself, which takes place without intentionality, 'an impossibility of hiding in oneself', an '*insomnia*' – and 'we can never envision speaking of an insomnia-*over* [insomnie-à]' (*ibid.*).[3] Conscience presupposes passive syntheses (retentions and protentions) allowing one to be on the alert without already

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3   This description of insomnia and non-intentional consciousness, which is 'something higher or earlier' than (intentional) 'consciousness' (Levinas 2002: 208), corresponds well with the chapter on 'Bad conscience and the inexorable' in Levinas 1998: 127–32. For a more detailed account of Levinas's position, cf. Welz 2008.

being directed at something specific. Intentionality comes into play as soon as one feels remorse for one's wrongdoing in the past, becomes aware of an imminent danger, or fears a mistake in the future. Thus, conscience demands two kinds of embodied presence of mind: non-intentional pre-reflective vigilance *and* self-evaluative awareness of certain contents of experience, either reproaching or justifying the responsible agent (or, respectively, the 'patient' suffering the uncontrollable 'call', crisis or compunction of conscience).[4]

It follows that the quality of conscientious co-presence in witnessing is special in two respects, both in regard to temporality and to affectivity:

(1) As to temporality, conscience is, on the one hand, always present and awake, even in one's dreams. When it speaks, its 'voice' speaks in the present. On the other hand, the 'acoustic mirror' of conscience (cf. Welz 2011b: 142) does not only reflect events that are past, or attitudes performed right now, but also the person one wishes to become. 'Bad conscience' points precisely to the tension between one's *status quo* and *terminus ad quem,* the tension between who one is and who one ought to be. Therefore conscience cannot be taken as a detached observer within the psyche. One's conscience is not separable from oneself. It remains identical with oneself at least to some extent, even in situations in which one would like to get rid of it. If this were not the case, the self-obligating quality of conscience would be inexplicable. 'Having' a conscience means being conscientious, which is crucial not only ethically in regard to one's

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4   James G. Hart (2009: 97–159) has developed a Husserlian account of conscience in his opus magnum *Who One Is, Book 2*, Chapter 3. For him, conscience is 'the I myself decentered' witnessing oneself at a distance through passive synthesis and the call of one's ideal true self: 'It is a witness of who I am and have been and who I have committed myself to be and how my present action or purported action is or is not coincident with these' (*ibid.* 136). Since 'conscience is pervaded by admonitions and painful humiliations', it is also associated with the conflicted self, and therefore, 'temptations to self-deception and dissociation surface here in a way that is not normally the case with retentions and memory' (*ibid.* 138). May we conclude that passive synthesis is combined with (more or less) active commitment to values? Hart has commented critically on my description of the experiential dimension of conscience as 'self-mirroring' and 'self-mediation', arguing that one runs the risk of thinking of conscience 'as the result of affective, perceptual, and intellectual acts' (*ibid.* 131). Nonetheless, he has taken up the mirror metaphor because a mirror reflects back without the mediation of position-taking acts. The question is whether we should restrict the concept of conscience to an, as it were, 'automatic', sub-personal, pre-propositional process of presencing, or include the voluntary response to this process – the part that Heidegger called *Gewissen-haben-wollen.* I would like to argue for the latter option because otherwise cases of self-deception including 'wilful blindness' (instead of facing oneself) could not be explained. Cf. Welz 2011a.

relations to others, but also in regard to one's personal development. 'Bad conscience' may induce a sort of self-revision in regard to the past and guide us to a 'better version of ourselves' in the future. Repenting as well as promising presupposes a presence of mind that is not bound to the present moment. With the help of memory and imagination we can 'travel' in time. As Søren Kierkegaard's pseudonym 'A' explains in *Either/Or* (1843), 'The Unhappiest One' is the one who does not have this possibility, but is always absent from himself, never present to himself, neither in love, nor in hope, or recollection (Kierkegaard 1987: 222–6). This means that he cannot preserve personal continuity across the gap between past and present, that he cannot assume responsibility for his own deeds or misdeeds, and that he will not be a reliable partner of interaction because he cannot keep his word. Needless to say, this counter-image to the conscientious person portrays an unethical stance, which lacks the presence of mind that is part and parcel of the phenomenon and concept of conscience.

(2) Since it is *our* present, past, and future, that is at stake, we cannot *not* care about how our lives have been and will become. Witnessing self-transformation involves a passionate relation to time. Time is not just determined by one's self-relation or by some observation that comes down to introspection. Rather, one's self-relation is determined by one's relations to others and the way one engages with them emotionally. The affectivity of conscientious co-presence comprises that the witness is present to him- or herself *in* being-present to others. It matters whether one is present in an unconcerned, indifferent manner, or in *sympathy and empathy*, taking to one's heart what one gets to know. The co-presence of a cold spectator has not the same value as the co-presence of a person who participates in others' pain and pleasure. It is essential to remember this when Holocaust survivors or their children impart their testimonies. Conscientious co-presence involves compassion, condolence, or fellow feeling – which enables the witness to better understand another's situation, based on a more profound impression of and participation in the other's life.

One of the insights formulated by Paul Ricoeur in the very final chapter of his book *Oneself as Another* is the following (1992: 340, 351): as self-inherent alterity, conscience is equally self-attestation and an injunction by another. The attestation of the self takes place in one's response to another. In being responsive to the other by whom one is requested, one witnesses both the other and oneself (cf. Liebsch 1999: 173–4). The aforementioned quotes by Dori Laub illustrate the problem that arises when this interrelation between selfhood and otherness is torn apart. As Burkhard Liebsch has argued, *Selbst-Bezeugung* or self-attestation cannot be kept within the boundaries of one's most personal self-relation because it is addressed to others. Through the other I witness

myself, and through me the other is attested. One's testimony to others reveals not just these others, but also one's self: the kind of person one is. Yet one's testimony remains precarious, without proof, depending on persons who might or might not be willing to give credit to it (cf. Liebsch 2012: 35).[5]

Hence, the *address-ability* and *response-ability* of subjectivity depends not only on conscience as 'inner witness', but also on an inter-subjective process of witnessing (cf. Oliver 2001: 5, 7, 17).[6] Conscience mirrors the self in its communication with others. Conscience, the witness within oneself, cannot be sustained without an external witness, an addressee. As Kelly Oliver points out, without dialogic relations to others there can be no dialogue with oneself (cf. *ibid*. 85–9, 91). Bearing witness to one's own oppression is paradoxical because, on the one hand, the subject's sense of agency is annihilated when the subject is objectified. Objects do not speak and do not act. Yet, on the other hand, while witnessing recalls painful memories of the objectification, it allows the trauma to be worked through and reinstitutes subjective agency as the ability to respond or address oneself (cf. *ibid*. 95, 103–5). Regaining subjective agency after trauma means more than 'the ability to transform the world' (Sax 2006: 474), and it cannot be reduced to 'the sociocultural capacity to act' (Ahearn 2010: 29). It also involves the individual's mental power of resilience and resistance to victimization, which pertains to post-traumatic growth (cf. Welz 2015). Nonetheless, once the traumatic event is worked through and a process of healing has begun, one may have the feeling that 'it was not me who made it happen' (cited in Utriainen 2013: 253), or at least not oneself alone.

5   One of Liebsch's motto-texts is the following by Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt (1994: 51): 'Durch den anderen werde ich mein eigener Zeuge, und durch mich wird der andere bezeugt'.

6   I do not agree with Kelly Oliver's statement that subjectivity is the 'the result of the process of witnessing' (2001: 7) – for, if there was no subject to *initiate* the process of witnessing, who could then bear witness to subjectivity *resulting* from this process? Subjectivity cannot just be the result of this process without also being its origin. Furthermore, it is inconsistent to claim, on the one hand, that subjectivity depends on the process of witnessing – which, for Oliver, is identical with (one's own) 'address-ability and response-ability' – and, on the other hand, to identify the 'inner witness' mentioned by Dori Laub with 'an addressable other' (*ibid*. 17), that is, another person. Oliver refers to Levinas's notion of vigilance or insomnia, of selfhood opened onto otherness, which keeps the self awake because of the other's demand (cf. *ibid*. 134), but she is not aware of the link to Levinas's concept of conscience. It is this lacuna in the literature about witnessing that I wish to fill.

As my previous considerations have shown, the self-other-conscious inner witness needs to be restored in survivors of atrocities, so that their experiences can be told and heard. But how can severely traumatized survivors tell others about experiences that partly elude memory and verbal language? This brings us to the next section.

2. Traumatized memory

Let us first have a close look at the symptomatology of traumatized memory and then consider its implications for witnessing and the (in)ability to integrate and communicate memories of trauma.

PTSD and witnessing: 'from seeing to saying' or 'reinventing in recounting'?

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a syndrome that may follow the experience of a traumatic event. The diagnostic criteria for PTSD have been revised in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* by the American Psychiatric Association (DSM-5, released in 2013), now comprising the following features (applying to persons older than 6 years):

A. Exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence (directly experiencing or witnessing the traumatic event(s), or learning that they occurred to a close family member or friend);[7]
B. Intrusion symptoms (such as recurrent, involuntary, distressing memories or dreams of the traumatic event(s), dissociative reactions in which the individual feels or acts as if the traumatic event(s) were recurring);
C. Avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event(s) (e.g. thoughts, places, situations);
D. Negative alterations in cognitions and mood (e.g. inability to remember an important aspect of the traumatic event(s), inability to experience happiness, feelings of detachment from others, persistent fear, anger, guilt, or shame);
E. Alterations in arousal and reactivity (e.g. irritable behaviour, hypervigilance, problems with concentration, sleep disturbance);
F. The duration of the disturbance (criteria A–E) is more than one month; and

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7   Criterion A2 from DSM-IV-R (2000) requiring that fear, helplessness or horror happen right after the trauma is removed in DSM-5.

G. Causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

The PTSD diagnosis lists a number of re-experiencing symptoms, which imply that traumatized memory, time and again, 'catapults' the patient back into a past that imposes itself also in the present. What does this mean for the process of witnessing when conditioned by trauma? Following John Durham Peters (2001: 709), it has often been taken for granted (1) that witnessing 'has two faces: the passive one of *seeing* and the active one of *saying*', (2) that seeing is equivalent to observing, while saying is equivalent to possessing and producing knowledge, and (3) that 'an active witness first must have been a passive one', since what one has seen authorizes what one says. However, this threefold statement is not as self-evident as it seems to be – for the following three reasons:

First, it overemphasizes the visual components of witnessing. Since senses are inter-modal, the visual system is coordinated with the vestibular and motor systems of the body, and vision itself is embedded in synaesthetic experience; the witness is not only a *testis oculatus* (cf. Oliver 2001: 12–15, 212–22, referring to Gallagher and Meltzoff 1996; Hurley 1998; Irigaray 1999: 166–7). Vision, touch, and basic orientation to the earth work together in producing sight. Sight is the result of the circulation of various forms of biosocial energy through the media of air, light, language, and so forth. Further, the fact that the process of self-witnessing *vis-à-vis* others is experienced in a holistic way – involving all cognitive, perceptual, volitional and emotional capacities of consciousness – forbids ocularcentrism. Fortunately, human beings are and will always be more than what they can see of themselves.

Second, insofar as seeing with the bodily eyes (perception) includes imaginative seeing with the mind's eye (mindsight, conception), it is not merely passive. In seeing, we not only receive sense impressions, but we also contribute meaning to what we see. Without the hermeneutical 'as' in *seeing-as* we could not say much about what we see. Even if perception itself is passion rather than action, the seen at some point raises the question, 'In what way does it matter to me?' This question, in turn, provokes an implicit or explicit interpretation of the perceived and establishes patterns of significance. At least the visual experiences that stem from the mind's eye are subject to the will. According to Colin McGinn (2004: 46), seeing 'can be something that you *do* (and do intentionally)'. In the case of imaginative *seeing-as*, the dichotomy between perception and conception collapses in the hybrid of bodily and mental 'vision'. The *seeing-as* experience is a joint product of the outer eyes and the inner eye (cf. *ibid*. 50). Worldviews are at once the prerequisite and the result of visual

experiences. Moreover, the seer does not normally remain mute, but becomes immersed in communication. Whenever this is the case, seeing is interacting with saying.

Third, the order 'from seeing to saying' or 'from perceiving to recounting the perceived' can be reversed. In extreme cases, it is first in the process of giving testimony that survivors of traumatic events come to 'know' their experience (cf. Bernard-Donals 2003: 197, 201, 205–6, 214). If traumatic events are not fully registered when they occur and, for this reason, can hardly be recalled, trauma ruins the certainty of knowledge. Experience that is irretrievable 'as it actually was' must be reinvented in its communication. Then the memory of trauma evolves in the telling of fragmented and troubled narratives, and the movement goes from saying to seeing, from recounting to beholding.

As Cathy Caruth points out with reference to the third chapter of Sigmund Freud's book *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920),[8] catastrophic events seem to repeat themselves in an uncanny way for those who have passed through them. The capacity to continually, in flashbacks, reproduce a traumatic event in exact detail, appears to be connected with the way it escapes full consciousness as it occurs. The infliction of trauma 'is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again' in nightmares and repetitive re-enactments (Caruth 1996: 4). Due to its unassimilated and incomprehensible nature, trauma was not known in the first instance and returns to haunt the survivors later, reappearing in a belated address, which is 'the story of a wound that cries out' (*ibid.*).

As Dorthe Berntsen characterizes the current debate in her study on *Involuntary Autobiographical Memories* (2009), the Freudian idea of an impaired processing and encoding and/or repression of traumatic memory, which remains disintegrated because it is stored in ways that render it difficult to access through voluntary recall, has received strong criticism. Consistent with neurobiological research showing that emotional arousal enhances rather than impairs memory, behavioural studies have revealed that memories of trauma are usually highly accessible to voluntary recall. Moreover, clinical research literature demonstrates that the problem following most forms of trauma is an inability to forget rather than an expulsion from awareness (cf. Berntsen

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8   In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* section III, Freud mentions, e.g., the recurring dreams
     experienced by those suffering from 'traumatic neurosis' as exceptions to the pleasure
     principle. Building on his 1914 article 'Recollecting, repeating and working through',
     Freud highlights the patients' compulsion or obligation to '*repeat* the repressed material
     as a contemporary experience instead of … *remembering* it as something belonging to
     the past' (Freud 2001: 18).

2009: 147ff., with detailed references to studies in the respective fields of specialization). Further, thought suppression has the paradoxical effect of enhancing rather than reducing the accessibility of involuntary memories (*ibid.* 164). Berntsen concludes that 'the more accessible and central the traumatic memory is to the organization of the person's life story and identity, the more likely it is to generate intrusive memories, flashbacks, and other PTSD symptoms' (*ibid.* 180). This way, Berntsen's mnemonic model of PTSD arrives at the result that traumatized persons remember too well, although they may not include the traumatic events in their life scripts because they do not know how to make sense of them.

Yet, while these new findings indicate that involuntary memories called forth by traumatic events can be governed by the same mechanisms that govern involuntary memories with a positive mood impact in daily life, these findings do not contest the fact that traumatic memories are usually tied to *difficulties in (re)telling* the story of the wound and its cause. Articulations of traumatic memories often seem inconsistent or even self-contradictory and disconnected from other contexts of meaning (see, e.g., Sack 2010: 28–31). This might be due to these memories' specific modes of appearance: while 'normal' biographical memories can be made explicit with the help of ordinary language, traumatic memories cannot be expressed as easily or virtually resist verbalization when manifesting themselves in the form of dislocated 'visual pictures, olfactoric, auditive, or kinaesthetic sensations' (van der Kolk 1996: 229). What, then, can turn the scales as to whether traumatic memories can be integrated (like a 'landmark' in one's mental 'coordinate system') or remain unassimilated (like 'unknown territory' or 'strange islands' in the 'stream' of consciousness)?

In the following section, I will argue that, despite appearances, Caruth's and Berntsen's accounts are not mutually exclusive in regard to how they define the relation between trauma and consciousness, but refer to different aspects of traumatic experience that are mixed up in the English term 'experience', which is an equivoque. Further, I will propose that we have to take into account different levels or dimensions of consciousness when determining to what extent traumatic memories can be integrated, known, and communicated – yet without operating with a notion of the 'unconscious' in the sense of a hidden, intrapsychic reality 'outside of' consciousness.[9]

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9   Following Rudolf Bernet's phenomenological analysis of Sigmund Freud's concept of the Unconscious, I assume that consciousness can bring something 'unconscious' (i.e., something foreign or absent to consciousness) to appearance, yet without incorporating it into or subordinating it to the conscious present, for 'consciousness can appear to

Shattered trust and the (in)ability to integrate and communicate traumatic experiences

The ambiguity of the English word 'experience' comes to the fore when one tries to translate it into German, at which point one has two options: *Erlebnis* or *Erfahrung* (plus the corresponding verb forms). One can experience (*erleben*) many things without knowing that one experiences them at the time of undergoing or living through the experience – for example radioactive radiation. Seen from a reflective distance, the immediate experience (*Erlebnis*) can acquire a certain meaning and is then experienced in the sense of *erfahren*: it is seen *as* something, for example as harmful to health. Additionally, one can try to understand one's experience (*Erfahrung*), that is to say one can relate the meaning of this experience to the meaning of other experiences, interpret it anew and transform it into more general knowledge, for example about the impact of nuclear reactor disasters.[10]

When discussing 'traumatic experiences', it is crucial to maintain the distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, notwithstanding the fact that both aspects are intermingled in the concept of 'trauma'. A traumatic *Erlebnis* happens to the experiencing subject that undergoes a traumatizing event as *Widerfahrnis*, that is, as an adversity that is opposed to anything wished-for – in such a way that the content of the experience is beyond mnemonic control because it cannot (or at least: not yet) be captured by reflective consciousness. A traumatic *Erlebnis* is overwhelming and, at first, 'beyond understanding'. One can, at best, understand that one cannot understand. Nonetheless, when trying to understand the immediate experience by thinking about it, it slowly changes. In the course of time it can be appropriated and added to one's treasure trove of experience despite remaining foreign: *as* something adverse, shocking, undesirable. The hermeneutical 'as' indicates that the initially inaccessible can later be included into a higher-order consciousness, through which the experiencing subject can relate to what (s)he undergoes or underwent.[11]

itself as something alien' and behave toward the Unconscious in such a way that it 'can neither exclude it nor immediately and completely appropriate it' (Bernet 2002: 349, cf. abstract).

10   As for a more detailed elaboration on the distinction between *erleben, erfahren* and *verstehen*, cf. Jung 1999: 228.

11   Following Wenjing Cai (2013), I do not want to oppose pre-reflective experience (defined as fully determined original datum, which ought to be matched and recovered by reflection) and reflective experience (defined as a non-essential secondary layer that is subsidiary to a meaningful foundational substratum or bottom layer, which is only to be explicated, described, or articulated) according to a dualistic model, which presupposes that pre-reflective experience constitutes a self-sufficient realm and primordial

In short, my suggestion is that traumatic experience remains un-integrated as long as it persists as an 'undigested' *Erlebnis*. As soon as it has become an intentional object of reflection and interpretation, the *Erlebnis* can be turned into an *Erfahrung*. Then the human being actively processes the event he or she underwent passively as a *homo subiectus*, that is, a subject that was subjected to this event.[12] Although reflection is always late, happening after the fact (*nachträglich*), subsequent to the traumatizing event, this does not necessarily imply that *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* are arranged in a chronological sequence, which starts with 'not knowing' and ends with full-fledged 'knowledge'. PTSD might also unfold as a confusing combination or entanglement of simultaneous knowing and not knowing, or it might encompass a paradox: knowledge of what cannot be known or fathomed out. Tumbling into the abyss of human beings' inhumanity can at best be conducive to an orientation about disorientation.

Therefore we are not confronted with an either/or of 'integration vs. non-integration' of traumatic memories, 'knowledge vs. ignorance' of the event that triggered the trauma. Rather, we have to soften or qualify the strongest claims of both (seemingly opposed) trauma theories – namely, Caruth's psychoanalytic and Berntsen's mnemonic model. Neither is it correct to assume that the experience of traumatized witnesses is not at all available to them because it is pushed to the margins of consciousness where it is *in toto* encapsulated or dissociated, nor that they can easily remember all experiential contents.

Martin Endreß and Andrea Pabst have investigated the social implications of traumata caused by interpersonal violence, which negates sociality, impairs one's physical and/or psychic integrity, and shatters 'basic trust' (Endreß and Pabst 2013: 89, 102–3).[13] They define basic (operating) trust as a constitutive,

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form of human life. Cai is right in her critique of this epistemological model, which downplays the existential dimension of reflection, i.e. the capacity to submit one's experience to normative inquiries calling one's deeds into question (cf. *ibid*. 339, 344, 351, 353). While conceding that the pre-reflective is the origin of reflection, Cai also sees it as the *telos* of reflection, which implies that pre-reflective experience is not fully determined on its own; rather, its meaning is unfolded in and through reflective interpretation, which opens up novel perspectives (cf. *ibid*. 350–2). Cai points out that this possibility is unique to human experience. Her suggestion to 'read' and interpret pre-reflective experience like a text reminds us of the fact that tacit understanding is open to reflection as 'the sole medium in terms of which one faces, examines, and values oneself' (*ibid*. 353).

12   On the ambiguity of activity and passivity within subjectivity, cf. Grøn 2011: 19–33.

13   I am happy to see that the methodology I presented on behalf of the Copenhagen research group on 'Trust, Conflict, Recognition' at the interdisciplinary conference *Vertrauen im Streit der Interpretationen – Hermeneutische und methodische Probleme*

pre-thematic mode of trust, which forms the background of both 'habitual trust' (i.e. the pragmatically effective fundament of routine and the product of inter-action) and 'reflexive trust' (i.e. a cognitive mode of trust that can be thematized as a strategic resource of action). While habitual trust can be (re)established through training, and reflexive trust refers to the rational calculation of risks, basic trust cannot be 'established' as such (cf. *ibid*. 90, 95).[14] If basic trust is shattered by traumatic experiences, this entails alterations of memory includ-ing 'amnesic experiences of forgetting crucial incidents' (*ibid*. 101, cf. Fischer and Riedesser 2003: 83). Usually, language makes it possible to evaluate, clas-sify, and share experiences with others. However, traumatizing experiences can lead to speechlessness, since the persons concerned can neither find words for what they went through, nor be empathic listeners. This inability can isolate and alienate victims of trauma from those around them (cf. *ibid*. 97–103).[15]

What I miss in this account is an explication of the natural nexus between such symptoms and their root: the shattering of basic trust. If trauma induces shattered trust, there might be one more reason why communication breaks down: victims of life-threatening trauma no longer dare to entrust themselves to others without hesitation, but live in a state of anxious (or even suspicious) watchfulness and try to guard themselves against possible danger, as they have lost the feeling of ontological security. The term 'basic trust' is misleading inso-far as it conveys the impression of there being a 'fundament' or 'basis' for other forms of trust, while, in fact, it is not available in the sense that we could estab-lish or re-establish it – neither in ourselves nor in others. In its 'groundless-ness'[16] it is not at our disposal and escapes our acts of volition – just as trau-matizing experience does, as long as it is not codified in language. Coping with traumatic experiences means turning the traumatic *Erlebnis* into an *Erfahrung*. This process requires reflective consciousness, by means of which traumatic memories can be worked through. As a result, they can be acknowledged and

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heutiger Vertrauensforschung at the University of Zurich on 6 November 2010 – namely, an approach to trust *ex negativo* (via experiences that negate or challenge trust) – proves fruitful also in a sociological context. Cf. Welz 2010 and Grøn 2012.

14   I think it would be more appropriate to speak of 'reflective' rather than 'reflexive' trust, as the authors obviously do not speak of trust that is *reflexartig* or *rückbezüglich*, but rather based on rational reflection.

15   Endreß and Pabst (2013: 96–7), too, operate with the distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* and link it up with an opposition of 'traumatizing' vs. 'traumatic' experiences. Yet I do not want to follow their idiosyncratic use of terms, which goes along with an unexplained identification of 'conscience' with 'consciousness.'

16   As to the 'groundlessness' of this 'fundament', cf. Welz 2010: chapter III and V.1.2.

communicated to the extent that the psychosomatic marks that a traumatizing event left on a person are put into words.

As long as trauma is encoded primarily on a sensorimotor level (as body memory) – which can be defined as 'the totality of implicit dispositions of perception and behavior mediated by the body and sedimented in the course of earlier experiences' (Fuchs 2011: 86) – it persists not in the form of explicit memory, but as a style of existence. The latter manifests itself indirectly and remains hidden to the one who is traumatized, but becomes visible to others: in the form of panic attacks, actions that a person avoids without being aware of it, overlooked opportunities, and other 'blind spots' in day-to-day living, which belong to the 'corporeal and intercorporeal unconscious' (*ibid.*).[17] The traumatic *Erlebnis* needs to be brought to mind and 'translated' if it is to be retrieved linguistically. Although it is rarely possible to include Holocaust trauma in a neat, coherent historical account of what has happened – which would, in its neatness, empty history of its horror and trivialize the problems of witnessing the Shoah – traumatic experiences may acquire some meaning in the context of the conscious framework of the victim's life. By contrast, if the capacity to formulate a communicable testimony is lost, it is difficult to recover from Holocaust trauma. In this case, the accurate registration and preservation of what happened comes at the cost of ongoing pathology: being forced to live through again and again what has not become part of the retrievable and renewable 'plot' of autobiographical memory. Nonetheless, we have to keep in mind that witnessing goes beyond the verbal communication and putting-into-words of

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17   Following Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1986: 308–9), Fuchs defines the unconscious as 'absence in presence, the unperceived in the perceived', which expresses itself in the following ambiguity of consciousness: 'One does not know something *and* does not want to know it; one does not see something *and* does not want to see it – in other words, one looks past it intentionally-unintentionally. Consciousness is not fully transparent to itself because it hides itself from itself' (Fuchs 2011: 101). Remarkably, Fuchs (*ibid.* 98) cites the memoirs of the Jewish writer Aharon Appelfeld, who from his seventh to his thirteenth year of age experienced WWII hiding in the woods of the Ukraine: 'More than fifty years have passed since the end of the second world war. I have forgotten a great deal, especially places, dates and people's names, but nevertheless I feel that time in my entire body. … Sometimes it is enough to smell food, to feel dampness in my shoes or hear a sudden noise to bring me back to the war' / 'Seit Ende des zweiten Weltkriegs sind bereits über fünfzig Jahre vergangen. Vieles habe ich vergessen, vor allem Orte, Daten und die Namen von Menschen, und dennoch verspüre ich diese Zeit mit meinem ganzen Körper. … Manchmal reicht der Geruch eines Essens, Feuchtigkeit in den Schuhen oder ein plötzliches Geräusch, um mich mitten in den Krieg zurückzuversetzen' (Appelfeld 2005: 57, 96).

experiences, beyond their thematization and representation. Silent waiting can also be a way of patiently coping with trauma (cf. Welz 2015).

3. Dialogic restitution of memory and identity

Bearing in mind the impact of trauma on the workings of memory, the next step is to address the role that inter- and intra-personal dialogue plays in the preservation of personal continuity. The latter includes a restitution of memory and identity in terms of self-recognition over time. Let us first examine the dialogue with another and then the dialogue with oneself.

In dialogue with another: listening, recounting, and the saying beyond the said

Before any content of a testimony can be told, one needs to participate in a relationship with someone who will listen. The Yale project of recording Holocaust testimonies has proved therapeutic: the testimonial process in the presence of a listener who accompanies the survivors on their journey into the past not only takes them back to the pain, horror, and sadness that is associated with that past; rather, it also engages them 'in claiming a story of their own which holds together the fragments of their memory' (Laub 2009: 139). The testimonial process 'functions as a dialogue, not only between the listener and the survivor, but also internally in the survivor', with him- or herself, and therefore testimony 'is a step in the restoration of one's own humanity' and 'in the rebuilding of mutuality and of trust' (*ibid*. 141). In the therapeutic action of testimony, trauma-induced fragmented memories and psychic disruption begin to be repaired (cf. Laub 2013: 189, 196).

Witnessing also involves non-verbal communication ('saying without the said'). Emmanuel Levinas emphasizes this pragmatic dimension of witnessing (i.e., 'the saying', *le dire*, the proximity of persons, one-being-for-another) more than the semantic dimension of witnessing (i.e., 'the said', *le dit*, the propositional content it conveys, the information transmitted). There is an overflowing of the said by a surplus of meaning, which is not just the convergence of speech with acts, but an ethical openness or exposure to the other, a gift implied in the giving of signs by an ego 'led to sincerity', 'responsibility', and 'non-indifference' for the other (Levinas 2004: 144–5).[18]

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18 According to Levinas, this 'saying' is inspired by 'the glory of the infinite', which calls for a self that is ready to be there for another, expressing its readiness by saying 'here I am'. See Levinas 2004: 152: 'Transcendence owes it to itself to interrupt its own

Not just in exceptional cases, but in everyday encounters, too, the witness cannot always fully account for what (s)he lives through, since *pathos* precedes *logos* and is always already past compared to the conscious present. One is affected before one can grasp what is going on. Although one can only belatedly (or not at all) find words for a *Widerfahrnis*, the process of transforming surprising or traumatic experiences is, in any case, determined by one's relationship to others. No one could be and become him- or herself without significant others. Without an attentive and supportive 'Thou' it becomes difficult to preserve one's dignity, and even more difficult to bear witness of one's being-declined.

Dori Laub imagines someone saying to him: 'I'll be with you in the very process of your losing me. I am your witness' (1992: 92).[19] Thereby the listening other becomes the witness of the witness. Even if the other leaves or dies, he or she will remain present *within* oneself, lingering in one's memory. However, the mental representation of another (the 'inner Thou') is, of course, not equivalent to the other who is met in an external reality and who is capable of questioning one's mental representations of him or her. There is a decisive difference between the other as a speaking subject and agent in a more or less shared world – and the image of this other in one's mind. In what ways, then, does the 'inner Thou' interact with the 'outer You'?

In *Testimony*, Laub describes how the encounter between the survivor-narrator of Holocaust testimony and the interviewer-listener makes it possible for the witness to reconstitute 'the internal "thou", and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself' (1992: 85). The appearance of the 'inner Thou'

demonstration. Its voice has to be silent as soon as one listens for its message.' But in the saying of a subject responsible for the other, 'the said and being are stated, but also … an overflowing of the said itself by a rhetoric which is not only a linguistic mirage, but a surplus of meaning of which consciousness all by itself would be incapable'. As for the distinction between the saying and the said, cf. Pinchevski 2005: 80–4.

19   Laub here quotes the following poem by Paul Celan (1980: 181):

To stand in the shadow
of the scar up in the air.

To stand-for-no-one-and nothing.
Unrecognized,
for you
alone.

With all there is room for in that,
even without
language.

seems to depend on the prior meeting with another person 'out there' in the social world. This can be illustrated by the case of young vagabond Menachem: a boy who was separated from his parents during the war, but managed to survive with the help of other people and a photograph of his mother, to which he talked when he felt alone in the streets of Krakow. According to Laub, this story 'exemplifies the process whereby survival takes place through the creative act of establishing and maintaining an internal witness who substitutes for the lack of witnessing in real life' (*ibid.* 87). Menachem compensated for the loss of his mother by speaking to her picture. While he waited for the re-union with his mother, her internalized image was his 'inner Thou'. By looking at the photograph, he kept her memory alive, which, in turn, kept him alive. As Dori Laub explained in an email of 16 September 2015, the photograph through which Menachem addressed his mother functioned as a 'transitional object': 'had he not had such a mother, he would not have been able to create this ever present internal thou.'

Thus the presence of the 'inner Thou' is conditioned by emotional bonds between people. Such bonds evolve and can be maintained only if one experiences a dialogue partner who is *not* identical with oneself. To put it another way: the 'inner Thou' that was earlier classified as an internal *object* is, in reality, a mentally represented *subject*. There cannot be an *intra*-personal dialogue without *inter*-personal dialogues between people who really exist and know each other. For this reason, psychoanalytic 'object relations theory' works only if supplemented by a philosophy of dialogue that takes seriously the inter-subjective dimensions of communication.

It is not a coincidence that Laub refers to Buber when claiming that one cannot say 'thou' even to oneself when one cannot turn to another 'you' (cf. Laub 1992: 82). As he expounds elsewhere in regard to the Shoah, the 'inner Thou' as a means for self-dialogue 'ceases to exist' when others fail to show empathy in the external world, which leads to 'the shutdown of the mental registering process' and the erasure of thought and memory (Laub 2013: 187). A listening companion is indispensable for an individual to resume 'dialogic narrative flow' – but if the yearning for an internal good object, with whom the experiencing 'I' can be in constant dialogue, finds no resonance in 'the passionate interest of a listening other', then the mental representation of an 'inner Thou' cannot reemerge (*ibid.* 197).

Is it, then, better to remember and bear witness, or to keep silent, move on and forget? Prima facie the answer seems obvious; yet the simple alternative between remembering or forgetting, bearing witness or keeping silent is untenable. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent, a time to remember and a

time to forget. Speech and silence, remembrance and oblivion may alternate – and yet the latter cannot occur without the former. One may wish to remember and bear witness *in order to* be able to move on and forget. Even the dream of *tabula rasa*, of a new beginning based on the oblivion of the past, presupposes the presence of burdensome memories (cf. Welz 2013). In any case, bearing witness brings relief to the victims only if there is someone who listens carefully and receives their memories.

This has wide-ranging implications also for difficult dialogues between enemies and for all other cases in which people are *not* willing to listen to one another. How to move on in the lack of mutual understanding? Aleida Assmann has investigated this problem in a recent article on the transformative power of 'dialogic memory' (2015). While the policy of forgetting has for ages served as a strategy for containing conflicting memories, and while the public sphere in postwar Germany was shaped by a 'pact of silence',[20] a therapeutic concern with the abiding impact of violent, traumatic pasts prescribes something different, namely reengagement with the past in order to overcome it (cf. *ibid*. 200–1). The shift from monologic to dialogic memory policies marks the recognition of the victims' memories as well as the integration of 'two or more perspectives on a common legacy of traumatic violence' (*ibid*. 208). Following the former concentration camp prisoner and later writer Jorge Semprún, Assmann argues that in order to forge a common future we need to share our past (cf. *ibid*. 209).

Thereby it becomes clear that the phenomenological and psychological perspectives discussed earlier do also touch upon ethical issues because they affect the (pre)conditions, norms, and limits of human action and interaction. In regard to our interaction with others, we have the obligation not to be indifferent to their suffering. In regard to our self-relation, we need to think about the retroactive effects of our actions and omissions on our self-understanding. Can we bear the consequences of what we have done or omitted to do? How do we later relate to what we underwent passively? Can we recognize ourselves in our deeds and decisions? In these questions our personal identity is at stake.

In a silent dialogue with oneself: self-witnessing and self-recognition

Personal identity and continuity across the gap between past and present can be preserved only if one's 'inner witness' remains intact or has been repaired. Otherwise one does not know with oneself what has happened and how one

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20   Elsewhere Assmann (2013: 201) calls this pact of silence 'dialogic forgetting' (*Schweigen als 'dialogisches Vergessen'*).

has reacted, and then one is neither able to give an account of oneself nor of others' fate. So far, we have become acquainted with two different descriptions of this 'inner witness': conscience as one's knowing-with-oneself in one's relations to others and the 'inner Thou' as mental representation of a You in the external world. Accordingly, the loss of the capacity to witness from the inside can be described in two different ways: one the one hand, the figure of 'The Unhappiest One' in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*, who is always absent from himself, embodies the lack of conscientious presence of mind; on the other hand, self-witnessing becomes impossible when the inner dialogue with an internalized other has stopped and, as a consequence, deliberation in dialogue with oneself has ended as well.

Hannah Arendt has termed thinking a 'silent dialogue of myself with myself', an 'inner dichotomy in which I can ask questions of myself and receive answers' (Arendt 2003: 98). For Arendt, this Socratic-Platonic description of the process of thinking implies that human beings exist in the plural and, even when alone, are in company. In thinking we become 'two-in-one' (*ibid.* 96). Remarkably, when being addressed by another who wants to talk to us, we immediately become one again and listen to the other outside of us. In Arendt's view, the fear of losing oneself is legitimate, 'for it is the fear of no longer being able to talk with oneself' (*ibid.*). This inability to talk with oneself and to return to the complex, internally differentiated oneness that includes otherness in itself, is one of the symptoms of trauma-induced pathology. It implies not only that one is abandoned by an empathic other, but also that one is deserted by oneself.

It is my contention that, just as the dialogue with oneself requires a dialogic relation to another, the cognitive conditions of self-witnessing are related to its social conditions. Witnessing can be conceptualized as the companionship of an 'inner' and an 'outer' witness, an 'inner' and an 'outer You' – with conscience establishing conscious co-presence between the two.

Yet there is a conspicuous difference between conscience and the 'inner Thou': while conscience functions as an 'inner witness' by registering everything one perceives, thinks, feels, and does in relation to others, the 'inner Thou' as internalized object or mental representation of another cannot do anything on its own. Being the mental image of an 'outer witness' or a listening You, it only reflects what the other does or has done. What about conscience – is it a kind of 'subject within the subject'? It is noteworthy that conscience is not a dialogue partner, but rather the faculty by which we are aware of ourselves. Conscience as a dimension of reflective or pre-reflective experience is neither a subject nor an object, but mediates between self and other by mirroring oneself even against one's will. Thereby conscience reveals one's non-coincidence with oneself, while

nonetheless being identical with oneself. One cannot negotiate with one's conscience as one can with another person because its 'voice' comes from oneself and yet over oneself. It turns against oneself when one is not true to oneself.

'Bad conscience' indicates when we are at odds with ourselves. Then the inner dialogue becomes a dispute, with our thoughts accusing or excusing ourselves. Conscience is not only the indicator of a conflicted self, but also the 'guardian' of self-identity in relation to alterity. As we already saw in regard to Ricoeur, alterity is not just 'out there', but self-inherent. Through conscience, one can experience oneself as another. Preserving one's personal identity does not mean that one remains the same, but that one recognizes oneself despite having changed.

The problem of self-recognition is one of the key problems to be dealt with when recovering from trauma. Semantically, self-recognition has a double meaning: it can both be taken in the sense of self-respect and in the sense of re-cognizing oneself as identical to oneself. As Paul Ricoeur notes in *The Course of Recognition*, 'it is indeed our most authentic identity, the one that makes us who we are, that demands to be recognized' (Ricoeur 2005: 21). It would be a mistake 'to mis-take oneself, to take oneself for what one is not' (*ibid.* 257). Ricoeur underlines that self-recognition requires, at each step, the help of others in interlocutory situations (cf. *ibid.* 69, 91, 96).

Further, as self-recognition involves the possibility of identifying 'oneself' despite one's self-transformations over time, it presupposes that one has a memory of one's past self, which can be linked up with one's present self, and a vision of who one wishes to become in the future. The above-mentioned alterations of memory affect episodic memory, which is responsible for the recollection of autobiographical events and experiences that occurred at a particular time and place. The term 'episodic memory' was coined by Endel Tulving in 1972, who counted 'autonoetic' consciousness amongst its key properties, that is, a special kind of consciousness accompanying the act of remembering and enabling one to be aware of oneself in subjective time, making possible mental time travel (Tulving 2002: 2–5, 20).[21] Normally, episodic memory has (or can acquire) a narrative structure, which gets confused in the case of traumatization.

In what follows, the problem of self-recognition will be discussed from two angles: (1) seen from the point of view of the traumatized victim, it is explicated as a problem of identifying and respecting oneself; (2) seen from the point of

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21   Tulving distinguishes between episodic and semantic memory. The latter is responsible for a record of factual information and concept-based general knowledge as well as shared meanings and traditional understandings.

view of the recipient of the victim's testimony, the problem of self-recognition is formulated as a problem of how one can identify with another while retaining a certain distance from this other, so that self and other do not fuse, but remain distinct from each other.

(1) The paradigm case of a victim who is at the same time an eyewitness giving a first-person account of evil and the suffering it produces is the case of the 'moral witness' as described in Avishai Margalit's *Ethics of Memory* (2002: 148–50, 163, 168). Moral witnesses have to live in order to serve – and to preserve the sober hope that in another place or another time there exists, or will exist, a moral community that will listen to their testimony (cf. *ibid*. 154–5). In Margalit's view, the minimal moral community is between oneself and one's future self (cf. *ibid*. 158–9). The authority of moral witnesses depends on their sincerity, which Margalit defines as a strong congruence between their emotions and avowals. 'But sincerity is only part of it; authenticity is another. An authentic person is one who gets rid of all his personae (masks) and gives expression to his "true self," especially in the extreme circumstances of being unprotected by a civilized moral environment' (*ibid*. 170). Here self-respect and self-identity are dependent on the extent to which a person lives up to the norm of truthfulness.

For Margalit, the relation of witnessing, like the relation of loving, is non-reflexive: 'it is possible, but not necessary, for one to witness oneself' (Margalit 2002: 175). However, if one's authority is shaped by the fact that one is identical with the one who went through and remembers the suffering of which one gives an account, it is hard to see how the relation of witnessing can remain non-reflexive. Furthermore, if Ricoeur is right in claiming that self-recognition is linked to self-attestation in the encounter with another, and if Laub is right in pointing out that a person's internal witness can only be re-established in dialogue with an external interlocutor, then self-awareness and the awareness of another are inseparable in the actual process of witnessing.

(2) The recipient of another's testimony can be confronted with the problem of secondary traumatization, through which his or her own self-recognition becomes endangered by over-identifying with the sufferer-victim. Following Susan David Bernstein (2003: 150, 158–9),[22] my suggestion is to develop further the notion of 'disidentification', which does not see the limits of empathy and identification as a deficit, but valorizes the distinction between sympathizer and sufferer; the notion of 'thwarted identification', where the testimonial 'I' does not invite the viewers to identify with it because there is no pretence of universal human experience; and the notion of 'dissonant identification', which

22   With reference to Teresa de Lauretis and Doris Sommer.

captures the value of affective engagement, but at the same time recalls the differences that remain between sympathizer and sufferer.

When the sympathizer and sufferer are present for one another in shared attention, they are united in trying to avert the danger of internalizing the perpetrator's view – for, in this case, conscience becomes an inner tyrant and torturer. Then the victim is caught in a double bind, which can be overcome only if someone else enables him or her to take up a new position towards him- or herself. The victim's own self-image or world picture needs to be transcended by a hopeful outlook towards something unexpected. In order to preserve personal continuity, one needs a view that, paradoxically, is discontinuous to one's own – redeeming one from self-contempt and permitting one to see beyond what one can see.[23] One's memory of 'who one is' must be 're-written' like a palimpsest: being at once transformed and restored. Whether or not this happens is contingent; but if it happens, it is a gracious event. Then one can find oneself *and* the other in a genuine dialogue.

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23   Cf. Grøn 2010: 223, who quotes the following prayer of a South African ex-convict, who, almost without hope, sought some sort of reconciliation with his own family: 'Lord, help us see beyond what we see'.

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