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Editor's Introduction

Sam Stuart-Booth

Studies in Testimony is intended to be a site of critical examination and enquiry into testimony in all its facets. Given this intentionally broad scope of academic interest, an interdisciplinary approach is not only encouraged but is necessary for the continued success of the journal. The philosophy of the journal is to encourage and facilitate a productive and dynamic relationship between the various approaches to testimony in fields as diverse, but certainly not limited to, literary theory, history and psychoanalysis. This approach is intended to ensure the fostering of new areas of enquiry and to revisit topics of continued and lasting relevance.

This first issue is truly international in scope, both in terms of the contributors themselves but also in the subject matter covered illustrating the expansive nature of research undertaken in this area of study. Hannah Grayson's article, 'Articulating Growth in Rwandan Terms: Adapting the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory', stems from the AHRC funded project 'Rwanda: Stories of Change', and explores 'how psychological frameworks might be mediated for understanding contemporary Rwandan stories' following the genocide of 1994. In the first of four articles that focus upon the Americas, Anna Forné examines the 'metadiscourses surrounding the installation of the prize category "testimony"' for the Casa de las Américas in the period 1970 - 1975. The article 'The Politics of Poetics: Latin American Testimonial Literature and the Casa de las Américas Literary Prize (1970-1975)' does so in order to explore the relationship between poetics and politics in this particular case. Anthony Nuckols' article, 'Kaddish for Those We Never Knew: Mourning and Bearing Witness to Losses that Are Not Our Own through Fiction', envisions 'a process of mourning that transcends [...] temporal distance through the sustaining of loss, the incorporation of absence within the narrative form and on the level of the diegesis, where the irrecoverability of the past becomes evident through the necessary recourse to invention, supposition and fiction itself'. Tim Craker focuses upon 'Testimony and Place in the Work of Victor Montejo' with the central question: 'To the extent that Montejo's work is a response to loss, what can it tell us about testimony as a response to the loss of place and

the place of loss?' In 'The Testimony of a Poet: Transcription, Witness, and Poetic Documentation in Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony*' Trevor Laurence Jockims illustrates the ways Reznikoff's *Testimony* does not simply absorb its sources into the poetic but 'by poeticizing them, illuminates the texts in their own right as well as in terms of the potentialities of the poetic act itself.' The final article in this issue, 'Poetic of the contingent detail in witness narratives about the reign of Terror during the French Revolution' by Carole Dornier, examines how three accounts of the Terror (July 1793 - July 1794) following the French Revolution attempt to 'restitute the strangeness' of the events they describe by subverting 'requirements for a traditional plot – a narrative logic and a chain of plausible events- erasing the marks of causality'.

The journal would not be possible without the editorial board and the generous help of the reviewers, all of whom are greatly thanked and gave their time freely.

Articulating Growth in Rwandan Terms: Adapting the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory

Dr Hannah Grayson

Introduction

This article introduces the 'Rwandan Stories of Change' research project and discusses the adaptation of a therapeutic tool for use by Rwandan therapists. Based on a thematic analysis of testimonies from the Genocide Archive of Rwanda, I emphasise the importance for such tools to be modified and used in culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate ways. I explore three contextual correlates in particular and suggest next steps based on these areas.

'Rwandan Stories of Change' is a 39-month research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and based at the University of St Andrews in Scotland.¹ The project investigates the ways in which individual Rwandan people have adjusted and reconstructed their lives in the years since the genocide. We aim to gain a qualitative understanding of the impact of the genocide with a particular focus on the expression of post-traumatic growth. We collaborate with the Aegis Trust, an international NGO working to prevent genocide through a series of educational and research programmes. Aegis has established the Genocide Archive of Rwanda as a unified repository for all information relating to the 1994 genocide.² It contains documentaries, photographs, TV and radio broadcasts, interactive maps, and other materials including an extensive archive of oral interviews. From these interviews, which include testimonies given by survivors and perpetrators of the genocide, we translate, analyse and publish stories of positive change, both social and psychological, from Rwanda over the last 23 years.

The importance of stories to people's lives is widely recognised, and stories play a vital role after trauma has been experienced both individually and collectively.³ In 1994, between April and July, up to one million Rwandan people were brutally killed in what is officially

¹ <http://rwandan.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/>.

² <http://www.genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw>.

³ L. Harms, *Understanding Trauma and Resilience* (London: Palgrave, 2015).

known as the Genocide against the Tutsi. Following an attack on the plane carrying then president Juvénal Habyarimana on 6th April, a large-scale hate campaign saw three months of mass violence which had catastrophic consequences for Rwandan people. Thousands of Rwandans were killed, others exiled, and the political and cultural fabric of the country was destroyed. Rwandan people's testimonies demonstrate the importance of narrative for articulating growth in general, its particular value for reconstructing shattered assumptions, and the potential for bringing words to experiences of trauma formerly impossible to describe.⁴ Additionally, the interpretation of events, consequences of events, and remembering of events all depend on how narratives (about what happened) are constructed, and this has a direct impact on healing and growth: 'One's explanatory style affects how one attributes the causes of an event and this attribution is an important factor affecting the cognitive processing involved in rebuilding one's assumptive world'.⁵ Sharing and documenting traumatic experience is seen as a restorative intervention; and the form of a testimony can help restore a sense of coherence and meaning to an individual who has suffered trauma.⁶

In semi-structured interviews conducted by staff members of the Aegis Trust, survivors, perpetrators, and rescuers have the opportunity to reflect on their lives before, during, and since the genocide, and to bear witness to what they experienced. The semi-structured approach enables staff to collect stories about certain areas of interest (for example, unity and reconciliation), and equally allows staff freedom to ask their own questions on a range of subjects. The interviews were not focused on themes of growth, and interviewees were free to speak at length on particular aspects of their story. Thus, the interviews range in length, from 10 minutes to around 90 minutes. Staff members from the Archive, themselves genocide survivors, conducted these 25 interviews between 2014 and 2016. Ten of them were conducted with members of unity and reconciliation associations: these are grass-roots groups established in local communities to foster cooperation in projects which benefit the

⁴ L. Harms, *Understanding Trauma and Resilience* and R. Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered assumptions: Towards a new psychology of trauma* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

⁵ C. L. Park and V. S. Helgeson, 'Introduction to the special section: growth following highly stressful life events - current status and future directions', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 74, 5, (2006), pp. 791-796.

⁶ D. Denborough, 'A framework for receiving and documenting testimonies of trauma', *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 3, 4 (2005), pp. 34-42, D. Denborough, *Trauma: Narrative responses to traumatic experience* (Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications, 2006).

community. In these interviews, people were asked to describe how their association had started, why they had joined the association and what they found beneficial about being a member of such an association. All interviews were conducted and recorded in the individuals' native language, Kinyarwanda. With the permission of the Genocide Archive of Rwanda, we commissioned the translation of these interviews into English. We used a rigorous translation process: verbatim translation into written Kinyarwanda, then translation into English by local translators, and back translation back into Kinyarwanda. At every stage, accuracy and discrepancies were checked by two translators and we made every effort to remain faithful to the original texts. All the interviewees had signed formal consent forms prior to the interview, in which they agreed for their interview to be stored online by the Genocide Archive of Rwanda and accessed by third parties such as educators and researchers. This has inevitable implications for the content of the testimonies, which are discussed below. For this study, 25 testimonies were analysed. This was the complete number of testimonies the project had translated into English at the time.

The open questions and semi-structured format allow individuals to express their stories in their own words, allowing them to tell their stories in a way that will be restorative for them.⁷ In turn, these narratives can provide structures of meaning that allow a person to understand both her/his role and the wider social or cultural plot of which s/he is a part.⁸ Cruz and Essen also demonstrate that the story format aids knowledge and growth in awareness, which in turn equips people to rebuild their lives.⁹ Through our project, we seek to give individual Rwandans the opportunity to express their own stories to a wide readership by transcribing the video testimonies and translating them into English. Attention to accurate and careful translation allows Rwandans to be heard in their own words, and follows Lala, McGarty and Thomas who emphasise the importance of a sense of ownership when sharing stories with the international community.¹⁰

⁷ P. Blackburn, 'Speaking the unspeakable: bearing witness to the stories of political violence, war and terror', *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 3/4 (2005), p. 98.

⁸ R. Neimeyer and A. Stewart, 'Trauma, healing and the narrative emplotment of loss', *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 77, 6 (1996), p 361.

⁹ F. G. Cruz and L Essen, *Adult survivors of childhood emotional, physical, and sexual abuse: Dynamics and treatment* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1994).

¹⁰ G. Lala, C. McGarty and E.F. Thomas, 'Messages of Hope: Using positive stories of survival to assist recovery in Rwanda', *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 2, 1 (2014), pp. 450-468.

In individual testimonies, researchers on our project have found evidence of post-traumatic growth, which is a framework for reading the kinds of positive adjustment and benefit finding individuals can experience after suffering.¹¹ It is a particular kind of growth yielded from suffering, which emerges in the development of new goals, or a clearer focus on one's purpose or spirituality, for example. Post-traumatic growth can be described as a dynamic process of rebuilding life-ability that occurs after psychosocial or spiritual coping (such as cognitive reframing) and leads to an increase in psychological wellbeing.¹² Post-traumatic growth does not deny the presence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or other negative effects of trauma. Rather it acknowledges the presence of positive changes that individuals may experience *despite* the pain, loss, and distress they have endured. The construct can be broadly defined as the degree to which an individual believes he or she has grown and developed as a person as a result of struggling with trauma or crisis.¹³ This is one element of personality growth within broader psychological adjustment, and implies an ability to go beyond an original level of psychosocial functioning.¹⁴ The Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), which comes in the form of a therapeutic questionnaire, assesses positive outcomes in reports from people who have experienced traumatic events, and these outcomes tend to be grouped in the following domains: new possibilities, spiritual change, the ability to relate to others, an increase in personal strength, and an enhanced appreciation of life.¹⁵ For this study, the PTGI has been used as an interpretative guide for

¹¹ L. E. R. Blackie, A. M. Roepke, N. Hitchcott and S. Joseph, 'Can people experience post-traumatic growth after committing violent acts?', *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 22, 4 (2016), pp. 409-412, <<https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/handle/10023/9506>> [accessed 4 April 2018].

¹² Walker-Williams, 'The Prevalence of Coping Behaviour, Posttraumatic Growth and Psychological Well-Being in Women who Experienced Childhood Sexual Abuse', *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 22, 4 (2012) pp. 617-622.

¹³ R. Tedeschi and L. Calhoun, 'The Post-traumatic growth inventory: Measuring the positive legacy of trauma', *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 9 (1996).

¹⁴ L.E.R. Blackie, E. Jayawickreme, N. Hitchcott and S. Joseph, 'Distinguishing Post-Traumatic Growth from Psychological Adjustment among Rwandan Genocide Survivors', in *Varieties of Virtue Ethics*, ed. by David Carr, James Arthur and Kristján Kristjánsson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 279 - 317 and V. O'Leary, 'Strength in the face of adversity: Individual and Social thriving', *Journal of Social Issues*, 54, 4 (1998), pp. 425-446.

¹⁵ See appendix A. The PTGI is a 21 item measure. Each item (e.g., 'My priorities about what is important in life', 'An appreciation for the value of my own life', 'I developed new interests') is rated on a six-point scale ranging from 0 (*I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis*) to 5 (*I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis*) so that scores on the total scale have a potential range of 0 to 105, with higher scores indicating greater levels of growth. The PTGI can be used to yield a total score and five subscale scores of Relating to Others (7 items), New

thematic saliency analysis of a corpus of testimonies. The interview methodology for the testimonies in question did not draw on the PTGI, or on post-traumatic growth. In contexts of counselling and therapy, the PTGI is designed to serve alongside other therapeutic tools as a way to explore shifts and areas of growth which might not emerge as readily as other themes in therapeutic discussions.

In our project, we draw out and compare different experiences of psychological and social adjustment, using a framework of post-traumatic growth to carry out our analysis. This allows us not only to compare adjustment in survivors and perpetrators, but also to provide a rare focus on forward-looking change and growth, where health and humanities research on post-genocide Rwanda might usually be dominated by studies on the negative effects of trauma. It looks beyond the 'traditional spotlight of posttraumatic stress and psychological distress' and provides important insight into how people recover, within a wide range of adaptive mechanisms.¹⁶ Healthy coping, and the expression of positive emotions following trauma, has not received adequate scholarly attention.¹⁷ Where research on post-traumatic adaptation tends to be skewed away from thriving and resilience, Wilson concludes it is more important to study healthy survivors of trauma because 'by understanding the strong, resilient, self-transcendent survivor of extreme life-adversity, we can learn how it is that they found the pathway to healing, recovery, resilience, and the actualization of their innate human potentials'.¹⁸ I do not claim here that interviewees self-identify as 'strong, resilient, [or] self-transcendent', but themes of post-traumatic growth are evident in many testimonies. Research in this vein enriches the Rwandan context by shedding light on the under-examined area of positive growth in individuals, but the model must be adapted in light of Rwandan contextual influences.

Possibilities (5 items), Personal Strength (4 items), Spiritual Change (2 items), and Appreciation of Life (3 items).

¹⁶ S. Joseph, H. Stockton, N. Hunt, J. Maltby, A. M. Wood, and S. Regel, 'The Psychological Well-Being Post-Traumatic Changes Questionnaire (PWB-PTCQ): Reliability and Validity', *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 4 (2012), pp. 420-428.

¹⁷ G. A. Bonanno, 'Loss, trauma, and human resilience: have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive events?', *The American Psychologist*, 59, 1 (2004), p. 24.

¹⁸ John Wilson, *The posttraumatic self: Restoring meaning and wholeness to personality* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 2.

We need to ask, as scholars have done for alternative cultural settings, how best to adapt the existing Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory for a Rwandan context.¹⁹ Given salient themes which emerge in the archive testimonies, how does the framework need to be mediated to be most relevant and most helpful? How do individuals express changes they experience, and how can we best articulate these changes in Rwandan terms?

Influence of context

The framework of post-traumatic growth provides a helpful lens for examining changes in personal strength, relating to others, new opportunities, spiritual growth, and appreciation of life. This five-part structure has been established through factor analysis whereby these domains were shown to correlate strongly alongside one another.²⁰ Yet this structure was originally established on the basis of data collected from undergraduate students in North America, and the post-traumatic growth inventory has not been adapted for sub-Saharan African contexts, apart from one project in South Africa.²¹

One thing that the archive testimonies and narrative approaches to trauma bring to light is that context plays a critical role in influencing the narratives of individuals, families and communities, 'that is, our narratives are dialogical and co-created'.²² We see in the testimonies indications of the ways in which cultural, linguistic, and socio-political norms and expectations influence narrative. While it is true that humans have inherent potential for developing positive character traits and virtues and overcoming adversity to develop beyond their previous level of functioning, that inherent capacity will emerge in a range of culturally determined ways depending on specific contexts:²³

Culture plays a major role in many aspects of the struggle with traumatic events, including what is perceived as stressful, which stressful life events are likely to

¹⁹ T. Weiss and R. Berger, *Posttraumatic Growth and Culturally Competent Practice: Lessons Learned from Around the Globe* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2010).

²⁰ Y. Longo, I. Cayne and S. Joseph, 'The scales of general well-being', *Personality and Individual Differences*, 109 (2017), pp. 148-159.

²¹ Walker-Williams, p. 618.

²² Harms, p. 109.

²³ Linley, Andrews and Joseph, 'Confirmatory factor analysis of the posttraumatic growth inventory', *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 12 (2004), pp. 321-332.

befall individuals and how they cope with them, as well as how one is transformed by the struggle.²⁴

The structure of well-being constructs has been shown to vary across cultures, so tools need to be modified to account for culture- and language - specific influences on understanding and expressing growth.²⁵ Evidently, it is normal in processes of recovery to experience optimal functioning in some areas but not others. On an individual level, there will always be variation in results using the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory. Of interest here is which areas emerge across a number of participants from the same culture, how these are distinct from those that emerge in other cultural contexts, and why.

Since scholarship on post-traumatic growth is still in its infancy, an important next step is to contextualise and adapt its related tools for use in specific cultural contexts.²⁶ Weiss and Berger gather a number of studies aiming to do this (2010), and explicitly aim to overcome a major obstacle faced by researchers: the tendency to decontextualise stress and coping and ignore cultural milieu, in spite of it being recognised as a critical factor.²⁷ They recommend that future research examine post-traumatic growth in additional religious and cultural contexts, in order to develop a pool of best practices for enhancing growth tailored to specific cultural backgrounds, while continuing to critically appraise its applicability to a specific client situation.²⁸ Attention must be paid to proximate influences such as the way people respond to major stressors, with 'idioms of trauma, distress, coping and growth', and the norms and rules surrounding this, along with distal influences such as broad, pervasive narratives around individualism and collectivism, for example. All of these influence the kinds of growth which are experienced and reported.²⁹

In the case of other models, such as Wilson's 12 Principles of Self-Transformation in the Posttraumatic Self (2007), moderating the model *a posteriori* to fit a particular cultural context is not necessary, since it has already been constituted from research in a variety of

²⁴ Weiss and Berger, p. 189.

²⁵ Longo, Cayne and Joseph, p. 157.

²⁶ Weiss and Berger, p. 189.

²⁷ M. Waller, 'Resilience in ecosystemic context: Evolution of the concept', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 71 (2001), pp. 290-297.

²⁸ Weiss and Berger, p. 192.

²⁹ IBID, pp. 3 - 4.

contexts (World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Bosnia, Croatia, Persian Gulf).³⁰ However, this is not the case with the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory. The existing questionnaire groups questions within the five aforementioned domains, though the questions are usually mixed up so that participants are not aware of these categories. Based on thematic saliency analysis of the archive testimonies, a number of the PTGI questions do not seem relevant in the Rwandan context: Q9 (*I am more willing to express my emotions*), Q12 (*I am better able to accept the way things worked out*), Q5 (*I have a better understanding of spiritual matters*), and Q1 (*I changed my priorities about what is important in life*). Although learning, in general, is a prevalent theme, there are no comments about emotional expression or spiritual understanding, and very little on acceptance and priorities.

Additionally, from the sample of 25 testimonies analysed, a number of relevant themes emerge which do not feature in the existing inventory. The theme of forgiveness is widespread, as is experiencing a change in opinion (*I thought x and now I think y*) or significant learning or training, which is tied to a new sense of purpose and direction, and in many cases a shift out of a past coloured by 'false history'. In terms of relating to others, specific forms of relating to neighbours are mentioned which carry particular cultural significance, such as intermarrying and giving cows. These could arguably be counted within some of the existing categories, but their prevalence suggests they could feature more explicitly in their own right.

Finally, it emerges that the 5 part structure of the inventory is inadequately nuanced for Rwanda post-genocide context, in the way it places 'relating to others' as separate from other factors. Most frequently in individuals' testimonies, other changes which are mentioned come in the context of relationships with others. Development is described as a group process, strength follows reconciliation, and people talk more about having 'a greater sense of closeness with others' than any other feature on the inventory. It is vital that as scholars from a range of backgrounds, we gauge these experiences of growth without imposing frameworks which are inappropriately biased towards individualism, and that we account for the traditionally and socio-politically driven communal nature of Rwandan culture.

³⁰ John Wilson, 'The Lens of Culture: Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives in the Assessment of Psychological Trauma and PTSD', in *Cross-Cultural Assessment of Psychological Trauma and PTSD*, ed. by John Wilson and Catherine So-Kum Tang (New York: Springer, 2007), pp. 3 - 30.

Adapted versions of this inventory have created a modified structure based on factor analysis.³¹ Basing the following suggestions rather on thematic saliency analysis, I seek to bring a multidimensional approach to assessing which areas of this inventory are most relevant and common in individual Rwandan stories. This is to explore connections between inner and outer worlds as regards the expression of wellness and growth, in other words, what contextual influences shape the articulation of growth by individuals in Rwanda, and which terms are subsequently most appropriate for describing and assessing that growth. I turn now to explore three related areas: community, language, and narratives of influence.

Based on this thematic analysis and common themes found in the testimonies, three areas are particularly striking which influence the semantics of growth for individuals in Rwanda. The first is the role and importance given to community and togetherness; the second is Kinyarwanda as the language of expression; and the third is a number of specific narratives of influence.

Community

In Rwanda, the capacity for positive adaptation in the face of adversity seems to be demonstrated extensively (and deliberately practised) in groups. In the testimonies, description of group initiatives and activities emerges more frequently than independent pursuits. And because individuals' testimonies often concern their families' past, their description of growth will tend to be given in relation to family or wider community. This is particularly evident in testimonies given by participants in unity and reconciliation groups, which are organised group meetings set up to encourage reconciliation after the destruction and divisiveness of the genocide. In Rwanda government and grassroots initiatives to strengthen unity and reconciliation have seen huge success. Shared narratives which build connection and support are a vital part of this since they enable communities to make sense of their circumstances and decide on next steps.³² In studies of post-traumatic growth in Israel, Spain and Japan, a stronger sense of connectedness to the community was shown to be important for post-traumatic growth.³³

³¹ Weiss and Berger, p. 36.

³² E. Chamlee-Wright and V. H. Storr, 'Social capital as collective narratives and post-disaster community recovery', *Sociological Review*, 59, 2 (2011), p. 270.

³³ Weiss and Berger, p. 190.

Deepened connectedness with others and a renewed understanding of the value of a relationship with others is a well-documented element of post-traumatic growth.³⁴ Human connectedness, acknowledgement and recognition, and relational warmth play key roles in promoting recovery and resilience, as well as secure attachments and the availability of role models.³⁵ Cross-cultural analysis has found communitarianism to be a greater or lesser influence on post-traumatic growth, and there this can manifest in social support and particular times (and contribute to healthy coping behaviour, building trust, acceptance, and help), it can also be an intrinsic feature of cultural expectations, affecting how individuals behave:³⁶

Independent individuals define themselves by how they differ from others, their uniqueness, and their personal accomplishments; they prefer individual action and strive to meet personal goals. Interdependent individuals focus on their relationships with others; they prefer collective action and try not to stand out from the crowd, seeking harmony with others and being sensitive to their potential impact on them.³⁷

This being so, the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory should be adapted to reflect the importance of community and togetherness in Rwanda. Bagilishya affirms that 'the mental health and well-being of Rwandans cannot be isolated from that of their families and those who surround them'.³⁸ This could mean a restructuring of the inventory, so that 'relating to others' is not seen as separate from the other four domains. Following research among Palestinian people, Weiss and Berger concluded that 'in more collectivistic societies, the borders between social experiences, spiritual considerations, and self-realization are more blurred', which can be reflected in the inventory structure.³⁹ To reflect sufficiently the

³⁴ C. S. Carver, 'Resilience and thriving: Issues, models, and linkages', *Journal of Social Issues*, 54 (1998), pp. 245–266 and K. Fromm, M. A. Andrykowski and J. Hunt, 'Positive and negative psychological sequelae of bone marrow transplantation: Implications for quality of life assessment', *Journal of Behavioural Medicine*, 19 (1996), pp. 221–240.

³⁵ Harms, p. 19.

³⁶ Walker-Williams, p. 262.

³⁷ Weiss and Berger, p.9.

³⁸ D. Bagilishya, 'Mourning and Recovery from Trauma: In Rwanda, Tears Flow Within', *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 37, (3 (2000)), p 352.

³⁹ Weiss and Berger, p. 36.

communitarian culture and reconciliation-driven social context of Rwanda, the structure could be re-worked to have 'relating to others' as one overarching domain connected to all the others.

Alternatively, the whole questionnaire could be conducted in relation to individuals' experience of their family, work, and other relationships, as in a systemic approach to therapy, which has the benefit of 'promoting connectedness'.⁴⁰ Or, the questionnaire could be used in group settings. Sociotherapy has been used widely in Rwanda since the genocide and has seen great success both in terms of individual healing and societal cohesion.⁴¹ In general, 'the therapeutic qualities of people coming together to share experiences, to remember collectively and to form a continuing story of what has occurred have been well noted', though the importance of choice, agency, and confidentiality must be noted.⁴² Themes of growth have been found in our corpus of testimonies even though questions did not directly address those themes. Group interventions can 'help generate alternative narratives that empower people to examine their dominant story and develop a version conducive to posttraumatic growth'.⁴³ Indeed, researchers have found that growth narratives facilitate personality development and resilience.⁴⁴ It is vital that therapeutic interventions remain balanced, drawing attention to neglected areas of focus in the client's life but not engendering an unhelpful bias towards positive growth either. In this vein, a tool like the Psychological Well-Being: Post-Traumatic Change Questionnaire (PWB-PTCQ) could be useful, since it incorporates positive and negative changes.⁴⁵ Bauer et al have found evidence of growth themes in narratives outside of therapeutic interventions, where participants narrate personal and interpersonal growth experiences as key elements of their autobiographical

⁴⁰ S. Hobfall, N. Ennis and J. Kay, 'Loss, resources and resiliency in close interpersonal relationships', in *Loss and trauma: General and close relationship perspectives*, ed. by J. Harvey and E Miller (Philadelphia: Brunner-Routledge, 2000), pp. 267-285.

⁴¹ *NAR (Never Again Rwanda) and Interpeace, Societal Healing in Rwanda: Mapping of Actors and Approaches* (2015), p. 26.

⁴² Harms, p. 120.

⁴³ R. Papadopoulos, 'Storied community as secure base', *The British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 15 (1999), pp. 322 - 332.

⁴⁴ J. Bauer and S. Park, 'Growth is not just for the young: growth narratives, eudaimonic resilience, and the aging self', in *New Frontiers in Resilient Aging: Life-Strengths and Well-Being in Late Life*, ed. by S. Prem and L. Corey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 60-89.

⁴⁵ S. Joseph, 'The Psychological Well-Being Post-Traumatic Changes Questionnaire'.

memories.⁴⁶ Building on this, the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory could be used as a guide in group discussions, and potentially in unity and reconciliation groups too, rather than a questionnaire for individuals in therapy only. This would also enable reports of post-traumatic growth to be sought from third-party observers, who may be more readily vocal than individuals, in a culture where putting oneself at the centre of attention is not the norm.⁴⁷ These possible therapeutic interventions are being explored within our project in dialogue with a number of psychologists and therapists working in Rwanda.

Language

By transcribing video testimonies conducted in Kinyarwanda and then translating them into English, we have noted a significant difference between the two languages, which affect the articulation of individual growth. Related to the aforementioned emphasis on community, pronoun indicators of 'I' and 'me' emerge less often than 'we' and 'us'. Second, individual growth and change is articulated in less direct and perhaps more hesitant ways than one would expect in a Euro-American context. In a Japanese context, individuals were found to experience growth in similar patterns to Europeans and Americans, but did not 'spontaneously report the changes' in the same way.⁴⁸ This would presumably differ in a more directed questionnaire, but the ways growth is expressed indirectly are worth noting. Growth and change are described via reports of pursuing new opportunities, or experiences of learning. Often answers are given at length and feature repetition of the same phrases or information. In addition, the use of proverbs emerges as a relatively common way of describing an approach to a situation (eg. through working together) or a conclusion about a commonly held belief (for instance about unity). Bagilishya describes proverbs as 'one strategy frequently used in Rwandan tradition to symbolize intense distress, and introduce a distance between experience and action, both at the social level and at the level of cognition'.⁴⁹ In Kinyarwanda, as well as meaning proverb or maxim, the word *umugani* also

⁴⁶ J. Bauer, D. McAdams and A. Sakaeda, 'Interpreting the Good Life: Growth Memories in the Lives of Mature, Happy People', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88, 1 (2005), pp. 203-217.

⁴⁷ Weiss and Berger, p. 140. Using third-party observers also addresses the limitations of self-reporting as subjective perception of growth.

⁴⁸ Weiss and Berger, p. 132.

⁴⁹ Bagilishya, p. 341.

signifies tale, story, or parable, highlighting the value of this mode of communication for restoring a sense of cohesion through narrative as well as expressing what a person has witnessed or has experienced emotionally.⁵⁰ Further, these traditional modes of expression build empathy by creating a sense of common ground, in turn facilitating further sharing, and they strengthen intergenerational links when wisdom is passed on from elders.⁵¹ Lastly, there are terms in Kinyarwanda which hold specific nuance that cannot be expressed in a scalar response to a closed question. For instance, the word *mudaheranwa*, which describes people who show themselves to be resilient and refuse to be left behind. Or for example, 'Nadadiye!' which is a response given to a greeting, based on the verb *kudadira* (to bundle firewood). This is used as an expression of strength and wellness between young people within the AERG community (Association of Student Survivors of the Genocide).

Adapting the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory for use in Kinyarwanda has already begun with a translation of the existing list of features from English into Kinyarwanda. However, given what I have outlined here, a more open format may be preferable. Such a format could account for cultural differences not only in the form of post-traumatic growth but in the readiness to articulate it.⁵² This could take the form of a semi-structured interview which uses the five domains as guidance for questions, or uses a life story model approach.⁵³ In its current form, the inventory is used by participants who mark a number on a scale for each question. An adapted questionnaire could feature more open questions to give space for participants to share proverbs or stories, cultural tools which more naturally facilitate their expression of growth and change. This is particularly important given that articulating growth and expressing emotion is so language-specific, as the above examples demonstrate. This also shifts attention away from quantitative assessment in the inventory, towards more qualitative assessment of well-being and change, whilst allowing people to draw on important cultural resources.

⁵⁰ IBID, p. 342.

⁵¹ IBID, p. 350.

⁵² Weiss and Berger, p. 140.

⁵³ D. McAdams, 'Personal narratives and the life story: Theory and research', in *Handbook of personality: Theory and research*, ed. by Oliver, Robins and Pervin (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), pp. 241-261.

Narratives of influence

In any context, complex narratives and influences are always at play which impacts external and internal worlds. The discourses which are circulated in the public sphere directly shape how growth is understood and valued in Rwanda. To return to the theme of change, since 1994, Rwanda as a country has changed in a myriad of ways. All kinds of processes of growth are occurring in Rwanda, as they have been over the past 23 years, and these are celebrated in the RPF government's discourse of national success. The Global Development Institute recently commented that 'Rwanda's desire to hit targets is almost pathological',⁵⁴ and the country has certainly drawn attention for its rapid growth in business, entrepreneurship, and trade.⁵⁵ Economically, the market is growing at a rate of 7% per annum, start-ups and technology companies have seen huge expansion, and creative arts are on the rise through a number of initiatives including the Ubumuntu festival and Spoken Word Rwanda.⁵⁶ The Rwandan government celebrates and encourages this wider national growth, and according to many people plays an overwhelmingly positive role in Rwandan security, development and political life.⁵⁷ Weiss and Berger note that post-traumatic growth can be an integral part of national narratives.⁵⁸ This will inevitably affect what people feel able to express, influencing individuals' sense of freedom to deviate from official discourses and shaping what national values are to be aspired to. In the testimonies, appreciation of life is at points voiced as gratitude to the Rwandan government for their ongoing work towards unity and reconciliation. The prevalence of these comments could be illustrative of the suspicion and/or fear which can accompany accounts of the past which stray from the official narrative. More broadly, government policies have implications for individuals' post-genocide identities and social interactions, and directly and indirectly affect how individuals are

⁵⁴ <https://twitter.com/GlobalDevInst/status/861581112434446336>.

⁵⁵ S. Allison, 'Like it or not, Rwanda is Africa's future', *Mail and Guardian*, 7th July 2017 <<https://mg.co.za/article/2017-07-07-00-like-it-or-not-rwanda-is-africas-future>> [accessed 9 February 2018].

⁵⁶ *The World Bank In Rwanda*, 7 March 2017 <<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/rwanda/overview>> [accessed 9 February 2018].

⁵⁷ D. Beswick, 'Managing Dissent in a Post-genocide Environment: The Challenge of Political Space in Rwanda', *Development and Change*, 41, 2 (2010), pp. 225-251.

⁵⁸ Weiss and Berger, p. 4.

positioned both socially and politically.⁵⁹ Drawing on positioning theory, Blackie and Hitchcott, explore these implications in lights of the Rwandan government's *Ndi Umunyarwanda* programme.⁶⁰ In terms of narratives, there is the danger, in the government's pervasive emphasis on unity and success, that individual differences become diluted. Critics have highlighted the lack of ambiguity in the government's genocide and post-genocide narratives, arguing that generalisations in these discourses do more to exclude and divide than to bring Rwandan people together.⁶¹

Pervasive narratives of national growth must be taken into account when contextualising individuals' testimonies, as well as the influential narratives which surround remembrance in Rwanda. Many cultural practices and rituals are formally and informally enacted following traumas and disasters, and in Rwanda the formal enactment of remembrance on a yearly basis is part of this.⁶² An annual programme of events takes place within a period of remembrance known as Kwibuka (the Kinyarwanda word for 'remember'). The season of commemoration begins on the 7th of April each year and lasts until the 4th of July, acknowledging the duration of the genocide in 1994. During this period, community groups gather to listen to talks and to share stories, and there are large scale commemorative events where hundreds gather. The exceptional nature of Rwanda's history and the extreme brutality of the genocide have implications for remembrance which go beyond the scope of this article. There is evidence that participation in communal acts in the aftermath of a disaster may build hope, trust, and solidarity, but participation in public acts of commemoration has also led to further traumatic episodes for some people.⁶³ There is

⁵⁹ R. Harré and F. Moghaddam, 'Introduction: The Self and Others in Traditional Psychology and in Positioning Theory,' in *The Self and Others: Positioning Individuals and Groups in Personal, Political, and Cultural Contexts*, ed. by R. Harré and F. Moghaddam (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2003), pp. 1-11.

⁶⁰ L. E. R. Blackie and N. Hitchcott, "'I am Rwandan': Unity and Reconciliation in Post-Genocide Rwanda', *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*, (2017) (forthcoming).

⁶¹ Jennie E. Burnet, *Genocide Lives In Us: Women, Memory, and Silence in Rwanda* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2012) and County Reports, 2014.

⁶² Harms, p. 20.

⁶³ S. Bloom, 'By the crowd they have been broken, by the crowd they shall be healed: The social transformation of trauma', in *The LEA series in personality and clinical psychology. Posttraumatic growth: Positive changes in the aftermath of crisis*, ed. by R. G. Tedeschi, C. L. Park and L. G. Calhoun (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998), pp. 179 - 213; R. Tedeschi, 'Violence transformed: Post-traumatic growth in survivors and their societies', *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 4, 3, (1999), pp. 319-341 and R. Sabah, 'Lorsque vous connaissez vos bourreaux. Rencontre avec Naasson Munyandamutsa, psychiatre rwandais', *Journal Humanité* (2004), <<https://www.humanite.fr/node/310814>> [accessed 9 February 2018].

equally a danger of engagement with official remembrance practices happening at the expense of more complex individual articulations of post-traumatic adaptation. Private spaces such as meetings with therapists and counsellors could serve as contexts for exploring these complexities. The complexity of national memorial practices and constructing comprehensive narratives of the past has been addressed by other scholars.⁶⁴

Other narratives of influence include religious narratives, which should also be taken into account when analysing post-traumatic growth.⁶⁵ The prevalence of the national growth story highlights the need for encouraging individuals to articulate their own experiences of growth and/or lack thereof, within a model which allows for individual specificity. The interviewees whose testimonies were gathered by the Genocide Archive of Rwanda were aware their testimonies would be accessible to scholars and researchers, thus were undoubtedly conditioned by that awareness, and the concomitant conditions of Rwanda's political climate. The space of a private therapy session should provide conditions of confidentiality and trust which allow individuals to speak freely, and will arguably allow for comprehensive expression of both positive and negative change experienced in Rwanda. The PTGI tool provides a potentially helpful way of prompting individuals to speak about themselves when they might not readily do so otherwise, but it can also invite reflections on individuals' socio-political context. Lastly, since in Rwanda practices of commemoration have such an important role and are so strongly government-led, there is a danger that individual stories become overshadowed or side-lined. Opportunities for individuals to express their own stories and to explore future-oriented perspectives on life are to be encouraged. It is important for people to tell their stories in ways which will be restorative for them.⁶⁶ The life story model and a focus on post-traumatic growth involve individuals reflecting on how they have moved through different stages of life and giving structure and organisation to a range of experiences, and this can bring a sense of resolution which benefits individuals.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ See: L. Major, 'Unearthing, untangling and re-articulating genocide corpses in Rwanda', *Critical African Studies*, 7, 2 (2015), pp. 164-181; S. Guyer, 'Rwanda's Bones', *boundary*, 2, 36 (2009), pp. 155-175 and N. P. Eltringham, *Discourse and Genocide: the contest for 'reality' in post-genocide Rwanda* (Thesis: University of London, 2001).

⁶⁵ A. Shaw, S. Joseph and A. Linley, 'Religion, spirituality, and posttraumatic growth: a systematic review', *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, 8, 1 (2005), pp. 1-11.

⁶⁶ P. Blackburn, 'Speaking the unspeakable: bearing witness to the stories of political violence, war and terror', *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 3, 4 (2005), pp. 97-105.

⁶⁷ J. Pennebaker, 'Writing about emotional experiences as a therapeutic process', *Psychological Science*, 8, 3 (1997), pp. 162-166.

Conclusion

In different cultures, growth may include different aspects. Although the possibility of growth from the struggle with adversity is universal, how this growth is experienced and articulated will vary from culture to culture.⁶⁸ This article has explored how cultural and socio-political context affects Rwandans' articulation of growth, given the specific experience of mass violence and trauma in Rwanda, and the ways that is remembered at a national level. Thematic analysis of archive testimonies has shown that the semantics and politics of expressing individual psychological growth are influenced on a number of levels. This has a series of implications for therapeutic work in Rwanda, and for the adaptation of existing models of measuring growth and change, such as the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory.

The contextual correlates of community, language, and narratives of influence must be considered when adapting tools for therapeutic use in Rwanda. We must pay attention to areas of growth specific to post-genocide Rwanda, which may be absent from existing questionnaires, as well as understanding how dominant public stories will affect individuals' readiness to express their own experiences. The existing PGTI could be re-structured, as other adapted versions of this inventory have come up with a modified factor structure. Based on data from refugees of the Bosnian war only three factors were found: changes in self, philosophy of life, and relating to others.⁶⁹ Different cultural assessments have resulted in restructuring the inventory to feature certain factors in different domains, for example in Turkey 'compassion for others' was repositioned in the spiritual growth domain.⁷⁰ So it is worth asking for Rwanda whether, for example, forgiveness would feature in that domain or in 'relating to others'. What is more, domains of growth will be linked to types of coping employed by individuals and valued in their environment.⁷¹ It would, therefore, be interesting to trace whether individuals who participate in sociotherapy report more growth in relating to others, and individuals who attend church services report more spiritual growth.

No model should be used in isolation. A number of self-report measures of growth after adversity have been developed, but they must be adapted according to different

⁶⁸ Weiss and Berger, p. 191.

⁶⁹ Weiss and Berger, p. 70.

⁷⁰ IBID, p. 56.

⁷¹ IBID, p. 58.

cultural contexts. The PWB-PTCQ (see Appendix B) can be utilised in clinical settings to complement more traditional measures of symptom severity and explore changes in narrative themes and directions which might not otherwise be obvious in therapeutic conversations. Unlike the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory, it allows for positive and negative expression of change (Joseph et al 2012). Other models include the Perceived Benefit Scales (McMillen and Fisher 1998), Changes in Outlook Questionnaire (Joseph, Williams and Yule 1993), Stress-Related Growth Scale (Park, Cohen and Murch 1996) and the Thriving Scale (Abraido-Lanza et al 1998), though these do not focus on post-traumatic growth as such. Alternative models offering a more open format would allow individuals to speak about growth in their own terms. Analysis of testimonies underlines the restorative potential of storytelling, and a narrative approach (rather than a questionnaire) may thus be more helpful, as well as more appropriate and culturally-sensitive given traditional modes of expression in Rwanda. Structured storytelling exercises, or a life story model approach are avenues worth exploring for the adaptation of the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory, as well as options for reflecting on both positive and negative change. These considerations will be taken forward in a workshop with therapists, clinical psychologists, and counsellors in Kigali in March 2018. The aim is to assess the most helpful elements of the PTGI and to formulate a tool which will be relevant and usable for therapeutic work in Rwanda. The identification of coping strategies used by survivors may contribute to a better understanding of factors that facilitate adaptive functioning, and for this reason post-traumatic growth should be integrated into therapeutic interventions in the aftermath of trauma.⁷² Processes which facilitate living and functioning well in the aftermath of trauma need to be understood better.⁷³ The interaction and mutual influence of relational, social, cultural, and political elements in any given context must be taken into account as background to these processes. Harms urges, 'so fundamental is culture to our interpretation and experience of the world that it needs to take a much stronger central role in understandings of trauma and resilience'.⁷⁴ It is also an ethical imperative for clinicians and researchers to be sensitive to

⁷² Weiss and Berger, p. 266.

⁷³ G. A. Bonanno and A. D. Mancini, 'Beyond resilience and PTSD: Mapping the heterogeneity of responses to potential trauma', *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 4, 1 (2012), pp. 77.

⁷⁴ Harms, p. 174.

cultural elements in their work.⁷⁵ In order for researchers, clinicians, and clients to better understand a range of responses to trauma in Rwanda, a clear and contextually-appropriate / culturally-sensitive tool is required. It is hoped that this article and the project work of 'Rwandan Stories of Change' will provide some first steps in that direction.

⁷⁵ R. Tedeschi and L. Calhoun, *Posttraumatic Growth in Clinical Practice* (London: Routledge, 2013).

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Appendix A

https://www.emdrhap.org/content/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/VIII-B_Post-Traumatic-Growth-Inventory.pdf

Post Traumatic Growth Inventory

Client Name: _____ Today's Date: _____

Indicate for each of the statements below the degree to which this change occurred in your life as a result of the crisis/disaster, using the following scale.

0 = I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis.

1 = I experienced this change to a very small degree as a result of my crisis.

2 = I experienced this change to a small degree as a result of my crisis.

3 = I experienced this change to a moderate degree as a result of my crisis.

4 = I experienced this change to a great degree as a result of my crisis.

5 = I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis.

Possible Areas of Growth	0	1	2	3	4	5
1. I changed my priorities about what is important in life.						
2. I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life.						
3. I developed new interests.						
4. I have a greater feeling of self-reliance.						
5. I have a better understanding of spiritual matters.						
6. I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble.						
7. I established a new path for my life.						
8. I have a greater sense of closeness with others.						
9. I am more willing to express my emotions.						
10. I know better that I can handle difficulties.						
11. I am able to do better things with my life.						
12. I am better able to accept the way things work out.						
13. I can better appreciate each day.						
14. New opportunities are available which wouldn't have been otherwise.						
15. I have more compassion for others.						
16. I put more effort into my relationships.						
17. I am more likely to try to change things which need changing.						
18. I have a stronger religious faith.						
19. I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was.						
20. I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are.						
21. I better accept needing others.						

Appendix B

Psychological Well-Being: Post-Traumatic Change Questionnaire (PWB-PTCQ)

Think about how you feel about yourself at the present time. Please read each of the following statements and rate how you have changed as a result of the trauma.

5 = Much more so now

4 = A bit more so now

3 = I feel the same about this as before

2 = A bit less so now

1 = Much less so now

___ 1. I like myself.

___ 2. I have confidence in my opinions.

___ 3. I have a sense of purpose in life.

___ 4. I have strong and close relationships in my life.

___ 5. I feel I am in control of my life.

___ 6. I am open to new experiences that challenge me.

___ 7. I accept who I am, with both my strengths and limitations.

___ 8. I don't worry what other people think of me.

___ 9. My life has meaning.

___ 10. I am a compassionate and giving person.

___ 11. I handle my responsibilities in life well.

___ 12. I am always seeking to learn about myself.

___ 13. I respect myself.

___ 14. I know what is important to me and will stand my ground, even if others disagree.

___ 15. I feel that my life is worthwhile and that I play a valuable role in things.

___ 16. I am grateful to have people in my life who care for me.

___ 17. I am able to cope with what life throws at me.

___ 18. I am hopeful about my future and look forward to new possibilities.

The Politics of Poetics: Latin American Testimonial Literature and the Casa de las Américas Literary Prize (1970-1975)

Anna Forné

Introduction

Casa de las Américas is a cultural institution founded in 1959 in connection with the Cuban Revolution in order to 'strengthen the bonds between Latin American and Caribbean artists and writers, and distribute their work throughout the length and breadth of the continent and even the world'.² With the mission to disseminate Latin American leftist culture and endorse the new artistic forms envisioned by the revolution, Casa de las Américas set up its own publishing house, research departments and journals. It soon gained prestige among Latin American intellectuals, primarily as a result of its prestigious annual literary prize, which was established the same year the institution was created in order to legitimize revolutionary literary aesthetics. In 1970, testimonial literature was included among the prize categories, alongside the conventional literary genres initially awarded: poetry, short stories, the novel, play scripts and essays. The impact of Casa de las Américas, particularly its journal on the literature in Latin America from the 1960s, is well established.³ However, the influence of its literary prize on the formation and conceptualisation of the genre of testimonial literature is a largely unexplored area despite the general interest in the cultural

² Roberto Fernández Retamar, 'Treinta Años de La Casa de Las Américas', *Estudios Avanzados*, 3.5 (1989), p. 69. All translations belong to the author unless otherwise indicated. Original: 'estrechar los vínculos entre los artistas y escritores latinoamericanos y caribeños, y difundir sus obras a lo largo y ancho del Continente, y aún del mundo'.

³ Carmen Ochando Aymerich, *La memoria en el espejo: aproximación a la escritura testimonial* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1998); Claudia Gilman, 'Casa de Las Américas (1960-1971): Un Esplendor En Dos Tiempos', in *Historia de Los Intelectuales En América Latina. II. Los Avatares de La 'Ciudad Letrada' En El Siglo XX*, ed. by Carlos Altamirano, II (Madrid; Buenos Aires: Katz, 2010), pp. 285-98; Claudia Gilman, *Entre la pluma y el fusil: debates y dilemas del escritor revolucionario en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2012); Nadia Lie, *Transición y transacción: la revista cubana Casa de las Américas, 1960-1976* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996); Juan Carlos Quintero Herencia, *Fulguración Del Espacio: Letras e Imaginario Institucional de La Revolución Cubana (1960-1971)* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo, 2002); Judith A. Weiss, *Casa de Las Américas: An Intellectual Review in the Cuban Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C. : Madrid: Estudios de Hispanófila, 1977).

politics of the period and much theorising on the genre of Latin American testimonial literature in general. According to Victoria García, author of 'Testimonio Literario Latinoamericano: Una Reconsideración Histórica Del Género', the canonical definitions of the genre do not reflect the variety of texts that were defined as testimonial by Casa de las Américas at the time of the genre's institutionalisation. She also points out the absence of an analysis of the texts awarded by Casa de las Américas in the predominant critical accounts:

[T]he definition of the genre established as canonical by the critics [...] does not conform to the diversity of texts that at the moment of its institutionalisation as a genre covered the notion of testimonial literature. Something similar happens to the texts awarded in the category of testimony by Casa de las Américas, whose fundamental participation in the institutionalisation of the genre, as observed by the critics, has not corresponded with an analysis of the works whose canonisation la Casa tried to promote with the prize.⁴

In order to reassess how testimonial literature was conceptualised aesthetically and politically in the early history of its institutionalisation in Latin America, this article examines the metadiscourses surrounding the installation of the prize category 'testimony', focusing on the juries' proceedings from the first quinquennial of the award (1970-1975), which are read in light of the ongoing debates during the sixties and seventies on the relationship between poetics and politics. Furthermore, the winning texts from the first quinquennial of the award will be examined in response to questions arising from the reading of the juries' minutes.

⁴ 'Testimonio Literario Latinoamericano: Una Reconsideración Histórica Del Género', *Exlibris*, 1.1 (2012), pp. 373-74. Original: '[L]a definición del género establecida como canónica por la crítica [...] no se adecua a la diversidad de textos que contemporáneamente a su institucionalización como género recubría la noción de literature testimonial. [...] Algo similar ocurre con los textos premiados en la categoría testimonio de Casa de las Américas, cuya fundamental participación en la institucionalización del género, observada por la crítica, no ha sido el correlato de un análisis de las obras cuya canonización, con las galardones, la Casa buscaba promover.'

Revolutionary Aesthetics

In the first decade of the Cuban Revolution, there was a general congruence between the political and cultural vanguards in Cuba, as in the rest of Latin America. Experimentation in artistic language was appreciated as an integral part of social revolution, so cultural vanguards were, by definition, revolutionary. Consequently, there are numerous examples of significant intellectuals and militants who criticized the idea of social realism as the paradigmatic genre for poetic revolution, promoting instead formal experimentation and aesthetic autonomy.⁵ As Ana Longoni shows in *Vanguardia y revolución* (2014), at the time, the concept of avant-garde was perceived in an anachronistic way, without reference to the conventional division between realism and abstraction. Instead, Longoni points out, the concept was used as an umbrella which comprehended everything to be defended as a position of value.⁶ However, as Claudia Gilman (2012) has shown in her extensive study on the figure of the revolutionary writer in Latin America, the congruence between the artistic and political vanguards only lasted for a decade in revolutionary Cuba. Around 1968, Gilman argues, the tensions between the requirements for communicative efficacy and the conflicting wish for a revolutionary (that is, experimental) aesthetic intensified, as did the opposition between the need to democratise culture and the urge to alter it towards new unconventional forms of expression. At this point, claims Gilman, anti-intellectualism became hegemonic in Cuba, and as a consequence art became political in a way that left no room for formal, avant-garde experiments.⁷

The introduction of a prize category in testimonial literature in 1970 occurred at a time of increasing political intervention in cultural matters in Cuba. It was an important departure from the earlier characteristics of the aesthetic expression of the political ideals of the revolution, which Fidel Castro described in his speeches given at the First Congress of Writers and Artists in Cuba in 1961⁸ as well as in his well-known 'Words to the Intellectuals',⁹

⁵ For example, the debates between Julio Cortázar, Óscar Collazos and Mario Vargas Llosa included in *Literatura en la revolución y revolución en la literatura (polémica)*, (México: Siglo XXI, 1970).

⁶ Ana Longoni, *Vanguardia y revolución: arte e izquierdas en la Argentina de los sesenta-setenta* (Buenos Aires: Ariel, 2014), p. 25.

⁷ Gilman, *Entre la pluma y el fusil*, pp. 335–38.

⁸ 'Discurso Pronunciado Por El Comandante Fidel Castro Ruiz, Primer Ministro Del Gobierno Revolucionario, En La Clausura Del Primer Congreso de Escritores y Artistas Efectuada En El Teatro

presented at the National Library after a series of meetings with Cuban intellectuals in the month of June in 1961. It was believed that the Revolution called for novel literary forms that could capture the specificities of the new political reality, as well as its historical background. However, the opinions on how this was to be achieved diverged, and so did the interpretations of Fidel Castro's famous statement on cultural politics and on intellectual and creative autonomy, which in 1961 initially declared that 'within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing.'¹⁰ A consequence of the changed political landscape at the turn of the decade, the official views on the relationship between poetics and politics moved towards more unilateral and orthodox positions.

By the end of the 1960s, the revolutionary process in Cuba was contained due to contra-revolutionary activities and the American trade sanctions, which caused political and economic difficulties that directly affected the cultural area. The polemics around the imprisonment of the Cuban writer Heberto Padilla in 1971 is often cited as a turning point. In 1968, Padilla was awarded the national poetry prize for a collection entitled *Fuera del Juego* [Out of the Game], which the authorities considered contra-revolutionary. Padilla was subsequently placed under house arrest. In 1971, when the period known as the Grey Quinquennial started – which was characterized by a severe political climate of control and censorship – Padilla was imprisoned. He was later forced to make a public confession before the Writer's Union (UNEAC) acknowledging contra-revolutionary activities, whereupon a group of 62 internationally-renowned intellectuals including Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Susan Sontag and Mario Vargas Llosa, signed a protest letter retracting their support for the Cuban Revolution.

Around the turn of the decade was also when Casa de las Américas was forced to comply with constraints imposed by the political leadership, which meant that the freedom to independently speak about and explore the relationship between literature and revolution was restricted. Comparing Fidel Castro's speech at the First Congress of Writers

'Chaplin' El 22 de Agosto 1961', 1961

<<http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1961/esp/f220861e.html>> [accessed 19 May 2016].

⁹ 'Palabras a Los Intelectuales', 1961

<<http://www.min.cult.cu/loader.php?sec=historia&cont=palabrasalosintelectuales>> [accessed 2 May 2017].

¹⁰ 'Discurso Pronunciado Por El Comandante Fidel Castro Ruiz, Primer Ministro Del Gobierno Revolucionario, En La Clausura Del Primer Congreso de Escritores y Artistas Efectuada En El Teatro 'Chaplin' El 22 de Agosto 1961'. Original: 'dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución; nada'.

and Artists in Cuba in 1961 to the one he gave at the closure of the First National Conference on Education and Culture in 1971 (which was a response to the polemics around the 'Padilla Affair'), there was a radical change concerning artistic freedom. In 1971, the political and educative utility of culture clearly prevails over artistic autonomy and creativity:

Because independently of a more or less technical level of writing, more or less imagination, as revolutionaries we value cultural works according to the values they carry with them for the people. [...] Our valuation is political. There cannot be aesthetic value without human content.¹¹

From this point, the value of an artistic work was, according to the politico-cultural agenda, exclusively understood in terms of its message and its communicative abilities. These same views of the literary text as an ideological manifestation and a socio-political instrument of documentation of the present, motivated the inclusion of testimonial literature among the prize categories of the Casa de la Américas literary award. The criteria for selection in the call for nominations in 1970 highlighted that:

The testimonial books should document, in a direct form, an aspect of the Latin American or Caribbean reality. A direct source is considered to be knowledge of the event by the author, or the collection by him of stories or evidence obtained from the protagonists or ideal witness.¹²

¹¹ Fidel Castro, 'Discurso Pronunciado Por El Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz, Primer Secretario Del Comité Central Del Partido Comunista de Cuba y Primer Ministro Del Gobierno Revolucionario, En La Clausura Del Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura, Efectuado En El Teatro de La Ctc, El 30 de Abril de 1971', 1971<<http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1971/esp/f300471e.html>> [accessed 4 May 2016]. Original: 'Porque independientemente de más o menos nivel técnico para escribir, más o menos imaginación, nosotros como revolucionarios valoramos las obras culturales en función de los valores que entrañen para el pueblo. [...] Nuestra valoración es política. No puede haber valor estético sin contenido humano'.

¹² Quoted in: Carmen Ochando Aymerich, *La memoria en el espejo: aproximación a la escritura testimonial* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1998), p. 32. Original: 'Los libros de testimonio documentarán, de forma directa, un aspecto de la realidad latinoamericana o caribeña. Se entiende por fuente directa el conocimiento de los hechos por el autor, o la recopilación por éste, de relatos o constancias obtenidas de los protagonistas o testigos idóneos'.

Hence, the pragmatic value of literary discourse was of prime consideration when Casa de las Américas in 1970 decided to include testimonial literature as one of the categories of its literary prize.¹³ Consequently, in the first call for nominations in this specific category, documentation, reality and immediacy were essential requirements.¹⁴

A new kind of literature

In 1970, the Uruguayan journalist María Esther Gilio won the Casa de las Américas Prize in the category of testimony with *La guerrilla tupamara* (The Tupamaros Guerrilla).¹⁵ The book is a compilation of reportages previously published in the important leftist Uruguayan weekly magazine *Marcha*, and they were motivated by the need to understand the consequences of the social and economic crisis in Uruguay at the time – a country which, during the first part of the 20th century, was known as ‘America’s Switzerland’. The title of the book refers to the appearance of an urban guerrilla in Uruguay in the 1960s which, according to Gilio, seemed an inexplicable phenomenon to most Latin Americans as well as to most Uruguayan citizens. In the introductory chapter of the book Gilio declares:

The emergence of an armed focus in this country is remarkable, not expected by the left, nor by the right and not explainable by the liberal schemes of the past, translated into phrases such as ‘Uruguay, Switzerland of America’, ‘Uruguay, portrait of a democracy’ [...] However, when the accelerated transformations undergone in the last two decades are analysed carefully, the emergence of the guerrilla group can be explained.¹⁶

¹³ Ángel Rama, ‘Conversación En Torno Al Testimonio’, *Casa de Las Américas*, XXXVI.200 (1995), pp. 122–24 (pp. 122–23).

¹⁴ Ochando Aymerich, p. 32.

¹⁵ María Esther Gilio, *La guerrilla tupamara*. (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1970).

¹⁶ Gilio, p. 11. Original: ‘El hecho de que haya aparecido un foco armado en este país ha resultado insólito, no esperado ni por la izquierda ni por la derecha y no explicable por lo esquemas liberales del pasado, traducidos en frases como «Uruguay, la Suiza de América», «Uruguay, retrato de una democracia» ... Sin embargo, cuando se analizan detenidamente las aceleradas transformaciones sufridas en las dos últimas décadas, resulta explicable la aparición del foco.’

The title of Gilio's book is *The Tupamaros Guerrilla*, referring to the urban guerrilla also known as MLN-T, the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional-Tupamaros (Tupamaros National Liberation Movement), which was active in Uruguay in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the majority of the book consists of articles describing how the Uruguayan state disregarded its duties due to the economic crisis and how this gave rise to an armed guerrilla. It includes features on the precarious living conditions of institutionalized children, inmates, and people with psychiatric disorders, as well as elderly people with a state pension being their only income. Furthermore, Gilio interviews construction workers who have emigrated to Buenos Aires to pursue better living conditions, and the meat workers on strike in 1968 and 1969. After having mapped out the current socio-economic situation in Uruguay in the 1960s does Gilio come to the point with a chapter called, 'What are the Tupamaros to you?' in which she interviews people in the rural zone of Maldonado, close to Montevideo, in order to record their opinions on the latest actions of the urban guerrilla. Only in the final section called, 'We Have Said It Is Enough', is the testimony exclusively dedicated to the Tupamaros guerrilla. First, Gilio describes their taking of the city of Pando on October 8, 1969, on the anniversary of the death of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. This is followed by interviews with some of the guerrilla members who participated in the military action in Pando.

A significant part of Gilio's book consists of detailed descriptions of the places she visits and the living conditions of her informants, together with the conversations she has with them. The author-narrator-journalist is thus omnipresent in all of the testimonies, both as an eyewitness and as an interlocutor. According to statements in the testimonies, these dialogues are direct transcriptions of the interviews. This immediacy was described by the jury as being one of the most important assets of Gilio's book, along with its dramatic qualities and the exposure of socio-political, topical issues. In the jury's minutes, it is stated that the average quality of the works presented for the first Casa de las Américas Prize in the category of testimony was extraordinary, and that 'This high level forced the jury to carefully weigh the literary merits, the current relevance of the subject and the political and social importance of the work'.¹⁷ In this respect, the testimonial literature defined by Casa de las

¹⁷ 'Actas Del Premio Casa de Las Américas', 1970, *Archivo de la Casa de las Américas*. These documents belong to the Archives of Casa de las Américas. Original: 'Este alto nivel obligó al jurado a sopesar minuciosamente los méritos literarios, la actualidad del tema y la trascendencia política y social de los trabajos'.

Américas in 1970 combines poetics and politics in a way that stretched conventional categorizations and allowed several layers of expression.

In what follows, I will briefly explore aspects of the dramatic and literary qualities of Gilio's work in order to identify the specific qualities in testimonial literature that characterize an accomplished blend of literary style and urgent political matters. In particular, it is the reportage on the psychiatric hospital of Colonia Etchepare, with the subtitle 'The Most Dreaded Hell', that stands out for its pathos and literariness. In this section of *La guerrilla tupamara*, the narration opens with a graphic description of the setting which, like the other settings in the book, is powerfully evocative. Aside from the vivid descriptions of the scenery, in this part of Gilio's book, the metanarrative elements are distinctive as being a literary enhancement of journalistic material, which recalls narrative journalism. Inspirational examples at the time include *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote or, in the Latin American sphere, the writings of Argentinian Rodolfo Walsh and Mexican Ricardo Pozas (both of whom were members of the Casa de las Américas jury in 1970).¹⁸ In a much-quoted passage, Norman Sims maintains that narrative journalism 'demands immersion in complex, difficult subjects. The voice of the writer surfaces to show that an author is at work. Authority shows thorough'.¹⁹ As a matter of fact, it is the presence of the voice of the author which, in Gilio's text, is the narrative technique that stylistically brings reportage into the realm of literature. As stated in *The living handbook of narratology*, metanarrative comments refer to the narrator's reflections upon the act of narration and are not exclusive to fiction. On the contrary, self-reflexive narrative passages may reinforce the illusion of authenticity without destroying the aesthetic effect, which is exactly what happens in *La guerrilla tupamara*:

Metanarrative passages need not destroy aesthetic illusion, but may also contribute to substantiating the illusion of authenticity that a narrative seeks to create. It is precisely the concept of narratorial illusionism, suggesting the

¹⁸ Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood a True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences* (New York: Random House, 1965); Rodolfo J Walsh, *Operación masacre*. (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Sigla, 1957); Ricardo Pozas, *Juan Pérez Jolote: biografía de un tzotzil*. (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1952).

¹⁹ Norman Sims, 'The Literary Journalists', in *The Literary Journalists* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), p. 2.

presence of a speaker or narrator, that illustrates that metanarrative expressions can serve to create a different type of illusion by accentuating the act of narration, thus triggering a different strategy of naturalization [...]²⁰

In the series of reportages included in *La guerrilla tupamara*, the voice of the author-narrator is clearly distinguishable, as an interviewer as well as in the metatextual commentaries inserted throughout the text. On the one hand, the working processes and methods of verification are described, and on the other, the sensory impressions and feelings of the author-narrator are depicted:

I took my notebook and wrote: 'Heart breaking cries, the guardian does not seem frightened or moved.' At that moment, I realized that I myself was not at all frightened and scarcely moved. I thought that this is probably what is often called 'professional deformation.' The pressing desire to convey everything with the utmost truth was transforming me into a mix of camera and recorder. The screams intensified.²¹

In *La guerrilla tupamara*, the emergence of the narrator by means of the self-reflexive commentaries clearly intensifies the illusion of immediacy and of the author-narrator being present in the setting described. Thus, self-referential narrative techniques contribute to the dramatic effect of Gilio's testimony. In one sense, the quoted paragraph demonstrates the ambiguity of the testimonial genre in that it demands objectivity and verifiability, secured by thoroughly describing the working methods (which in this case are even enacted by the author-narrator), yet it is constructed around the subjectivity of the author-narrator. The

²⁰ Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning, 'Metanarration and Metafiction', *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, 2012
<http://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Metanarration_and_Metafiction> [accessed 1 September 2017].

²¹ Gilio, p. 44. Original: 'Tomé mi cuaderno y anoté: «Gritos desgarradores, el guardián no parece asustado o conmovido». En ese momento me di cuenta de que yo misma no estaba nada asustada y apenas conmovida. Pensé que es seguramente a eso que se suele llamar «deformación profesional». El acuciante deseo de transmitirlo todo con la máxima veracidad me estaba transformando en una mezcla de máquina fotográfica con grabador. Los gritos se intensificaban.'

self-referential comments support the illusion of authenticity while exploring the borders of literariness.

The central plot of the book is the story of Pando's takeover by the MLN-Tupamaros in October 1969 and this chronicle is also based on journalistic material compiled by the author. The notable difference here is the increasing identification between the voice of the journalist and her choir of informants, which at times seem indistinguishable. The story opens with a first-person narration in which the narrator observes her co-travellers on the bus to Pando: 'At ten in the morning, Antonio and I got on the bus. It was almost empty but we still preferred the long rear seat'.²² While in the previous reportages the distinction between the voice of the author-narrator and the informants is unmistakable, in this piece it is not clear whether the narrative 'I' is identical to the name that features on the cover of the book, or if it is the narrator of a testimony given to Gilio by one of the participants in the takeover of Pando. This ambiguity between the voice of the author-narrator and the voices of the informants contrasts with the illusion created earlier by the emergence of the author-narrator. In this case, the author as journalist dissolves in favour of the chorus of voices of the informants. At the same time, this blending of voices signals the author's identification and sympathy with the story being told. However, despite this momentary narrative ambiguity, the veracity and validity of the account is reinforced by means of a map of the centre of Pando inserted in the book, the insertion of explanatory footnotes, and by way of the intermittent incorporation of transcribed dialogues between the narrative fragments. In this way, the aestheticization of the material, which bestows the testimony with the desired literary quality, is contained and counterbalanced by the highlighting of different documentary aspects. In view of this, it could be argued that it is the recurrent narrative dramatization of the gathered documentary materials, as well as the self-reflexive features, that transforms Gilio's text from a report into a new kind of literary work: testimonial literature.

After no prize was awarded in 1971, in 1972 the prize was given to Marcio Moreira Alves for *Un grano de mostaza (El despertar de la Revolución Brasileña)* [A grain of mustard. (The awakening of the Brazilian Revolution)]. The members of the jury highlight the superior literary quality of the winner, in combination with its non-fictionality:

²² Gilio, p. 129. Original: 'A las diez de la mañana, Antonio y yo subimos al ómnibus. Estaba casi vacío pero igual preferimos el asiento largo del fondo.'

- 2) A work that lives its own life and in which the subject is treated with breadth and depth, destined to last more than the brief existence of the purely journalistic work and, because of that, requires a superior literary quality.
- 3) A work true to reality that approaches and discards fiction, which constitutes one of the elements of narrative creation, as in the novel and the short story.²³

In these two paragraphs, the testimonial genre is defined negatively. On the one hand, it is in opposition to the journalistic discourse that it is supposed to exceed by virtue of its literary quality. On the other hand, the required literariness is not to be achieved by fictionalizing the work since it is required that the testimony identifies fiction only to eliminate it. In this case, fiction is defined as the opposite of truth because it renders something invented, while literariness is associated with the formal properties of the testimony. In this respect, fiction is a moral rather than an aesthetic category since it refers to a difference between truth and falsehood, while literariness only refers to the formal-aesthetic qualities of the text. On the basis of these negations it is possible to argue that even though the socio-political criticism is crucial, literary quality is also central and can only be understood as formal aspects of the work, which would not affect the veracity or authenticity of the content but only embellish and improve the form. For what does it otherwise mean when the jury of 1972 emphasises the 'relevant literary beauty' next to the 'objective style' of that year's winner?

Like María Esther Gilio, Márcio Moreira Alves was a recognized journalist at the time of winning the Casa de las Américas Prize in the category of testimony in 1972. Before going into exile, first in Chile and later in France, Moreira Alves was a member of the Brazilian Parliament, which was closed in December 1968. Earlier that year, the Parliament refused to deprive Moreira Alves of his impunity when the military wanted to prosecute him over a speech he had delivered in which he denounced political violence by the military and the police, and called for a boycott of the military parades during 'Semana da Pátria' (National

²³ 'Actas Del Premio Casa de Las Américas', 1972, *Archivo de la Casa de las Américas*. Original: '2º) Una obra que viva por sí misma y donde la temática esté tratada con amplitud y profundidad, y destinada a perdurar más allá de la existencia efímera de los trabajos puramente periodísticos y que, por eso mismo, exige una superior calidad literaria. 3º) Una obra fiel a la realidad que enfoca y que descarta la ficción, que constituye uno de los elementos de la creación narrativa, como la novela y el cuento.'

Week). Finally, on December 11, 1968, the members of Parliament voted on the request of extradition, refusing it. In retaliation, the government ordered the closure of the Parliament, and Moreira Alves went into exile.

In terms of genre, Moreira Alves's testimony could be considered to be his intellectual autobiography or memoir because it tells the story of his personal awakening in relation to the 'awakening of the Brazilian Revolution', which is the subtitle of the work. In this regard, *Un grano de mostaza* is, on the one hand, the intellectual autobiography of a young Brazilian, a member of the country's old ruling oligarchy, who 'betrays' his social class and becomes a revolutionary. On the other hand, the testimony contains a detailed denunciation of Brazil's socio-economic and political system. Both stories run parallel in the book, and there is no ambiguity regarding the narrative perspective or the identity of the narrator. The opening chapter describes a pivotal event in Brazil's history when Moreira Alves's speech brought about the closure of the Parliament. On this subject, personal and public history are indistinguishable, and both reach a turning point by the end of 1968:

The brief period of congruence between my life and the political life of Brazil ends at three in the afternoon on December 12, 1968, when three hundred parliamentarians applauded their own boldness to bring to a close the long years of humiliation at the hands of the military.²⁴

The objectivity of Moreira Alves's testimony, commended by the jury, is to be found both in the extensive depiction of Brazil's socio-economic and political life, as well as in the autobiographical pieces which narrate the personal development of the author-narrator during a process of getting to know himself in relation to the structural problems of his country:

The process of political radicalization, which I had gone through since the seizure of power by the military four years earlier, had been essentially intuitive and

²⁴ Moreira Alves, *Un grano de mostaza: el despertar de la Revolución brasileña* (La Habana: Casa de Las Américas, 1972), p. 20. Original: 'El fugaz período de coincidencia entre mi vida y la vida política del Brasil se cierra a las tres de la tarde del 12 de diciembre de 1968, cuando trescientos parlamentarios aplaudieron en su propia temeridad por concluir los largos años de humillación en manos de los militares.'

intellectual. I did not reach a revolutionary stance through suffering the harsh humiliations that so often accompany the lot of workers and peasants. On the contrary: political radicalization had given meaning to my life [...]²⁵

In one sense, in Moreira Alves's testimony it is impossible to separate the individual history from the collective, and in this respect the 'relevant literary beauty' of the text noted by the jury is to be found evenly throughout the text. In comparison with Gilio's work, Moreira Alves's text is closer to a conventional intellectual autobiography since it does not incorporate a chorus of different voices, and the textual structure does not expose ambiguities caused by self-reflection or changes of perspective.

In the minutes of the jury of 1973, the requirement for a literary style disappears and again the principal consideration is the documentation of the revolutionary struggle by means of the collection of immediate testimonies. *Los subversivos* [The Subversives] by Antonio Caso opens with the kind of paratextual presentation (here even called 'Indispensable introduction') that later on would be one of the principal characteristics of Latin American testimonial literature, in which the author establishes the context by indicating what type of text the reader has in front of him/her: 'This book simply contains a series of testimonial stories. The testimonies were narrated by Brazilian urban guerrilla members [...] the testimonies only express the individual opinion of their authors.'²⁶ However, emphasizes Caso, the testimonies are told only to shed light on the historical truth without wanting to impose any judgement. Apart from the introduction, a short epilogue, a final chapter called 'Approximation to Brazil', and the documentary annexes, the winner in the category of testimony in 1973 does not show any authorial intervention in the testimonies, and it could, therefore, be argued that Caso's text is not a narrative account but rather a raw compilation of directly transcribed testimonies. However, in the minutes, the

²⁵ Moreira Alves, p. 14. Original: 'El proceso de radicalización política, que yo había recorrido desde la toma del poder por los militares cuatro años atrás, había sido esencialmente intuitivo e intelectual. No había llegado a posiciones revolucionarias a través del sufrimiento, de las duras humillaciones que tantas veces acompañan las opciones de obreros y campesinos. Al contrario: la radicalización política había dado un sentido a mi vida [...]'.
²⁶ Antonio Caso, *Los Subversivos* (La Habana: Casa de las Americas, 1973), p. 11. Original: 'Este libro contiene, simplemente, una serie de relatos testimoniales. Los testimonios fueron narrados por guerrilleros urbanos brasileños [...] los testimonios solo expresan la opinión individual de sus autores.'

jury highlights not only the accomplished structure and method of the winner, but also the emotional tension that some of the testimonial voices transmit. In this case, dramatic tension is created not by means of deliberate literary strategies as in *La guerrilla tupamara*, but as the result of the extraordinary stories told by Caso's informants in a colloquial and sometimes even humoristic way.

Personal accounts return as a decisive consideration according to the jury's minutes in 1974, when the Peruvian journalist Hugo Neira wins with *Huillca: Habla un campesino peruano* [Huillca: A Peruvian Farmer Speaks]. Again, the emotional effect on the reader is pivotal. What was original on this occasion was something that a decade later would become the dominant characteristic of Latin American testimonial literature: the subaltern perspective, which gives voice to a marginalized subject through the mediation of a solidary intellectual. The jury stated: 'The author, Hugo Neira Samanez, has managed to capture the testimony of a contemporary who is the custodian of vivid traditions, and he himself has served as a vehicle of expression for those who, for linguistic or other reasons, generally do not have the opportunity to receive it.'²⁷ Just as Rigoberta Menchu's internationally celebrated testimony *I Rigoberta Menchú* (which won the prize in 1983)²⁸ underwent a stylistic revision by the Venezuelan journalist Elizabeth Burgos Debray, Huillca's testimony was improved on the recommendation of the jury, who proposed a linguistic and stylistic revision (to be carried out by an author-mediator) before publication. In this testimony, as in the canonical testimonies of, for example, Rigoberta Menchú and Domitila Barrios, the autoethnographic voice is transmitted through a mediator.²⁹ Thus, the Quechua is translated and transcribed into Spanish, keeping some stylistic and syntactic traits of the original voice. The orality of the story is also conveyed in the laconic and repetitive narrative style. That is to say, the interventions of the intermediary never become explicit and are only made textually visible by means of paratextual elements: a prologue, the chapter headings and the explanatory footnotes. Some critics have suggested that the text of Huillca's testimony is

²⁷ 'Actas Del Premio Casa de Las Américas', 1974', *Archivo de la Casa de las Américas*. Original: 'El autor, Hugo Neira Samanez, ha tenido el mérito de captar el testimonio de un contemporáneo que es depositario de tradiciones vivas, y el mismo ha servido de vehículo de expresión para quienes, por razones de idioma y de otro tipo, no tienen generalmente oportunidad de recibirlo.'

²⁸ Rigoberta Menchú and Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (Guatemala: Arcoiris, 1983); Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, trans. by Ann Wright (London: Verso, 1984).

²⁹ Domitila Barrios de Chungara, *Si Me Permiten Hablar ...*, (México: Siglo XXI, 1978).

subjected to an ideological manipulation that in the long run reduces the cultural authenticity of the autoethnographic discourse.³⁰ They argue that, despite the textual invisibility of the authorial intermediary, it nevertheless leaves an evident political imprint that manipulates and misrepresents the original story. The critics referred to here seem to have read the text of Neira / Huilca in light of the conventions of the Latin American *indigenista* narrative, which places the individual, linguistic, mythical and cultural dimension above the collective, epic and transcultural, which usually are understood as typical elements of the testimonial genre.³¹ Maria Teresa Grillo discusses this point of view, concluding that in Huilca's testimony these two aspects – collective political militancy and subjective cultural presence – overlap.³² Hence, it would be possible to assume that the textualization of Huilca's oral testimony takes a form that surpasses the conventional binary structure of the canonical *indigenista* narrative which, as Huyatán Martínez points out, was always deeply disconnected from its referent and its specific expressive forms. According to Huyatán Martínez, this characteristic split of *indigenista* literature was not solved until the anthropological methodology was combined with literary writing, giving rise to the genre of testimonial literature.³³ However, in *Huilca* the intellectual commitment surpasses and erases any artistic gesture on the part of the journalist, who primarily conveys the

³⁰ Juan Zevallos Aguilar, 'From Representation to Self-Representation: Life Stories, Testimonios, and Autoethnographies in Spanish America', *Latin American Indian Literatures Journal*, 20.1 (2004), p. 22; Jesús Díaz Caballero, 'Para una lectura del etno-testimonio peruano de los años setenta', in *Asedios a la heterogeneidad cultural: libro de homenaje a Antonio Cornejo Polar*, ed. by José Antonio Mazzotti and U. Juan Zevallos Aguilar (Philadelphia: Asociación Internacional de Peruanistas, 1996), pp. 341–42.

³¹ In *The Andes Imagined: Indigenismo, Society and Modernity* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), p. 1., Jorge Coronado gives the following explanation of the Indigenista movement that emerges in the early twentieth century in Latin America: 'As a constellation of extremely varied practices, including painting, photography, literature, and literary and cultural criticism, as well as diverse government policies, indigenismo endeavored to vindicate the area's indigenous peoples after centuries of abuse and marginalization. [...] Without exception, the discourses that sought to articulate this reconfiguration all constructed particular versions of the indio and of indigenous culture. As a result, the indio, represented by other's projections, became a critical component of the new configurations of Andean society and culture that these practices imagined.'

³² María Teresa Grillo Arbulú, 'Rutas Textuales de La Exclusión : Raza y Etnicidad En Textos de Enunciación Andina Del Perú Colonial y Republicano' (University of British Columbia, 2013), (p. 213) <<http://oatd.org/oatd/record?record=handle%5C%3A2429%5C%2F45330>> [accessed October 7 2015].

³³ Eduardo Huaytán Martínez, 'Indigenismo, Antropología y Testimonio En El Perú. Rupturas, Ampliaciones y Plataformas de Representación', *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, Año XL. 80 (2014), p. 311.

information on the union struggle of Saturnino Huillca, narrated in the present tense by the informant. In this regard, the book awarded the Casa de las Américas Prize in the category of testimony in 1974 did not adopt a complex literary form. Consequently, *Huillca* does not display the characteristics that Huaytán Martínez ascribes to the Peruvian testimony of the 70s, which according to him belongs in the field of literature. Perhaps it is symptomatic that, when the politicization of the culture during the Grey Quinquennial was at its peak, the award-winning text in 1974 did not respond directly to the original criterion of literary quality. Unlike in Gilio's case, Neira's interventions in the testimony are not visible beyond some deictic markers; that is, it seems as if Huillca speaks. Consequently, the putting into a discourse of Saturnino Huillca's testimony does not confer literariness, nor does the oral character of the narrative seem to facilitate an *indigenista* reading of the text because of the demythification of the referent. In addition, the lack of ideological distance between informant and intermediary seems to preclude the insertion of this text into the Peruvian national canon. In this respect, *Huillca: a Peruvian peasant* would comply with the core criteria of testimonial literature as it was conceptualized by Casa de las Américas, though it would be excluded from other literary series at the international, continental and national levels.

In the minutes of 1975, we again encounter a contradictory statement when the jury simultaneously commends both literariness and the documentation of the events: 'The grounds for the jury to make its decision were based on the just level of literary adaption of the testimonial genre, as well as the important information the book offers [...]'.³⁴ What does this literary adaptation consist of in *Aquí se habla de combatientes y bandidos* [Here we talk about fighters and bandits] by Raúl González de Cascorro, and in what ways does the authorial presence or contention condition the relationship between documentation and literariness?

Roberto González Echevarría observes that the making of this documentary novel was no different to making the journalistic text, and he points out that in fact several of the authors of the early testimonials were journalists by profession. In his analysis of *Aquí se habla de combatientes y bandidos*, González Echevarría highlights the fragmentation of the story, which is structured in short pieces that each correspond to the testimony of an

³⁴ 'Actas Del Premio Casa de Las Américas', 1975, *Archivo de la Casa de las Américas*.

informant. According to González Echevarría, authorial containment is a characteristic aspect of the genre since it is through the unlimited and uninterrupted flow of testimonial voices that the text generates an illusion of reality:

The core of the book consists of a series of brief statements by those involved. There is no clear plot line and no narrator: each utterance is preceded, as in a play, by the name of the participant. There is at the end a list of names that is very much like the cast in the program for a play. As in *Ulysses* the reader is able to reconstruct the sequence of events only as he or she learns to recognize each 'voice.' The book is a gallery of voices that, true to the title, talk about the confrontation between '*combatientes*' and '*bandidos*'. The action exists as in a pure present (*aquí*), the pure presence of theatrical performance, without protagonist and without the centering figure of the narrator. The insistence on speech underscores the desire for immediacy and presentness: the absence of an articulate narrative discourse emphasizes the illusion that this is unmediated action before writing.³⁵

In the testimonies brought together in a fragmented way in *Aquí se habla de combatientes y bandidos*, the voice of the writer dissolves, which makes this testimony similar in style to the winner of 1972 – *Los subversivos* by Antonio Caso – which also consists of individual voices, albeit less fragmented. In both cases, I would argue, like González Echevarría, that these testimonies could be read as theatrical performances which primarily aim for an illusion of reality and for political resonance, giving prominence to the documentary aspects of the genre. In these testimonial texts, immediate action and a collective voice prevails over contemplation and self-reflexivity.

³⁵ Roberto González Echevarría, *The Voice of the Masters: Writing and Authority in Modern Latin American Literature*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), p. 116. Original: 'Los argumentos del jurado para otorgar su decisión estuvieron sustentados en el justo nivel de adecuación literaria dentro del género testimonial, así como por la importante información que el libro ofrece [...]'.

Conclusion

In conclusion, during the first five years of the Casa de las Américas Prize in the category of testimony there is a constant vacillation regarding the characteristics of the genre. In relation to the thematic aspect of documentation of the revolutionary struggles emerges the idea that the aesthetic elaboration of the documentary materials determines the difference between a journalistic account and the new genre of testimonial literature, as well as the difference between testimony and fiction. It seems that even though political regulation from 1970 required transparent commitment, intellectuals and writers continuously tried to find new ways to protect literature as an art-form, even within the boundaries of the testimonial genre, and in consonance with the revolutionary ideals. The institutionalization of testimonial literature as a prize category in 1970 can thus be understood as an aesthetic-political solution to the long-discussed conflict between artistic practice and political action because it formulates different solutions to the question of how intellectuals can participate in revolution and what the social and political role of the writer can be. In this regard, testimonial literature could be conceived of as a new kind of literature which, in its beginnings, encompassed a variety of forms which differed most notably regarding the level of intervention of the author and the scale of self-reflexivity.

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Kaddish for Those We Never Knew: Mourning and Bearing Witness to Losses that Are Not Our Own Through Fiction

Anthony Nuckols

Recent decades have been witness to theoretical contributions which have furthered the ways in which we understand and articulate the past's bearing on the present: the so-called memory boom of the previous century has led theorists, such as Dominick LaCapra, to argue that 'the *problem* of memory has become so widespread and intense that one is tempted to take a suspicious view and refer to fixation'.¹ Even before this 'fixation' on memory, however, the question of literature and representing the traumatic past provoked much debate, from Adorno's oft-quoted dictum on poetry in the post-Holocaust world to Elie Wiesel's statement on testimony as a newly invented literature by Holocaust survivors. At the centre of the debates surrounding literary representation and the horrors of the past is the question of fiction and testimony: who has the right to speak, what role does literary invention have, if any, in representing past trauma and what are the possible limitations and ethical implications of fictional works dealing with the traumatic past. Holocaust testimony as a genre insists on the unknowable, incomprehensible nature of the Holocaust ('an event without witness')², while fictional Holocaust narratives would seem to insist by way of identification with either narrator or characters that 'this incomprehensible event [can] become comprehensible and so [...] normalized, part of experience'.³ In other words, fiction and testimony would seem to be at odds with each other.⁴

¹ Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 8.

² Dori Laub, 'An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival', In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 81.

³ Robert Eaglestone, *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 22.

⁴ This is perhaps best evidenced by the infamous case of Bruno Dösekker's publishing his work of fiction, *Fragments*, as a memoir under the false name Binjamin Wilkomirski. Despite the fact that Dösekker's case is morally suspect, 'Susan Suleiman described *Fragments* as "a work of literary art,

Despite the particularities of these debates, literature has nevertheless played an integral role in the advances in both memory and trauma studies: concepts such as Marianne Hirsch's postmemory have provided us with the necessary tools to explain how later generations have dealt with inherited memories of trauma through literary works and the so-called 'transnational turn' in memory studies has led to a shift in gaze to other national cases, creating a nexus for comparative literature and memory studies, especially in postcolonial studies.

Yet despite the imperative to remember stemming from the very same debates on representation and the horrors of the twentieth century, memory and the construction of social narratives surrounding traumatic events can be exclusionary as well, where memories of the past are constructed in such a way as not to compare with other contexts but to compete and even exclude. In *Precarious Life* (2004), Judith Butler has explained how trauma and the subsequent commemoration of the losses of the 9/11 attacks were conceived in 'such a way as to deny the *grievability* of others.'⁵ Moreover, our relation to trauma occurring in other contexts is not always as straightforward as we sometimes think. Michael Rothberg makes a telling observation in *The Future of Trauma Theory* (2014) on the structural violence of the globalised system in which we live, with the example of the fires and collapse of clothing factories in southern Asia in recent years. In a globalised world subject to rules of late capitalism, the term 'bystander' is no longer sufficient to truly grasp the meaning of our position in the present before these types of tragedies: 'we are more than bystanders and something other than direct perpetrators in the violence of global capital.'⁶ Taking into consideration these questions that have conditioned the way we conceive our relation to the past (fiction versus survivor testimony, postmemory, uses of memory and our relation to trauma that is not our own), what sort of literature could allow for a more inclusionary form of remembrance, one that would take into account not only our

powerful in its effect' and Lawrence Langer 'regarded the book to be "a very compelling work of literature"'. Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 37.

⁵ Perhaps one of the most poignant examples in Butler's work is the case of the Palestinian-American who wanted to place an obituary in a San Francisco paper, only to be denied this right on the grounds that it would be offensive. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), p. 35.

⁶ Michael Rothberg, 'Preface: Beyond Tancred and Clorinda: Trauma Studies for Implicated Subjects', in *The Future of Trauma Theory*, ed. by Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant and Robert Eaglestone (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. xv.

own past losses but also the suffering of others, resulting in what Michael Rothberg has termed 'multidirectional memory', with 'the potential to create new form of solidarity and new visions of justice'?⁷ How are we able to heed the imperative to acknowledge and remember loss stemming from the past lessons of the Shoah in a world where our connections to *the other* are ever-changing in the system of global capital which has left us somewhere between bystander and director perpetrator? How are we to grieve losses from which we are not only temporally removed, but also culturally or geographically distanced? How are we to acknowledge or even *mourn* losses that are not our own?

Theories on mourning which, along with memory and trauma studies, have lent themselves to the study of literary or cultural representation to such an extent that we can even speak of 'mourning theory', can help us shed light on these questions.⁸ While Freud's original concept of mourning opposite melancholia forms the basis of almost all mourning theories today, I propose an understanding of mourning that goes beyond the original Freudian binary that could be applied to what we may call posttraumatic narratives of postmemory: that is, a collective mourning that is carried out in the present, temporally removed from the moment of traumatic loss, as an affective mode of confronting and connecting to an inherited traumatic past that bridges the gap between the historical moment of occurrence and the present.⁹ Here I propose to take this concept one step further, where the very same tropes identified in posttraumatic narratives of mourning can serve to bridge not only temporal distance, but also geographical or cultural distance as well, where collective mourning is seen as an affirmative, transnational, political practice in the creation of community in which both author *and* reader can assume the role of transnational posttraumatic witness.

Returning to the question of testimony and fiction, I conceive transnational posttraumatic narratives of mourning as a form of testimony: a bearing of witness to others

⁷ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 5.

⁸ Lucy Brisley, 'The Will to Remember: Problematizing the Ethico-Politics of Mourning and Melancholia' *The International Journal of Civic, Political, and Community Studies*, 10, (2013), pp. 61-72.

⁹ Elsewhere I have positioned these posttraumatic narratives of mourning opposite what we may call narratives of historical memory recovery, especially in the case of contemporary literary works on the Spanish Civil War. See Anthony Nuckols, 'La novela de duelo frente a la novela de recuperación de memoria histórica', *Caracol*, 11 (2016), pp. 210-242.

and their losses that transcends borders, as well as a direct testimony of the particularities of our own connection to these losses which are not own; a sort of literary 'monument to witnessing', in words of Shoshana Felman.¹⁰ Firstly, I will briefly describe my understanding of mourning and the tropologies that define posttraumatic narratives of mourning. Secondly, I will lay the framework necessary to apply posttraumatic narratives of mourning *transnationally*, drawing primarily on the work of Nancy Fraser, Judith Butler, and Nouri Gana. Finally, I will offer up an example of a transnational posttraumatic narrative of mourning, referencing the North American Jewish author Nathan Englander and his novel *The Ministry of Special Cases* (2007), a novel about Argentina's estimated 30,000 detained-disappeared during the last military dictatorship (1976-1983). Here, a novel written by a North American author allows us to bear witness to the losses of the *Proceso de reorganización nacional* ('the National Reorganization Process') and our relation to them.

Posttraumatic Narratives of Mourning

As previously mentioned, the Freudian binary of mourning versus melancholia continues to underlie the majority of present mourning theories, where originally the success of the healthy mourning process is reduced to the complete decathexis from the lost love object and the subsequent reinvestment of libidinal energies in a replacement; melancholia, on the other hand, is understood as a violent, pathological state in which this process is arrested.

The so-called consolatory paradigm¹¹ (where the lost object is subsequently replaced) has been critiqued and written off as conservative, exclusionary, and conducive to amnesia: where the substitution of the lost object is seen, at best, as reflecting a simple return to the status quo, governed by a capitalist *modus operandi* where the original object is viewed as disposable;¹² at worst, the replacement is seen as an act of killing that condemns the lost object to an irreversible hermeneutic death.¹³ These critiques have given way to what has been termed the 'depathologisation' of melancholia, where the

¹⁰ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 10.

¹¹ Tammy Clewell, *Mourning, Modernism, Postmodernism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

¹² Clewell; Brisley.

¹³ David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, 'A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia', in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. David L. Eng, and David Kazanjian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 365.

melancholic process of holding on to the lost object, refusing consolation and substitution, is vindicated and theorized as a process with great political and creative potential.¹⁴

While I do understand the consolatory paradigm of mourning as problematic, ethically and politically suspect, I do not see Freud's *original* melancholia as a productive model and using the original Freudian concept of melancholia presents certain problems: 'Contemporary theorists can embrace melancholia only inasmuch as they 'forget' that it entails an *unconscious distortion* of the lost object's meaning –i.e., it's a species of forgetting not, remembering'.¹⁵ In other words, despite the aforementioned depathologisation of melancholia, its application to memory work, i.e. melancholic memory, is essentially a misnomer.¹⁶ Furthermore, the concerns about consolation and the question of what exactly a mourning process would entail are particularly relevant, and become further complicated, in the case that concerns us here: in the postmemorial, posttraumatic present, how can the losses of previous generations, which are not directly our own, be worked through in a potential, collective mourning process? How can we conceive of the literary text as a conscious *cultural practice* that, at the same time, does not offer itself up as an aesthetic form of consolation.¹⁷

I propose, then, what we may call narratives of 'recalcitrant mourning';¹⁸ that is, a literature that actively resists substitution, foregoing the possibility of consolation, where resistance to the metaphorical transaction via the substitute constitutes 'the very locus

¹⁴ An example of one of the more recent contributions within this so-called 'depathologisation' of melancholia would be Enzo Traverso's *Left-Wing Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), in which Traverso defends melancholia in the left not as a debilitating and inhibiting pathological state wracked with narcissistic tendencies in the wake of the triumph of global neoliberal practices, pace Wendy Brown, but rather as a condition for political potential: 'this melancholia does not mean lamenting a lost utopia, but rather rethinking a revolutionary project in a non-revolutionary age' (p. 20).

¹⁵ Greg Forter quoted in Brisley, p. 65.

¹⁶ Brisley, p. 65.

¹⁷ Jo Labanyi essentially urges us to consider cultural texts as *cultural practices*. Jo Labanyi, 'Doing Things: Emotion, Affect, and Materiality', *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 11.3-4, (2010), pp. 223-233.

¹⁸ Patricia Rae opts for the term 'resistant mourning', which she defines as 'a resistance to reconciliation, full stop: a refusal to accept the acceptance of loss, whether through the severing and transference of libidinal ties or through the successful expansion of identity through introjection, or through any other kind of compensatory process'. See Patricia Rae, 'Introduction: Modernist Mourning'. In *Modernism and Mourning*, ed. Patricia Rae (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Press, 2007), pp. 16-17.

where mourning becomes an affirmative practice with political consequences'.¹⁹ Put another way, the literary narrative about the traumatic past cannot, and should not, offer consolation for past losses nor hope to give form to loss, which by its very essence lacks form.²⁰

Furthermore, if, according to the early Freudian economics of mourning, in order for the process to be successful there must be a substitutive transaction, then resistance (disobedience, refusal, recalcitrance) to fulfilment renders mourning a task impossible to carry to completion.²¹ While at the individual level, this would perhaps trigger an arrested process, for the collective, this ongoing work of mourning would allow for an always-open working-through loss in postmemorial, posttraumatic literature, where past losses are acknowledged as irreparable and unrecoverable, where the inherited absences are actively sought to be sustained through the literary work: before the losses of history, we remain inconsolable and to mourn is to bear witness to our *inability* to fully know these losses in the present, let alone begin to remediate them.

In texts themselves, this is done through what we may call a poetics of absence or absence as a trope, where absence or the impossibility of recovering history is either acknowledged or introduced into the literary form or on the level of diegesis. In the case of a homodiegetic narrator, often times the reader is confronted with a narrator who overtly admits not knowing everything about the traumatic past of a certain person or event, and thus resorts inevitably to supposition and inference; others may, in an attempt to relate some episode of the past, do so in what may be perceived by the reader as a difficult, ultra-mediated narration. Still others, in the case of a heterodiegetic narrator, may offer, through a sort of prosopopoeic trope, a focalized conjuring of the lost or dead. Still others may choose to incorporate absence directly into the narrative form itself with the use of ellipses or intentionally disrupted shifts in narration. Despite the diversity in achieving this said poetics of absence, the irrecoverable, unknowable, and irreparable character of the past

¹⁹ Idelber Avelar, 'Restitution and Mourning in Latin American Postdictatorship', *boundary 2*, 26.3 (1999), p. 203.

²⁰ Sam Durrant, *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning* (Albany: The University of New York Press, 2004), p. 6.

²¹ Avelar, p. 206. This notion of a mourning process impossible to carry out is reminiscent of Derrida's mourning aporia or 'impossible mourning' (Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). However, as Theodore Koulouris points out, Derrida's notion of 'impossible mourning' must not be confused with the Mitscherlich's 'inability to mourn', which they saw as characterising post-War German society in their inability to fully come to terms with not only the Nazi atrocities but also the loss of the figure of the Führer.

becomes manifest through the necessary recourse to invention, supposition and fiction itself, resulting in a narrative that houses, often times in more ways than one, loss at its core.

Having briefly laid out characteristics of posttraumatic narratives of mourning that categorise them as such, I wish to offer now a visual example with the intention of illustrating more clearly how loss and subsequent absence may be central to a work, as well as shifting the focus towards the Argentinian case. In his work on the figure of the detained-disappeared²² in countries of the Southern Cone, Uruguayan sociologist Gabriel Gatti points to several visual artists whose work participates in what he has coined as 'narratives absent of meaning',²³ (*narrativas ausentes de sentido*): social narratives constructed in a posttraumatic reality that are constituted in and assume *catastrophe* as 'the place of enunciation'; while 'it may be a place difficult to utter' it is, nonetheless, a space 'from which one can talk and in which identity can be constructed'.²⁴ In the case of forced disappearance in the Southern Cone, the artists in question confront the irremediable immateriality of the disappeared body, 'assuming *the very impossibility of representing* and the consequent need to find the means and languages to work with that impossibility'.²⁵

From among the various artists cited by Gatti, the work of Argentinian photographer Gustavo Germano perhaps best visually exemplifies how I see posttraumatic narratives of mourning as housing absence at its core. The first and original series entitled *Ausencias* (2006)²⁶ is composed of two sets of photographs: the first, consisting in personal photographs of family members and friends taken in the 1970s, are placed alongside Germano's photographs taken in the exact same locations but decades later in 2006, with the patent absence of family members or friends who were disappeared during the years of the last Argentinian dictatorship. Identical photographs, save for the aging of the

²² This dual, inclusionary term encompasses those who were detained, tortured, and/or disappeared. Additionally, here I use the verb *disappear* as a transitive verb, mimicking this versatility that exists in Spanish, which emphasises the idea that one is disappeared by force.

²³ Here it is important to point out that Gatti uses the term *narrative* to refer to socially constructed narratives surrounding the figure of the detained-disappeared as opposed to literary narratives.

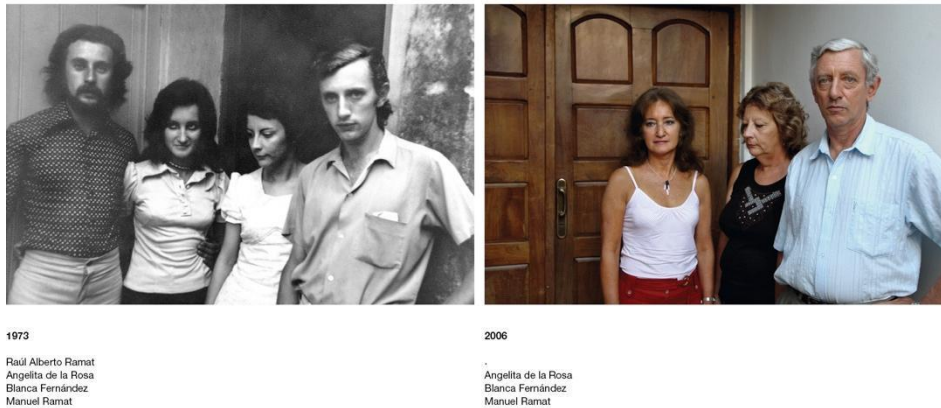
²⁴ Gabriel Gatti, *Identidades desaparecidas: Peleas por el sentido en la desaparición forzada* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2012), p. 147. My translation. Original: 'el lugar de enunciación [...] aunque sea un lugar difícil de decir, desde él se puede hablar y en él se puede construir identidad'.

²⁵ Gatti, p. 150. My translation. Original: 'asumiendo la imposibilidad misma de representar y la necesidad consecuente de dar con resortes y lenguajes para trabajar con esa imposibilidad'.

²⁶ Along the same lines and title, Germano went on to create *Ausências (Brasil)* in 2012 and *Ausencias (Colombia)* in 2015 with family members of victims of forced disappearance and violence in these two cases.

photograph's subjects and, in some cases, colour versus black and white, the result of the juxtaposition of the two photos places loss and absence at the very centre of the photographs:

All of the photos contain a lack, and it is extremely forceful. There is something there that is not seen but yet fills. And it oppresses and overwhelms.²⁷



*Figure 1. Ausencias.*²⁸



*Figure 2. Ausencias.*²⁹

Comprised of fifteen distinct pairs, Gatti writes:

²⁷ Gatti, p. 153. My translation. Original: 'Todas las fotos contienen una falta, y es tremendamente contundente. Hay algo ahí que no se ve pero que llena. Y que oprime y sobrecoge'.

²⁸ Gustavo Germano, 'Ausencias (Argentina)', *Gustavo Germano* <<http://www.gustavogermano.com/#ausencias>> [accessed 23 January 2017].

²⁹ Germano.

[...] the complete series produces a terribly unsettling effect, that of discovering that the emptiness, excuse me, *that* emptiness, is indeed filled.³⁰

I suggest that this affective model for mourning can transcend not only time but also geographical or even cultural distance. In other words, if we can posit 'recalcitrant mourning' narratives as a mode of confronting inherited, indirect traumatic losses, can we not also conceive (and locate) similar narratives that may equally serve as an affective model for *transnational*, geographically or culturally indirect traumatic loss?

Transnational Posttraumatic Narratives of Mourning

In his book *Signifying Loss* (2011), Nouri Gana points the way (as the subtitle suggests) 'Toward a Poetics of Narrative Mourning', focusing on the work of several authors, hailing from different backgrounds who grapple with a traumatic loss in their own contexts. In the coda to the same study, he lays the groundwork for what he calls a 'geopolitics of mourning', posing the question as to whether or not a rethinking of loss and mourning can lead to 'the production of viable affective bonds that might in turn foster a sense of transnational solidarity and global community?'³¹ I conceive what I propose here as a possible response to the question raised by Gana, where posttraumatic narratives of mourning functioning transnationally (i.e. addressing past violence across borders) not only allow us to acknowledge the loss and pain of the other, but also demonstrate how we can be affected by and, sometimes, tied-in to trauma that is not always our own, enabling a 'multidirectional memory' exchange.

Judith Butler's reflection on community and the state of dependency as the primary human condition explains how we are tied up not only with one another but also with those who came before us, where violence 'is, always, an exploitation of that primary tie' and where:

³⁰ Gatti, p. 153. My translation. Original: '[...] la serie complete produce un efecto terriblemente turbador, el de descubrir que el vacío, perdón, que ese vacío, está lleno'.

³¹ Nouri Gana, *Signifying Loss: Toward a Poetics of Narrative Mourning*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2011), p. 182.

[...] the primary others who are past for me not only live on in the fibre of the boundary that contains me [...], but also haunt the way I am, as it were, periodically undone and open to becoming unbounded.³²

Nevertheless, Butler addresses the fact that this notion of shared bodily vulnerability is often times constructed along either national or racial lines, leaving other losses as unthinkable and ungrievable, as demonstrated in the case of the United State's reaction to the 9/11 attacks, where unilateral, pre-emptive war always already precludes the grievability of the other.³³

On a transnational scale, I see this, in part, as a problem of what Nancy Fraser calls misrepresentation through misframing: when notions of shared body vulnerability are delimited to the Keynesian-Westphalian frame (i.e. the nation-state), entire communities of individuals affected by injustices are excluded from participation. In an ever-globalising world where we are faced with crises that clearly already exist and function transnationally (climate change, war, refugees, genocide, etc.), misrepresentation through misframing only multiplies and exacerbates oppression and inequality, foreclosing for many the ability to make claims against injustice or even to have their grievances and losses understood as grievable. Yet despite the disenfranchising of entire communities thanks to the system of global capital, we are, in a way, more interconnected than ever before, implicated in and tied to many of these injustices, as Rothberg's aforementioned reflection on the term 'bystander' suggests. In other words, today, more than ever, 'the state-territorial principle no longer affords an adequate basis for determining the 'who' of justice in every case'.³⁴

Nevertheless, we can challenge current modes of framing through what Fraser calls the 'transformative approach', where:

³² Butler, p. 27.

³³ Gana has also theorised on the possible political implications stemming from the notion of inconsolability, p. 180.

³⁴ Nancy Fraser, 'Reframing Justice in a Globalizing World', *New Left Review*, 36, Nov-Dec, (2005), p. 12.

[...] the aim is to overcome injustices by changing not just the boundaries of the 'who' of justice, but also the mode of their constitution, hence the way they are drawn.³⁵

If we hold on to Butler's notion of vulnerability and apply it to this transformative approach in reframing how boundaries are established, we can begin to conceive of a mourning process that would establish a community that begins with our own experiences of violence but that would finish with the understanding of our connectedness, or even complicity in, other acts of violence: 'Loss has made a tenuous "we" of us all,' where loss 'tear[s] us from ourselves and bind[s] us to others, transport[s] us, undo[es] us, implicate[s] us in lives that are not our own'.³⁶

Thus, I see *transnational* posttraumatic narratives of mourning as constituting a tool in combating the precariousness intrinsic to the globalising world as a way of redrawing or reframing the public sphere through the literary text, where losses that are not directly our own can be acknowledged as irreparable and unrecoverable, thus initiating a process of recalcitrant mourning, which not only disobeys calls for consolation, but also the current framing of claims to injustice.

The Ministry of Special Cases

As an example of a transnational posttraumatic narrative of mourning, I point to Nathan Englander's *The Ministry of Special Cases* (2007). Author of two collections of short stories, *For The Relief of Unbearable Urges* (1999) and *What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank* (2012), as well as the recently published *Dinner at the Centre of the Earth* (2017), Englander's first novel depicts the story of a Jewish-Argentinian family in the days before and after the military coup of 1976, which would give way to the seven-year military dictatorship during which an estimated 30,000 individuals, deemed subversives by the government, would disappear. With forced disappearance at the centre of Englander's novel and his having written fiction about Jews during the Holocaust and Russian pogroms, Englander admits often asking himself questions like 'Do I have the right to write about a topic that has

³⁵ Fraser, p. 13.

³⁶ Butler, p. 20, p. 25.

nothing to do with my own experience?' or 'To what point is it respectful to become involved with something as gigantic as Jewish (or in this case, Argentinian) memory?'³⁷ Englander wrote most of the novel while living in Jerusalem, a time he associates with episodes of violence and the realisation of his own vulnerability,³⁸ and was inspired to write about the disappearances in Argentina from some young Argentinians he met in Israel who 'were so deeply formed by this period of history that it got under [his] skin and stayed with [him]'.³⁹ I understand Englander's novel as an exercise in reframing to the extent that it is a narrative that begins with Englander's own personal experience and ends with an openness to the suffering of the other.

In a similar way to Gustavo Germano's photographs, I see the narrative as displaying the same trope of absence, housing it at its very core: Englander explains that he is 'obsessed with the idea of negative space, with the idea of absence' in his work.⁴⁰ This absence functions on two levels within the novel: on the level of the diegesis for the characters involved, as well as on a non-diegetic level through the very structure of the narration. The resulting heteroglossia from these two ways of addressing absence in the novel permits the text to present itself as incapable of offering consolation for loss while, at the same time, offering itself as a testimony of how, despite distances, we may acknowledge suffering across borders despite our inability to repair or fully recover past losses. In other words, as a distanced, fictional account of loss and grieving, it constitutes a space unbounded by borders or limits in which both author and readers alike can bear witness to

³⁷ Carolina Esses, 'Nathan Englander: "Estoy obsesionado con la ausencia"', *Revista Ñ Clarín*, 18 July 2009 < http://edant.revistaenie.clarin.com/notas/2009/07/18/_-01960392.htm > [accessed 22 September 2016], (para 3 of 13). My translation. Original: '¿hasta qué punto es respetuoso meterme con algo gigantesco como la memoria judía?'.

³⁸ 'It's a very American thought to think your life has value. Most other countries don't have that luxury. But this idea: Do I as an individual, do I have a right to think I don't want to die? Does this country need to protect me? [...] And the individual's obligation to community and vice versa'. John Fox, 'Nathan Englander Interview', *Bookfox*, 2008, < <http://thejohnfox.com/2008/10/nathan-englander-interview/> > [accessed 22 September 2016], (para 4 of 86).

³⁹ Fox, para 26 of 86.

⁴⁰ Esses, para 3 of 13. This absence, similar to Germano's photographs, is also present on the cover of the Vintage International edition of the novel. Reminiscent of the photographs carried and displayed by friends and relatives of the disappeared from the early days of the dictatorship to the present, the cover of the novel depicts a young man's face which is blocked by a white box in which the title appears, thus impeding the viewer of knowing his identity.

the formlessness and irreparability of another's loss, acknowledging the grievability of the other.

The omniscient third-person narrator tells the story of Kaddish and Lillian Poznan and the detention and subsequent disappearance of their son, Pato, during the first days of the last Argentinian military dictatorship. Kaddish and Lillian, while both Argentinian Jews, come from very different backgrounds: Kaddish, the son of a prostitute, was raised within the Jewish community associated with the Society of the Benevolent Self, a synagogue run by gangsters and pimps;⁴¹ Lillian was brought up in the more traditional United Jewish Congregation. Death, disappearance, and mourning itself are at the very centre of the narration, beginning with the protagonist's name, Kaddish, given to him by a rabbi at his birth ('Let his name be Kaddish to ward off the angel of death. A trick and a blessing. Let his child be the mourner instead of the mourned').⁴² Establishing Kaddish as a mourner by name not only serves to foreshadow his soon-to-be state of inconsolable mourner, as we shall see, but is also ironic, as his job has to do not with sustaining a connection between the dead and the living but with erasing it: with much of Buenos Aires's Jewish community ashamed of their past connections to the less socially acceptable congregation, Kaddish is paid to enter the Society for the Benevolent Self's cemetery (separated by a wall from the upright Jewish one) in order to chisel away the names from tombstones of those who wish to erase any possible connection to their deceased family members associated with the congregation. Lillian, on the other hand, works for a small insurance company where, in the days after the coup, 'still-stunned citizens took out policies on themselves. They repeated questions, asked the obvious, and all touched upon the central point: *'What happens if I die?'* (p. 41). Foreshadowing the disappearances that until then had only been rumours, Lillian's boss admits that cashing in on the insurance policies was meant to be a smooth process: 'that is, for those with proof of death.' (p. 41).

Pato, Kaddish and Lillian's son, views his father's work with contempt, often times obligated by his father to help him in his remunerated grave desecration. A university

⁴¹ For more information related to the criminal organization which dealt in human trafficking between Argentina and Eastern Europe between the 1880s and 1930s, see Gustavo Sánchez Canales, "'The Benevolent Self Was a Disgrace beyond Measure for Every Argentine Jew': Between the Need to Remember and the Desire to Forget in Nathan Englander's *The Ministry of Special Cases*", *Partial Answers*, 13.1 (2015), pp. 58-59.

⁴² Nathan Englander, *The Ministry of Special Cases* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), p. 8. Further references from this edition are given directly after the quotation within the text.

student with openly leftist leanings, Pato and his fellow classmates are witness to the military junta's purges and reforms within the university, the violence committed by police on fellow university students, and the police raids and detentions that were becoming so commonplace.⁴³ Amidst ever-increasing stories of disappearances (the first of which is mentioned by one of Pato's friends, Flavia), Kaddish and Lillian urge Pato to get rid of his compromising books. Pato is unconvinced, therefore Kaddish proceeds to burn the books in the bathtub, only to be discovered by his son, provoking a brawl between the two and resulting in Pato's leaving. A few days later, Pato is detained along with his friends in the street one night after a concert. While the other detained youth are let go, Pato is held at the police station for having forgotten his ID. Kaddish is finally informed days later and picks his son up and takes him home. While waiting for Lillian's return home, Kaddish and Pato begin yet another heated quarrel – Pato tells his father he wishes he were dead, to which Kaddish responds he wishes his son had never been born – only to be interrupted finally by a knock at the door: 'Kaddish went to get it. And Kaddish got his wish. It was, in an instant, as if his son was never born.' (p. 116). Four men enter the house and take Pato away, along with two books, the ones Kaddish had not burned.

Thus, begins the 'period of inestimable loss and insecurity' that conditions the central plot (p. 104). Lillian and Kaddish begin the endless search for their son, tirelessly seeking out any information as to their son's whereabouts in police stations, speaking to officials, priests and high-ranking members of the Jewish community in Buenos Aires. Ultimately, they find themselves bogged down in the fictional Ministry of Special Cases where they are forced to wait days upon days in hopes of filing any injunction that would lead to information about their detained son.⁴⁴ As their search proves fruitless, here we as

⁴³ While it is true that the years leading up to the military coup were indeed plagued with violence from extremist militant groups of both right and left, the so-called 'theory of two devils' – that is, that violence came not only from the state but from leftist militant groups as well – was essentially a narrative created by the military junta to justify state terrorism: 'the higher estimates of guerrilla forces barely amount to 5 percent of the estimates 30,000 *desaparecidos*. The figure for victims murdered by the guerrillas in the period prior to and during the dictatorship is 687, most of them military or security forces personnel, and a few civilians.' Likewise, the term 'dirty war' (*guerra sucia*) can also be seen as a product of the military junta's official narrative, as the vast majority of detained-disappeared were *not* indeed militants, but civilians. See Susana Kaiser, *Postmemories of Terror* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 25-28.

⁴⁴ 'We Argentínians know that there never was such a ministry, and yet imagining it, in this case, becomes totally valid: upon finishing the novel it appears to us in fact that that it must have existed.' My translation. Original: 'Todos los argentinos sabemos que no hubo tal ministerio, y sin embargo la

readers are witness to the irremediable absence that has suddenly installed itself in Kaddish and Lillian's life: forced to repeat their story with everyone they question for help:

[...] in each telling it was if [their] son had never been. The idea of absence had acquired its own fierce momentum. It was like snatching a ball from a baby and hiding it behind one's back—there was the initial shock and then, like that, Pato was no more (p. 135).

As the couple continue their search, facing bureaucratic obstacles, the silence and unwillingness to speak of others in similar circumstances, and the harshness of not knowing whether their son is alive or dead, we see Kaddish and Lillian diverge in their coping of the situation. While Lillian remains confident her son will return, Kaddish begins to suspect that he will not:

'Don't talk like he's lost, Kaddish. Don't ever talk like we have no son.' 'We don't,' Kaddish said. Lillian, with great speed, slapped Kaddish across the face. 'It is not a sin to admit,' Kaddish said. 'Until we get him back, he's gone.' 'You listen,' Lillian said. 'He's not anything but ever-present, he is not anything but on his way home.' (p. 233)

It is here precisely here, in this divergence, this absence of both factual information and absence of body that the novel is converted into a space of doubt, granting us insight as readers into the cruel nature of what Gabriel Gatti refers to as place that surrounds the figure of the detained-disappeared: it is 'the limbo of the non-dead-non-living [...] They are forever *being disappeared*. Neither alive nor dead, entities which are difficult to articulate.'⁴⁵ We see through Kaddish and Lillian that Pato is both simultaneously alive and dead, in a:

imaginación, en este caso, se nos ocurre como totalmente válida: al terminar la novela nos parece que de hecho debió haber existido.' Carlos Gamero, 'La dictadura contada en inglés', *Revista Ñ Clarín*, 4 October 2009 <http://edant.revistaenie.clarin.com/notas/2008/10/04/_-01773782.htm> [accessed 22 September 2016], (para 13 of 14).

⁴⁵ Gatti, p. 18. My translation. Original: 'el limbo de los no-muertos-no-vivos, los desaparecidos [...] siempre están siendo desaparecidos: ni vivos, ni muertos, entidades incómodas para hablar de ellas'.

[...] space of perpetual instability, a sort of *permanent limbo*. An unsolvable space, moreover: it will not even be closed with the eventual certainty of death. He will continue *being* detained-disappeared.⁴⁶

Just as the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons defined forced disappearance as a crime against humanity and one that is considered 'continuous or permanent as long as the fate or whereabouts of the victim has not been determined,' Kaddish and Lillian are condemned to suffer the crime as long as they do not know Pato's true fate.⁴⁷

As Lillian continues her search for answers and help at the Ministry of Special Cases, the United Congregations of Argentina, and with a priest, Kaddish, thanks to a tip from a former client of his, goes to the fishing piers to speak with a man who supposedly knows something about his son. On the pier, the man introduces himself as Victor Wollensky, a naval pilot ('what might a man in this upside-down country end up doing in the navy but flying on planes') who claims to know 'what happens to the children', as he is 'the monster who tosses them into the sea' (pp. 263; 264). Wollensky explains that the detained young people are driven to the runway in busses, naked and drugged, and herded into the planes from which they are then thrown out, alive, over the River Plate. Showing him a photo of Pato, Kaddish asks Wollensky if he recognises his son, to which the pilot responds:

'They all look the same and they all look like this. *All in the same boat* is the saying. But they don't have one. They're all at the bottom of the river' (p. 264).

Confronted with the possibility that his son has been murdered by Wollensky or one of the many other guards, Kaddish:

⁴⁶ Gatti, p. 63. My translation. Original: 'espacio de inestabilidad perpetua, una suerte de limbo permanente. Un espacio irresoluble además: ni siquiera se cierra con la eventual certeza de la muerte. Seguirá siendo un detenido-desaparecido'.

⁴⁷ Organization of American States, 'Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearance of Persons', *Organization of American States* <<http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/treaties/a-60.html>> [accessed 28 January 2017].

[...] lapel in hand, [...] made a cut with a sawing motion. He put the knife down and rent the fabric, giving a good tear. This is how he did it, this is how it's always been done: a sign of mourning [...] (p. 269).⁴⁸

Despite perhaps coming closer to the truth, Kaddish is nonetheless faced once again with the undeniable absence of his son when he approaches the local rabbi with doubts about how 'to make a funeral when there wasn't a son' (p. 291). The rabbi explains that he does not understand how Kaddish can want to have a funeral without a body and with his wife still believing their son may be alive:

'Maybe,' the rabbi said, 'you're wrong in not waiting.' 'Me? I'm the same as always. Not right or wrong, only deficient,' Kaddish said, 'forever falling short. But this one thing, a father to a dead son without a son to weep over. This is an absence that's not right and not fair.' (p. 294)

Unconvinced, the rabbi explains that it would be against Jewish law to perform a burial without a body:

'Abandon the mourning. [...] Go back to your wife. She's a sensible woman, Poznan. It sounds like she does the right thing. [...] Forget a funeral. You are forbidden in these circumstances even to mourn' (pp. 294; 298).

Kaddish, burdened by his situation, leaves the rabbi's house determined to hold a burial for his son, to shed himself of the prohibition to mourn and assume, as his name would suggest, his role as a mourner.

In the meantime, determined in her search, Lillian has found a priest who assures her that her son is alive and well, but just needs a payment in exchange for information about his whereabouts. Unable to pay, Kaddish, himself convinced of his son's fate, decides to

⁴⁸ While here the news of the possible whereabouts of Pato is revealed to Kaddish by an admitted perpetrator, I do not see the novel as granting the perpetrator as a figure any sort of privileged place in revealing truth. For Kaddish, the revelation of the fate of many young people does not confirm his own son's fate, but merely catalyses his coming to terms with what he believes to be his son's final resting place.

break into the famous La Recoleta cemetery to steal some bones of an important family and hold them ransom in order to pay the impossible sum for Lillian's sake. However, the deceased's daughter does not feel threatened, nor moved to pay for what is already hers. Defeated, Kaddish returns home to present Lillian with the bones as Pato's: 'A dead son is all I have left to give you. That's why I'm here. That's what I've got. I brought you back his bones' (p. 338). Lillian, unconvinced they are her son's ('A mother knows her own son and when he is near'), tells Kaddish to take them and do what he must 'to set [him]self right' (p. 339). In an attempt to do right by his son and tradition, Kaddish buries the surrogate bones next to his mother's grave in the cemetery of The Society of the Benevolent Self. Lillian, convinced of her son's ever-present state:

[...] made her way to the chair by the window. She sat down and settled in. She set her gaze on the corner Pato would come around. And as she did every night, Lillian thought, He will turn [...] (p. 339).

Neither Kaddish nor Lillian is able to truly mourn the loss of their son: Kaddish, perhaps conditioned by his own name, will forever know the replacement grave as false, and Lillian, with her notion of reality and time permanently distorted by her son's disappearance, will, as the narrator tells us, 'settle in' to the absence left by her son.

Having elucidated the ways in which absence functions at the diegetic level, where the catastrophe of Pato's disappearance comes to condition both Kaddish and Lillian's inability to fully mourn,⁴⁹ I would like to point out the ways in which I see *The Ministry of Special Cases* as functioning as a posttraumatic narrative of mourning *transnationally*, thus consolidating the text as a testimony not only of the losses of the detained-disappeared but also of our own inability as readers, distanced in time and space from the losses, to remediate loss. There is one moment in particular in the novel (a mere five pages amongst

⁴⁹ While here I use the same wording, I would not liken Kaddish and Lillian's 'inability to mourn' with that proposed by the Mitscherlich's in the case of post-war Germany, where the inability to mourn the lost love object (an idealised image of the Third Reich, the figure of the Führer, etc.) stems from the fact that the beloved object was responsible, in a way, for its own loss. See Seth Moglen, *Mourning Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 15-16 and Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 1-3.

more than three hundred) where I see the same sort of poetics of absence previously mentioned at work.

Towards the end of the novel, we see a shift in the omniscient narration – a break, in the middle of chapter, where the narrator begins to use first-person plural pronouns, uniting both characters and readers: ‘Let’s make it clear that it’s a girl from the start. There should be no expectation of its being Pato when we see the body, long and lank (and living still)’ (p. 300). The young girl is being held in a clandestine detention centre (the very same cell Pato was held in, we are told) and who, between interrogations and torture, discovers six small notes written on paper left in the foam mattress of her cell with the name *PATO POZNAN* scribbled at the top. In this sort of prosopopoeic device where Pato is alive in these notes left by him, having passed through the detention centre as well, we see the girl as the nexus between both Kaddish and Lillian’s realities:

In the present is where things came apart. Lillian alone was convinced of Pato alive and Pato well and Pato held in some other place. Kaddish alone believed, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that Pato was at the bottom of the River Plate. Then there was the girl. She embraced, quite neatly, the conflicting positions of Lillian and Kaddish. She saw both their truths, believed ardently both their absolutes. By virtue of inhabiting a cell where Pato once was and now was not, Pato was to her as living as he was dead. (p. 303)

The girl then takes a decision, receiving Pato’s testimony by memorising the notes and hiding them in her mouth, in an attempt to protect them from her torturers.

The narrator then explains that as Pato’s parents continue their search (Lillian for more information, Kaddish for a rabbi willing to perform a funeral without a body), the young girl’s body ‘had already been settled in the sand for some days under the pressure of a trillion litres of River Plate’ (p. 304). Despite the fact that the narrator, endowed with omniscience, provides us with a vast array of details about our protagonists’ lives or the very scene of the unnamed tortured girl, the narrator chooses *not* to reveal to the reader the contents of the six small notes:

An obvious omission. It's fair to wonder about the contents of those notes. It's true that the girl got to read them and memorize them and swallow them down. It wouldn't be right, though, to share Pato's message when neither Kaddish nor Lillian will hear it, when neither parent will learn that those notes ever were. [...] The memory is the girl's alone. And that's how it will stay. (p. 304).

Having to answer only to the reader, the narrator nevertheless opts for absence despite his knowing, converting us as readers into witnesses of not only the crime but the very same unknowability, irreparability, and irrecoverability it entails for Kaddish and Lillian.

The final product of this heteroglossia (the narration of Kaddish and Lillian's loss, fruitless search, and installation in never-ending absence through dialogue and omniscient narration; the narrator's direct address to the reader, including us in that first-person plural 'Let's make it clear') is a text that bears witness to the loss of the other, of others' losses, as well as our role in the spatially and temporally removed present to do no other than recognise loss, create testimony of our own inability to remediate and our own inconsolability before loss.

Conclusion

Englander's novel was generally well received in mainstream Argentinian press, being described as a responsible account of disappearance in the recognition of the irremediable nature of such a crime. In an article published in the Argentinian newspaper *Clarín's* cultural supplement *Revista Ñ*, Carlos Gamerro reserves especially laudable remarks for *The Ministry of Special Cases*, a fact that when compared with Gamerro's brief overview of other foreign-born novelists who have written *novelas del Proceso* ('novels on the Process') holds all the more merit. For Gamerro, it is precisely because of novels like Englander's that:

[...] allow for the hope that the overwhelming experience of the last dictatorship [in Argentina] can go on to form part of the memory of *humanity* [...] and not only our own. It is something we can celebrate, then, that the 'heavy inheritance

of the dictatorship' is perhaps too heavy for the shoulders of one single people, and for one single literature.⁵⁰

The heteroglossia present in *The Ministry of Special Cases*, the way in which Englander preserves absence on two different levels, permitting us to not only witness Kaddish and Lillian's loss but also mimicking it in a way by converting the reading of the novel as loss through the denial to reveal Pato's ultimate fate, constitutes what Emir Eshel calls a 'futurity':

[...] new modes of expression [...] that change the world. Metaphors and creative narratives enable us to reshape habits, feelings, and even social relations. Their imaginative power contributes to the process by which a community and reconstitute itself.⁵¹

In Gamero's review of the novel, he points precisely toward a future community where the atrocities of the detained-disappeared are installed in human memory, which in the case of the novel in question is possible because of the author's own inherited memories and narratives of loss and his own sense of vulnerability. Beginning with those sensibilities on behalf of the author, the novel published in the US effectively places the losses of Argentina within the public sphere.

In establishing this transnational space through the novel, it constitutes a literary exercise in Fraser's transformative approach to combat injustices caused by misframing, where certain individuals' stories are often denied an audience. The novel ensures the extension and preservation of mutual vulnerability and creates a public space through literature that is independent of the limitations of the nation-state and that allows us to access the posttraumatic past of others and acknowledges it as irreparable, unrecoverable and, nevertheless, an act a violence directed towards that very bond that connects us. While

⁵⁰ Carlos Gamero, (para 3 of 13). My translation. Original: 'permiten esperar que la abrumadora experiencia de la última dictadura pueda pasar a formar parte de la memoria de la humanidad [...] y no sólo de la nuestra. Es algo que podemos celebrar, entonces: la "pesada herencia de la dictadura" quizá sea demasiado pesada para los hombros de un solo pueblo, y de una sola literatura.'

⁵¹ Amir Eshel, *Futurity: Contemporary Literature and the Quest for the Past* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 7.

the novel never explicitly makes any reference to US involvement in supporting or abetting state-sponsored terrorism in Argentina or other Latin American countries, by presenting a fictional account of forced disappearance that sustains the particularities of loss for both characters and readers in the US (and world) market, the novel effectively paves the way for any future public debate on the issue.⁵² Furthermore, in relating Kaddish and Lilian's attempts at filing an injunction at the Ministry of Special Cases on behalf of their disappeared son, Englander's novel tackles head on the issue of habeas corpus, a right which had been rescinded in the case of those declared enemy combatants by the US in their war on terror.⁵³ The novel thus becomes a space which allows for a multidirectional memory exchange, transforming conventional frames that reflect how we are connected to others' trauma and losses.

I see posttraumatic narratives of mourning as a cultural practice that, when functioning transnationally like *The Ministry of Special Cases*, participate in a mourning process that is catalysed and carried out through the acknowledgement of the unknowable and irrecoverable nature of loss. Returning to the previously mentioned tension between testimony and fiction, the incorporation of absence stemming from violent losses that are not our own directly into the literary narrative converts the text in a species of fictional testimony that functions on two levels: firstly, as a testimony to the others' historical losses and, secondly, as a testimony of our own position temporally or culturally removed from the past, fully incapable of anything other than acknowledging said losses.

⁵² For more on US involvement in state terrorism in Latin America, see J. Patrice McSherry, *Predatory States* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005).

⁵³ Englander explains that 'a very simple metaphor for a government literally out of control is the suspension of habeas corpus. But [he] had this as a metaphor for years, then [his] own government decided to suspend habeas corpus, so it wasn't a political book but then [he] inherited a political stance'. Fox, para 31 of 86.

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Testimony and Place in the Work of Victor Montejo

Tim Craker

The Loss of Place and the Place of Loss

Victor Montejo's first book, *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village*, lays out in a clear-eyed way the death of a place - or, since the village remains, the death of a world that can no longer take place in that place. Montejo's *testimonio* shows us how the 36-year civil war, with the genocidal practices that reached their height in the 80s, tore apart the fabric of society in Guatemala. In the midst of this fight, where land reform and political engagement had become distant issues compared with survival and the further loss of land to the army after massacres, we see how Montejo, despite his courage and resourcefulness, cannot, in the end, escape the demand to turn in names of 'guerillas', whether he knows any or not. Finding himself in a place where his ties to his fellow villagers must be severed - whether by betraying them, by being killed as a result of his refusal to 'cooperate', or by leaving - Montejo chooses exile. What is lost here is the network of social relationships that make up what anthropologists sometimes call the 'closed corporate community' of Maya village life, and with the loss of that body of relationships, he loses his place in the world.

Not only does Montejo lose his place in the world, however, but the world that takes place in the dynamic of everyday life in his village is gone, re-placed (we might say) by a static, corpse-like version of the life-world:

The last days of October resembled a sick burro reluctant to move a step. More corpses kept appearing in the outskirts of town, and machine gun volleys shattered the silence every night. The army infested the town with secret agents who sowed distrust and fear among the neighbors [...] the army became the sole arbiter over the lives of Guatemalans.¹

¹ Victor Montejo, *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village*, trans. by Victor Perera (Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 1987), pp.112-113.

Montejo then tells us that he leaves with the 'firm expectation of returning when peace and tranquility will have returned to the beloved land of the quetzal', but his work in the years before his return, as we shall see, bears the marks of his loss. Insofar as it is not just 'peace and tranquility' that have been lost, but his place in the world, his eventual return to the 'land of the quetzal', then, will also mark something more than a cessation of violence: it will also mark a rebirth of a world.²

Montejo's work *represents* for us a particular way of addressing the place of loss. Montejo's work is not just a representative example of a certain perspective and style, his work actively takes up the difficult task of representing a way of life to others. One sees this as a thread throughout his life and work. In his *testimonio*, when the men of a village where he is teaching grade school are mistakenly captured in a gunfight as 'guerillas,' a woman from that village calls upon him to talk with the army on their behalf, to explain to the commander that a mistake has been made. His willingness to speak for this woman and others in the village rather than go immediately home to his own village after the skirmish leads to his own torture and eventual exile. While in exile he publishes the *testimonio* and a book of poems that, in different ways, represent the Maya to a wider public; later still - as an anthropologist - he published written versions of oral traditions (folk tales, a brief epic poem, and the songs, traditions, and stories of people in a refugee camp in Chiapas, Mexico) in an attempt to ensure these voices could be heard. Arguing that discrimination occurs against *indios*, but that all Guatemaltecos use Maya traditions to serve personal and nationalist agendas, he has worked to have anthropologists use the term 'Maya' rather than 'Indian' in their work. He also served Guatemala for a time - after the war - in a cabinet post as Secretary of Peace, and as a *diputado* in the Guatemalan congress.

In all these ways, Montejo is - in Kirsten Silva Gruesz's felicitous phrase - an 'ambassador of culture.' More media and scholarly attention has been given to Rigoberta Menchú, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, who has been the public face of contemporary Maya culture for over 30 years now. As Gruesz reminds us: 'The Romantic-era search for the national author whose writing would best represent 'our' essential values and character (a process one also sees at work in the contemporary context of ethnic writers)

² Victor Montejo, pp.112-113.

sought to compress a complex web of meanings into a single icon of cultural mastery.’³ If Menchú has been an icon, our focus on Montejó is not an effort to produce another iconic image. Rather, our focus is meant as a corrective to the general focus on Menchú, and to open up the discussion on Montejó to Gruesz’s insight that ‘The rhetoric of ambassadorship insists on literature’s place in a public sphere, where definitions of citizenship, identity, and policy are debated.’⁴

If the testimony of Victor Montejó is that of a cultural ambassador, it takes place in many different genres. In his work as an anthropologist, for example, Montejó writes down the oral tradition (which he sees as itself in the process of being lost) of the man of lightning as it has been told in his village. In this brief epic account of *El Q’anil: Man of Lightning* (2001), the village of *Jacaltenango* is called upon to respond to the need of another village across the sea, which is under attack. Sorcerous shape-shifters see this as an opportunity to win personal glory and ensure that they are the ones sent. *Xhuwan* (Juan), a porter, sees this as a disaster in the making, and goes to visit the four *k’uh* (ancestors / angels of lightning-bolt powers who occupy the heights of the mountains surrounding the village, towards the north, east, west, and south, and who protect the village) to ask them to save his people from the shame that will be brought upon them by the certain death of the foolish sorcerers. Finally, *Q’anil*, on the southwestern range, grants him the power he will need to defeat the enemy and save the sorcerers, but says that *Xhuwan* needs to promise that he will forswear returning to his family, since his transformation will require him to become, like the other *k’uh*, an immortal protector of the village from the heights of the mountain. He promises this, is joined by two others who have a similar devotion to the community rather than to self-glorification, and wins the battle and the respect of the sorcerers. On his return, he has lost his place in the village, but the world that takes place in that place has been renewed because of his sacrifice. Put another way, though defeat would have made it impossible to return, the victory also makes it impossible to return - though his return then brings about a renewal. In the trope or turn of the return, then, we see the (im)possibility of return that shapes Montejó’s work.⁵

³ Kirsten Silva Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture: The Transamerican Origins of Latino Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 15-18.

⁴ Kirsten Silva Gruesz, *Ambassadors of Culture*, pp. 15-18.

⁵ Victor Montejó, *El Q’anil: Man of Lightning*, trans. by Wallace Kaufman and Susan G. Rascon (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001).

Montejo's volume of poetry, for example, written in the decade after he left Guatemala, consistently brings to the foreground what has been lost, so that it is not completely lost and may be reborn. Insofar as Montejo's historical and anthropological writings make the same gesture, the poetry would not be a privileged example. Insofar as Montejo's poetry, however, is an embodiment of what we might call a 'poetics' of creation that emphasizes rebirth and renewal (as we shall see), the poems are more than a mere example of a theme. We will have occasion to see whether this poetics of creation may also be at work in other forms of discourse (e.g. history), and what that means for the ways Montejo's work as a whole address the loss of place and the place of loss. But the poetry created in response to loss is particularly telling, especially when contrasted with a poem like 'A Los Cuchumatanes' by Juan Diéguez Olaverri. Written in exile, after a failed revolution, Olaverri's poem is a nostalgic balm for the loss of a country that never was:

¡Oh cielo de mi Patria!
¡Oh caros horizontes!
¡Oh azules, altos montes;
oídme desde allí!
La alma mía os saluda,
cumbres de la alta Sierra,
murallas de esa tierra
donde la luz yo vi!⁶

Unlike Olaverri, though Montejo marks loss, he generally avoids nostalgia.

In 'Interrogations by Ancestors', he imagines what Maya ancestors will say to their descendants when they stop being silent and learn how much of the Maya culture has been lost. The admonition to rekindle 'la pequena llama sola' (the single tiny flame) in order that 'los pueblos' (the people) might light the way to a future is the logical outcome of their dismay, but the admonition has force only insofar as one has internalized voices that have long since been silenced: 'who little by little | were stilled, | their traces disappearing | like

⁶ Juan Diéguez Olaverri, 'A Los Cuchumatanes',
<<http://www.poemasde.net/a-los-cuchumatanes-juan-dieguez-olaverri/>> [accessed September 8 2017].

the distant wind | of the unknowable | stars.' Juxtaposed with this loss of the ancestors and their knowledge - even to the point of forgetting what the poem later remembers, that for the Maya the stars were not unknowable - is the dream of a rebirth, one made all the more difficult because, although there are still traces of the lost past carved in the stele in ceremonial plazas of the ancient temples, 'it will take a long time to read | and not just imagine | the stories written on those stones.'⁷ Even so, Montejo seems to add (later, in a poem called 'Sculpted Stones'), the *stele* still 'speak.' Montejo writes of the stones 'lost in the jungle' and 'forgotten' in which, however, the 'Maya and their glyphs | stand as one | like fathers and sons.' Is it possible to retrace in these stones a vestige of Maya culture? The stones seem to 'say' so, as when a glyph:

[...] bares its teeth
to the onlookers
as if saying:
"After two thousand years,
Traveler,
we're still on our feet
vigilant
among the silken
cobwebs
of time."⁸

This lost past which nevertheless remains, which has been silenced but nevertheless speaks, is not only a matter for poetic contemplation for Montejo. This theme of a disastrous loss that nevertheless calls for, or upon, Maya voices or traditions in response can also be seen in his history of the advent of violence in the Kuchumatan highlands. As Kay Warren notes of the work in Spanish upon which *Voices from Exile* is based, 'Montejo structures his collection of testimonies of genocidal war to mirror Bartolomé de las Casas's famous description of the atrocities committed by the Spanish invaders against indigenous

⁷ Victor Montejo, *Sculpted Stones*, trans. by Victor Parera (Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 1995), pp. 8-19.

⁸ Victor Montejo, *Sculpted Stones*, p. 35.

populations.' Though the 'intercutting of fragments from the sixteenth century las Casas account' that underscore the similarity is not in *Voices from Exile*, the parallel remains - as does the reference to the *Codex Florentino* in which *Nahuatl* descriptions of omens of the Spanish conquest are found.⁹ In a section devoted to 'Dreams and Portents', Montejo draws on a tradition, one not even necessarily explicitly Maya, to give voice to a diverse Maya response to the onset of violence in the early 80s in the Kuchumatanes. In addition to dreams of golden letters in the sky and of machetes falling from the sky in great numbers were dreams of patron saints leaving their niches to move toward the West, toward Chiapas. Over 100,000 people would eventually move into Mexico, at least for a time, in response to the violence, not to mention the many people who were 'internally' displaced. Stories of such displaced people, the 'voices from exile', have been collected and transcribed by Montejo, but they have also been situated or placed in the context of a Maya history of Guatemala and *la violencia*. In this way the stories do not simply reach us like the dismembered bodies Montejo tells us about that washed downstream to refugee camps in Chiapas, but as part of a multi-layered account, one that emulates the Maya tradition of a 'keeper of days' to remember and situate events.

What this history that must be, in Walter Benjamin's famous phrase, 'brushed against the grain' might mean for Montejo's way of addressing loss, we will take up a bit later in the context of a discussion on mourning and melancholia. First, though, let us look at another of his poems, 'Ombligo', for what it can tell us about taking the measure of loss and living with it, about enduring loss:

Ombligo

Yo sé que mi ombligo	I know my umbilical cord
está sembrado	is planted
allá en las tierras altas	there in the highlands
de Guatemala.	of Guatemala.
Y aunque esté lejos	And though I'm a long way
de mi patria	from home

⁹ Kay B. Warren, *Indigenous Movements and their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 122-128.

yo sé que mi corazón	I know my undivided
indivisible	heart
late igual que antes	beats as before
y sufre la distante	and endures the distant
melancolía. ¹⁰	melancholy.

This capacity to endure melancholy without giving in to it (to experience loss without either 'getting over it' and 'moving on', on the one hand, or becoming captivated by an idealized version of the past as a way of diminishing the sense of loss in one's self, on the other) is what one sees in his characteristic gesture of marking both a devastating, incontrovertible loss and the possibility of rebirth - an experience of the (im)possibility of return to the place - world of the Maya in the American Tropics. The term 'place-world' is taken from Edward Casey who, after Heidegger, has taught us to see the opening of a world in and through a gathering together of what is near and far in a particular place.¹¹ Let's now look at how the creation of the world and the poetry that remembers it brings such a place-world into relief for us.

The Sense of Place

It is no accident that the burial of his umbilical cord in the Kuchumatan Mountains (as we just saw in his poem 'Ombligo') functions to centre Montejo's thought of the American Tropics in his poetry and anthropology. In the account of creation given in *Popul Vuh* (2003) - a central text not only for understanding the Maya but also for understanding literature of indigenous people throughout the Americas, as has been argued by Gordon Brotherston¹² - we are told that in the beginning, after the creation of the world: 'All then was measured and staked out into four divisions, doubling over and stretching the measuring cords of the womb of sky and the womb of earth.'¹³ Initially, there was water 'all alone,' and sky 'all

¹⁰ Victor Montejo, *Sculpted Stones*, pp, 88 - 89.

¹¹ Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 2nd edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

¹² Gordon Brotherston, *Book of the Fourth World: Reading the Native Americas through their Literature* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1992).

¹³ Allen J. Christenson, *Popul Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya* (New York: O Books, 2003) p. 65.

alone,' but when the earth juts into the sky out of the water, the sky and earth are brought into relation to one another, forming the constitutive relation of all relations necessary for a world. This relation of earth and sky, or the world, takes place in and through its measurement, and without it there is no sense of place, and no world.

If, however, the birth of the world performed in the tying-together of sky and earth is measured by the umbilical cords of the womb of sky and womb of earth, setting out the four divisions from the centre of the world, this is just the beginning. For good measure, the gods thought, the wonder of a world of things held together in the relation of sky and earth needs to be remembered and praised, so this creation of the world could not be complete until the successful creation of human beings who, with the help of the Council Book (the *Popul Vuh*), could keep the days and re-enact - or renew - the act of creating the world. Without both the measurement of the world and its remembrance, then, there is no sense of place in a world of things in relation to one another, only of discrete elements - water all alone, or sky all alone without relation, and so without the interconnections that define a place.

This vision of creation and its necessary daily remembrance is echoed in many ways, according to Friedel, Schele, and Parker, who point out that one may see a repetition of the creation of the world in a variety of basic acts. For example:

The very act of preparing a plot of land for growing food - the clearing and measuring out of rectilinear spaces - echoes Creation mythology thousands of years old. Before cutting down the trees and brush, a devout Yukatek farmer will make offerings at the center of his field. His field has four corners and four side sides like the original order established in Creation...He marks the corners and sides of his field, just as First Father lifted up the sky and created a house with four sides and four corners.¹⁴

This is one of the multiple examples of the significance of the centring of life in connection to the four cardinal directions, which thereby creates a pattern of five cardinal directions - or (in Latin) a quincunx. According to William Hanks, this pattern is seen throughout Maya language and culture: 'Altars, yards, cornfields, the earth, the sky, and the highest

¹⁴ David Friedel, Linda Schele and Joy Parker, *Maya Cosmos: Three thousand Years on the Shaman's Path* (New York: Perennial Publishing, 2001), p. 130.

atmospheres are described in terms of the five point cardinal frame.’¹⁵ And, in the succinct phrasing of Vogt, we see that ‘[h]ouses and fields are small scale models of the quincuncial cosmogony.’¹⁶ Within the context of this cosmogony, the intercardinal positions are crucial for situating the altars, yards, cornfields and so on, but what we want to underscore here is the act of centering that occurs when a term like ‘the navel of the world’ is used to designate a small but central hill in Zinacantan.¹⁷

This moveable, centring, quincuncial perspective is also embodied in a poem of Montejo's entitled ‘The Five Directions.’ Montejo begins with the rising of the sun in the east of his country, but the threads of light (along the warp and woof of east / west and north / south) are woven or tied together at the centre or navel of the world:

The sun will travel slowly
from east to west
and likewise shine
from north to south,
though it will be clearest
in the center,
The navel of the world.¹⁸

Of particular interest here is the temporal character of the light - the way it can be traced ‘slowly’ from East to West, along with the active *shining* of light from north to south. What this suggests is that the ‘center’ is as temporal as it is physical:

Cocks will crow loudly
when dawn appears
in the East of our country.
The smiling sun will climb

¹⁵ William Hanks, *Referential Practice, Language and Lived Space Among the Maya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 349

¹⁶ Evon Z. Vogt, *Tortillas for the Gods: A Symbolic Analysis of Zinacantan Rituals* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 58.

¹⁷ *Maya Cosmos*, pp. 123-126.

¹⁸ Victor Montejo, *Sculpted Stones*, p 21.

with the bustle of melodious birds
and light will flash
in the cones of distant volcanoes.¹⁹

Our focus is on an *event* of the sky becoming light, filled with the sound of birds, and - in a flash - meeting the earth, the volcanoes jutting into the sky.

This echoes *Popul Vuh* where, as we have seen, the world comes into being when things come together and are remembered. In *Popul Vuh*, this idea is underscored by the account of how- without memory - things fall apart, and the world dissolves. We see this in the first attempt to make a human being using mud. This being could not even remember its own form, much less the world, and dissolved. When the people made of wood, the manikins, failed to care for the things of the world, to hold them in their memory and be thankful for them, the things rose up against their 'masters' in the 'humiliation' that included the great flood that dissolved all of creation. The flip side of the idea that memory plays a creative role in holding the world together is the idea that without language there would be no world at all. We have seen that, initially, there was the sky 'alone,' not in relation to anything else. And there was the murmuring of the water 'alone,' not in relation to anything else. But with the word of the gods, including Sudden Thunderbolt and New Thunderbolt, mountains thrust out of the waters into the sky, and sky and earth are joined in relation to each other. In a flash of lighting, then, the power to bring together what is near and far constitutes the world. This constitutive act is repeated in the performance of reading *Popul Vuh*:

It takes a long performance and account to complete the lighting of all the
sky-earth:
the fourfold siding, fourfold cornering,
measuring, fourfold staking,
halving the cord, stretching the cord
in the sky, on the earth,
the four sides, the four corners, as it is said,

¹⁹ IBID.

by the Maker, Modeler,
mother-father of life, of humankind,
giver of breath, giver of heart,
bearer, upbringer in the light that lasts
of those born in the light, begotten in the light;
worrier, knower of everything, whatever there is;
sky-earth, lake-sea.²⁰

As we saw earlier, the sky-earth, or world, is created and opens out in the four-fold directions as the umbilical cords of Heart of Sky and Heart of Earth are tied together and stretched out. If the light is clearest at the centre, the navel of the world, it may be because where sky and earth meet and the four corners emerge, at the navel of a new world, there is a kind of clearing that occurs that makes possible the thought of the possibility of humanity.

Such was the formation of the earth when it was brought forth by the Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth, as they are called, since they were the first to think of it. The sky was set apart, and the earth was set apart in the midst of the waters.

Such was their plan when they thought, when they worried about the completion of their work.²¹

What they 'worried about' in thinking of the 'completion of their work' was a being who would be able to be a 'keeper of days,' who could understand, remember, and be thankful for the world that was created. It took the gods several tries to get it right, which underscores the way creation is a repetitive, temporal process - creation takes place, but it also takes time. In the same way, the re-creation of the world through the performance or reading of *Popul Vuh* by a keeper of days is a repetitive, temporal process, which creates the world anew each time.²²

²⁰ Dennis Tedlock, *Popul Vuh: The Definitive Edition of the Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings*, Revised Edition (New York: Touchstone Books, 1996), pp. 63-64.

²¹ IBID, p. 66.

²² IBID p. 63.

The gods needed to repeat their acts of creation because their creations could not keep the days and be thankful. Then, when they did create beings capable of remembering and understanding the bringing-together of things, they discovered that these men of maize could do this too well. As the new beings said, 'we've understood | what is far and near, | and we've seen what is great and small | under the sky, on the earth.' To underscore this, the narrative then recounts: 'They understand everything perfectly, they sighted the four sides, the four corners in the sky, on the earth, and this doesn't sound good to the builder and sculptor,' who think that while it would be good for them to see what is nearby, a portion of the face of the earth, seeing the near and the far brought together makes them like gods. So, 'They were blinded as the face of a mirror is breathed upon'.²³ *Popul Vuh*, however, speaks of knowledge gained by those shamans who read it and know the Maya calendar:

They know whether war would occur; everything they saw was clear to them.
Whether there would be death, or whether there would be famine, or whether
quarrels would occur, they knew it for certain, since there was a place to see it,
there was a book. Council Book [Popul Vuh] was their name for it'.²⁴

The profound acceptance of the temporal process of keeping days, of the limits placed on our understanding of the lighting of the world, so that we must return again and again to the lighting of the world as it is given in *Popul Vuh*, as well as attend to each new day as significant in its own right, is echoed in the following passage of Montejó's poem:

I believe in the avian light
in the center of America
that greets the lovely dawning of day
in the East
and knows how to say goodbye
to the dark evening
of the West.²⁵

²³ IBID, p. 148.

²⁴ IBID, p. 192.

²⁵ Montejó, *Sculpted Stones*, p. 23.

The light is avian because with the dawning of a new day the sky becomes not only light but also filled with the sound of birds. In a double-gesture concerning loss and rebirth that is now familiar to us, this avian light 'knows how to say goodbye' to the day as the sun sets but also knows how to greet 'the lovely dawning of day.' This capacity, it will come as no surprise to us to find, emerges from an almost erased Maya sacred geography:

These are the five directions
according to Mayan astronomers:
The red dawn of day (East).
The dying black of evening (West).
The white of the chilly North.
The yellow power of the South;
and in the center of the world
the intense blue-green
of the tropics.²⁶

In addition, then, to holding together the East and the West through the keeping of days, the avian light at the centre of the world also weaves together the North and the South with the East and the West:

I believe in the avian light of the tropics
that pursues its fugitive arc
from North to South
and South to North
when the cold comes
making bite-marks
with its cold white fangs.²⁷

²⁶ IBID, p. 21.

²⁷ IBID, p. 23.

The centre or navel of the world, then, figured in the *temporal* avian light of the tropics, is not a point in space so much as it is the holding together, keeping, or weaving of the four directions.

The five directions Montejo articulates for us here, when taken together, give us an implicit poetics of creation, an opening of the world that gathers together what is near and far in a particular place, but the key here is that the intercardinal directions have to be taken together. To take only the East and West, and to divide them, is to forget the temporal event of the sky becoming light and filled with the sound of birds.

How beautiful to see the world
through the Maya prism
with its five cardinal directions.
Can this be learned by Westerners
who see just two directions:
East and West?

What do the birds,
wrapped in their melodious song,
know about the arms race
between East and West?²⁸

The East / West divide also leaves out the role of the imagination in relation to nature, since the 'leaping deer,' who are 'symbols of good luck,' know nothing about '*odios diplomaticos*' between East and West. And children who have just been born are likewise positioned outside the bounds of an East / West divide, so that they do not yet know the reductive world produced by this dichotomy, still prevalent today (though no longer in the form of the Cold War that had such violent consequences in Guatemala).²⁹ Rather than beginning with a binary division, then, Montejo seeks to begin with a quincuncial sharing (out) of the world:

More than ever I believe

²⁸ IBID, p. 21.

²⁹ IBID, pp. 22 -23.

as the ancient Maya believed
in the five sacred colors
that rule the world's directions.³⁰

From within the avian blue-green light of the tropics, evoking not only the quetzal feathers but also the blue of Heart of Sky and the green of Heart of Earth, we can see the world in such a way that it is held or woven together, and we can, as humans (in the account of the *Popul Vuh*) were meant to do, keep the days and be thankful.

When we learn to see the world
like human beings,
we'll see that life is very beautiful,
an unfolded flower
that won't bloom twice.³¹

Given the temporal character of this avian green-blue lighting of the world in and through which the world unfolds itself, it is difficult to understand in what sense it is a centre. Perhaps it might be clearer to think, as we have seen Friedel, Schele and Parker do, of a 'centering' that takes place in this quincuncial cosmogony.³²

Place as Palimpsest

*A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there.*³³

—Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local*

³⁰ IBID, p. 23.

³¹ IBID, p. 23.

³² *Maya Cosmos*, pp. 123-176.

³³ Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997).

Is the poetic cosmogony we have just sketched out sufficient to explain how Montejo finds his way about this landscape of exile and return, of loss and renewal?

Drawing on Lucy Lippard's suggestive formulation in the epigraph above, we might refine this question further to ask: How do we readers, like Montejo, immerse ourselves in the layers 'replete with histories and memories', the connections that 'surround' and 'form' a place, deal with the loss of 'what happened there', all the while recognizing the promise or possibility (which is not a given, nor a prediction) of 'what will happen there?'

Perhaps one place to start such an inquiry is the concept of 'palimpsest' with which Lippard is working. What does it mean to understand place as a palimpsest?

In a remarkable installation about Retreat Plantation on St. Simon's Island, an artist and a historian see in the term 'palimpsest' a way to come to grips with the difficulty of envisioning Retreat Plantation as a place over time.³⁴ So: that the sole remaining still-standing quarters of the enslaved people who lived on the plantation has become a gift shop at the Plantation Golf Course (of Sea Island Golf Courses) is more than an irony of history, it is an almost erased, not quite legible, but still significant feature of a place considered as a palimpsest. To this image we can add the graveyard of enslaved inhabitants of Retreat Plantation that is just out of bounds (but still in play) at the golf course, along with the tabby ruins of a plantation 'slave hospital' that adds local color and a sense of 'authentic' history to the grounds of The Cloister Resort. Juxtapositions of images like these enable us to see history take place, or become implaced, in its layers. We can lament the time-space compression of a tourist industry that silences the former inhabitants of the plantation, but then we realize that the plantation itself (and its use of tabby materials first used by native inhabitants) is connected to the displacement of indigenous people on the island - who were themselves located in a complicated network of places and affiliations. Rather than an exercise in nostalgia for some 'authentic' understanding of a place, then, the installation becomes an inquiry into how we might situate ourselves in relation to a palimpsest-place that, while 'socially constructed' in relation to global economies of colonialism and tourism, nevertheless has a depth that cannot (quite) be erased. This reminds us that places are composed of multiple connections and layers that give our experiences of them dimensions of width and depth without locking us into - but also not denying as part of the equation -

³⁴ Melanie Pavich-Lindsay and Lisa Tuttle, *Retreat: Palimpsest of a Georgia Sea Island Plantation* (Clark Atlanta University Galleries, 2001).

either lamentation of the shallowness of a sense of place in a plantation-turned-resort or reactionary affirmations of nostalgic identity that endure as essences in an otherwise changeable world.

As in the palimpsest of Retreat Plantation, Montejo's testimony in his work as a whole calls upon us to respond in ways that neither simply affirm nor jettison our attachments and identifications. The complicated character of this gesture owes something to the complicated character of mourning and melancholia as reactions to loss, especially if we broaden the concepts to include societal reactions to loss that occur in social change. Here we see the possibility, pursued in a recent anthology on loss, edited by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, of using the concepts of melancholia and mourning in a context that does not focus on the individual so much as on socio-historical fields of inquiry.³⁵ This possibility has interesting consequences for our study of Montejo who, as an 'ambassador of culture' in Kirsten Silva Gruesz's useful phrase, comes to represent not only a Maya identity, but also the processes of change and loss places and cultures may undergo.

Whatever else we might say about these concepts 'mourning' and 'melancholia', as responses to loss, they have to be understood in relation to complex layers of attachments and identifications, which cannot be jettisoned all at once when we have lost something to which we are attached or with which we identify. Because the object is lost to us, the attempt to affirm and maintain our connections to the object can open a kind of wound that saps energy from us. On the other hand, the expenditure of energy involved in jettisoning one's attachments to and identifications with an object all at once is thought by Freud to be prohibitive; because our relation to the object is made up of 'innumerable single impressions (unconscious traces of them),' the libido can detach itself from the object only 'bit by bit.' If the work of mourning gets short-circuited when the focus is not so much on a lost object as on a loss of the ego, as Freud at least sometimes seems to suggest, it remains the case that we cannot simply affirm or jettison the layers of attachments and identifications that have accreted over time. We keep our connections, to a certain extent, but we also uncouple our connections, bit by bit, over time, until with the passage of time the links become less difficult to break off. So if places may be understood as palimpsests, sedimentary records of social and cultural change, our attachments and identifications with places have about them

³⁵ David L. Eng and David Kazanjian eds., *Loss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

something of the character of a palimpsest as well. This means that when a place is lost to us we have the capacity to 'get over' our loss, partially, over time, but also to stay attached to what we have lost, or at least to the wound in our ego that marks our sense of loss.³⁶

Freud's work tends to be dismissive of the strategy of coping with loss through a melancholy fixation on a lost ideal, and has a parallel in Benjamin's critique of a 'historicist' identification with a 'lost' past which has been idealized by the 'victors,' which he then contrasts to the work of historical materialists who uncouple our identifications and attachments layer by layer through reading history 'against the grain.' The attempt of the historicist to focus on the past alone stems, he supposes, from a kind of acedia, or sorrow of the world (as Thomas Aquinas defines it). Rather than acknowledge loss as central to history and seek to work out the implications of that loss for our lives, the historicist focuses on his or her identification with the past. By substituting the identification with the past for the lost past, the historicist seeks to shore up the sense of loss by internalizing the loss of the past into him- or herself. Thus, what has been lost becomes experienced as a loss in his / her ego, but in a way that cannot acknowledge it. This results in the seemingly 'blind' affirmation of the nostalgic account of what has been lost; to question seriously the transmission of and loss of cultural treasures in terms other than those of our primary identification would be to be unable to sustain the fiction of an identification with the past that will make up for its loss.³⁷

This way of understanding mourning and melancholia in a social register may seem all too familiar to us. People are displaced. Places die. We confront, again and again, the loss of the possibility of inhabiting a world (through historical forces we narrate as 'colonization', 'modernization', 'globalization', 'governmentality', etc.). Like Benjamin's angel of history, we see disaster pile upon disaster with a wearying ever-changing sameness. How, we wonder, are we to respond to this otherwise than with sadness in and anger at our helpless complicity with the loss of whole worlds? We might ask of Benjamin and Freud, what enables us to read history against the grain rather than short-circuit the work of mourning through focusing on the wound one feels and substituting for an attachment to the object a

³⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia,' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol XIV, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 2001), pp. 243-258.

³⁷ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 253-264.

narcissistic identification with those who have defined the lost object? What enables us, in Benjamin's terms, to 'seize history' in a 'moment of danger' rather than be captivated by it?

Derek Walcott, in a colonial register, leads us to a similar question. Walcott makes a distinction between the history of the New World as a causal chain and the myth of the New World as a place where 'everything is renewed'. Literature that 'serves the muse of History' then becomes 'chained' to the past, and is a literature of revenge or remorse. Poets of the New World (from 'Whitman to Neruda', Walcott says) who, like Adam, see themselves at the creation of the world, seek to break the chains of history and renew the world. This distinction has more to do with the purposes of the writer than the genres of discourse. Novels and other forms of literature share narrative structures with history, and remind us that 'in time every event becomes an exertion of memory and is thus subject to invention', making them more subject to the power of creation at the heart of myth and poetry than to the chains of cause and effect. At the same time, there are 'poets of the Third World' whose poetry, in service to the muse of History, respects 'only incoherence or nostalgia'. As with Montejó, more important than the genre of discourse is the purpose to which it is put. Whether in poetic or narrative form, there is a poetic and mythic attention to the possibility of creation understood as always including rebirth and renewal. This leads to the question: If history (and the history of colonization and slavery in particular) prompts us to think that all history can do is 'what the past always does: suffer, and stare' (as he puts it in *Omeros*³⁸)—an image of our inability to free ourselves from the chains of cause and effect in our apprehension of history—how is poetry as an affirmation (however conflicted) of creation (and of the creation of the New World in particular) possible?³⁹

Montejó, of course, is able to draw on what amounts to a poetics of Maya cosmogony in a kind of answer to these questions. After all, loss is built into the act of creation, with the world undergoing several 'humiliations' before humankind was successfully created. Even then, humans lost their ability to see the world completely, making them dependent on the supplement of the *Popul Vuh*. Most importantly, however, is the way the gods require a memory of creation to 'complete the lighting of all the sky-earth'. Each time the story of creation is retold, the world is renewed. The keeping of days is itself

³⁸ Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (New York: Noonday Press, 1990), p. 15.

³⁹ Derek Walcott, 'The Muse of History', in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1998), pp. 36-64.

an act of creation, of renewal or rebirth. This is especially true when the original manuscript of the *Popul Vuh* is either hidden or gone, because the *Popul Vuh* must now be told amidst the 'preaching about God' in 'the time of Christendom'. Written in a transliteration of the K'iche language, it is created anew, even while remembering its loss of place in the world. Montejo, however, in drawing on a poetics of Maya cosmogony, does not (as Derek Walcott sometimes seems to do) simply privilege poetry over history; nor does he (as Benjamin sometimes seems to do), in focusing on loss and the absence of linear progress, assume the inescapability of the perspective of the angel of history. Rather, Montejo's work testifies to the power of the perspective of a man who understands that *sharp* distinctions between melancholy and mourning, history and poetry, serve other purposes than that of moving toward a rebirth of Maya worlds and villages.

We see this attitude at work in a later book, *Voices from Exile* (1999), which examines the displacement of a people through a study of Maya who have moved from the Kuchumatan Highlands in Guatemala to refugee camps in Chiapas, Mexico. Exile is often defined by the place from which one has been displaced, but the voices from exile are not nostalgic as much as articulations of different kinds of implacement after this general displacement. For example, in certain cases people from different villages and languages lived in the 'same' camp. Clearly, their initial experiences would have been quite different, but over time the importance of Spanish as a medium for communication led to greater knowledge of Spanish (for those women, for example, who had not previously had an opportunity to learn market Spanish). And children from different villages who grew up and were educated together sometimes learned more than one Maya language along with their Spanish.⁴⁰ On their return to Guatemala, whether in a newly established village for repatriation or to their home village, these experiences would lay the groundwork for what Kay Warren calls a pluricultural society. Montejo's recognition of this leads him to his latest book, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance: Identity, Representation, and Leadership* (2005), which seeks to think through the implications of a rebirth of a Maya world.⁴¹ What might it mean - in spite of the violence, in spite of the loss of a traditional sense of place, in spite of

⁴⁰ Victor Montejo, *Voices from Exile: Violence and Survival in Modern Maya History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

⁴¹ Victor Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance: Identity, Representation and Leadership* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

everything - to underscore the possibility of inhabiting a renewed human world in the American Tropics?

For Whom Is Montejo's Testimony Given?

Our guiding question has been one of how (in what forms), when (in which event, across what periods of time, according to what tempo), where (in what place or across what places), by whom (which subject, citizen, community, society, world) and for whom - with what purpose - do responses to loss *take place*? We have sought to weave together loosely responses to these questions through focusing on the thread of Montejo's response to loss. We are perhaps now in a position to focus on the purpose of Montejo's testimony.

The strategy of Montejo's collected essays on the Pan-Maya movement after the war and its consequences for thinking about issues of identity, representation, and leadership, is roughly the following. There is a Maya tradition - it is not the province of any particular Maya language or group, but in the interconnecting family resemblances (as Wittgenstein might put it) it can be seen - and that plurivocal tradition is in the process of being renewed yet again. Take these practices and ways of speaking and seeing as a kind of bedrock - not one that cannot be worn away or lost, but a sedimentary ground for getting on with things - and see in the more and more finely grained understandings we have of the plurivocal tradition the possibility of a common sharing (out) - or *partage*, in Jean-Luc Nancy's terms - of 'being all together, all and each one among all.'⁴² This possibility of a democratic culture is marked by Montejo at the level of the efforts of Maya self-determination (which for Montejo consists primarily of weaving together the different voices of a Maya tradition and its changes rather than creating a separate nation-state), at the level of national culture and feeling (which for Montejo consists in demythifying racism and weaving together a plurivocal Maya tradition with a *mestizaje* conception of being ladino in order to enable indigenous people to live with other citizens of Guatemala as indigenous and as citizens), or at the level of the Americas (where Montejo focuses on the importance of addressing the same issues he is addressing in Guatemala within the hemisphere as a whole). In response to the loss of sense felt generally because of colonization, the Cold War, and globalization, he focuses on

⁴² Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Truth of Democracy*, trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

the sense of a *Mayab'* world that nevertheless has been, is, and will be - though not necessarily in a continuous way. It is perhaps worth remembering that the ancient Maya, in 'keeping the days', worked within a calendrical system that was able to situate or 'place' the days in relation to multiple cycles of years. A *k'atun* cycle refers to 20 Maya years, and each *k'atun* has its own prophecies and meanings associated with it, which can shape the meanings of the days within that *k'atun* cycle. There is, then, always the possibility of disruption between *k'atun*-cycles. There is also disruption involved in the *b'aktun*, the completion of 144,000 days or 20 *k'atun*. Montejo refers to this when he notes (prior to 2012) that Maya leaders are aware of the coming-to-completion of the 13th *b'aktun* (in the long count), and that past prophecies concerning the coming 14th *b'aktun* tends to create a 'millennial' attitude to the future of the Maya and all people in the Americas. Their attitude, however, is neither catastrophic nor messianic. Rather, they focus on things taking place in such a way as to see events come into being that are resonant with both past and future, but which are neither completely grounded in the past nor come to completion in the future (whether catastrophically or redemptively). Thus, rather than the traditionalist focus on what has been, on the one hand, or the revolutionary focus on what must be, on the other, Montejo advocates a 'regenerationist' stance that looks backwards and forwards simultaneously, all the while keeping a sharp eye on the injustices as well as the possibilities of the present moment, which will give way to another *k'atun* or cycle of 20 Maya years.

The key point here is that there is a difference between *having* a place-world and *making* a place-world. Traditionalists and revolutionaries each focus on possession rather than creation. Can we reclaim our place in the world? Can we re-place those in positions of power? These questions are expressions of desire to *have* a place - with its attendant powers - in order to create the world anew, but Montejo sees in each of these ways of engaging the world a dead-end, one that does not lead to the regenerationist style of leadership that he sees as necessary to weave together the Maya and the ladino in Guatemala in a pluricultural nation. Can we lay claim to Maya traditions, he would ask, without claiming them as belonging only to the Maya? Ladino appropriation of Maya tradition is nothing new (just read Miguel Angel Asturias!), but what might be new is a trust in the possibility of the tradition being regenerated in its mixture with ladino life and culture. 'It may be selling out if one transforms oneself into a "Madino" (Maya-ladino) from a hunger for power for oneself, but not if the goal is to place the Maya agenda in the foreground, equal with the ladino

agenda.⁴³ This potential restructuring of cultural discourse can occur only in a world where there is a shared aim to bring about a unified sense of place to a pluricultural society, but this shared aim can only come about through a Maya renaissance, a rebirth of a world that has always already been a weaving-together of different voices, but which, like a promise, is also always still to come.

As a result, in Montejo's more specific terms, we might rather ask of the angel of history whether it is possible to endure melancholy but refuse to give in to it; to attend to changes in tradition that occur in voices from exile, without forgetting their ties to the traditional colonial wound marked, for example, in the *Codex Florentino*; to transcribe / translate / transform oral traditions that are becoming lost by writing them down, but not without insisting on the irreducible oral setting from which these works emerge; to engage in a critique of continuing appropriations and losses of the Maya, but also to situate for us the rebirth of Maya ways of life as a promise of democracy to come, of being all together, all and each one among all?

⁴³ Victor Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance: Identity*.

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The Testimony of a Poet: Transcription, Witness, and Poetic Documentation in Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony*

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In his introduction to *Against Expression* (2011), Craig Dworkin designates Echo as the embodying spirit of conceptual writing, passing over 'the confessions of Narcissus' and 'the romance of Orpheus' in favour of a goddess who manifests duplication as poetic value.¹ Dworkin's choice of Echo underscores documentation and transcription as central to conceptual writing's movement away from Orphic romance and confessional modes of poetic expression. Indeed, the importance of Orphism in the lyric tradition is one that extends certainly to Plato, and its careful entwined into the mythological system of Orpheus' descent into—and return from—the underworld, articulates the visionary nature of Orphism so important to the romanticism to which Dworkin alludes. Choosing Echo underscores the role of documentation and recording as a poetic practice and, furthermore, the status of Echo—traditionally a lesser spirit—is compelling in this regard: Echo, after all, requires Narcisse in order to appear. In this way, Echo is not only a figure of repetition, but of secondariness, ever tied to the presence of another in order to appear.

Explaining the role of transcription and documentation as literary activities, Dworkin approvingly applies the term 'uncreative' to his appraisal of archetypal transcribers like Herman Melville's scrivener and Gustave Flaubert's Francois Bouvard, who produce works that 'culminate in an uncreative frenzy of imitation and transcription'.² Part of what is so intriguing in this transition is that it represents not simply a change in method, but a crossing of genres. Where transcription is a practice whose mode of writing has its history in other disciplines, its employment in the creative realm creates intriguing generic tensions between the documentary and creative, between the original and the secondary. In this regard, poetic acts of transcription are 'uncreative' approbatively: What is made—following the root

¹ Craig Dworkin, 'The Fate of Echo', in *Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing*, eds. by Kenneth Goldsmith and Craig Dworkin (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2011), p. xlvii.

² IBID, p. XVI.

of poetry, *poesis*, as a making—is not something new, but the old newly seen. The sponsoring spirit of Echo informs much of conceptual writing, and I would like to offer here a consideration of this documentary impulse as it is illustrated by Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony*, a work that employs transcription and reframing practices by utilizing courtroom documents—witness testimonies—that have been drawn from thousands of actual cases.³ My aim is to consider the numerous kinds of intersection at work in *Testimony*, including the interaction between the poetic and the documentary, the written and the spoken, and the subjective and the objective as they are manifested by Reznikoff's poetic reframing of courtroom testimonies.

Reznikoff worked on *Testimony* for his entire professional life. Trained as a lawyer (though he practised only for a short time) and long engaged in the writing of entries for a legal encyclopedia, Reznikoff brought to his poetic work another language set entirely, namely that of legal discourse. He was particularly interested in testimonies, pouring over thousands and thousands of pages in the slow-construction of his poetic works. The choice of testimony documents in the creation of a poetic text was a carefully motivated one on Reznikoff's part. This is true not only from the perspective of objectivity and documentation, but of testimony as a particular mode of objectivity and documentation. As Reznikoff notes, the tie between giving testimony and writing poetry is not so distant as might be assumed, particular the so-called objectivist brand of poetry with which he was associated. 'By the term objectivist I suppose a writer may be meant who does not write directly about his feelings but about what he sees and hears,' Reznikoff explains, '[and] who is restricted almost to the testimony of a witness in a court of law'.⁴ Reznikoff continues to assert that the act of testimony itself, in a court of law, offers a good description of what the poetic act itself should also aim to achieve. 'Suppose [you are] in a court of law,' he explains, '[and] you are testifying in a negligence case. You cannot get up on the stand and say, "the man is negligent." That's a conclusion of fact'.⁵ The poet, too, should not 'conclude a fact' but, rather, testify to it by naming the particulars with which it is surrounded. In this manner, as

³ Charles Reznikoff, *Testimony: The United States (1885-1915) : Recitative* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 2015).

⁴ Milton Hindus ed., *Charles Reznikoff: Man and Poet* (Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1984), p. 194.

⁵ *IBID*, p. 195

Reznikoff says, 'there is an analogy between testimony in the court and the testimony of a poet'.⁶

There are two central items to consider when discussing Reznikoff's reframing of testimony documents: first, the movement the original documents have made from spoken language to written language; second, the over-determining presence that the accepted languages of testimony have vis a vis individual acts of testimony. To begin with the question of transcribing spoken testimonies into the written documents Reznikoff was able to access, it is clear that the act of courtroom transcription calls upon a host of intriguing questions surrounding language itself. It is worth noting that each sphere (legal, sociological, poetic) that utilizes transcription in building a body of knowledge does so with its own conventions (as to the transcriptive act itself) and that these conventions will point to essential pursuits and values of the sphere itself. In courtroom uses of transcription, fidelity is essential, and what is said far supersedes *how* it is said; while in the sphere of the social sciences *how* an answer is given may be as important (or more important) than the answer that is given. Thus, social sciences, for instance ethnographers interested in gleaning values attached to a group's daily practices, will scrupulously record intonations, pauses, volumes, inflexions, and so on to attempt to capture the sounds of the answers as they are given. In courtroom transcription, no substantial effort is made to record the sounds or nuances of spoken language, as content will normally exceed manner. Moreover, the individual utterances of a testimony is impacted by the over-determining frame of the accepted conventions of testimony in order to give the greatest probability that what is extracted from the individual will fit the larger purpose of the testimonial act: namely, to objectively provide the raw materials on which a legal determination can be made in the case at hand.

What I am attempting to illuminate, whether we are discussing transcription practices in the courts or in the social sciences (two very prevalent spheres of their usage) the aim is toward objectivity and the reliable collection of information that can be used in service of some other primary goal: to formulate an argument, to determine guilt, to test a hypothesis. The important point is that the ways in which conceptual writing exploits, tests, or otherwise builds out from these baseline practices is a poetic matter largely overlooked in discussions of conceptual writing, this despite the clear fact that a large portion of

⁶ IBID, p. 195.

conceptual writers utilize transcription in some way specifically as a poetic practice.

Understanding these roots proves to be quite illuminating when it comes to understanding the uses to which conceptual writers are putting them, as I hope to show.

A long-established research and documentary practice in the legal and social science fields, transcription is often thought of as a necessary evil on the way toward knowledge. Rachelle Annechino, in her essay 'Transcription and Reflexivity', offers an emblematic framing of transcription within this context:

For projects that incorporate transcripts, the transcription process can feel like a necessary evil that you have to get through in order to move on to 'real' analysis. Transcribing recordings yourself can be a revelation and a great way to get close to your data, but at the same time there's a wall of tedium people hit, when transcription would be gladly traded for a less painfully tedious task.⁷

Annechino is speaking here as an ethnographer, discussing recorded interviews as they are rendered as text for subsequent analysis, but the analogy to the legal sphere is clear. Individual speech acts are idiosyncratic, and the work of the transcriber has a lot to do with regularizing and capturing these idiosyncrasies in ways that can convert the speech act not only to written text, but data that is quantified as text. Transcription, here, is a part of analysis for the researcher herself but not the final product of that research. Likewise, in a legal setting, the testimony is first captured as text, and then subject to analysis and interpretation. In the legal sphere, however, it is not so much the act of transcription—carried out by a court reporter whose one concern is accuracy—but in the overarching rhetorical framework into which the 'acceptable' utterance that ends up being transcribed must be placed. That is, within the legal sphere there is a control put on speech itself—particularly testimony—precisely to make the journey from speech act to recorded data, i.e. evidence, possible; whereas in numerous social science practices the work of extracting data comes after the more freely formed speech is captured. As Ian Davidson points out in 'The Languages of Charles Reznikoff', Reznikoff is interested in restoring the

⁷ Rachelle Annechino, *Transcription and reflexivity*, <<http://ethnographymatters.net/blog/2012/05/02/transcrip-on-and-reflexivity/>> [accessed 9 April 2018].

individual speech act embedded within the documents of testimony that has regularized them.⁸ This act, an ethical and poetic one, aims to restore the voice by re-releasing it as poetic testimony: 'In *Testimony*, Reznikoff demonstrates the ways in which America culture, homogenized through performative legal processes, has a variety of voices, each one of which is an example of itself'.⁹

Testimony is a polyphonic text that envoices numerous speakers that step forward, have their say, and then recede. The language of witness and testimony, Giorgio Agamben writes in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, is always about this activity between the said and the unsaid:

Testimony is a potentiality that becomes actual through an impotentiality of speech; it is, moreover, an impossibility that gives itself existence through a possibility of speaking. These two movements cannot be identified with either a subject with a consciousness; yet they cannot be divided into two incommunicable substances. Their inseparable intimacy is testimony.¹⁰

The 'intimacy' of testimony in this sense is in constant evidence in Reznikoff's text. Examples can almost be drawn at random, as the project itself is repeated by each instance.

Immediately, *Part One: The United States (1885-1890)*, establishes the text's organizing principle of dividing individual testimonies into regional markers: 'The South', 'The North', and 'The West' in the case of Part One. These divisions are then subdivided by motifs, which often recur under numerous regional markers: 'Social Life', 'Domestic Scenes', 'Negroes', 'Machine Age' occur under various regional headings in Part One; other motifs, such as 'Chinese' and 'Stagecoaches' occur under only one regional marker (in the case of Part One, these fall only under the purview of 'The West'.) In this way, Reznikoff provides senses of both regional singularity and commonality, as well as offering—in the instance of the trans-geographical motifs—a varied sense of reality for groups and concepts of particular motifs as they vary across regions. Finally, the first motif of each section is always called a

⁸ Ian Davidson, 'The Languages of Charles Reznikoff', *Journal of American Studies*, 45 (2) (2011), pp. 355-369.

⁹ IBID, p. 358.

¹⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), pp. 145 - 146.

‘Recitative’. The use of the term ‘recitative’ — a technical term from opera identifying a declamatory style of voice in which the singer is permitted to depart from stylized forms of singing to adopt more regular patterns of speech in order to convey plot and story—highlights Reznikoff’s poetic technique and his adoption of ‘regular patterns of speech.’ The first poem from the *Recitative* section of *Part One*:

I.

Jim went to his house
and got a pair of plow lines
and then into the stable
and put one on the jack
and led the jack out
and tied him to a fence;
and put the noose in the other line around the head of the jack
and began to pull.

The Jack began to make a right smart noise.

Its dead body was found next morning,
fifteen or twenty feet from the stable door;
the neck, just back of the head,
badly bruised.¹¹

This poem sets much of the tone for the work as a whole, its detachment and objectivity, but also—following Agamben’s notion of the saying and unsaying of testimony—the great blanks and unknowns that reside so prominently in Reznikoff’s poems. Here we do not really know why the jack—another name for a mule—was killed by Jim. Presumably, the matter is at court to determine precisely this, to account for Jim’s odd behaviour and methodical killing of the mule (emphasized by the repetition of ‘and’ at the beginning of nearly every line at the poems’ outset). We simply are not given enough context to understand what has happened, and in fact, we don’t know even who is speaking. It may be Jim himself, as

¹¹ Reznikoff, *Testimony*, p. 5.

Reznikoff often appears to transpose first-person speech to the third person, and it is also possible that Reznikoff is summarizing a great deal of court documents into this condensed, horrific scene. The undertones of lynching is clearly alluded to in the poem as well, a subject that will arise as the work progresses, as an important element of Reznikoff's focus on the treatment of minorities, women, and immigrants in the American period he is attempting to capture via his poetization of court documents. It is precisely THIS indeterminacy which is preserved by the act of sincerity. An indeterminacy of the event—an indeterminacy that belongs to the object, rather than to the subject. An important effect of this uncertainty is the objectivity and impartiality it lends to Reznikoff's text: rather than emote, contextualize, and narrativise, the text simply provides: like a stenographer, Reznikoff behave like a recording device, culling through the documents and providing a poetic synthesis that still endeavors to resist subjectivity in favor of providing a poetic testimonial.

This activity of detachment in the light of violence is repeated constantly throughout the text. In a poem located under the motif of 'Domestic Scenes' in Part One, this process is brought to a kind of extreme instance:

1

It was nearly daylight when she gave birth to the child,
Lying on the quilt
He had doubled up for her.
He put the child on his left arm
And took it out of the room,
And she could hear the splashing of water.
When he came back
She asked him where the child was.
He replied: "Out there—in the water."

He punched up the fire
And returned with an armload of wood
And the child,
And put the dead child into the fire.
She said: "O John, don't!"

He did not reply
But turned to her and smiled.¹²

Here, again, we lack a good deal of context, we lack certainty as to the speaker (except in the quoted portions, but there we still do not know who is providing the reported speech), and we certainly lack motive. Why did John do what he did? We can infer reasons, but we cannot know; nor can we know what the court has found, whether fault was assigned, and to whom. Instead we know only the scene, and we watch it in a kind of helplessness. Indeed, in acts of complete violence when a life is taken, or many lives, the role of the witness is certainly to speak but also to outline the absence implied by their speaking: they speak for those who cannot speak. In this way, the sense of uncertainty surrounding Reznikoff's texts further bears witness to the troubling absence at the centre of many of these scenes, namely, the person(s) whose life has been taken. This idea is recalled by the very notion of witness itself—and the duty of witness—which Agamben unpacks in *Remnants of Auschwitz*:

The witness usually testifies in the name of justice and truth and as such his or her speech draws consistency and fullness. Yet here the value of testimony lies in what it lacks; at its center it contains something that cannot be borne witness to [...] the 'true' witnesses, the 'complete witnesses,' are those [...] who 'touched bottom: the survivors speak in their stead, by proxy [...] they bear witness to a missing testimony.'¹³

This sense of bearing witness to 'missing testimony' is inscribed across the entire project of *Testimony*, and indeed becomes its haunting subject. Indeed, at times the perpetrators of violence are not even human beings but the age itself. This notion Reznikoff returns to many times in the recurring motif 'Machine Age'. Two examples are provided below, to give a sense of how Reznikoff uses the juxtaposition of events—almost in the manner of a sonnet cycle—to underscore themes and to give a sense of the expanse of particular scenes as they recur repeatedly. Only the details change: the act of bearing

¹² Reznikoff, *Testimony*, p. 15.

¹³ Agamben, p. 34.

witness persists. Here two deaths, or injuries, are described; both suffered by workers in relatively new acts of employment brought about by modernization:

Machine Age

1

Forty feet above the ground on a telegraph pole,
The lineman
Forced the spur he wore into the pole and,
Throwing his other leg around it,
Leaned over

To fasten a line with his nipper
To the end of a cross arm
By a wire around the glass cup on a pin.

The line, hauled tight
Hundreds of feet ahead of him
By means of a reel,
Broke,
And the crossarm
Broke where it was fastened to the pole:
He fell headlong
To the stones below.

2

all revolving shafts are dangerous
but a vertical shaft,
neither boxed nor guarded against,
most dangerous.

The girl's work for the company was changed
To sweeping the floors:
Among other places the floor of a room
Where the shaft in a passageway—
Between the wall and a machine—
Ran from the floor to the ceiling.
In sweeping around it one morning
Her apron was caught
And drawn about the shaft
And she was whirled around
Striking the wall and machinery.¹⁴

Transcription is, I have argued, a salient feature of conceptual writing. These instances, to extend our discussion beyond Reznikoff for the moment, have ordinarily attempted to centralize the nature and practice of transcription as essential to the text that is produced. As I will argue momentarily, Reznikoff offers in my estimation a unique instance of transcription and reframing, one that seeks to establish a more nuanced ethical stance toward the text than many of the other conceptual writers who have employed transcription and reframing practices have seemed to me to do. Rather than transcribing to suggest the equality and objectivity of texts, as has been something of the norm among conceptual writers, Reznikoff does it to restore the individuality and idiosyncrasy of what has been transcribed. This difference, I hope to show, marks an important place in the history of transcription and reframing practices within conceptual writing, one that instantiates an ethical gravity that has largely been vacated from the practice of transcription and reframing within conceptual writing over recent years. Degrees of this evacuation, and instances of it, range from Simon Morris's honorific performative retyping of *On the Road*,¹⁵ to Nathan Austin's slightly-silly-yet-insightful transcription of the television game show *Family Feud*,¹⁶

¹⁴ Reznikoff, *Testimony*, pp. 79 - 80.

¹⁵ Morris's project—born-digital as a blog and subsequently published as a book, *Getting Inside Jack Kerouac's Head*—the project is a straight-ahead transcription of Kerouac's novel, page by page. The final product is pure repetition, and is artistically meaningless by most any measure, leaving only the act of transcription as a sole sight of (potential) meaning. It is pure echo.

¹⁶ Austin transcribes a month of answers from the television game show *Family Feud* and then reassembles them alphabetically, according to the second letter of the answer phrase's first word.

to the more extreme mantel taken up first by Kenneth Goldsmith's magisterial and still practice-defining *Day* to his now infamous *The Autopsy of Michael Brown*. This latter example, greeted by most critics with distress over its blanket appropriation and evening of a highly fraught text, would seem to represent the nadir of critical tolerance for the notion that all texts are (at least conceptually) equal, and would seem further to demonstrate the limit case for the notion of textual homogeneity itself.

There are many meanings of transcription across many spheres, but acknowledging that these are all practices born outside the poetic sphere—are decidedly anti-creative in their ideal attempts to simply record with fidelity as a precursor to analysis—remains fundamental to understanding the poetic act of reframing. I do not mean to offer anything like a full history of transcription here, but I do want to spend some time illustrating how transcription practice as it exists in conceptual writing is both indebted to, and removed from, its roots as a research and legal tool. Transcription, broadly conceived, can be thought of in terms of two categories: specific, and generic. A specific transcription aims to render the speech act of a single speaker with notation adapted from musical transcription focused on conveying the rhythms and intonation of that speaker. For anyone familiar with the challenges of ekphrasis, the efforts of social linguistics to render the complexities of human speech in logographic form is nothing short of herculean. This emphasis on the sound of language is historically determined: the first transcriptions preexisted audio recording technology, and although technological advances have found other ways to detail the sounds of speech, the roots of research transcription in sound remains important. Broad transcription, in contrast to specific transcription, is aimed at conveying the way a population speaks, for instance, the collective pronunciation of the letter a in the word hat in northern London. Both these approaches are of primary importance to linguists, though

Here the relationship between input (in this case, broadcasts of the show) and output (Austin's book, *Survey Says!*) also has its beginning in duplication but swerves from it. *Survey Says!* is an echo chamber of the program, transcribing contestants' responses over the course of two months of broadcasts, yet the ordering logic of Austin's arrangement overtakes the 'natural' ordering of the responses in favor of alphabetization, an organizing principal so fundamental to conceptual writing that Jacquelyn Ardam has remarked, in 'The ABCs of Conceptual Writing', that it 'has a substantial stronghold' (133) over the field. Part of the appeal of alphabetizing is that, as 'an inherently meta-discursive trope', (Ardam 133) it centralizes language as an organized system within discrete writing projects, while also serving to reduce a mass of data—in Austin's case, a month of game show responses—to an organizing principle that is at once objective and yet familiar enough to seem organic.

most transcription work in the social sciences is at some level interested in conveying the sound of speech, if not for linguistic purposes then to record the tone of an answer by an interview subject, or even the delay before answering, as this might impact the meaning of the answer being given. Child psychologists, for instance, are often especially interested in the ways in which the answer *and* its delivery in speech convey meaning and how to represent this complete picture of data in their research findings.¹⁷

The sound of speech for research transcriptions of numerous kinds across the social sciences reveals, by way of contrast and fidelity, just how minimally both are important to conceptual transcription. The overwhelming effort in conceptual transcription is toward the creation of a literary object, not a faithful rendering of reality, either to the sound of spoken language, or the data it has recorded. Conceptual writers can seem positively lackadaisical, despite avowed interests in capturing the nuances of spoken language, when contrasted with examples of research transcription. While the comparison is obviously somewhat unfair—to take a hallmark from within transcription practice itself: one should use as much detail in transcription as the aims of the research project warrants—it is rather eye-opening to compare the work across disciplines. Thinking of Steele, or to take a much more recent example, Barry Heselwood, alongside a conceptual poet doing transcription illuminates both practitioners' aims.¹⁸ While Heselwood, in his recent book, advocates for tracking positions of tongue tip, blade, and back, as well as vocal chord vibrations across a single phoneme, Goldsmith is content with including a few 'ahs' and 'uhms' within a perfectly punctuated and paragraphed transcription of a radio traffic report.¹⁹

¹⁷ To briefly underline the importance of efforts to capture sound in transcription, elocutionist Joshua Steele's 1775 transcription of actor David Garrick's recitation of Hamlet's famous soliloquy—often cited as the very first act of specific transcription—helps to make the point. Leaving behind the crosscurrent between literature and transcription evident in this foundational example, it is compelling to recall that, in the absence of recording technologies, specific transcription was the only way available to capture spoken language in this kind of detailed attention to the way it sounds. The result is a cross between musical annotation, and poetic scansion: The result cannot be read meaningfully without an understanding of the symbol system, but it is worth noting the difficulty evident in attempting to convey sound within text, and how important just such an aim can be within research transcription.

¹⁸ Barry Heselwood, *Phonetic Transcription in Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

¹⁹ Kenneth Goldsmith, *Traffic*, (New York: Make Now Press, 2007).

The foundational essay on the subject of transcription is Elinor Ochs' 'Transcription as Theory'.²⁰ In this work Ochs, an ethnographer, discusses in detail the practices of transcription, and the implications these practices have, asserting the still-canonical idea that every transcriptive act, no matter how faithful to the 'original,' involves interference on the part of the transcriber. The question is double: What normative practice is being bent, and how, and in what way does this engender a new (un)uncreative writing practice? As Ochs writes, 'transcription is a selective process reflecting theoretical goals and definitions', and 'the process of transcription has not been foregrounded' and 'a transcript that includes the information presented in what follows should be considered a "basic transcript."'.²¹ 'Selectivity, then, is to be encouraged. But selectivity should not be random and implicit, rather the transcriber should be conscious of the filtering process. The basis for the selective process should be clear'.²²

Transcription, I believe, telescopes conceptual writing's desire for, in Jeffrey T. Nealon's phrase, an 'antioriginalist performativity'.²³ If the desire is to be 'antioriginal', and to 'foreground...the ubiquitous functioning of language as a set of practices, not the fatality of redemptive meaning or innovative epiphany that poetry is famous for', then transcription is the perfect vehicle.²⁴ The more interesting part of Nealon's phrase is 'performativity,' since it is evident that the act of transcribing holds a great deal of poetic value for the majority of conceptual writers. Texts that employ some form of transcription or reframing, like *Testimony*, tend to be large texts (*Tesimony* is over 500 pages long, and Reznikoff worked on it for decades). There is an important element of understanding the work of *Testimony* as *work*: the image of Reznikoff as amanuensis, pouring over thousands of court documents, transcribing and rearranging them laboriously, is always mentioned in discussions of the work – as if the method, the performance, of its compositional method were (as they are) part and parcel of the poetic achievement of the text itself. Goldsmith's *Day* is an even more extreme instance of this, since its status is based almost entirely on the labor evident in its production. It is a work of gargantuan, tedious transcription—a 900-page book that is little

²⁰ Elinor Ochs, 'Transcription as theory', in *Developmental pragmatics*, edited by E. Ochs and B. B. Schieffelin (New York: Academic Press, 1979), pp. 43 - 72.

²¹ IBID, p. 44.

²² IBID, p. 44.

²³ Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity* (London: Duke UP: 1998), p. 117.

²⁴ IBID, p. 120.

more than a retyping of a single Sunday issue of the *New York Times*—and every critic's desire to mention the 900-pageness of the project reminds us that, whatever may be said about reframing, the performance holds meaning. Furthermore, through his choice of subject part of its meaning is its scope. Returning to ethnographer Rachelle Annechino's statements on transcription in this light, clarity begins to emerge, and her description of research transcription now echoes Sisyphus' life in the underworld:

For research projects that incorporate transcripts, the transcription process can feel like a necessary evil that you have to get through in order to move on to "real" analysis. Transcribing recordings yourself can be a revelation and a great way to get close to your data, but at the same time there's a wall of tedium people hit, when transcription would be gladly traded for a less painfully tedious task.²⁵

This 'wall of tedium' is at the centre of the value of transcription as a poetic practice, and it's also central to the value of reading these works. Steven McCaffery, in a recent article entitled *Day Labor*, underlines precisely this idea, arguing that:

Goldsmith's concern in *Day* is not with aesthetic defamiliarization but with obdurate exemplarity – carrying out a totally useless labor, with the attendant consequence of transcribing an immense and theoretically unreadable tome who value is admitted to be zero.²⁶

Returning to *Survey Says!* the project of Austin to transcribe answers given by contestants and then to arrange them schematically, is sourced in an activity that strikes one as both useless and tedious. As Austin notes, 'It took time -- I had to watch each episode twice, more or less, and often had to rewind particular segments several times, to ensure I got things right.' However, the practice reveals itself as meditative for Austin and the tedium becomes a way of short-circuiting inspiration in favour of agglutination:

²⁵ Annechino.

²⁶ Steven McCaffery, 'Day Labor', in *Time in Time: Short Poems, Long Poems, and the Rhetoric of the North American Avant-Gardism, 1983-2008*, edited by J. Mark Smith (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2013), p. 180.

There's something sort of pleasurable about this weird process that was not creative at all. I didn't have to be inspired. I could be exhausted from teaching four classes and come home and plug away at it. And I was getting somewhere. Every day the file grew by X number of lines.²⁷

Testimony itself is an immense work, but it is far more than an act of transcription. Not only does Reznikoff distil and arrange to provide poetic testimony, he has also chosen documents of inherent historical import. Where one might bristle at the deliberate uselessness of transcribing a newspaper, there is no such case to be made against Reznikoff's careful resurrection of an historical document in *Testimony*. The compelling difference with *Testimony* is that though the work has massive scope, it is not made up of language without historical or ethical import, nor in Reznikoff's reframing and transcription of the courtroom documents merely performative 'antioriginality'. Rather than using alphabetical organization, or totality as organization (*all* of the Sunday Times, *all* of *On the Road*) Reznikoff gives his work an ethical organization – regional markers, markers of motif, all centered around providing a harrowing image of the American life as it was captured in courtroom testimony, and as it is recaptured in poetic testimony.

There is a compelling alchemy achieved by repetition. In one sense, transcription is the same semantic act over one page as it is over 900, but the final point to be emphasized here is that these works based in a transcription method are also works that tend to extend the method over a great duration. This is certainly true of Reznikoff's *Testimony*, whose page-count and extended years of composition, underscore an important element of transcription as practice. What, after all, is the effect of the same act done many, many times, as opposed to once, particularly if that act is a valueless, repetitive one? The activity gains meaning precisely by being repeated because the collision of the finite with the infinite embodied in such tedium invokes the sublime. As Sianne Ngai writes in *Our Aesthetic Categories*:

²⁷ Austin (email to the Author, 5 October 2016).

Like the Kantian sublime, the stuplime points to the limits of our representational capabilities, not through the limitlessness or infinity of concepts, but through a no less than exhaustive confrontation with the discrete and finite in repetition. The bits and scraps of what surrounds the self on all side is what Beckett calls 'quaqua'.²⁸

As Ngai notes, 'in this manner, stuplimity pulls us downward into the denseness of language rather than lifting us up toward unrepresentable divines—a realm much like the mud in *How it Is*, where bits and scraps accumulate in beings transmitted [...].' A lot of something finite becomes a substitution for the idea of the infinite. 'Here,' Ngai argues:

finitely large numbers substitute for the infinities we associate with the sublime, yet the effect of these enumerations is to similarly call attention to representational or conceptual fatigues, if not destructions. Such tiredness results even when the narrator subdivided the enormity of what we are asked to imagine [...]²⁹

The writer carries that fatigue for us, pushing the rock of transcriptions repetitive and tedious labour on our behalf:

What stuplime productions do rely on is an ant-auratic, anti-euphoric tedium which at times deliberately risks seeming obtuse, rather than insist upon its capacity for intellectual or spiritual transcendence and/or clever irony. Rather than being centered around grandiose questions of being or the proliferation of larger-than-life iconography, this boredom resides in relentless attention to the abject and the small [...]³⁰

We do not know how to respond and that, too, is part of the value, and it may be this final act of being stupefied that the act of transcription so importantly confers. It is in many ways

²⁸ Sianne Ngai, *Stuplimity: Shock and Boredom in Twentieth-Century Aesthetics*, <<http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.100/10.2ngai.txt>> [accessed 9 April 2018].

²⁹ IBID.

³⁰ IBID.

an inversion of the chain of inspiration spoken of by Plato, and certainly—returning to Dworkin’s summoning of Echo, a refutation of it—one in which a chain of tedium, or a wall of it, is there for the reader to encounter.

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Poetic of the contingent detail in witness narratives about the reign of Terror during the French Revolution

Carole Dornier

In memory of Renaud Dulong

Following Paul Ricoeur and Renaud Dulong, I would define testimony first of all as a fact of language and an act of discourse, an account of a past event, certified by the fact that the narrator was present during this event: his or her account emphasizes that they were there at this time. In a more or less implicit way, the narrator requests to be believed.¹ According to Hayden White and Paul Ricoeur, all narrative implies an intrigue and a figuration; any narrative text has a literary and fictional dimension and presupposes strategies of linguistic figuration used in the writings of imagination. To emplot events is an operation more poetic than scientific, and it is a matter of choice among the various sorts of plots available in a given cultural tradition. There is no natural or logical necessity presiding over this choice, which is relatively free. A trope would, therefore, be at work in any narrative, including factual and historical, insofar as it results from emplotment.² The accounts I will speak about are written and published testimonies, in accordance with the intentions of the narrators. To publish one's own testimony means that the narrator accepts that they are taking part in a public debate.³ We can call these kinds of testimonies historical testimonies, intentionally written by narrators who were witnesses but who want to provide material for a history of their time. For Krystof Pomian, 'a narrative is given as historical when it displays the

¹ Paul Ricoeur, in *La Mémoire, l'Histoire, l'Oubli* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), p. 201-208, develops the definition of testimony by Renaud Dulong (*Le Témoin oculaire: les conditions sociales de l'attestation personnelle*, (Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1998), p. 43): 'Un récit autobiographiquement certifié d'un événement passé.'

² Hayden White, 'Literary Theory and Historical Writing', in *Figural Realism, Studies in the Mimesis Effect* (London/Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 8-9; Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récit* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), pp. 286-301, Carole Dornier, 'Toutes les histoires sont-elles des fictions?', in *Esthétique du témoignage*, ed. by R. Dulong and C. Dornier (Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2005), pp. 91-106.

³ Paul Ricoeur, *La Mémoire, l'Histoire, l'Oubli*, pp. 205-206.

intention of submitting itself to a control of its appropriateness to the past extra-textual reality of which it treats'.⁴ From a pragmatic point of view, it is the expression of this intention which specifies the historical narration (the autobiographical pact or attestation). But it is also the possibility of carrying out this control through confrontation with sources that distinguishes history from fiction. Nevertheless, the demand which the author of the narrative of lived events, as well as historians, is trying to satisfy, includes, as Pomian has pointed out, the expectation of a restitution of what was seen and felt. What could be seen and felt by one who has lived these events, are objects required in the factual narrative and which require poetics.⁵

My hypothesis is that, in these intentional accounts which are intended to play an historical part, the traumatic event is a peculiar challenge for the narrator and implies a specific art of writing. I mean by *trauma* the subjective experience of an individual who witnessed an overwhelming life-threatening event, who felt an 'intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation'.⁶ How to transmit these specific events among others facts which are not traumatic or traumatic to such a degree and to still reach the public? How to reconstitute the part of the unbelievable or unlikely? How to deal with narrative devices to avoid stereotypes or conventional rhetoric, to share and to make the audience feel what was lived and felt? I would argue that it requires specific devices.

The French Revolution and particularly the period called The Terror (June 1793 – 27 July 1794) was incited by conflict between rival political factions, and was marked by mass executions of 'enemies of the revolution'. Aristocrats, Girondists (political faction rival to the dominant Jacobins), and all the citizens suspected of furthering a return to Monarchy were threatened. All this period can be considered, in fact, as traumatic, 'unnamed experience [...] [an] irruption of the incredible', which then gives rise to a political instrumentalization, amalgamating revolution and terror.⁷ In order to be a witness to a disappearing world, to

⁴ Krzysztof Pomian, *Sur l'Histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 34.

⁵ Pomian, pp. 64-65.

⁶ See Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York : Basic Books, 1997), pp. 33-34.

⁷ See Jean-Clément Martin, 'Les Mots de la violence: les guerres révolutionnaires', in *La Violence de la guerre (1914-1945), approches comparées des deux conflits mondiaux*, ed. by S. Audoin-Rouzeau (Paris : éditions Complexe, 2002), pp. 34-35; About *trauma* as a concept for understanding Terror, and about the variety of explanations on the origins of the Terror, see Patrice Higonnet, 'Terror, Trauma and the 'Young Marx' Explanation of Jacobin Politics', *Past and Present*, 191, (May, 2006), pp.

plead one's own cause, and to testify to overwhelming and horrifying events, memoirs and written accounts proliferated during the following decades.

Among a lot of accounts that were published are those whose authors were well known enough and which had the rhetorical and literary qualities necessary to interest a public. They could borrow from contemporary literature such genres as history, novel, memoirs and autobiography, theatrical melodrama, pamphlets, trial briefs and courtroom literature. These witnesses were eager to share their feelings, to make people understand their traumatic experience. The literary, rhetorical and poetic heritage, requiring verisimilitude and decorum, acted as a brake on the realization of this purpose. To pass on their experience, the narrators had to create specific ways to show and to make people feel what they saw and what they felt. It is these specific ways I would like to emphasize in this paper.

Leaning on three testimonies of witnesses who escaped death during the Terror and having rhetoric and literary skills, I will study in their accounts the different devices used to create a strong effect of presence at the traumatic scene, especially by contingent details and narrative devices of *showing*, restitution of sensory perceptions, internal focusing and a confined point of view, reported discourse and narrative slowing down.⁸ Subverting requirements for a traditional plot - a narrative logic and a chain of plausible events - omitting marks of causality, this kind of narrative, far away from any attempt at convincing or pleasing, tries to reconstitute the strangeness of the scene. These accounts of traumatic events are all the more specific in their historical context since the narrative of the period, as well in history as in a novel, remains submitted to rhetorical and aesthetic canons and to a limited set of techniques.

For obvious reasons, testimony in memoirs or historical narratives written after the French Revolution uses forensic or epideictic rhetoric, as defined by Aristotle. Testifying after a time of trouble following civil and internal conflicts is often a way to justify or to accuse, to praise or to censure. The main issue is to convince the audience of what must be considered as just or not, in an imaginary trial. However, in the case of traumatic events, things are

121-164.

⁸ About this concept, see Tobias Klauk and Tilmann Köppe, 'Telling vs Showing', in *The living Handbook of Narratology*, edited by P. Hühn (Hamburg: Hamburg University, 2014), <<http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/telling-vs-showing>> [accessed 20 March 2018].

different, as I would like to uphold. The aim of the traumatic testimony discourse is less to convince than to imagine and believe what is hard to believe, to share an extreme experience.

Among these testimonies, *Mon agonie de trente huit heures* de Jourgnac de Saint-Méard (*My agony during thirty-eight hours*) is well known by the historians working on the French Revolution.⁹ It is one of the most famous and complete accounts of the September Massacres, seen by a survivor, the journalist Jourgnac de Saint-Méard. Jourgnac was arrested because he was suspected to be a counter-revolutionary and consequently someone who would aid the invading Prussians. During these days, hundreds of people were killed by a mob or condemned and executed, usually with a sabre, after a summary trial in the prisons where the slaughter took place. The second testimony is by Jean-Baptiste Louvet, a novelist who became a Girondist representative during the beginning of the Revolution.¹⁰ In 1793, the Montagnard faction, considering the Girondists as reactionary enemies, obtained from the Convention their arrest. Louvet was among those who escaped Paris, lived in the country and was hunted down while the Terror was expanding. The third account comes from the memoirs by Madame Campan, lady-in-waiting to Queen Marie-Antoinette, who was in the Tuileries on 10 August 1792.¹¹ She had remained in the palace, where a number of servants and courtiers were hunted down and killed by the insurgents.

Jourgnac, in his prison, was sure to die; nevertheless, he escaped death, thanks to his ability to win sympathy and to justify himself during his trial. Louvet was several times very nearly discovered, and eventually eluded investigation and reached Switzerland. Campan saw the sabre brandished over her head miraculously stopped by an unexpected order. The three witnesses are then survivors and I have chosen to focus on the account of the life-threatening experience that they have told.

In different parts of their accounts, all of them use forensic rhetoric to plead their own cause. Jourgnac who cannot hide his royalism, and published his text in Paris a few days after the events, must adopt an opportunist attitude, so, he presents himself as a faithful

⁹ Jourgnac de Saint-Méard, 'Mon agonie de trente-huit heures', *Les Massacres de septembre* (Paris: Librairie académique Perrin, 1907). My translation.

¹⁰ *Mémoires de Jean-Baptiste Louvet* (Paris: éditions Desjonquères, 1988). My translation.

¹¹ *Mémoires de madame de Campan* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1988), <<http://www.authorama.com/book/memoirs-of-marie-antoinette.html>> [accessed 20 March 2018].

citizen who admits his mistakes. Louvet who writes in exile, out of danger, can give vent to his opinion against the Terror and the Jacobins leaders and to his plea for the Girondist faction. As for Madame Campan, her memoirs are a sober but efficient defence of the Queen and the Royal Family, and of herself, whose faithfulness was suspected because of her role under Napoleon 1st. This forensic rhetoric must take the political context into account to reach its public, but it can also be considered as a limit of the expression of a human truth. The suspicion of partiality often soils such testimonies, which is precisely why narrators are led to follow others tracks when they want to transmit extreme experiences and the human truth which can be drawn from it. They try to share the strangeness of the traumatic experiences they went through; that is the reason why I would rather speak about the poetics of these testimonies than rhetoric about the scenes I am going to focus on.

In these scenes, Jourgnac, Louvet and Campan use the narrative device of *showing* or *mimesis*, that is to say, the direct representation of events and speech (versus *telling* or *diegesis*, indirect presentation and summary). They give greater importance to sensory details, internal focusing and a confined point of view, direct speech and narrative slowing down.

The narrative showing mode suits, particularly, the traumatic scenes because it presents the events of the story less as elements of a plot, that is to say, an esthetic unit providing causal linking than as scenes or images without logical connections. The showing mode is a verbal way to express how traumatic memories can be reactivated in their whole intensity. Particularly in the account of Jourgnac, which relates the events of a few days, but in the two others too, slowing down is given first by more and more precise chronological details: 'Monday 3rd at three o'clock in the morning [...] Tuesday at one o'clock in the morning [...]' and so on.¹² If these details sound like an official document and tag the story with marks of factuality, they also stretch the duration of telling, suggesting an unbearable wait and an imminent threat for the prisoners destined to slaughter in the case of Jourgnac, the length of days and nights spent outside trying to escape detection for Louvet, and the intensity of dangerous moments in front of an angry mob for Campan.

By techniques of dramatisation, narrators stay in the background to let the characters speak the story. When Jourgnac tells of his arrest and his questioning, the narrator fades; the

¹² Jourgnac de Saint-Méard. My translation.

words pronounced are reproduced without any introduction or commentary, emphasizing the procedural features of the dialogue. This dialogue between the accused, defending himself, and his judges is sometimes interrupted by elements of the account which focus on sinister facts, disturbing the course of questioning as following:

The caretaker, full of alarm, went and warned that a prisoner was escaping through the chimney. The presiding judge ordered him to be shot with pistols. [...] He was the unfortunate Maussabré. [...] He was finished off in front of the wicket.¹³

The dialogue and these kinds of narrative breaks stretch the account and make the reader feel present at the scene, increasing its crucial intensity.

In the memoirs of Louvet, a longer text to tell events spreading over several years, slowing down is obvious in the part regarding his escape in the country, which is the most traumatic part of his experience. Louvet organizes his account around a few scenes, telling in which circumstances he was very nearly discovered and arrested. For instance, near Rostrenen, in Brittany, the little troop of runaways is submitted to a particularly dangerous check in the barn where they spend the night:

At one hour in the morning, [the danger] arrived. 'Open up in the name of the law', shouted someone. [...] Our only candle was blown out. One of us slowly opened the door and shut it at once. 'There are people around the house', he said. A threatening and louder voice repeated from outside: 'Open up in the name of the law'. At once after a deep silence among us, first surprised, an only unanimous and really terrible cry followed: 'To arms!' Everybody was looking for them, everybody was groping for clothes. It couldn't be very quick. We were hearing from time to time 'in the name of the law', but the tone was less assertive. 'We won't go out before being ready', we answered. I remember that it took me a long time to find my gun. [...]. Eventually, we opened. A figure

¹³ Journac de Saint-Méard, p. 234. My translation. Original: '[...]Le concierge entra tout effaré, pour avertir qu'un prisonnier se sauvait par la cheminée. Le président lui dit de faire tirer sur lui des coups de pistolet [...] C'était le malheureux Maussabré [...]. Il fut achevé devant la porte du guichet.'

wearing a tricoloured scarf was barring the door. Close behind him was a quite numerous troop of national guards. Torches were lightening the scene. 'What were you doing here?' asked abruptly the administrator of the district [...]¹⁴

The narrator keeps on depicting the scene with so many details that he needs to apologize to the virtual readers for the length of his account.¹⁵ He uses dramatic visualization, representing the event with descriptive details, rendering gestures and dialogue to make the scene more visual and imaginatively present to the reader. The visual memory underlines the dark, the light and the colours; on the other hand, as a dramatic device, the accurate words are reported in direct speech, more as sounds and auditory memories than for their meaning. For a short while, after that episode, the runaways escaped to their arrest and to death. Louvet will use the same devices in other following episodes: when the outlaws hidden in a cave hold their breath, or when a shelter is refused to them during a rainy night, or when Louvet is lying, the barrel of his pistol in his mouth to kill himself if discovered, in a carriage under clothes, straw and boxes, while a guard, checking the vehicle, is walking on his body.

Madame Campan uses dramatic visualization, narrative slowing down and sensory details to represent the overwhelming, increasing popular violence which defies belief and made her go into an entirely unknown world:

On the 20th of June [1792] this mob thronged about the Tuileries in still greater numbers, armed with pikes, hatchets, and murderous instruments of all kinds, decorated with ribbons of the national colours, shouting, 'The nation forever! Down with the veto!' [...] The Queen could not join the King; she was in the

¹⁴ *Mémoires de Jean-Baptiste Louvet*, p. 85. My translation. Original: 'À une heure du matin, il arriva. Au nom de la loi, criait-on, ouvrez. [...] Notre unique chandelle était éteinte. L'un de nous entrouvrit doucement la porte et la referma sur-le-champ. La maison est entourée, nous dit-il. Une voix menaçante et plus forte répéta du dehors: Au nom de la loi, ouvrez. Aussitôt au profond silence qu'un premier mouvement de surprise avait causé parmi nous succéda un seul cri, un cri unanime et vraiment terrible: Aux armes! Chacun les cherchait, chacun s'habillait à tâtons. Cela ne pouvait être fort prompt. Le nom de la loi se faisait de temps en temps entendre; mais d'un ton moins assuré. Nous ne sortirons que quand nous serons prêts, lui répondait-on. Je me souviens que mon fusil se fit longtemps chercher [...] Enfin nous ouvîmes. Un personnage à ruban tricolore barrait la porte. Un peu derrière lui était un groupe assez fort de gardes nationales. Des flambeaux éclairaient la scène. Que faisiez-vous là? demanda brusquement l'administrateur de district.'

¹⁵ *Mémoires de Jean-Baptiste Louvet*, p. 87.

council chamber, where she had been placed behind the great table to protect her, as much as possible, against the approach of the barbarians [...] She had fixed a tricoloured cockade, which one of the National Guard had given her, upon her head. The poor little Dauphin was, like the King, shrouded in an enormous red cap. The horde passed in files before the table; the sort of standards which they carried were symbols of the most atrocious barbarity. There was one representing a gibbet, to which a dirty doll was suspended; the words 'Marie Antoinette à la lanterne' were written beneath it. Another was a board, to which a bullock's heart was fastened, with 'Heart of Louis XVI' written around it. And a third showed the horn of an ox, with an obscene inscription.¹⁶

More than the vocabulary expressing value judgment ('barbarians...atrocious barbarity'), these are visual details ('ribbons of the national colours...tricoloured cockade...red cap'), precise description of unseemly objects ('a dirty doll...bullock's heart...the horn of an ox') quotations of threatening words ('Marie Antoinette à la lanterne', 'Heart of Louis XVI') which share the frightening oddness of the scene. Imagery and dramatic visualization representing strange details are here at the opposite of narrative *patterning*. In this true story, discerning and anticipating the structure of the plot, leaning on common beliefs or causal connections that most readers will have some direct experience with, turn out to be impossible. To quote Aristotle, history 'relates what has happened', and fiction 'what may happen [...], according to the law of probability or necessity'.¹⁷ This horrific scene, from the point of view of Campan, has happened even if it should not have happened, being completely out of

¹⁶ *Mémoires de madame de Campan*, Book VI, chapter VII. My translation. Original: 'Le 20 juin, cette troupe encore plus nombreuse armée de piques, de haches et d'instruments meurtriers de toutes sortes garnis de rubans aux couleurs de la nation, se porta vers le palais des Tuileries criant : *Vive la nation ! A bas le veto !* [...] La reine n'avait pu parvenir jusqu'au roi. Elle était dans la salle du Conseil et on avait eu de même l'idée de la placer derrière la grande table, pour la garantir autant que possible de l'approche de ces barbares [...] Elle avait attaché à sa tête une cocarde aux trois couleurs qu'un garde national lui avait donnée. Le pauvre petit dauphin était, ainsi que le roi, affublé d'un énorme bonnet rouge. La horde défila devant cette table; les espèces d'étendards qu'elle portait étaient des symboles de la plus atroce barbarie. Il y en avait un qui représentait une potence à laquelle une méchante poupée était suspendue; ces mots étaient écrits au bas : *Marie-Antoinette à la lanterne*. Un autre était une planche sur laquelle on avait fixé un cœur de bœuf, autour duquel était écrit : *Cœur de Louis XVI*. Enfin un troisième offrait les cornes d'un bœuf avec une légende obscène.'

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Poetics*, I, 9, 1451a, 35.

verisimilitude. That is the reason why the narrators of traumatic experiences try to reconstitute these strange and contingent details which sound like marks of truth.

Journac too in his account gives horrifying details to show the terrible situation of prisoners destined to be massacred:

The main issue for us was to know which posture we should get to receive death with the least suffering when we would go into the place of the slaughter; [...] that is the horrible details we were deliberating on.¹⁸

And Louvet emphasizes these apparent trifles which are almost unbearable in the life of outlaws: 'Measuring each footstep, softly breathing, suppressing a sneeze, a laugh, a cry, the faintest noise [...]'.¹⁹ He underlines, for instance, an incidental event, which does not play any role in the course of the story but emphasizes his desperate situation: after a night spent in an inn, he noticed that he had lost a dose of opium he kept to commit suicide in case of arrest. He describes his anxiety and his distraught search for this instrument of death.

These contingent details testify to the authenticity of the account, while the facts defy imagination. They are like useless pieces of memory; they don't help to organize the narrative and to build the plot. Without any explaining function, they are clues to nothing, drawing their value from this lack of usefulness.

Another way to share the feelings of the victims at the moment of the events is the internal focalization and a restricted narrative point of view. Journac refrains from anticipating, from using flashforward or prolepsis in these parts of his account. He reconstitutes the tension felt at the time, the uncertainty about the conclusion of events. As soon as he was acquitted, after a long scene when he hardly defended himself in front of the court which was judging him, he noticed:

I heard above me people applauding and giving a cheer. I looked up and saw several heads gathering and leaning against the bars of the cell window; and as

¹⁸ Journac de Saint-Méard, pp. 218 - 219. My translation. Original: 'Notre occupation la plus importante était de savoir quelle serait la position que nous devons prendre pour recevoir la mort le moins douloureusement, quand nous entrerions dans le lieu du massacre. [...] C'était sur ces horribles détails que nous délibérions.'

¹⁹ *Mémoires de Jean-Baptiste Louvet*, p. 135.

their eyes were opened and moving, I came to realize that the muffled and worrying buzz I heard during the questioning came from there.²⁰

The narrator avoids anticipating: it is a way to feel his fear but also the extreme tension of the accused, completely absorbed in his defence. The restricted point of view is also conveyed by sensorial details, especially auditory perceptions and by emphasizing the gaps in information. For example, here were the only events related by Jourgnac are for the 27th August:

27th . We heard a gunshot from inside the prison; at once they hurriedly run in the stairs and in the corridors; they quickly lock and bolt; they go into our room where one of our jailers counts us and says to be quiet, that we are out of danger. That's all that we can say about that abrupt and taciturn character.²¹

We do not know who shot, and what was the danger that the jailer was talking about. Till the end of the account, we won't get any further information about it, simply because we know only what the victim and the narrator knew. In this example, the restricted point of view is not only a device to understand what the protagonist could feel during the events. The lack of information still lasts when the narrator tells the story, perhaps at the opposite of the novel, where the writer will later give the missing explanations the reader expects, we'll never know.

The narrow perspective fits with the confinement of the prisoners, as shown by the following extract of detailing what happened on 2nd September, at four o'clock:

²⁰ Jourgnac de Saint-Méard, p. 238. My translation. Original: 'J'entendis au-dessus de moi applaudir et crier bravo. Je levai les yeux, et j'aperçus plusieurs têtes groupées contre les barreaux du soupirail du guichet; et comme elles avaient les yeux ouverts et mobiles, je compris que le bourdonnement sourd et inquiétant, que j'avais entendu pendant mon interrogatoire, venait de cet endroit.'

²¹ Jourgnac de Saint-Méard, p. 209. My translation. Original: 'Le 27 - Nous entendîmes le bruit d'un coup de pistolet qu'on tira dans l'intérieur de la prison; aussitôt on court précipitamment dans les escaliers et les corridors; on ouvre et on ferme avec vivacité des serrures et des verrous; on entre dans notre chambre, où un de nos guichetiers, après nous avoir comptés, nous dit d'être tranquilles, que le danger était passé. Voilà tout ce qu'a voulu nous dire sur cet événement ce brusque et taciturne personnage.'

The agonizing cries of a man who was cut to pieces with a sabre drew us to the window of the turret and we saw, facing the wicket of our prison, the body of a dead man laid on the street.²²

Locked in their cell, the prisoners hear noises, cries and words, and they can't know where they come from and what they mean. The restricted narrative point of view is particularly efficient to make the reader feel the fear of these moments.

Louvet uses the same devices in different scenes. His companions and he were confined in shelters, caves, barns, attics, where they avoided making noise and stay in the dark lying in wait, as in the following example:

The following day, at ten o'clock in the evening, when everything seemed asleep in the smallholding but the too faithful dog barking without respite, we believed to hear around the barn a noise like men softly walking and quietly talking; a few minutes later we saw a big light in the cowshed which was always dark; some were talking, but cautiously; then there was a deep silence. A faint noise started again from outside; at last, we heard that they were climbing our ladder. Were we discovered? Was the barn surrounded? We took our arms.²³

The hidden group cannot move and make any noise. Where they are, they can hear from outside and try to guess, relying on their auditory perceptions, what is happening. The restricted point of view conveys the uncertainty of the situation when the runaways cannot know if the presence they notice is dangerous or not; it conveys the state of mind of the outlaws, who have to hide their presence and ward off the threats.

²² Jourgnac de Saint-Méard, p. 213. My translation. Original: 'Les cris déchirants d'un homme qu'on hachait à coups de sabre nous attirèrent à la fenêtre de la tourelle, et nous vîmes, vis-à-vis le guichet de notre prison, le corps d'un homme étendu mort sur le pavé.'

²³ *Mémoires de Jean-Baptiste Louvet*, p. 127. My translation. Original: 'Le lendemain, il était dix heures de nuit, et tout semblait dormir dans la métairie, excepté le chien trop fidèle, dont les aboiements ne nous laissaient point de repos: nous crûmes entendre autour de la grange un bruit semblable à celui que produiraient plusieurs hommes qui marcheraient doucement et parleraient bas; quelques minutes après, nous vîmes une grande clarté dans l'étable, où la lumière n'entraît jamais; quelques-uns y parlaient d'abord, mais avec précaution; puis il se fit un profond silence; un peu de bruit recommença au-dehors; enfin, nous entendîmes qu'on montait à notre échelle. Etions-nous découverts, la grange était-elle entourée? Nous prîmes nos armes'.

This restricted point of view, refraining from anticipating, is very obvious in the most traumatic episode of the account of Madame Campan. On 10 August 1792, the 'insurrectionary' Paris Commune besieged the Tuileries palace. King Louis XVI and the royal family took shelter with the Legislative Assembly. Mme Campan, her sister and other servants and courtiers had stayed in the palace, besieged soon by the mob and the Marseillais. Campan who tried to escape was caught by an assailant:

I ran towards the staircase followed by our women. The murderers left the heyduc to come to me. The women threw themselves at their feet, and held their sabres. The narrowness of the staircase impeded the assassins; but I had already felt a terrible hand thrust into my back to seize me by my clothes, when someone called out from the bottom of the staircase, 'What are you doing above there? We don't kill women'. The horrid Marseillais who was going to murder me answered a 'heim' whose sound I will always remember. I was on my knees; my executioner quitted his hold of me, and said, 'Get up, you rascal; the nation pardons you'.²⁴

The narrator used, as a device of restricted point of view and of internal focalization, the obliteration of personal reference ('a terrible hand' is the agent of the verbs *thrust* and *seize*), which is a way to express the situation of the woman running and turning her back on her attacker. The direct speech, especially the onomatopoeia 'heim', or the insulting words 'you rascal' (*coquine* in French), report the accurate words, as contingent details definitely related to the traumatic scene, as she noticed herself:

²⁴ *Mémoires de madame de Campan*. My translation. Original: 'Je cours vers l'escalier, suivie de nos femmes. Les assassins quittent l'heyduque pour venir à moi. Ces femmes se jettent à leurs pieds et saisissent les sabres. Le peu de largeur de l'escalier gênait les assassins; mais j'avais déjà senti une main terrible s'enfoncer dans mon dos pour me saisir par mes vêtements, lorsqu'on cria du bas de l'escalier: que faites-vous là-haut? L'horrible Marseillais qui allait me massacrer, répondit un *heim* dont le son ne sortira jamais de ma mémoire. L'autre voix répondit ces seuls mots: "On ne tue pas les femmes." J'étais à genoux, mon bourreau me lâcha et me dit: "Lève-toi, coquine, la nation te fait grâce". Book VI. Chapter VIII. I translate this extract, the english quoted translation being uncomplete ('The horrid Marseillais [...] I will always remember').

The brutality of these words did not prevent my suddenly experiencing an indescribable feeling which partook almost equally of the love of life and the idea that I was going to see my son, and all that was dear to me, again. A moment before I had thought less of death than of the pain which the steel, suspended over my head, would occasion me. Death is seldom seen so close without striking his blow. I heard every syllable uttered by the assassins, just as if I had been calm.²⁵

In her own words, Campan tries to make her reader understand the peculiar nature of this experience when she faced death. She suggests the difficulties in expressing her indescribable relief and, on the other hand, she uses approximate sentences to do it ('which partook almost equally of [...]') She highlights the specific features of her mental state: she feared more suffering than death, she notices a phenomenon of heightened awareness ('I heard every syllable') and a kind of dissociation or emotional detachment ('just as if I had been calm').

Before relating this event, she had told of the death of a heyduque (a servant of the court dressed as a Hungarian) and how numbing and dazing makes him unable to escape:

I saw there only our two femmes de chambre and one of the Queen's two heyducs, a man of great height and military aspect. I saw that he was pale, and sitting on a bed. I cried out to him, 'Fly! the footmen and our people are already safe.' – 'I cannot', said the man to me; 'I am dying of fear'. As he spoke I heard a number of men rushing hastily up the staircase; they threw themselves upon him, and I saw him assassinated.²⁶

²⁵ *Mémoires de madame de Campan*, Book VI, Chapter VIII. My translation. Original: 'La grossièreté de ces paroles ne m'empêcha pas d'éprouver soudain un sentiment inexprimable qui tenait presque autant à l'amour de la vie qu'à l'idée que j'allais revoir mon fils et tout ce qui m'était cher. Un instant auparavant, j'avais moins pensé à la mort que pressenti la douleur que m'allait causer le fer suspendu sur ma tête. On voit rarement la mort de si près sans la subir. Je peux dire qu'alors les organes, lorsqu'on ne s'évanouit pas, sont dans tout leur développement et que j'entendais les moindres paroles des assassins, comme si j'eusse été de sang-froid.'

²⁶ IBID, Book VI, Chapter VIII. My translation. Original: 'Je n'[e] vis [dans cette pièce] que nos deux femmes de chambre et l'un des deux heyduques de la reine, homme d'une très haute taille et d'une physionomie tout à fait martiale. Je le vis pâle et assis sur un lit ; je lui criai : « Sauvez-vous, les valets de pied et nos gens le sont déjà. – Je ne le puis, me dit cet homme, je suis mort de peur. » Comme il

The 'great height and military aspect of the heyduc' contrasts with the fact he is completely paralysed by fear and unable to struggle. Following the narrative fictional patterns and the canon of verisimilitude in the novel, this contrast is not suitable or decent except for parodic or ironical purposes. The tone of the narrator here is, however, whatever you want but ironical. In fact, the scene can be defined as *uncanny*: as far from the licenses of fiction as from what sounds familiar in the common reality.²⁷ The extreme experience defies verisimilitude which can be better understood as readers' expectations than plausibility. The three narrators try to make the reader understand a very specific experience: they very nearly died and felt the death inside of them. Campan says: 'Death is seldom seen so close without striking his blow'. Jourgnac names his account: 'My agony during thirty-eight years'. Louvet speaks of a companion who should never go back: 'he had death in his eyes'.²⁸ However, what does it mean to face or see your own death or to agonize when you are still living, or to see the death in someone's eyes, rationally speaking? It means, probably, that the only figurative discourse, that is to say, a metaphoric or metonymic one, is able to take in charge such an experience as representing his own death. Literary devices here are the only way to represent what is not possible to represent in a mere factual account. And that also the role of literature in traumatic testimony a way of working through, that is to say, to gain critical distance, to be able to distinguish between past, present and future. The narrators of these traumatic experiences alternate between two types of discourse: they relate astonishing traumatic events which can astonish the reader and they reassure the narratee by explanations and analysis of the facts. These alternating discourses can be understood as a compromise between a concern for accuracy and authenticity and the needed restoration of a common world, where rationality and humanity do exist. Thanks to this compromise, readers can conciliate critical distance and empathy.

The survivors have to share their extreme experience without shaping their narrative in a coherent plot, without following criteria of verisimilitude and decorum, which were very important at their time when the scientific history did not yet exist and historical writing was still submitted to literary patterns. In others parts of their works they use, as many authors of memoirs since the religious wars when this kind of writing spread because of conflictual

me disait ces mots, j'entends une troupe d'hommes monter précipitamment l'escalier : ils se jettent sur lui, je le vois assassiner.'

²⁷ About *uncanny* and *trauma*, see Claude Janin, *Figures et destins du traumatisme* (Paris: PUF, 1996).

²⁸ *Mémoires de Jean-Baptiste Louvet*, p. 134.

legitimacy, forensic and epideictic rhetoric, and fictional patterns as epic and heroic scenes. However, these devices, and particularly conventional *pathos* stand in the way of sharing experience.

If these three witnesses have succeeded in transmitting testimonies that we still read today, it is not because they forgot an art of writing which they owned before their cruel experience. At the opposite, the fact that they were particularly talented at writing enabled them to find a way off the beaten track. Even if in parts of their accounts, they use conventional patterns and devices, in the traumatic scenes I have focused on, they described details which attend to the scene, which reconstitute its strangeness, and showed their ability to get rid of arguing purpose and, partiality, to transmit a human truth. A poetics of the contingent and meaningless detail, which is actually a sign of the experience, tries not to convince but to pass down. Far away from social and political context requiring rhetoric involvement, it gives to the testimony a universal impact. The poetics of the factual seems a particularly interesting challenge for literary criticism. Involving narratological, rhetorical and stylistic criteria, it derives from the place taken by the analysis of discourse in history. The ultimate consequence is to displace the object of literary studies, which would no longer be a corpus of recognized genres, but a certain quality of the writings which, by a work of form, attempts to restore and share an experience.

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