The Audiovisual Unconscious: Media and Trauma in the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies

Amit Pinchevski

Modern technological media and psychoanalysis are historically coextensive, so argues Friedrich Kittler. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, a profound transformation had taken place in the material conditions of communication—what Kittler terms *Aufschreibesystem* (literally "writing-down system," translated as "discourse network").[1] Prior to that transformation, writing, in its various manifestations, was the dominant medium of information storage and transmission. When writing was the prevailing writing-down system, all forms of data had to pass through the "bottleneck of the signifier" (*GFT*, p. 4). With the technological transformation that followed, the symbolic mediation of writing was supplemented by the nonsymbolic writing-down system of sight and sound: the audio channel of the phonograph and the visual channel of the cinematograph. As opposed to writing, these media are unselective inscription devices, capturing the intentional together with the unintentional, data and noise, indiscriminately as they come. It is against this

1. See Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800–1900*, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Stanford, Calif., 1990) and *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, Calif., 1999); hereafter abbreviated *GFT*. For a discussion of the term *Aufschreibesystem,* see John Johnston, introduction to Kittler, *Literature, Media, Information Systems*, trans. and ed. Johnston (Amsterdam, 1997).

background that psychoanalysis appears as a contemporaneous method of recording both intentional and unintentional expressions: the meanings conveyed by speech together with the halts, parapraxes, and stutters—which are rendered at least as meaningful as the intended meanings. Psychoanalysis has a technological counterpart in the form of late nineteenth-century media: the psychic and the technical constitute two parallel mechanisms for the inscription of traces, with the logic of the latter partially informing the former.[2] Sigmund Freud has an unlikely partner in Thomas Edison: the talking cure and the discovery of the unconscious are concomitant with phonography and the mechanization of non-sense.

Yet media and psychoanalysis, argues Kittler, do not only supplement the medium of writing; they also take on various tasks of cultural mediation previously under the monopoly of script.[3] One such task is the writing of the past, historiography understood most literally, which, following Kittler's reasoning, is also transformed by modern media to include the aural and the visual. That the past is experienced through its media traces is obvious enough to any citizen of the twentieth century. Less obvious, however, is the extent to which the conceptual correlation between media and psychoanalysis pointed out by Kittler continues to infuse recent thinking and writing on the past. Just as the science of the unconscious had its technological unconscious in late nineteenth-century media, recent psychoanalytically informed discourses, particularly in the humanities, have their own technological underpinnings in late twentieth-century media.

A case in point is the discourse of trauma and testimony as developed in the seminal work on Holocaust testimonies of Dori Laub, Lawrence Langer, and Shoshana Felman. Their studies bring together literature, his-

2. Jacques Derrida offers a different configuration of the archival apparatus of psychoanalysis in the form of printing, handwritten correspondence, and the postal system. See Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, 1996), pp. 15–20.

3. For more on this point, see Thomas Elsaesser, "Freud as Media Theorist: Mystic Writing-Pads and the Matter of Memory," *Screen* 50 (Spring 2009): 100–113. As Elsaesser notes, Kittler's logic can be extended to view Freud's "'psychic apparatus'" as consisting of two, mutually exclusive media functions: storage ("'system of the Unconscious'") and transmission ("'perception-consciousness system'") (ibid., p. 101).

A M I T   P I N C H E V S K I is a senior lecturer in the Department of Communication and Journalism at the Hebrew University. He is the author of *By Way of Interruption: Levinas and the Ethics of Communication* (2005) and coeditor, with Paul Frosh, of *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication* (2009).

tory, and psychoanalysis to consider the challenges of language in testifying to the calamities of the Holocaust. The insights they provided have importantly influenced numerous accounts on other historical and personal tragedies; indeed, much of what is currently called trauma theory in literary, film, and media studies has its roots in these texts. Yet despite the wide application in various intellectual and artistic media, little attention has been given to the actual media behind this discourse. As I argue in the following, the technological unconscious of trauma and testimony discourse is the videotape as an audiovisual technology of recording, processing, and transmission.

   Ostensibly, there is no discovery in pointing out the technology at work. It is plainly clear that much of the source material for the authors above is videotaped testimonies, which is perhaps why this detail failed to attract special attention, with only a few exceptions. Among these are studies that explore the ways in which the audiovisual medium plays into the creation of a distinctive genre of testimony vis-à-vis other forms of historical knowledge and traumatic memory.[4] While providing important insights, this perspective tends to regard technology on the instrumental level, in terms of the challenges and opportunities the video apparatus introduces into the fraught question of representing the Holocaust. What is at issue here, however, is something different and, in a sense, more fundamental: not merely the media apparatus but the media a priori—the technological infrastructure from which such a genre can become meaningful in the first place. At issue, then, is what Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht calls the "'materialities of communication'": "those phenomena and conditions that contribute to the production of meaning, without being meanings themselves."[5] That the trauma and testimony discourse is underwritten by audiovisual technology of recording and replaying bears importantly on how both trauma and testimony themselves are consequently theorized. Read with videography in mind, these key texts bespeak the writing-down system without which the pains of testimony could not have come to signify as such, let alone be made available for scrutiny. It is only with an audiovisual medium capable of capturing and reproducing evidence of the fleeting

---

   4. See Simone Gigliotti, "Technology, Trauma, and Representation: Holocaust Testimony and Videotape," in *Temporalities, Autobiography, and Everyday Life*, ed. Jan Campbell and Janet Harbord (Manchester, 2002), pp. 204–18; Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust* (Amherst, Mass., 2003), pp. 67–109; Aleida Assmann, "History, Memory and the Genre of Testimony," *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (2006): 261–73; and Alan Meek, *Trauma and Media: Theories, Histories, and Images* (New York, 2010), pp. 133–70.
   5. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, Calif., 2004), p. 8.

unconscious that a discourse concerned with the unarticulated traumatic past becomes intelligible.

Archive, Media, Trauma

The idea to videotape the testimonies of Holocaust survivors was initiated in 1979 by television producer and documentarian Laurel Vlock and psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Dori Laub.[6] It began as a grassroots operation in New Haven, Connecticut, with the involvement of local figures from the Jewish community and Yale University and soon took shape as the Holocaust Survivors Film Project (despite the name, filming was conducted from the start in videotape). In 1981 the project set itself under the auspices of Yale University as the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, with Geoffrey Hartman as its academic director. To date, more than 4,400 video testimonies have been taped, all of which are available in the Sterling Memorial Library at Yale.[7]

As Laub later attested, the idea came after watching two films that attempted to relate to the Holocaust: the 1978 television miniseries *Holocaust*—whose "'studio quality of Hollywood'" he found appalling—and Marcel Ophüls's *The Sorrow and the Pity*, whose employment of testimonies he found deeply impressive.[8] These two salutary checks on the cultural mediation of the Holocaust are the background for the development of a new form of testimony, one that combines the psychoanalytic session and the television interview—what Geoffrey Hartman termed "videotestimony."[9] The founders' premise was "that the medium of video could be used successfully to document the personal memories of Holocaust

---

6. The first to record Holocaust survivors shortly after the war was David P. Boder, an American psychologist at Illinois Institute of Technology. Boder traveled to Europe in 1946 equipped with a wire recorder, an audio recording device developed by his IIT colleague, Marvin Camras, for the Armour Research Foundation during the war. He published the interviews in his *I Did Not Interview the Dead* (Urbana, Ill., 1949). See also Alan Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices: The 1946 Holocaust Interviews of David Boder* (Oxford, 2010), esp. chap. 5.

7. The original recording format was three-quarter-inch U-Matic videocassettes with a running time of one hour and seven minutes. Due to deterioration of the magnetic tape, the original videocassettes are currently stored in a temperature-controlled room in the Yale archives. The video testimonies currently available for viewing at Yale are all VHS copies of the originals. For the last few years the material has been digitized, a development that reasserts the tension between storage and dissemination at the base of this archive.

8. Mary Marshall Clark, "Holocaust Video Testimony, Oral History, and Narrative Medicine: The Struggle against Indifference," *Literature and Medicine* 24 (Fall 2005): 273. See Dori Laub, "Testimonies in the Treatment of Genocidal Trauma," *Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 4 (Jan. 2002): 76–77.

9. Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Bloomington, Ind., 1996), p. 143; hereafter abbreviated *LS*.

witnesses."[10] From its inception, the Yale archive had a dual rationale: on the one hand, documenting the personal memories of survivors under the pressing conviction that "time is running out and that every survivor has a unique story to tell"; and, on the other hand, employing videotape technology to capture the testimonies, as "it was felt that the 'living portraiture' of television would add a compassionate and sensitive dimension to the historical record."[11]

This rationale is far from obvious. Presumably, documenting testimonies could have been transcribed, recorded, or even filmed. Videotape technology had two important advantages for a project like Yale's archive. It made it possible to carry out the entire process as an in-house production, including shooting, editing, and postproduction—all at a considerably lower cost than film. But more crucially, as a companion technology to television, the videotape, unlike film, can be easily preconfigured for televisual transmission. As such, the videotape constitutes at once a medium of archiving and a medium of potential broadcasting, as affirmed by Hartman:

> The principle of giving survivors their voice has been a sustaining one. Also that of giving a face to that voice: of choosing video over audio, because of the immediacy and evidentiality it added to the interview. The "embodiment" of the survivors, their gestures and bearing, is part of the testimony. . . . Audiences now and in the future would surely be audiovisual. We decided to make video recordings of public broadcast quality, to build an Archive of Conscience on which future educators and filmmakers might rely. These living portraits are the nearest our descendants can come to a generation passing from the scene. [*LS*, p. 144]

Videotestimony thus performs two media functions: storage and transmission. It can capture the uniqueness and authenticity of the storyteller, the "embodiment" of the survivor bearing witness, while at the same time it holds the potential for future dissemination ("public broadcast quality") for collective participation and intergenerational communication.[12]

---

10.   Yale University Library: Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, "About the Archive: History," www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/about/history.html

11.   Ibid.

12.   Arjun Appadurai suggests that with the advent of interactive technologies, the archive is becoming freed from the orbit of the state and its official networks, transforming instead into "a deliberate site for the production of anticipated memories by intentional communities" (Arjun Appadurai, "Archive and Aspiration," in *Information Is Alive: Art and Theory on Archiving and Retrieving Data*, trans. Leo Reijnen, Stephen Kovats, and Klara Glowczewska, ed. Joke Brouwer, Arjen Mulder, and Susan Charlton [Rotterdam, 2003], p. 17). In this sense, the

Videotestimony is a special kind of archival material; disposed to deposition inasmuch as distribution, it conflates the singularity of the testimonies with the universality of their appeal. Such is the imperative of this archive, an imperative that is inseparable from the archive's technological infrastructure.

As Jacques Derrida argued, the archive is about the past as much as it is about the future, and it is therefore both conservative and revolutionary. To archive something is not simply to consign what is already there waiting to be archived; rather, it is to shape the very construction of that which is archived and hence its future forms of distribution and signification. It is in this respect that the technology of archiving is intrinsic to the act of archiving: "the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming to existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event."[13] Such is also the case with the archiving technology of the Yale archive; videography does not document testimonies as already formed and self-contained narratives but rather conditions the very structure of their signification, which allows them to signify precisely as testimonies.[14] In addition to and independently of the testimonial narrative itself, videography produces what might be called the audiovisual mark of trauma: the indexical and temporal markers of corporeality as captured by the video camera and recorded and reproduced by the videotape. If indeed the Yale archive could be said to be both conservative and revolutionary, it is by virtue of videography functioning as a medium for archiving testimonies and, at the same time, as a medium through which testimonies so archived redefine the scope of the archivable.

The Yale archive is the context of some of the most original theoretical developments around trauma in the humanities over the last decades. Indeed, the discourse of trauma and testimony owes much to the analytical possibilities opened by the archive—specifically, the lending of audiovisual testimonies to the professional analysis of literary critics, psychoanalysts, and critical historians. Focusing on three key representatives—Laub, Langer, and Felman—the analysis below sets out to explicate the intermedial exchanges among speech, writing, and videography in the work of each. In other words, under discussion is an ekphrastic process: the written

---

Yale archive can be seen as a precursor to more recent archival formations based on interactive technologies that invite social participation and collaborative contributions.

13. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 17.

14. Videography is to be understood here in the double sense: the writing of and writing on the videotape, the inscription and description of videotestimonies.

interpretations of videotape recordings of survivors' oral testimonies. The analysis of the three accounts revolves around an apparent preoccupation of each author with a specific media function, corresponding respectively with what Kittler declares as the three elementary functions of media: recording, processing, and transmission.[15] What trauma comes to signify in these accounts will be shown to be connected with the way videography performs these three elementary media functions.

Recording

Dori Laub has made a crucial contribution to the understanding of massive trauma, both clinically and historically. His insights doubtless follow from his unique position as a child survivor, a psychoanalyst engaged in the treatment of survivors, and a cofounder of the Yale archive for Holocaust testimonies. According to Laub, bearing witness to trauma is facilitated by the recovery of an empathic listener who comes to partially participate in the reliving of the traumatic experience. The listener is not merely ancillary but is in fact fundamental to the process, serving an interpellative function by presenting him or herself before the witness as an open and supportive addressee, a Thou. As Felman, Laub's coauthor, puts it, *"it takes two to witness the unconscious";* or in Laub's words, the listener takes on "the responsibility for bearing witness that previously the narrator felt he bore alone, and therefore could not carry out."[16] The listener can be said to bear witness to trauma even before the witness does, heeding the narrative as it emerges from abeyance.

Given the emphasis on the listening party, it is curious that Laub's maieutics of testimony practically ignores the presence of the video camera on site. Yet, following his own logic, there is reason to believe that the camera's role is not unlike that of the listener; in fact, it may even be said to anticipate the listener's bearing witness to the witness and is hence indispensible to the process. If the listener is the facilitator of testimony, as Laub suggests, the camera facilitates the listener's facilitating; it serves as a technological surrogate for an audience *in potentia*—the audience for which many survivors had been waiting for a lifetime—providing them with the kind of holding environment that is unattainable in the solitude of an off-camera interview. If the listener acts as the Buberian Thou, the camera acts as the Levinasian *le tiers;* it imposes thirdness on the witnessing dyad. Bearing witness is from the outset bearing witness on camera, already with

---

15. In this Kittler follows John von Neumann and Claude Shannon; see Kittler, "The City Is a Medium," trans. Matthew Griffin, *New Literary History* 27 (Autumn 1996): 722.

16. Shoshana Felman and Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York, 1992), pp. 15, 85; hereafter abbreviated *T*.

the dual prospect of safekeeping and dissemination. Hartman seems to come close to this realization when he suggests, invoking Maurice Halbwachs, that the video archive constitutes "a provisional 'affective community' for the survivor."[17] If for Halbwachs "affective community" meant the immediate social ties and common experiences from which collective memory emerges, in Hartman's rendering it is now the apparatus of the archive that doubles as the enabling context for the construction of a remembering community. It doesn't take just two to bear witness, but the promise of a whole congregation.

While focusing predominantly on the witnessing dyad, Laub's conception of testimony nevertheless discloses its technological setting through an apparent preoccupation with the issue of recording. This much is evident in the various inflections of *record* recurring in Laub's writing and, moreover, in the productive ambiguity of its meaning. Here is how Laub describes massive trauma: "the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction." Hence the challenge for the listener is in searching for an experience whose registration is still pending, "a record that has yet to be made" (*T*, p. 57). "Record" is sufficiently ambiguous to be read as the outcome of a psychoanalytic process by which an event is to be retroactively restored, but equally as the actual record, the video recording capturing the process of restoring the missing mental record—a record by which the testimony may also be retroactively replayed. Indeed, the two senses of record are inescapably linked; the technological observing and recording mechanisms work as restorative prosthetics for the once-blocked mental observing and recording mechanisms.

Testimony is the search for a missing record, on record. With this productive ambiguity, the technical sense of *record* rejoins its Latin etymology *recordari,* literally, "restore to heart" *(cor)* and, by extension, "call to mind." A partial acknowledgment to that effect is found in Laub's text; testimonies recorded at Yale "set in motion a testimonial process similar in nature to the psychoanalytic process, in that it is yet another medium which provides a listener to trauma, another medium of re-externalization—and thus historicization—of the event" (*T*, p. 70). For this reason, Laub asks that the listener act as a "blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time" (*T*, p. 57). But there is in fact another screen—the television screen—on which this inscription comes to be inscribed in the first place.

17. Hartman, "Witnessing Video Testimony: An Interview with Geoffrey Hartman," interview by Jennifer R. Ballengee, *Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 1 (2001): 220.

As screens and records occupy the process of witnessing, psychoanalysis and videotestimony become the coefficient media of trauma.

And, yet, the added visual channel of videotestimony introduces problems foreign to the strictly audio channel of the talking cure. As Kittler notes, for Freud psychoanalysis was based on the separation of speech and vision; analysis proceeds by having the analysand speaking while lying down and the analyst sitting in the back while noting down all the minute halts, slips, and digressions in the flow of speech. Freud's aversion to the visual is particularly apparent in his writing on hysteria, where the talking cure is set to destroy the images inside the patient's head (typically the more "'visual'" women), decomposing the "inner film" into spoken words (*GFT*, pp. 141, 142). Videotestimony invokes the time-honored auditory bias of psychoanalysis by basing itself on what Hartman calls a "counter-cinematic integrity." While showing, it attempts to divert attention from what is shown to what is heard; it makes the image auxiliary to speech (*LS*, p. 139).

Curbing the visual was indeed one of the first challenges of this enterprise. As Hartman affirms, after experimenting with different types of camera work during interviews, the decision was to give up the "expressive potential and remain fixed, except for enough motion to satisfy more naturally the viewer's eye."[18] Another decision was to record survivors in a neutral studio, rather than in the privacy of their homes, so as to minimize distractions. It was also decided that the camera should focus exclusively on the witness without showing the interviewer, deliberately producing the oft-disdained trope of "talking heads." "We were not filmmakers," Hartman affirms, "even potentially, but facilitators and preservers of archival documents in audiovisual form. In short, our technique, or lack of it, was homeopathic: it used television to cure television, to turn the medium against itself, limiting even while exploiting its visualizing power" ("TS," p. 117). In making the image an extension of the voice, videotestimony acts as a audiovisual amplification of the puncturing details of speech—gestures, postures, expressions, pauses, silences—all markers of what Hartman calls the survivor's "embodied voice" ("TS," p. 117).[19] The audiovisual serves to register the performing of trauma, capturing the witnessing body as its ultimate referent.

Consider Laub's often-cited depiction of a woman recounting her memories of the uprising in Auschwitz. Laub describes her as "slight, self-effacing, almost talking in whispers, mostly to herself." But then, "a sudden intensity, passion and color were infused into the narrative. She was fully there. 'All of a sudden,' she said, 'we saw four chimneys going up in flames, exploding'"; before long, the woman "fell silent and the tumults of the moment faded" (*T*, p. 59). Laub then recounts a debate following the screening of this testimony at a conference where attending historians disqualified the testimony claiming that, historically, only one chimney was blown up, not four. Insisting on its importance, Laub argues that what the woman was testifying to was not empirical history but something more radical: "'an event that broke the all compelling frame of Auschwitz'" (*T*, p. 60). What the historians fail to acknowledge, according to Laub, is the performative aspect of testimony—the timbre and cadence of voice, gestures, expressions, and nonverbal cues—which arguably convey a more profound meaning than the merely historical. In challenging the historians' judgment, Laub effectively challenges their conception of what constitutes a legitimate historical record, a position that relies on the technological capability to record and reproduce spoken words together with their accompanying indexical markers. The debate between the psychoanalyst and the historians can be read as underwritten by their respective media of record.[20]

Laub's later work involves more explicitly video cameras in the therapeutic process itself. Together with his associates, Laub held a series of video interviews with Holocaust survivors hospitalized in mental institutions in Israel. Their postulation was that many of the survivors could have avoided the long hospitalization had they been given the opportunity to share their traumatic experiences. The aim of the study was therefore "to investigate the role of video testimony as a potential useful psychotherapeutic clinical intervention." The introduction of cameras into the therapeutic process proved remedial: "By videotaping testimonies of these patients' experiences before, during, and after World War II, we created

20. This testimony was at the center of a controversy in which Thomas Trezise charged Laub with misrepresenting the woman's testimony due to Laub's overidentification with her. In his response, Laub admits to some inaccuracies (including overdramatizing the above description) but criticizes Trezise for failing to understand the therapeutic testimonial process. This debate as well can be read in terms of media: Laub, who interviewed the woman, speaks as the immediate addressee of the testimony; Trezise speaks as a mediated addressee, as an audience, watching the tape years later. See Thomas Trezise, "Between History and Psychoanalysis: A Case Study in the Reception of Holocaust Survivor Testimony," *History and Memory* 20 (Spring–Summer 2008): 7–47, and Laub, "On Holocaust Testimony and Its 'Reception' within Its Own Frame, as a Process in Its Own Right: A Response to 'Between History and Psychoanalysis' by Thomas Trezise," *History and Memory* 21 (Summer–Spring 2009): 127–50.

highly condensed texts that could be interpreted on multiple levels going far beyond the mere narrative content of clinical medical history." The record produced thereby was born out of three "channels" captured on tape: the "cognitive channel," emphasizing "a detailed reconstruction of historical facts related to the traumatic events"; the "affective channel," reconstructing "feelings then and now"; and the "sensory channel," reconstructing "bodily sensations, sight, smells, and sounds."[21] Joint viewings of videotestimonies were then organized with staff and patients, ensued by group discussions that further contributed to the process.[22]

The use of cameras in therapy may appear cutting edge, but in fact it harkens back to a pre-Freudian tradition in the form of Jean-Martin Charcot, Freud's teacher at the Salpêtrière clinic in Paris, who was among the first to admit cameras into the ward (see *GFT*, pp. 141–43).[23] While still committed to verbal interaction, videotestimony nevertheless unsettles the sensory hierarchy of traditional therapy. No longer is the doctor listening to the patient in seclusion while taking down notes for him alone to see. The two are now recorded during session, and the videotestimony is then shared with a small audience (the interviewer and patient among them). If, as Kittler suggests, psychoanalysis and media supplant the monopoly of writing as a medium of experience, videotestimony might be seen as a hybrid mutation. Speech and writing give way to screen and camera—a taping cure in lieu of a talking cure.

In sum, recording for Laub performs a double redemptive function: restoring survivors' lost personal records and instituting historical records for future generations:

> Video testimonies of genocidal trauma are a necessary part of the larger historical record as well as of the individual's release from entrapment in trauma. The experience of survivors may be the *only* historical record of an event that has not been captured through the usual methods of historical record and public discourse. The event

21.   Baruch Greenwald et al., "Psychiatry, Testimony, and Shoah: Reconstructing the Narratives of the Muted," *International Social Health Care Policy, Programs, and Studies* 43, no. 2–3 (2006): 200, 201–2, 203.

22.   A parallel technique employing media in therapy was developed for treating posttraumatic stress syndrome, especially of rape victims. The patient is recorded speaking about her or his condition and then asked to repeatedly listen to the tape as a means for desensitizing the traumatic experience. See Edna B. Foa and Barbara Olasov Rothbaum, *Treating the Trauma of Rape: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for PTSD* (New York, 1998), esp. chap. 10.

23.   See also Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800–1900*, p. 277, and Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography of the Salpêtrière*, trans. Alisa Hartz (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), chaps. 1–3.

can literally be recreated only through a testimonial process. The process is a method of registering, perceiving, knowing, telling, remembering, and transmitting historical information about genocide that varies from traditional methods of academic historiography to a considerable extent.[24]

A medium of redemption at once private and collective, videotestimony is *Jetztzeit* caught on tape, complete with all its "chips of Messianic time."[25] A source and resource for a new historical record, videotestimony holds something that can never be fully narrativized. Recording and narrative are incongruous, as the one holds precisely what the other lacks: referentiality in the case of recording, chronology in the case of narrative. Whereas narrative constructs a sense of progress through time, recording captures the actual flow of time, along with the contingencies occasioned therewith. According to Kittler, media technologies do not simply extend sensory capacities but determine "recording thresholds," that is, the changing ratio between perception and inscription.[26] Not only is videotestimony a prime example for the shift in the recordable, it also records that very shift. For it is only with audiovisual media that the shortcoming of words can be documented as they surface from the fragments of traumatic memory. Recording bears witness to the gap between the spoken and the unspoken, between the Symbolic and the Real. And if the Real always returns to the same place, as Jacques Lacan used to say, that place is caught somewhere on tape.

Processing

Lawrence Langer's *Holocaust Testimonies* is one of the most penetrating studies on videotestimonies written to date. Having watched hundreds of videotaped testimonies from the Fortunoff archive at Yale, Langer provides an exacting account of what he calls the "disrupted narratives" of Holocaust survivors.[27] Lager's preoccupation throughout the study is with two related yet distinct senses of processing. First, the word *process* figures importantly in his text, designating the actual performance of testimony, the process of recalling and recounting as it happens, a process whose temporal flow is shared by the survivor bearing witness and the audience watching the testimony. As its Latin etymology suggests, *process* implies advance or prog-

24. Laub, "Testimonies in the Treatment of Genocidal Trauma," p. 73

25. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York, 1969), p. 263.

26. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800–1900*, p. 284.

27. Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, Conn., 1991), p. xi; hereafter abbreviated *HT*.

ress through time, the unfolding of sequential temporality—a key element in the temporal structure of videotestimony. The second sense of process relates to Langer's own analysis and interpretation, his *watching* of and *writing* on videotestimonies, his processing of the audiovisual in terms of the literary. This processing involves identifying, classifying, and explicating, with great acumen, the distinctive characteristics of videotestimonies according to narrative conventions of form and content, even if these eventually prove deficient.

For Langer, a traditional written account "is finished when we begin to read it, its opening, middle, and end already established between the covers of the book" (*HT*, p. 17). Videotaped oral testimony, by contrast, creates meaning through the very production of narrative; it "unfolds before our eyes and ears; we are present at the invention of what, when we speak of written texts, we call style" (*HT*, p. 58). Until recently, he argues, we had to depend almost exclusively on the literary for addressing an audience with survivors' memories. Employing videotape technology to record survivors' testimonies calls for the development of new ways for the audience to engage with these accounts. Both written and oral forms involve an "imaginative space" between narrator and the audience. In the written, however, the author strives to narrow this space (by means of literary strategies such as chronology, analogy, imagery, dialogue); in the oral, the witness "confirms the vast imaginative space separating what he or she has endured from our capacity to absorb it" (*HT*, p. 19). Whereas written accounts draw on literary conventions and devices to engage the audience, videotaped testimonies draw on the mediated presence of the speaker, which "in addition to language includes gesture, a periodic silence whose effect cannot be duplicated on the printed page, and above all a freedom from the legacy of literary form and precedent to which anyone attempting a written narrative on any subject is indebted" (*HT*, p. 41). If the literary transforms the real that it attempts to elucidate, the videotape performs the real that it inadvertently captures.

A consistent theme in Langer's analysis is the double temporality of videotaped testimonies.[28] The paradigmatic case of this double temporality is the distinction between "deep memory" and "common memory," two terms Langer borrows from author-survivor Charlotte Delbo. Whereas common memory "restores the self to its normal pre- and postcamp routines" while offering "detached portraits, from the

---

28. This double temporality marks each of Langer's five types of memory—deep, anguished, humiliated, tainted, and unheroic—which correspond respectively to five types of self: buried, divided, besieged, impromptu, and diminished.

vantage point of today, of what it must have been like then," deep memory "tries to recall the Auschwitz self as it was then. . . . [It] suspects *and* depends on common memory, knowing what common memory cannot know but tries nonetheless to express" (*HT*, p. 6). Deep memory is the subterranean memory that lurks beneath common memory, the traumatic *then* infecting and intruding the habitual *now*, forever beyond proper articulation and comprehension.

Although emphasizing the importance of videotape, Langer nevertheless overlooks the more profound significance of the media technology at hand, an oversight that bears precisely on the double temporality above. While discussing deep memory, Langer proposes that what distinguishes video testimonies is their "'reversible continuity,'" which is "foreign to the straight chronology that governs most written memoirs" (*HT*, p. 20). Yet is it not the nature of the medium rather than of the narrative that Langer is referring to? Isn't the narrative always susceptible to the technological potential of halting and reversing the flow of time? After all, what better approximates the cotemporal *now* as it is interrupted by the traumatic *then* than a technologically reproduced narrative? Moreover, would it even be possible to detect and locate deep memory without the ability to pause, rewind, and replay? For how else could Langer analyze the moments where deep memory intrudes into the narrative, the pauses and silences that turn in his text into ellipses, without being able to reproduce these moments time and again? Consumed by the flow of the here-and-now, these intrusions are revived and rendered meaningful only as they are reproduced—only as reproducible—which means that deep memory is in fact an offshoot of videotestimony and, by extension, of the audiovisual archive.

Referring to Langer's study, Saul Friedlander asks whether on the collective level "an event such as the Shoah may, after all the survivors have disappeared, leave traces of a deep memory beyond individual recall, which will defy any attempt to give it meaning."[29] To the extent that deep memory is a by-product of the audiovisual archive, this question seems only partially relevant. For deep memory is not properly an individual memory within the reach of personal recall; it is rather a mediated form of that memory, its recorded afterlife, which makes it not only safe from oblivion but also infinitely reproducible. To paraphrase Edison's (purported) quip on the phonograph, deep memory in the audiovisual archive, has become, as it were, immortal. Or to quote Kittler on this point: "the realm of the dead is as extensive as the storage and transmission capabili-

29. Saul Friedlander, "Trauma, Memory, and Transference," in *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, ed. Hartman (Oxford, 1994), p. 254.

ties of a given culture" (*GFT*, p. 13). Far from disappearing with the survivors, the audiovisual archive is the ultimate depository of deep memory.

Interestingly, Friedlander's sole example of deep memory is the last frame of Art Spiegelman's autobiographical comic *Maus*, where Artie's farther, in a slip of the tongue, calls Artie "Richieu," the name of his son who had died in the Holocaust before Artie was born. Significantly, that frame also reveals the technological backdrop of Spiegleman's comics: "So . . . let's stop, please, your tape recorder . . . I'm tired from talking, Richieu, and it's enough stories for now."[30] Friedlander's coupling of deep memory with *Maus* rests on a hidden connection: both originate from tape recording. The deep memory of Richieu was captured on Artie's recordings before taking shape in his drawings. As trauma transfers from one generation to the next, the unmediated becomes hypermediated. What defies literary memory is approachable only by means of nonliterary media.[31]

In one of the first accounts on the audiovisual archive, James Young likens videotestimony to "celluloid *megilla*": fragments of memory stitched together into a continuously unfurling scroll.[32] This metaphor calls for some unpacking because it further illustrates the confusion between narrative and medium (leaving aside Young's confusion between celluloid and magnetic tape). To understand the confusion, it might be helpful to distinguish between media that assume structure and media that assume time. In media that assume structure, the relation between retrieval and storage follows a fixed constructed order that is observed irrespectively of the original order of storage. Thus, in the Torah (presumably the source of Young's metaphor) Exodus might have been written before Genesis but it is still second in line. When reading a scroll, or any textual medium for that matter, it is possible to move back and forth, but the structure—that is, the narrative—is assumed even if not followed. Recording technologies, by contrast, are devices that capture the actual flow of time regardless of the contents. Here the relation between retrieval and storage follows a fixed temporal order. If structure-assuming media pro-

30. Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus,* 2 vols. (New York, 1996), 2:296. For further analysis of these last panels, see James E. Young, "The Holocaust as Vicarious Past: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and the Afterimages of History," *Critical Inquiry* 24 (Spring 1998): 666–99.

31. This is also evident in Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, another account for which *Maus* is the paradigmatic case. As a deeply mediated form of memory, postmemory is the second generation Holocaust memory, typically as received and transmitted by novels, testimonies, photographs, and films. See Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), pp. 12–40 and "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory," in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, pp. 215–46.

32. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington, Ind., 1988), p. 157.

duce their own separate time, independently of the time of inscription, time-assuming media conform to the original pulse of recording. Synchronicity between playing and recording is therefore the condition for both faithful reproduction and mischievous tinkering (as in fast-speed playing, slow-speed playing, or Beatles-like reverse playing).

Although all storage media, as mechanisms for overcoming time, are reversible, the reversibility specific to text is structural while the one specific to recording is temporal.[33] It is for this reason that time-axis manipulation applies to media that assume time but not to those that assume structure; it would make little sense to say that reading fast or slow, backwards or forwards, amounts to manipulating the flow of time. Time-axis manipulation is particularly apt for revealing the hidden aspects of familiar reality as captured by recording devices. Thus, when sociologists like Harvey Sacks employed tape recorders to record how people actually speak, human talk could be unraveled in all its wonderful everyday messiness—hence, sociolinguistics.[34] Similarly, when literary scholars like Langer used the videotape to study the "disrupted narratives" of Holocaust survivors, testimony could be revealed as a discourse of silences as much as of words—hence, trauma theory. When recording technologies are applied to process the temporal flow of narrative, the Real takes precedence over the Symbolic. The "reversible continuity" Langer ascribes to videotestimonies is therefore a temporal reversibility—the technological condition for the emergence of deep memory.

One of the original uses of videotape technology was in closed-circuit surveillance systems designed for shopping centers, prisons, and other locations of panoptic power.[35] Although employing videotape in this context has nothing to do with surveillance, the logic of processing videotaped material in both cases is nonetheless comparable. Closed Circuit TV (CCTV) video-recording documents events successively so as to allow rewinding back to instances that went unnoticed in real time but are deemed

33. For further discussion on time-axis manipulation see Sybille Krämer, "The Cultural Techniques of Time-Axis Manipulation: On Friedrich Kittler's Conceptions of Media," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 23, no. 7–8 (2006): 93–109, and Hartmut Winkler, "Geometry of Time: Media, Specialization, and Reversibility," www.uni-paderborn.de/~winkler/hase_e.pdf

34. See Harvey Sacks, *Lectures on Conversation*, 2 vols. in 1 (Malden, Mass., 1995). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari make a related point with respect to the work of linguist William Labov; see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* trans. Brian Massumi, vol. 2 of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Massumi et al. (Minneapolis, 1987), pp. 92–110.

35. See Kittler, *Optical Media*, trans. Anthony Enns (Cambridge, 2010), p. 221. According to Kittler, television cameras were similarly developed as surveillance mechanisms for missile experiments at Peenemünde; see Kittler, "Unconditional Surrender," trans. William Whobrey, in *Materialities of Communication*, ed. Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (Stanford, Calif., 1994), p. 331.

important ex post facto (like identifying a shoplifter). Langer's processing of videotestimonies is similar in that his reading is also concerned with key moments that are accessible only by means of rewinding and replaying—the puncturing moments in testimonies where the double temporality of the traumatic *then* and the narrational *now* is performed in actual time. By Langer's own admission, this is "a process difficult and perhaps impossible to detect on the printed page of a written text" (*HT*, p. 67). Deep memory, insofar as it is trauma captured on videotape, is a function of time-axis manipulation.[36]

When it comes down to allegiances, Langer's is clearly with the literary. His textual processing of the audiovisual treads on the verge of narrative inquiry, gesturing to the outside from the inside. William Shakespeare, John Milton, and Marcel Proust are occasionally invoked only to affirm the implausibility of any comparison between videotaped testimonies and traditional narrative forms. Langer's main literary inspiration comes instead from Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of Disaster,* a fragmentary text poised to probe the extremities of language as it touches and skirts the disaster—an event so devastating that it leaves everything intact. To quote Blanchot, "We feel that there cannot be any experience of the disaster, even if we were to understand disaster to be the ultimate experience."[37] Drawing on Blanchot's insights, Langer nevertheless ventures a decisive conversion: "Although he calls his text *The Writing of the Disaster*, his language applies with equal precision to what we have been examining, the 'speaking of the disaster'" (*HT*, p. 69). Thus, the writing of the impossibility of writing is transposed into the speaking of the impossibility of speaking; Blanchot's unwriting and the survivors' unspeaking are rendered equivalent. Yet what this conversion hides is a shift in the inscription system: from symbolic to indexical, from structural to temporal. Langer's ability to approach "the speaking of the disaster" entails the technological recording and processing of instances in which the survivor's body "speaks"—the audiovisual effects of the Real. A literary theory of trauma can make sense only insofar as it presupposes media that capture vibrations rather than representations.

---

36.   Here one might be reminded of Benjamin's idea of "*das optische Unbewusste*" (literally "the optical unconscious," but translated as "unconscious optics"). According to Benjamin, "the camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses" (Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, p. 237). In Langer's case, however, Benjamin's optical unconscious is realized twice over: not only does the camera allow observing what would otherwise remain unseen, the camera and the accompanying videotape apparatus provide a glimpse into the unconscious itself.

37.   Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, Nebr., 1995), p. 51.

Transmission

The seminal text of the growing discourse of trauma and testimony is undoubtedly Felman and Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. The book brings together a literary scholar and a psychoanalyst—two narrative-based professions—to address the collapse of narrative in the wake of the Holocaust. With one of the authors as cofounder of the Yale archive, it should not come as a surprise that large portions of the analysis deal with survivors' videotaped testimonies. But no less significant are the circumstances that instigated the writing of this book for the other author. As Felman recounts, it was the story of one class in the fall of 1984: "The textual framework of the course included texts (and testimonies) by Camus, Dostoevsky, Freud, Mallarmé, Paul Celan, as well as autobiographical/historical life accounts borrowed from the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale" (*T*, p. 7). Following the screening of a videotaped testimony "something happened, toward the conclusion of the class, which took me completely by surprise. The class itself broke out into a crisis" (*T*, p. 47). The papers that students submitted subsequently turned out to be a "profound statement of the trauma they had gone through and of the significance of their assuming the position of the witness" (*T*, p. 52). It was this event, Felman declares, "which determined me to write about it, and which contained, in fact, the germ—and the germination—of this book" (*T*, p. 47).

That Felman ascribes such formative power to an event that, in her words, "broke the framework of the course" (*T*, p. 55) (that is, the textual framework) is indicative of the media backdrop of this theory of testimony. Felman is preoccupied with transmission, an issue that spells simultaneously the predicament of testimony and its transcendence. Her model of transmission is inspired by Claude Lanzmann's monumental documentary *Shoah*; as he stated in a 1990 seminar at Yale: "I wanted really to address the intelligence of the viewer more than the emotions. . . . My purpose was the transmission."[38] By "transmission" Lanzmann might mean a nonrepresentational mode of communication, the imparting of something beyond the imparting of knowledge. On this view, the truth of testimony lies not in the faithfulness of its representation but in the sense of bewilderment it transmits to the viewer. In her essay on the film, Felman suggests that the import of Lanzmann's achievement is in "performing the historical and contradictory double task of the breaking of the silence and of the simultaneous shattering of any given discourse, of the breaking—or

---

38. Claude Lanzmann, "Seminar with Claude Lanzmann 11 April 1990," trans. Ruth Larson, *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991): 93.

the bursting open—of all frames" (the breaking of frames and frameworks is a recurring phrase of Felman's) (*T*, p. 224). What the film dramatizes, then, is what might be called the transmission function of testimony, which emanates from the contradiction between the necessity and the impossibility of testimony.

Transmission informs much of Felman's work on testimony, with the story of that class serving as its so-called primal scene. It was the first time that Felman decided to move on "from poetry into reality and to study in a literary class something which is *a priori* not defined as literary, but is rather of the order of raw documents—historical and autobiographical" (*T*, p. 42). The shift from the textual to the audiovisual spawned a crisis: none of the assigned readings had the shattering effect of the "raw" video-taped testimonies. Compelled to respond to the crisis, she prepared an address to the class, citing the feeling of one student: "We have been *talking* about the accident—and here all of a sudden *the accident happened* in the class, happened *to* the class" (*T*, p. 50). Felman prefers to view the crisis as an accumulative effect, with the audiovisual building on the previous impact of the textual, finally resorting back to the literary as a way of working through the crisis. Yet is the crisis here not precisely that of the literary in failing to attend to a transmission that supersedes its impact and is outside its domain?

The term *transmission of trauma* entered the vocabulary of psychology in the early 1980s in the context of second-generation effects of the Holocaust;[39] children of survivors exhibited pathological behavior (that is, post-traumatic), such as nightmares, acute anxiety, and overidentification with their parents' misfortune. The metaphor of transmission was initially chosen to denote some kind of traumatic transference from one generation to the next.[40] More recent speculations seem to have taken the metaphor to a new level of specificity:

> The transmission of sound waves in telecommunications is a commonly accepted phenomenon and may serve as a suitable analogy that also illustrates the process of trauma transmission. Thus, in the same

39. Here are some instructive Google trivia: According to Google Books, "transmission of trauma" has a physiological parallel in medicine as early as the 1940s; and according to Google Ngram, the term itself is virtually nonexistent before the 1980s, whereas its occurrence in English books increases almost a thousandfold by the end of the 1990s.

40. One of the first discussions to use the term is James Herzog, "World beyond Metaphor: Thoughts on the Transmission of Trauma," in *Generations of the Holocaust*, ed. Martin S. Bergmann and Milton E. Jucovy (New York, 1982), pp. 103–19. A precursor to this idea can be found in the work of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, especially in their discussion on "the phantom effect"; see Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis,* trans. and ed. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago, 1994), pp. 165–76.

way as heat, light, sound and electricity can be invisibly carried from a transmitter to a receiver, it is possible that unconscious experiences can also be transmitted from parents to their children through some complex process of extrasensory communication.[41]

If psychopathological transmission is still of the metaphorical order, an imminent development is poised to turn metaphor into actuality. Recently posted revisions to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-V*) stipulate the amended causes of posttraumatic stress disorder. The fourth criterion reads: "Experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the event(s) (e.g., first responders collecting body parts; police officers repeatedly exposed to details of child abuse). (Note: this does not apply to exposure through electronic media, television, movies, or pictures, unless this exposure is work related)."[42] The caveat rejecting the possibility of a technologically mediated trauma—except, that is, when on the job—seems offered protection against lawsuits; one could surmise that journalists, photographers, CCTV security guards, film editors, and perhaps even television critics might be among the potential plaintiffs. But, if read more seriously, the caveat betrays a dramatic concession. For if trauma can be transmitted through media when work related, there is no reason why this could not happen otherwise. Once admitted, the possibility that media may transmit trauma cannot be contained to one situation only, however excruciating.[43] In retrospect, the crisis experienced in Felman's class would easily fit the criterion. But, more importantly, what was proclaimed as the "germ and germination" of her work on testimony—a case of audiovisual transmission of trauma—is now about to be included among the possible causes of trauma itself. There seems to be more truth than poetry to the technological resonances of trauma, as both clinical and critical discourses acknowledge, however implicitly, the transmissibility of the audiovisual.

In her more recent work on the Eichmann trial, Felman further extends the reach of the transmission of trauma, yet once again largely disavowing its media setting. Reading critically Hannah Arendt's account of the trial, Felman brilliantly suggests that the significance of this extraordinary legal

41. Natan P. F. Kellermann, "Transmission of Holocaust Trauma—An Integrative View," *Psychiatry* 64, no. 3 (2001): 260.

42. American Psychiatric Association, "*DSM-V* Development, Proposed Revisions," www.dsm5.org/ProposedRevisions/Pages/proposedrevision.aspx?rid=166#

43. The stakes in broadening PTSD criteria are ever so high in the wake of 9/11—the culmination of the transmission of trauma, if there ever was one—which is most likely the back story behind the proposed revisions. See Mark A. Schuster et al., "A National Survey of Stress Reactions after September 11, 2001, Terrorist Attacks," *New England Journal of Medicine* 345, no. 20 (2001): 1507–12.

event was not only in the serving of historical justice but in "the granting of authority (articulateness and transmissibility) to trauma by a legal process of transformation of individual into collective trauma."[44] With more than one hundred witnesses, the trial provided release to survivors' silenced and untold traumatic memories, making them public for the first time. "The tool of law," argues Felman, "was used not only as a tool of *proof* of unimaginable facts but, above all, as a compelling *medium of transmission*—as an effective tool of national and international *communication* of these thought-defying facts" (*JU*, p. 133).[45] Similarly, when referring to one of the witnesses in the trial, the writer K-Zetnik, who memorably collapsed on the stand before completing his testimony, Felman declares: "it was precisely through K-Zetnik's *legal muteness* that the trial inadvertently *gave silence a transmitting power*, and—although not by intention—managed to transmit the legal meaning of collective trauma." Thus Felman concludes, "Once the trial gave transmissibility to silence, other silences became, within the trial, fraught with meaning" (*JU*, p. 154).

How could the testimonies heard during trial gain such public impact and transform into a collectively shared trauma? Felman answers this question only in passing: "Broadcast live over the radio and passionately listened to, the trial was becoming the central event in the country's life" (*JU*, p. 127). This single reference to the media context in Israel of the early 1960s—where radio was the only broadcasting medium (television arrived only towards the end of the decade)—reveals the technological conditions for the transmission of trauma during the Eichmann trial. It was the acoustic medium of radio that allowed survivors to attain voice while taking to the airwaves.[46] Although the verb *transmit* suffuses her text, Felman fails to spot the link between the two kinds of transmission occasioned with the trial—the traumatic and the radiophonic. Carried over from Lanzmann's *Shoah* to the discourse of testimony, the transmission function is finally

44. Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), p. 7; hereafter abbreviated *JU*.

45. Italics are in the original. Here is how Felman explains the rationale behind the trial (again, italics hers):

   The reason he decided to add living witnesses to documents, the Israeli prosecutor Gideon Hausner in his turn explained, was that the Nuremberg trials had *failed to transmit*, or to impress on human memory and "on the hearts of men," the knowledge and the shock of what had happened. The Eichmann trial sought, in contrast, not only to establish facts but to transmit (transmit truth as event and as the shock of an *encounter* with events, transmit history as an experience). [*JU*, p. 133]

46. See Amit Pinchevski and Tamar Liebes, "Severed Voices: Radio and the Mediation of Trauma in the Eichmann Trial," *Public Culture* 22 (Spring 2010): 265–91.

brought to bear on the collective impact of the Eichmann trial—all the while unaware of its various media a priori.

Transmission, argues Régis Debray, is necessarily a violent act: "Every transmission is a combat, against noise, against inertia, against the other transmitters, and even—especially—against the addressees."[47] What is usually meant by communication is therefore the opposite of transmission: "Communication is a transmission that has cooled, that is stable and calm."[48] Debray's observation would apply squarely to Felman's work, but coming from someone deeply concerned with technical mediation it would also put some strain on the relation between software and hardware in trauma and testimony discourse. Testimony emerges as a historical and ethical concern profoundly implicated by the challenges of the transmission of trauma, including the possibility of transmission itself becoming traumatic. If testimony transmits something beyond the literary, it is owing to the intervention of media whose impact unsettles the literary. Felman's account thus appears as already out-of-joint with itself, having its germ and germination in an audiovisual moment. To use Derrida's words, the audiovisual is the *mal d'archive* of Felman's writing on testimony: "an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement."[49] The literary gestures towards what it can never archive within textual means— the effect of its own collapse as captured by nonliterary media. It is when the sensory transgresses the literary that the transmission function of testimony is set off.

Media, Trauma, War

It will not have gone unnoticed that the present discussion has brought together, on the one hand, three Jewish scholars committed to narrative inquiry and whose collective work is devoted to the traumatic legacies of the Second World War and, on the other, a German media theorist born in Saxony in 1943 for whom all modern technological advancements are war driven.[50] One would be hard pressed to find two more diametrical discourses on the nature of history, subjectivity, and morality in the wake of war. If for the former war is the source of suffering both physical and mental, for the latter it is the origination of machines whose reign tran-

47. Régis Debray, *Media Manifestos*, trans. Eric Rauth (New York, 1996), p. 45.
48. Ibid., p. 48.
49. Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 91.
50. On Kittler's view of war, see Winthrop-Young, "Drill and Distraction in the Yellow Submarine: On the Dominance of War in Friedrich Kittler's Media Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28 (Summer 2002): 825–54 and *Kittler and the Media* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 120–46.

scends both body and mind. Taken to the extreme, the choice they seem to leave us with is technics *or* civilization. That said, the one can be usefully read alongside the other as two postwar accounts on the collapse of narrative as a medium of history. Moreover, the posttrauma of the former and the posthumanism of the latter can be viewed as parallel effects of the medium overtaking the narrative. Rubbed against each other, they better expose their respective critical strengths; taken together, they both point to the conjunction of media and trauma in the postwar experience.

From a Kittlerian point of view, the three accounts on testimony and trauma discussed above are the result of inverted remediation—a written analysis of videotape recordings of spoken narratives. The outcome is a low signal-to-noise ratio discourse in which the background noise is as significant as the data conveyed. Just as psychoanalysis, with its insistence to record all contingencies of speech, has a phonographic a priori, contemporary discourse of testimony and trauma, with its commitment to account for the unrepresentable and the unsayable, has an audiovisual (and, more precisely, videographic) a priori. In this sense, what Felman and Laub designate as the crises of testimony in literature, psychoanalysis, and history (three metanarratives rooted in the production of narrative) is coextensive with the expansion of modern audiovisual media; the failure of narrative in bearing witness is consistent with the technological mediation of that very failure.[51] If testimony performs its own crisis, audiovisual media bear witness to it. Or, as Kittler might have it, the discourse of trauma and testimony has literature summon its two successors in mediating reality—media and psychoanalysis—to examine conjointly literature's inadequacy in giving account of the horrors of war.

This might have some important implications for current debates on Holocaust testimony. Giorgio Agamben has famously opposed testimony to the archive, taking his lead from Michel Foucault's notion of archeology.[52] According to Foucault, the archive is the system that regulates what is sayable in accordance with the already-said: "The archive is the first law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events."[53] Subjectivity itself, argues Foucault, is a function of the archive; what is normally called the subject is a discursively conditioned

51.   See John Ellis, *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (London, 2000), pp. 1–38, and Paul Frosh and Pinchevski, "Why Media Witnessing? Why Now?" in *Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication,* ed. Frosh and Pinchevski (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 1–19.

52.   See Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York, 2002), chap. 4.

53.   Michel Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*, in "*The Archeology of Knowledge*" *and* "*The Discourse on Language*," trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1972), p. 129.

and enacted subject-position. In Agamben's rendering, testimony in the wake of Auschwitz is the opposite of Foucault's archive. Rather than designating the regulation of speech insofar as it is a relation between the said and the unsaid, testimony refers to the relation between the possibility and impossibility of speech—that is, the possibility of the annulment or dispossession of speech. This move allows Agamben to reintroduce the subject—the witness—as the one that has the potential of not having language: "The subject is thus the possibility that language does not exist, does not take place."[54] Subjectivity reappears as the capacity to bear witness to an impossibility of speech through its very existence, that is, through the contingency of speech.[55]

Kittler, while influenced by Foucault's archeology, criticizes the latter's exclusive reliance on the medium of writing and utter disregard for modern technologies of storage and transmission. "It is for this reason," argues Kittler, "that all his analyses end immediately before that point in time at which other media penetrated the library's stacks. Discourse analysis cannot be applied to sound archives or towers of film rolls" (*GFT*, p. 5). In this respect, the Yale archive introduces a significant reconfiguration of the archival formation whereby the audiovisual takes the role of the textual. What writing was to Foucault's archive, videography is to the Yale archive—both its technological condition and its logic of operation. This reconfiguration entails a profoundly different concept of the archivable; the audiovisual archive is designed to store precisely that which cannot be properly archived by writing—trauma. Rather than the system of everything sayable, the audiovisual archive is the system of everything recordable, which not only destabilizes Agamben's opposition between archive and testimony but ultimately makes the former the condition of the latter. The relation between the possibility and the impossibility of speech—the contingency of testimony, its capacity not to be—is not foreign to the audiovisual archive but rather thoroughly performed by it. Once the archive turns videographic, testimony and the precariousness of its articulation become simultaneous and compound. It is by means of videotestimony that the witness emerges as the subject bearing witness—on tape—to the impossibility that gives rise to testimony. Archive and testimony are inseparable.

What might Kittler make out of all this? Possibly, here is yet another example of how subjectivity is a product of technological-discursive re-

---

54. Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 146.
55. Agamben ultimately argues that contingency is the primary modal category: "Contingency is not one modality among others, alongside possibility, impossibility, and necessity: it is the actual giving of a possibility, the way in which a potentiality exists as such" (ibid.).

gimes. What Kittler calls the "so-called man" is constituted by trauma, which in turn is constituted by a specific psycho-techno constellation. Subjectivity is rendered traumatic against the background of videotape playback. Yet even though Kittler's perspective allows us to understand how trauma is linked to media, trauma still can provide a critique of this perspective itself. In fact, the trauma framework might be the first step towards a dialectical critique of Kittler's media theory.

There is no escape from Kittler's technological singlemindedness; his efforts to subordinate history to technology are nothing less than, well, obsessive. His own technological a priori is that of computer engineering and information theory, invoking time and again Claude Shannon's mathematical model of communication.[56] Bearing in mind his preoccupation with World War Two technologies of the *Wehrmacht*, Peenemünde, and the *Luftwaffe*, this obsession ultimately amounts to blindness. As aptly put by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young: "there is no Hitler in Kittler's war, no war of aggression, no final solution, no complicity of military conquest and racial genocide, and subsequently no question of guilt and responsibility."[57] Kittler would probably regard such questions of guilt and responsibility as chimerical effects of the "so-called man" and hence as a further reinstatement of retrograde anthropocentrism under the guise of human moral agency.

But what if this blindness could be read as something of a posttraumatic reaction? What if this technological monomania is but an elaborate form of acting out, relegating to the background precisely what cannot be dealt with and accounted for?[58] To the extent that media and trauma also intersect in Kittler's case, his would be the opposite of the three accounts above. Whereas their preoccupation with trauma suppresses the underlying media, his preoccupation with media suppresses the underlying trauma. It is as if there is a parallel mode of transmission of trauma at work in Kittler's meditations, the transmission of a secret that remains buried under a mass of technical information, transmitted but never properly communicated.

56. See Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana, Ill., 1963).

57. Winthrop-Young, *Kittler and the Media*, p. 142.

58. In a recent (and probably recorded) interview, Kittler gives this brief biographical note: "it is perhaps important that your readers know that I was born in East Germany in 1943 and that I still have some dim memories of the Second World War and afterwards when the Red Army was all around. And, of course, in East Germany during the 1940s and 1950s, it was very difficult to obtain a university education under that particular government. . . . That is why my parents left East Germany in 1958." Someone like Laub or Felman would probably make much of the omission (or blunder) in the fact that East Germany was not established until 1949 (Kittler, "From Discourse Networks to Cultural Mathematics: An Interview with Friedrich A. Kittler," interview by John Armitage, *Theory, Culture, and Society* 23, no. 7–8 [2006]: 17).