

ONE

On the Verge of History and Memory

SPEAKING OF THE troubled relation of memory to history, Yosef Yerushalmi says of the contemporary moment that “perhaps the time has come to look more closely at ruptures, breaches, breaks [in history], to identify them more precisely, . . . to understand that not everything of value that existed before a break was either salvaged or metamorphosed, but was lost, and that often some of what fell by the wayside became, through our retrieval, meaningful to us” (*Zakhor* 101). Writing at the conclusion of a century that was to witness one of the most profound breaks in all of history let alone Jewish history, his is an understandable call. It is not just the call to understand the ways in which what has been lost to memory affects the writing both of testimony and of the histories that make use of it as its raw material. It is also a call to understand the ways in which that effort at retrieval—sometimes exceedingly selective, sometimes careless or mightily subjective—creates something other than memory, something new, and something perhaps tenuously related to what took place.

I want to make the case that memory and forgetfulness are facets of the same phenomenon of understanding: the occurrence of events begins interminably to recede into an inaccessible past at the very moment of occurrence, while the event’s passage into language—into any knowledge that we might formulate of the occurrence—makes of the occurrence something (narrative, testimony, history) *other* than the event. The narrative of the event and the irretrievable event itself may, in Emmanuel Levinas’s terms, approach one another, but they are of an altogether different order; and—nonetheless—the event intrudes upon the witness’s ability to place it into the fabric of narrative, tearing it, or tugging at it, haunting the narrative and the witness both. My aim is to explore this phenomenon, particularly the representations that are produced, as a kind of “excess” of the event, which haunt both the one who was there and the one who only catches a glimpse of the event secondhand.

I'm particularly interested in events that might be called traumatic, or what Yerushalmi called, in the realm of history, "breaks" in the fabric of the known. In fact, it may well be the case that the passage of the occurrence from event to experience is confounded by that void of memory (the disappearance of the event) that insinuates itself in the midsts of that passage. The path from event to experience, from what happened to knowledge of what happened, is a discursive one: to make events available at all—to make them historical—one has to speak them. But this passage from witness to testimony or from the immemorial event to memory, is an impossible one if we think of it as recuperation or redemption of the event. Of course, the Holocaust is the most obvious instance of an event that seems to stand in the way of recollection—Agamben has made the case, troublingly, that the event can only be recuperated by those who, in his terms, speak for the dead (an impossible task)—and that produces a crisis of representation for memory. The Holocaust, as a break, functions doubly in this book: it is at once the historical instance that, in Blanchot's words, "ruined everything," that forced us to decisively change how we think of history and its relation to memory (see LaCapra); and it also haunts our accounts of how memory and its object—our representation of events and the events themselves—come into contact with one another since 1945.

It was Emmanuel Levinas—the philosophical touchstone of this project—that most obviously revolutionized the philosophical foundations of remembrance. In *Totality and Infinity* and in *Otherwise than Being*, he argued that the individual's engagement with others and the individual's representation of those engagements (events and the memory of events) cannot be made commensurate, but that their relation produces a kind of void or excess. For Levinas, this void is always associated with the "break" of the Holocaust. But it's a void that is productive of a positive ethics. If the relation of memory and forgetfulness is less a matter of extremes or opposition and more a matter of simultaneity—as Levinas has laid out—then the passage from event to experience, witness to testimony, might be less a passage than a crux, a point in time that annihilates time and that forces upon the witness both the imperative to speak and the knowledge that to speak the experience and to act in the face of that experience is both impossible and impossible to avoid. This is precisely the ethical moment implied by Levinas's simultaneous imposition of what he calls "the saying" and "the said": faced with the enormity of the event we are compelled to act and to make that action knowable to and oriented toward an other through speech (what is said), and yet we realize that anything said or represented reduces that enormity to a language or a medium that can't quite contain it. And yet the event itself is completely lost—both to history and to memory—unless it is said. Just as saying and said cannot exist without one another, neither can memory and forgetting so exist.

Notions of memory that take as their task a full or even partial recuperation of events in the name of knowledge will always fail in that task: because the event disrupts our ability to, in Kant's terms, bring it under a concept adequate to the experience itself, there is no way the event could be said to be redeemed. What I'm calling forgetful memory comes as an involuntary and unbidden flash of the event that disrupts collective memory and history (that sees it, in other words, as a variety of *anamnesis* rather than as *mneme*, as a marker of what has been lost rather than as a representation of what can be remembered). If it is true that disastrous or traumatic events are themselves paradigmatic for the source of memory—if it is true, in other words, that Levinas's witness is someone who feels the weight of the event bodily and not just intellectually or existentially—then it may be useful to think of watershed events as found in the historical or cultural record as prooftexts for a forgetful memory.

I'll examine, among other questions, how what we see (and forget) influences what we can say and write about disastrous events; what narratives of witness give us access to; and whether the priority of events to their remembrance—and their inherent susceptibility to forgetting—impoverishes or enriches a survivor's capacity to remember events or to act as an eyewitness. Taking the work of Amos Funkenstein, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Pierre Nora and others as its point of departure, the book explores the ways in which what Maurice Blanchot calls "the immemorial" affects memory since the Holocaust, a fabric of narrative and of images several thousand years old—and punctuated by injunctions to remember—that has been profoundly affected by the destruction. But instead of seeing testimonial accounts of disasters as a record of the events that, taken one by one, can be understood as "exile," or "pogrom," or "Final Solution," I'll make the case that such accounts indicate not only a loss of life or of culture or of family, but also a site where the event is replaced by a representation that bears a vexed relation to the event itself. I want to take up Yerushalmi's challenge to explore how the current, post-Holocaust generation sees the "uses of forgetting" found in sacred and secular literature, legal writing, and memorial, testimonial, and historical writing and other media.

I intend to do so by tracing how our accounts of events, in memory, reshape not just narrative consciousness but also our view of more traditional definitions of witness, testimony, and history. Witnessing is the act of seeing as we are confronted with or involved in a set of circumstances; testimony is what we say about those events. What intervenes between these two acts—one spontaneous and the other intentional—is memory and its opposite, forgetting. What Kant suggested two hundred years ago is relevant here: the occurrence of events is presented to consciousness by translating it into already-existing concepts and categories. As this process takes place, aspects of the event that are felt bodily may be lost to reason and speech. Specifically,

I'm interested in the double process of retrieval and loss—memory and forgetting—that lies at the crux *between* witness and testimony. Representations of what has been seen by witnesses are problematic not only because the witnesses has trouble finding the words to render the experience; they are problematic also because in the process of witnessing and testifying they exchange the event-as-memory for consciousness of the event, the event-as-knowledge. In the process of remembering the event for history, the witness elides aspects of the event that aren't available as testimony or as representation, aspects that—for the reader or second-hand witness—may well be overlooked.



In an essay originally published as a review of Yerushalmi's *Zakhor*, Pierre Vidal-Naquet notes that "In Hebrew, 'zakhor' signifies 'remember.' In the Jewish tradition, remembering is a duty for those who are Jewish: 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem . . .' What exactly must be remembered?" (58). He links Yerushalmi's book to Aharon Megged's novella *Yad Vashem*, explaining that the novel is in part about the conundrum of understanding the relation of the family's history in eastern Europe while insisting on a place in Eretz Israel. The couple's immediate problem is finding a name for their child that places him at once in Israel and nonetheless doesn't offend a grandfather who is a refugee from eastern Europe. The problem of remembering, suggests Vidal-Naquet, is the problem of the object of remembrance and the name: *yad vashem*, the monument and the name. While we attach names to objects, and see objects as mnemonics for that which is irrevocably lost—like the six million in Europe, or, in the case of Megged's grandfather, the connection to a decimated Ashkenazi culture—what has been lost and what is absent exerts a terrible pressure upon both monument and name, and insinuates itself between the two. "What exactly must be remembered?" Vidal-Naquet answers: "Aharon Megged's novella clearly shows that one can choose between memories," though the conundrum of Yerushalmi's thesis about memory and its connection to the break or rupture is that we may, in fact, not be able to choose at all; the choice comes, unbidden and out of our direct control. If there's any clearer indication of this, it's Vidal-Naquet's implicit connection of Yerushalmi and Proust, and his call for an integration of history and memory that does not draw strict lines of demarcation between them. And both men, the historian and the novelist, are in the end writers: our challenge since 1945, he suggests, is of "setting memory in motion, of doing, in short, for history what Proust did for the novel. This is no easy task . . ." though in accomplishing it we understand that "writing history is also a work of art" ("The Historian and the Test of Murder" 140).

Vidal-Naquet, with the Holocaust revision industry on his mind, is concerned with the language of history and its tendency to reduce events to col-

lectivities. What happens to an individual in Auschwitz, what is remembered and written as testimony, is collected together with all other such remembrances and taken as an amalgam, and we say that such and such happened in Auschwitz (or maybe more insidiously, we know that such and such happened there). Any discrepancy among the testimonies—the memories—of those who were there are taken as errors or lies by the deniers, and is used to impeach the knowledge of the atrocities: the raw material that acts as its foundation is, after all, riddled by inaccuracy, or dishonesty, or forgetfulness. The paradigm for history's flattening of memory is Thucydides' account of the "disappearance" of the Helots at the hands of the Spartans in 424 BCE. "To constitute the two thousand helots as a historical whole when each helot had his own life and his own death, one obviously must construct the set 'helots.' To us, this would seem to go without saying; it would seem to be, as one says, 'obvious,' but in reality it is not so, any more or any less than the set 'Jews' or the set 'National Socialist Germany'" ("The Holocaust's Challenge to History" 144). The construction of the set by history doesn't allow any language at all to indicate the experiences of the individuals. There is no room, in other words, in a collective memory that would stand in for history for individual memory (anamnesis) to intrude or interrupt the narrative. Certainly the reality of the individual experiences do intrude upon Thucydides' text, as Vidal-Naquet tells us by pointing attention to the word "each" as it refers to the helots: "shortly thereafter, they were made to disappear, and no one knew in what manner each of them had been eliminated" (Thucydides, IV: 80, 1–4; cited in *Assassins of Memory* 100). The attempt by the historian to write a memory that eliminates the individual memory, what at memory's foundation is lost (the manner of death and the quality of suffering), is foiled by language's uncanny ability to register just that absence.

But Vidal-Naquet worries that this isn't enough in the face of efforts by the denial industry to foreground the narrative over the silence of the victims. And so he points approvingly to Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, a film that foregrounds the individual, forgetful memory. In fact, if anything Lanzmann's film puts the narrative of the Shoah—the language and images we now take for knowledge, and have as a storehouse of collective memory—entirely in the background; Vidal-Naquet sees *Shoah* as something almost mad: it is "a historical work where memory alone, a memory of today, is called upon to bear witness" ("Holocaust's Challenge" 150). Lanzmann's film is an instance whereby those who saw and experienced the atrocities are given an opportunity to recall those events and to have a chance to speak precociously: to produce a language that is at once both a presentation of the object of memory, and which is at the same time a presentation of the object's loss and of that loss's effect upon the witness. The film is admirable because it places together, in an almost jarring fashion, *yad vashem*, the monument and the name—Simon Srebnik in peaceful fields outside Chelmno, fields where forty years

earlier he exhumed and burned bodies; Simon Prodchlebnik nonchalantly telling Lanzmann that the trucks that were used to gas members of his town are very like those that deliver cigarettes to stores in his current hometown of Tel Aviv. Between *mneme*, the narrative of the Holocaust that we and the witnesses have clearly at their disposal as collective memory, and *anamnesis*, the flash of recall sparked by a name or a smell or sight, comes the disaster: a memory that is not a representation but a moment of seeing without knowing, a moment perhaps of witness, but a moment that annihilates both past and present and creates, instead, a presence that can only be made available for the viewer of the film, or the reader of testimony, through a speaking or writing that is precocious, out of control, and utterly troubling. Lanzmann has made a film that manages to “search for time lost as at once time lost and time rediscovered.” He finds memory “[b]etween time lost and time rediscovered,” and he finds it there as “the work of art” (150). For Vidal-Naquet, *Shoah* is a work of memory precisely because it navigates between *yad vashem*, the monument and the name, *mneme* and *anamnesis*, and understands that what lies between them is a void of memory, the destroyer of history, and the language that gives them all a palpable presence.

Vidal-Naquet sees the cause for this absence or forgetting in the intransigence of events, an intransigence that is different from the durability or presence of objects, things. It is an intransigence that exerts itself upon narratives that try to flatten them into collective memory, or render them as things: The Holocaust, The Diaspora, Auschwitz. “A historical discourse is a web of explanations that may give way to an ‘other explanation’ if the latter is deemed to account for” the heterogenousness of events in a more satisfactory manner (*Assassins of Memory* 97). It is the unreasonableness of events, their inability to fit paradigms, that is so damnably hard to account for in historical writing; and it is this unreasonableness—the apparent contradiction of an event’s presence in memory and its simultaneous disappearance into an “irreducible opaqueness”—that compels writing. And it is writing (of a certain sort) that is best suited to rendering this opaqueness, memory and its converse. “The historian writes; he conjures up a place and time, but he himself is situated in a place and time, at the center of a nation, for example, which entails the elimination of other nations. As a writer, he has depended at length solely on written texts, which has simultaneously entailed the elimination of oral or gestural manifestations, the booty of anthropologists” (*Assassins of Memory* 110). But if the historian doesn’t recognize that “oral and gestural manifestations,” as well as the storehouse of rhetorical figure, are elements of the real, then we lose the connection with “what might be called, for lack of a better term, reality,” and we are immersed then “in discourse, but such discourse would no longer be historical” (111). I’d go further, and suggest that unless a historian recognizes the demands of reality as well as the demands of writing, he is certainly writing historically but he is not account-

ing for memory. This, after all, was what *Shoah* did most notably: it insisted upon the place and the name—mneme, the discourse of “The Holocaust,” and anamnesis, the flash of that which is absent—and allowed the two, together, to produce a memory in the viewer and the witness both.



David Krell explains that when one writes, one is “always writing on the verge of both remembrance and oblivion” (1). He goes on to wonder “whether writing is a metaphor for memory or memory a metaphor for writing” (4), and suggests that in the end untangling the relationship of memory and forgetfulness will require an understanding of writing, and how our understanding of it was influenced by the Greeks. Writing on the verge of memory and forgetfulness is not unlike Blanchot’s thesis that “to write . . . is to be in relation, through words and their absence, with what one cannot remember” (121); and it is not unlike Aristotle’s question, “How then does one remember what is not present? For this would imply that one could also see and hear what is not present” (450b 19). For Aristotle the question was how the feeling of memory was related to the object that called the feeling to mind if the object were forever lost; for Blanchot the question is how that feeling may be made palpable to the witness if not through a kind of writing or inscription. It was Aristotle who most plainly made the distinction between mneme and anamnesis, memory and recollection, where memory is the making present of something absent, while recollection is a type of kinesis or movement, a motion or animation in which what is absent becomes suddenly present but as process. “For recollection is the inherence of the power of presencings [or the presence within of the power that stimulates changes]. And this in such a way that the man is moved of himself and because of the motions that he has” (452a 10). The point, again, is that memory in this sense doesn’t make the object or event present but—at best—brings events that are lost in time to a present time, but the events are not made present as such but as movement. The person brought to memory does not experience the presence of an object or event—as if it were possible to relive the experiences of Auschwitz, or the privations of the ghetto, or the horribly uncomfortable feeling as you listen to your parents’ stories again and again—but is brought to a nexus, a juncture comprised not by a convergence of objects or events but a concavity of experience, a void. In Krell’s terms, “*kinesis* . . . here means a gradual or perhaps quite sudden coming-to-presence or self-showing of an absent being that till now was also absent from memory” and what occurs is a “nexus or node—the origins of what Dilthey, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty will much later call the *Zusammenhang des Lebens*, the ‘holding together’ or cohesion of life” (19).

Anamnesis as distinct from mneme, then, is the creation of a nexus or crux through movement; memory as making present is here supplemented by

a memory as absence or forgetting, a sense that what is not present is what in fact makes memory possible. For Aristotle, to have motion one must also have a starting point, an *arche*. This origin isn't found at the beginning as one would expect—as the origin of history, we presume, comes at the point where writing begins—but in the middle (452a 17). The origin of movement, of memories, is more like the midpoint of an amalgam of points, what Krell calls a “*ruling center* of a particular constellation of memories.” “Aristotle intends to describe in kinesis not a linear movement from starting-point to end-point, like strings on a pearl or the events of a narrative, but a kind of back-and-forth movement from ruling center to adjacent, contiguous memories” in multidimensional space (Krell 19). It is a constellation organized by habit—by knowledge—but the movement itself is ungoverned by order. The movement—the absent origin, absent source of memory—is like the kernel that troubles the shell, like the event that haunts the survivor or the witness and compels her to testify and to speak in a language that is only partly, if at all, under her control. The flash of recollection, anamnesis, is not the making present of the event, then, but an incessant movement, a compulsion to speak. But “what do we remember?” What we remember is not the event itself; instead we bring to mind a sense that among all the knowledges we have at our disposal and through which we've ordered what we call our lives there is a crux, a void, that risks throwing all this order into disarray. That sense risks rendering the distinctions we've made between events that occur at different times—at different points in history, or at different stages of a narrative we've cobbled together to call collective memory—undistinguishable. But it also has the potential effect of making out of all this disorder a kind of disastrous wholeness, a sense that “life is from hence permeated by an uncanny and thoroughly disruptive unity” (Krell 21). The point of origin—the lost memory—is the origin of writing as well.

But the most effective writing-as-memory, writing on the verge of memory and oblivion, is writing that is plainly indicative. Aristotle, wondering about the same thing Vidal-Naquet does (“what is it that we remember?”), asks:

Does one remember the pathos or that from which the pathos came to be? . . . If pathos is like an imprint or a trace in us, why should the perception of this very thing be the memory of something else and not simply of itself? (450b 11ff.)

The answer lies partly in the action of anamnesis—the action of the soul in memory “inscribes a kind of imprint of what is perceived” (450a 30)—which is seen as a kind of inscription or imprint, but not the kind normally associated with writing. Memory both is and is not a representation; it presents (*darstellung*) what cannot be represented (*vorstellung*). But the answer also lies partly in seeing writing as, in Blanchot's terms, the disaster, that

action of language that brings to mind the event's other, what precedes even our knowledge of the event.

The question of how fully a state of affairs can be rendered discursively is especially pressing in the case of historical discourse, in which the veracity or coherence of eyewitness testimony is one of the pillars on which the historical reality or truth of events rests. But while testimony may serve as evidence, it is not necessarily the best indication of the nature of events. Inherent in Holocaust testimonies, like other testimonies of trauma, are the "anguished memories" that make themselves apparent in survivor's attempts to write the disaster of their experiences during the events of the war. Lawrence Langer's point, in *Holocaust Testimonies*, is that the distance between what has been witnessed and what can be committed to testimony—what was seen and what can be said—is often wide and always palpable: not only in the witness's statements but in the shrugged shoulders, the wincing, the tears, and the silences that punctuate the oral testimonies and that are aestheticized but not domesticated in the written language of figure. On extrinsic criteria, the worth of a discourse, regardless of its ability to produce knowledge or to accurately record an event, can always be called into question if we can impeach the character or the veracity of a speaker who cannot tell us precisely what happened in terms we can recognize. How could what they say be possible, we might ask? On intrinsic criteria, a testimony would have to agree with or at least corroborate a good deal of other eyewitness testimony of the Holocaust in order to tell a certain truth. It would have to represent a reality to which other witnesses have testified and which is internally coherent. (See Carlo Ginzburg's and Martin Jay's essays on the problems of verifiability of witnesses in the case of disasters like the Shoah.) Holocaust testimony is often both extrinsically incredible (the events to which the witness testifies seem impossible, unreal) and intrinsically incoherent (exhibiting gaps, silences, and disjunctions).

On an "indicative" criterion, what matters is a written account's ability to make readers "see" an issue or an event that exceeds language's ability to narrate it. In terms of *kairos*, rather than providing the criteria that would secure appropriate reactions from an audience based upon the constraints of time and place in which they find themselves, such a discourse would explode time and place, and indicate what Dale Sullivan calls a "fullness of time" that lies beyond any definable historical situation. An "indicative" (or "epideictic") criterion can be found in the Platonic corpus: there writing is granted the ability to indicate (though perhaps not produce) knowledge, and to the extent that it manages to indicate what lies beyond the contingencies of the world the speaker may be considered of better or worse character. In *Phaedrus* and *Gorgias*, Plato suggests that language leads speaker and listener to Truth by indicating rather than by producing it. Socrates' second speech on love (*Phaedrus* 244a–257b) figurally represents the cosmology whereby an investment in

love and beauty brings souls closer to their point of origin; it does not produce knowledge of that cosmology. But the figural effect of the speech—as well as the object of representation itself, a mnemonic whereby the soul is perfected as it glimpses an object that reminds it of its former perfection—indicates what lies beyond the contingencies of the world (where, in the *Gorgias* [469b–c], Socrates imagines the possibility of a state of affairs in which he may neither do nor suffer harm). The relation between truth as content and what lies beyond truth—what might be called, in psychoanalytic terms, the “real”—is the matter at issue in the debate, late in the *Phaedrus*, on the value of writing. When, in Socrates’ retelling of the myth of the origins of writing, Ammon charges writing not as a drug for memory, but for reminding (275a), he is making a claim similar to the one Socrates makes in his second speech on love about the perfection of the soul: that in seeing the beauty of the lover, the soul is reminded of its origin in perfection and is compelled to return there (249b–e). Writing cannot bring the object of knowledge to the reader, any more than the lover can bring about the perfection of the soul. But writing does (in Socrates’ words) *remind* the reader of it, though it does not represent the object. In fact, the conundrum for Plato’s Socrates is whether rhetoric produces truth or an image of truth, and most readers of the *Phaedrus* suggest that the best it can do is the latter. What writing, and ideally rhetoric, can do, however, is indicate that which is “really written in the soul” (278a), what lies at the source of language—what lies at its point of origin but to which language does not provide unfettered access.

It is precisely this relation between language and the events that precede or lie outside it—between writing and the disaster—that occupies Blanchot’s attention in *The Writing of the Disaster*. There Blanchot makes clear that experience is a state of being that requires knowledge. The occurrence of the event in which a person is implicated and sees herself as such *precedes* experience. It is immediate: “not only [does it] rule out all mediation; it is the infiniteness of a presence such that it can no longer be spoken of” (24). In the occurrence of the event, the individual is “exposed to unity”: in order to render the occurrence as an experience at all—in order for the occurrence to be seen as an event—the individual becomes defined as a subject. She becomes an “I” over against which the event can also be identified, given attributes, and finally named. At the moment the individual recognizes the occurrence of the event as an experience, and herself as the subject of experience, the event “falls in its turn outside being” (24). Experiences, recognized by the witness and named, are nonetheless haunted by their status as events, and “the names [are] ravaged by the absence that preceded them”—the event now lost to memory except as a name—and “seem remainders, each one, of another language, both disappeared and never yet pronounced, a language we cannot even attempt to restore without reintroducing these names back into the world” (58).

There is a bodily element to this kind of memory, the indicative facet of language or discourse that insinuates what precedes experience or knowledge into the narrative fabric of history or memory. Arguing against a Baudrillardian pleasure that seems inherent in a theory of indication, Edith Wyschogrod wonders whether there isn't something in memory—in the aguished winces or tears—that works against pleasure. She cites, in *The Transparency of Evil*, this passage:

Auschwitz and the final solution simply cannot be expiated. Punishment and crime have no common measure here, and the unrealistic character of the punishment ensures the unreality of the facts. What we are currently experiencing is something else entirely . . . a transmission from a historical stage into a mythical stage: the mythic—and media led reconstruction of these events. (92)

There is, apparently, no way to see, as Vidal-Naquet wishes to, the intransigence of the real beyond the proliferation of discourse.

But if we see the real as precisely those gaps or breaks in testimony—in the kinesis of memory, the precociousness of speech that seems to work its way out of the mouths of the witnesses in spite of their desire to flatten the narrative and simply “say what they saw”—then a language of indication doesn't “go all the way down” in Rorty's terms but in fact stops at the crux of memory which in very real terms involves suffering. Inasmuch as Roskies' ghetto poets, Lanzmann's survivors, and the key-bearing Moroccans who may or may not carry with them a palpable reminder of loss all make memory present with a sign, it is evidence of, in Aristotle's terms, a potentially painful “movement of himself,” or in Plato's of what is “truly written on the soul.” It is evidence of “*bodily pain*,” which “*is the limiting condition of the hyperreal*” (Wyschogrod 180; original italics).

Caruth's point in “Unclaimed Experience” and in her book of the same title is that history and trauma bear an indissoluble connection with one another. We consider history as that which can be preserved as a memory and written, but the event that serves as the object of history, that which happens, is erased or blotted out. Blanchot's argument about the “immemorial” nature of the disaster suggests that once an experience occurs, it is forever lost; it is at this point—“upon losing what we have to say” (Blanchot 21), the point of forgetfulness—that writing begins. Forgetfulness is the source of memory. The “victim of [trauma] was never fully conscious during the [event] itself: the person gets away, Freud says, ‘apparently unharmed’” (Caruth 187). The witness saw, but *only* saw, the deed or the circumstance that presented itself as trauma; the traumatic circumstance was never fully known—and hence could not be remembered—at all, and what follows is a profusion of language. What we read in survivor testimonies is the displacement of the traumatic event—the historical event, lost to memory—by the

language of the testimony, the sometimes broken, sometimes contradictory stories of the camps, or of hiding, or of the aftermath. But it is a language that is disrupted by that event, the language of repetition, in which the event is narrated over and over again but in language that may not be obviously associated with the event at all. “When a discourse *holds* in some way, it is . . . because it has been opened upon the basis of some traumatizing event, by an upsetting question that does not let one rest . . . and because it nevertheless resists the destruction begun by its traumatism” (Derrida, *Passages* 381; original italics). Re-membering is a sense of what has been dismembered, that which is not whole, which doesn’t obey the rules of logic or knowledge, and what is not fully present.

This truly is a forgetful memory, in which the making present of what is irretrievably past acknowledges that absence. Speaking of Augustine, who—in the *Confessions* (X 16–26)—is at pains to understand how to remember forgetfulness, Edith Wyschogrod writes that “forgetfulness appears to be more than a mere privation of the being of memory but takes on a density of its own” (186). The problem this presents for Augustine is that it gives to absence—oblivion—a palpable presence. Augustine recognizes that “forgetting is an absence of objects which once may have been present. Augustine can then hope that some remnant of a particular absent object will show itself. Failing such an appearance, there is only oblivion” (187). But it is possible to see that absence as being indicated by a sign which is itself a trace of what is missing. That is, what Augustine had not quite been able to theorize (oddly enough, given his predisposition to neoplatonism) is an indicative writing that created a space not for oblivion (pure negativity) but for a fullness that is marked as absence. Like trauma, oblivion might better be seen as an *arche*-event that was never fully present and, as void, has been repressed and transformed into a symptom (see Wyschogrod apropos Lacan, 188). The source of memory is lost and breaches speech; it is not language but is lodged within language, as oblivion is lodged within language and made present through it. Breaching speech is only possible through the trace, the “arche-phenomenon of memory” in Derrida’s terms, without which there could be no writing at all. The trace is “the non-presence of the other inscribed within the sense of the present” (*Of Grammatology* 70–71), a collapse of space and time into itself, creating a space, a void. Indicative writing, a writing that indicates memory as the break, is a kind of incision, a commingling of inside and outside that is written on the heart as much as (in *Phaedrus*) one’s soul: “I will put my law, [the Torah] within them and I will write it on their hearts” (Jeremiah 31:33)

The source of memory is a crux (in Merleau-Ponty, *creux*) that “has everything to do with memory: *se creuser la tete* means to make a great effort to recall something” (Krell 93). In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty writes that the crux “is a pit or hollow that opens of itself in the otherwise

too solid flesh of the world, a concavity that allows there to be visibility” (193). But it is also “a certain interiority, a certain absence, a negativity that is not nothing” in a palpable embodiment of ideas. Merleau-Ponty is attempting to describe, perhaps no better than Augustine and Plato but certainly no worse, the bodily, almost painful sense that comes with the unbidden memory, a sense that there is something—the opacity of the event—that language indicates but whose source is maddeningly difficult if not impossible to locate in time and space. The true problem of memory is

how at each instant [consciousness’s] former experiences are present to it in the form of a horizon which it is able to reopen, if it takes that horizon as its theme, in an act of reminiscence, but which it can also leave “at the margins.” . . . To remember is not to restore under the gaze of consciousness a tableau of the self-subsistent past; it is to ensconce oneself on the horizon of the past and to unfold little by little the perspectives contained there until the experiences bounded by that horizon are, as it were, lived anew in their temporal place. (*Phenomenology of Perception* 30)

Memory involves a collapse of time, and involves a bodily “attempt to reopen time, starting from the implication of the present, and only in the body, being our only permanent means of ‘adopting a stance’” (*Phenomenology of Perception* 211). Like Aristotle’s kinesis, and Plato’s indication, memory here involves a midpoint between representing fully a presence of the event in its cultural or collective sense (mneme) and the flashing forth in the present that which is altogether lost (anamnesis), a shuttling back and forth that produces and is related to bodily pain, and that indicates a sense of profound and traumatic loss. Memory as crux is both a presence and an absence that limits being and is its guarantor (Krell 95).

What all of this suggests is that we should give up on the idea of memory as a kind of representation. Instead, we should see memory as an intersection of remembrance and oblivion, a troublesome presence that is forgotten but guaranteed by the event’s loss. Memory truly is on the verge: the past can make itself bear painfully upon the present but it can’t be brought into the present in representation, or mimetically. What this means is that the only vehicle for memory is the body, as it is inscribed by the event and calls for its inscription—its indication—but that doesn’t quite have the tools for it. Memory is indexical insofar as it is a convergence of collected, collective memories, and of histories, that provide a way to know a memory’s *environs*, but it is indexical in that it allows you to read only that which is concealed by its own shorthand, in its breathlessness. We should think of memory as a kind of writing, in that events may be indicated rather than recollected, indicated from one body onto another.