

ACTS OF MEMORY

Cultural Recall in the Present

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Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self

Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it, we are nothing.
—Luis Buñuel

Memory is an action: essentially it is the action of telling a story.
—Pierre Janet

Introduction

Survivors of trauma frequently remark that they are not the same people they were before they were traumatized. As a survivor of the Nazi death camps observes, “One can be alive after Sobibor without having survived Sobibor.”¹ Jonathan Shay, a therapist who works with Vietnam veterans, has often heard his patients say “I died in Vietnam.”² Migael Scherer expresses a loss commonly experienced by rape survivors when she writes, “I will always miss myself as I was.”³ I take these comments seriously, as more than *façons de parler*, in part because, after enduring a near-fatal murder attempt and sexual assault, I could no longer find in myself the self I once was.⁴

The undoing of the self in trauma involves a radical disruption of memory, a severing of past from present and, typically, an inability to envision a future. And yet trauma survivors often eventually find ways to reconstruct themselves and carry on with reconfigured lives. In this chapter, I discuss the problem of the undoing of the self in trauma and the role of trauma narratives—what I call “speech acts of memory”—in remaking the self. I argue that working through, or remastering, traumatic memory (in the case of human-inflicted trauma) involves a shift from being the object or medium of someone else’s (the perpetrator’s) speech (or other expressive behavior) to being the subject of one’s own. The act of bearing witness to the trauma facilitates this shift, not only by transforming traumatic memory into a coherent narrative that can then be integrated into the survivor’s sense of self and view of the world, but

also by reintegrating the survivor into a community, reestablishing connections essential to selfhood. The study of trauma, I suggest, provides support for a view of the self as fundamentally relational—vulnerable enough to be undone by violence and yet resilient enough to be reconstructed with the help of others.

The study of trauma also supports the view of memory as multiform and often in flux. Memories of traumatic events can be themselves traumatic: uncontrollable, intrusive, and frequently somatic. They are experienced by the survivor as inflicted, not chosen—as flashbacks to the events themselves. In contrast, narrating memories to others (who are strong enough and empathic enough to be able to listen) empowers survivors to gain more control over the traces left by trauma. Narrative memory is not passively endured; rather, it is an act on the part of the narrator, a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self.

This is not to say that narrating one's memories of trauma is always therapeutic, nor that it is, by itself, sufficient for recovery from trauma. But that such narratives contribute significantly to such recovery is currently accepted as uncontroversial in the field of the psychology of trauma.⁵

Trauma and the Undoing of the Self

There is a much clearer professional consensus among psychologists about what counts as a traumatic event than there is among philosophers concerning the nature of the self.⁶ A traumatic event is one in which a person feels utterly helpless in the face of a force that is perceived to be life-threatening.⁷ The immediate psychological responses to such trauma include terror, loss of control, and intense fear of annihilation. Long-term effects include the physiological responses of hypervigilance, heightened startle response, sleep disorders, and the more psychological, yet still involuntary, responses of depression, inability to concentrate, lack of interest in activities that used to give life meaning, and a sense of a foreshortened future (DSM IV 1994, 12).

A commonly accepted explanation of these symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is that, in trauma, the ordinarily adaptive human responses to danger that prepare the body to fight or flee are of no avail. "When neither resistance nor escape is possible," Judith Herman explains, "the human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganized. Each component of the ordinary response to danger, having lost its utility, tends to persist in an altered and exaggerated state long after the actual danger is over" (Herman 1992, 34). When the trauma is of human origin and is intentionally inflicted, the kind I discuss in this chapter, it not only shatters one's fundamental assumptions about the world and one's safety in it, but also severs the sustaining connection between the self and the rest of humanity. Victims of

human-inflicted trauma are reduced to mere objects by their tormenters: their subjectivity is rendered useless and viewed as worthless. As Herman observes, "The traumatic event thus destroys the belief that one *can be oneself* in relation to others" (Herman 1992, 53). I would add that without this belief one can no longer *be oneself* even to oneself, since the self exists fundamentally in relation to others.

Though philosophers have held different views on what makes someone the same person over time (for example, same body, same soul, same consciousness or memories), most traditional philosophical accounts of the self, from Descartes's to contemporary theorists', have been individualistic, based on the assumption that one can individuate selves and determine the criteria for their identity over time independently of the social context in which they are situated. In contrast, recent accounts of the self inspired by Marx, Freud, and feminist theory have focused on the ways in which the self is formed in relation to others and sustained in a social context. On these accounts, persons are, in Annette Baier's words, "second persons," that is, "essentially successors, heirs to other persons who formed and cared for them."⁸ In addition, the self is viewed as related to and constructed by others in an ongoing way, not only because others continue to shape and define us throughout our lifetimes, but also because our own sense of self is couched in descriptions whose meanings are social phenomena (Scheman 1983).

Locke famously identified the self with a set of continuous memories, a kind of ongoing narrative of one's past that is extended with each new experience (1974). On this view, person A (at time 1) is identical with person B (at time 2) if B remembers having the experiences of A. This view of the self as narrative, modified to account for relational aspects of the self, is the one I invoke here in discussing the undoing of the self by trauma and its remaking through acts of memory.⁹

Trauma undoes the self by breaking the ongoing narrative, severing the connections among remembered past, lived present, and anticipated future. In telling a first-person trauma narrative to a suitable listener, the survivor is, at the same time and once again, a second person, dependent on the listener in order to return to personhood.

Traumatic Memory

All memory of (human-inflicted) trauma—whether traumatic memory or narrative memory—is cultural memory in at least two respects. First, traumatic events are initially experienced in a cultural context (even when endured alone) and are taken in under certain descriptions and other (for example, sensory) representations and not others. What is happening/what happened can be understood only in terms of the meanings of the traumatizing actions and

accompanying words. As Elizabeth Tonkin points out, “the contents or evoked messages of memory are . . . ineluctably social insofar as they are acquired in the social world and can be coded in symbol systems which are culturally familiar” (Tonkin 1992, 112). Or, as Andreas Huyssen observes, “all representation . . . is based on memory. . . . But rather than leading us to some authentic origin or giving us verifiable access to the real, memory, even and especially in its belatedness, is itself based on representation. The past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become memory” (Huyssen 1995, 2–3).

Second, how (and even whether) traumatic events are remembered depends on not only how they are initially experienced but also how (whether) they are perceived by others, directly or indirectly, and the extent to which others are able to listen empathically to the survivor’s testimony. The traumatic event is experienced as culturally embedded (or framed),¹⁰ is remembered as such (in both traumatic and narrative memory), and is shaped and reshaped in memory over time according, at least in part, to how others in the survivor’s culture respond.

And yet, although traumatic memories are cultural in the above respects, they are “articulated,” to use Huyssen’s term, in a way less dependent on linguistic and other symbolic representations and more dependent on sensory representations, than are narrative memories. A primary distinguishing factor of traumatic memories is that they are more tied to the body than are narrative memories. Indeed, traumatic memory can be viewed as a kind of somatic memory, as Roberta Culbertson notes, “full of fleeting images, the percussion of blows, sounds, and movements of the body—disconnected, cacophonous, the cells suffused with the active power of adrenalin, or coated with the anesthetizing numbness of noradrenalin” (1995, 174).

Traumatic memory blurs the Cartesian mind-body distinction that continues to inform our cultural narrative about the nature of the self. In the aftermath of my own assault, body and mind became virtually indistinguishable. My mental state (typically, depression) felt physiological, like lead in my veins, while my physical state (frequently, incapacitation by fear and anxiety) was the incarnation of a cognitive and emotional paralysis resulting from shattered assumptions about my safety in the world. The physiological traces of trauma give the lie to a latent mind-body dualism that still informs our culture’s most prevalent attitude to trauma, namely, that victims should “buck up,” put the past behind them, and get on with their lives. My hypervigilance, heightened startle response, insomnia, and other PTSD symptoms were no more psychological, and no more under my control, than were my heart rate and blood pressure.

The intermingling of mind and body is apparent in traumatic memories that remain in the body, in each of the senses, in the heart that races and skin that crawls whenever something resurrects the only slightly buried terror. As Shay writes in his study of combat trauma, “Traumatic memory is not narrative.

Rather, it is experience that reoccurs, either as full sensory replay of traumatic events in dreams or flashbacks, with all things seen, heard, smelled, and felt intact, or as disconnected fragments. These fragments may be inexplicable rage, terror, uncontrollable crying, or disconnected body states and sensations” (1994, 172).

Sensory flashbacks are not, of course, merely a clinical phenomenon, nor are they peculiar to trauma. Proust describes the pleasantly vivid flashbacks brought on by the leisurely savoring of a tea-soaked madeleine (1981, 1:48–49).¹¹ Trauma, however, changes the nature and frequency of sensory, emotional, and physiological flashbacks. They are reminiscent of the traumatic event itself, as Shay writes, in that “once experiencing is under way, the survivor lacks authority to stop it or put it away. The helplessness associated with the original experience is replayed in the apparent helplessness to end or modify the reexperience once it has begun” (1994, 174). Traumatic flashbacks immobilize the body by rendering the will as useless as it is in a nightmare in which one desperately tries to flee, but remains frozen.

Traumatic memory is also characterized by a destruction of a sense of the self as continuing over time. Primo Levi describes the disappearance of the future in the minds of the prisoners in Auschwitz: “Memory is a curious instrument: ever since I have been in the camp, two lines written by a friend of mine a long time ago have been running through my mind:

‘. . . Until one day
there will be no more sense in saying: tomorrow.’

It is like that here. Do you know how one says ‘never’ in camp slang? ‘*Morgen früh*,’ tomorrow morning” (1993, 133).

The ability to form a plan of life, considered by some to be essential to personhood,¹² is lost when one loses a sense of one’s temporal being, as happened to Levi and the other prisoners in Auschwitz: “We had not only forgotten our country and our culture, but also our family, our past, the future we had imagined for ourselves, because, like animals, we were confined to the present moment” (1989, 75). Thinking of his former life, Levi noted, “Today the only thing left of the life of those days is what one needs to suffer hunger and cold; I am not even alive enough to know how to kill myself” (1989, 143–44).

The disappearance of the past and the foreshortening of the future are common symptoms among those who have survived trauma of various kinds. As Shay observes in his study of combat trauma in Vietnam War veterans, “The destruction of time is an inner survival skill.” These words, written about concentration camp prisoners, apply equally to soldiers in prolonged combat:

Thinking of the future stirs up such intense yearning and hope that . . . it [is] unbearable; they quickly learn that these emotions . . . will make them desperate. . . . The future is reduced to a matter of hours or days. Alterations in time sense begin with the

obliteration of the future but eventually progress to obliteration of the past. . . . Thus prisoners are eventually reduced to living in an endless present. (Shay 1994, 176, quoting Herman 1992, 89)

The shrinking of time to the immediate present is experienced not only during the traumatizing events, but also in their aftermath, at least until the traumatic episode is integrated into the survivor's life narrative. "My former life?" Charlotte Delbo wrote after being returned to Paris from the death camps. "Had I had a former life? My life afterwards? Was I alive to have an afterwards, to know what afterwards meant? I was floating in a present devoid of reality" (1995, 237). The ability to envision a future, along with the ability to remember a past, enable a person to self-identify as the same person over time. When these abilities are lost the ability to have or to be a self is lost as well.

In trauma, not only are one's connections with memories of an earlier life lost, along with the ability to envision a future, but one's basic cognitive and emotional capacities are gone, or radically altered, as well. This epistemological crisis leaves the survivor with virtually no bearings to navigate by. As Jean Améry writes, "Whoever has succumbed to torture can no longer feel at home in the world" (1995, 136).

Trauma reveals the ways in which one's ability to feel at home in the world is as much a physical as an epistemological accomplishment. Améry writes of the person who is tortured that from the moment of the first blow he loses "trust in the world," which includes "the irrational and logically unjustifiable belief in absolute causality perhaps, or the likewise blind belief in the validity of the inductive inference." More important, according to Améry, is the loss of the certainty that other persons "will respect my physical, and with it also my metaphysical, being. The boundaries of my body are also the boundaries of my self. My skin surface shields me against the external world. If I am to have trust, I must feel on it only what I *want* to feel. At the first blow, however, this trust in the world breaks down" (1995, 126). Améry goes on to compare torture to rape, an apt comparison, not only because both objectify and traumatize the victim, but also because the pain they inflict reduces the victim to flesh, to the purely physical. It is as if the tormentor says with his blows: You are nothing but a body, a mere object for my will—here, I'll prove it!

In addition, trauma can obliterate one's former emotional repertoire, leaving one with only a kind of counterfactual, propositional knowledge of emotions. When alerted to the rumors that the camp in which he was incarcerated would be evacuated the next day, Levi felt no emotion, just as for many months he had "no longer felt any pain, joy or fear" except in a conditional manner: "if I still had my former sensitivity, I thought, this would be an extremely moving moment" (1993, 152–53). The inability to feel one's former emotions, even in the aftermath of trauma, leaves the survivor not only numbed, but often also without the motivation to carry out the task of reconstructing an ongoing narrative.

Traumatic memory also perpetuates the loss of control experienced during the traumatic events. Traumatic memories are intrusive, triggered by things reminiscent of the traumatic event and carrying a strong, sometimes overwhelming, emotional charge. Not only is one's response to items that would startle anyone heightened, but one has an involuntary startle response to things that formerly provoked no reaction or a subtler, still voluntary one. The loss of control evidenced by these and other PTSD symptoms alters who one is, not only in that it limits what one can do (and can refrain from doing and experiencing), but also in that it changes what one *wants* to do.

Such loss of control over oneself—one's memories, one's desires—can explain, to a large extent, what a survivor means in saying "I am no longer myself." Trauma survivors long for their former selves not only because those selves were more familiar and less damaged, but also because they were controllable, more predictable. The fact that, as has been recently discovered, certain drugs, such as Prozac, give PTSD sufferers greater self-control, by making them better able to choose their reactions to things and the timing of their responses, accounts for the common response to such drugs: "they make me more myself" (Kramer 1993).

In order to recover, a trauma survivor needs to be able to regain control over traumatic memories and other intrusive PTSD symptoms, recover a sense of control over her environment (within reasonable limits), and be reconnected with humanity. Whether these achievements occur depends, to a large extent, on other people.

Narrative Memory and the Remaking of the Self

How does one remake a self from the scattered shards of disrupted memory? How can traumatic memory be transformed into or replaced by narrative memory? Delbo writes of memories being stripped away from the inmates of the death camps, and of the incomprehensibly difficult task of getting them back after the war: "The survivor must undertake to regain his memory, regain what he possessed before: his knowledge, his experience, his childhood memories, his manual dexterity and his intellectual faculties, sensitivity, the capacity to dream, imagine, laugh" (1995, 255). This passage illustrates a major obstacle to the trauma survivor's reconstructing a self in the sense of a remembered and ongoing narrative about oneself: the difficulty in regaining lost cognitive and emotional capacities.

An additional reason why trauma survivors are frequently unable to construct narratives to make sense of themselves and to convey what they experienced is that, as Levi writes, "our language lacks words to express this offense, the demolition of a man" (1985, 9). It is debatable, however, whether that is the case, or whether the problem is simply others' refusal to hear survivors'

stories, which makes it difficult for survivors to tell them even to themselves. As Paul Fussell observes, in his account of World War I:

One of the cruxes of war . . . is the collision between events and the language available—or thought appropriate—to describe them. . . . Logically, there is no reason why the English language could not perfectly well render the actuality of . . . warfare. . . . What listener wants to be torn and shaken when he doesn't have to be? We have made *unspeakable* mean indescribable: it really means *nasty*.¹³

In order to construct self-narratives we need not only the words with which to tell our stories, but also an audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them. This aspect of remaking a self in the aftermath of trauma highlights the dependency of the self on others and helps to explain why it is so difficult for survivors to recover when others are unwilling to listen to what they endured.

As psychoanalyst Dori Laub notes, "Bearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener" (Felman and Laub 1992, 70). It involves a "re-externalizing" of the traumatic event(s) that "can occur and take effect only when one can articulate and *transmit* the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside" (69). And to the extent that bearing witness reestablishes the survivor's identity, the empathic other is essential to the remaking of the self. Laub writes of Chaim Guri's film, *The Eighty-first Blow*, which "portrays the image of a man who narrates the story of his sufferings in the camps only to hear his audience say: 'All this cannot be true, it could not have happened. You must have made it up.' This denial by the listener inflicts, according to the film, the ultimately fateful blow, beyond the eighty blows that man, in Jewish tradition, can sustain and survive" (68).

By constructing and telling a narrative of the trauma endured, and with the help of understanding listeners, the survivor begins not only to integrate the traumatic episode into a life with a before and after, but also to gain control over the occurrence of intrusive memories. When I was hospitalized after my assault I experienced moments of reprieve from vivid and terrifying flashbacks when giving my account of what had happened—to the police, doctors, a psychiatrist, a lawyer, and a prosecutor. Although others apologized for putting me through what seemed to them a retraumatizing ordeal, I responded that it was, even at that early stage, therapeutic to bear witness in the presence of others who heard and believed what I told them. Two and a half years later, when my assailant was brought to trial, I found it healing to give my testimony in public and to have it confirmed by the police, prosecutor, my lawyer, and, ultimately, the jury, who found my assailant guilty of rape and attempted murder.¹⁴

How might we account for this process of "mastering the trauma" through repeated telling of one's story? Whereas traumatic memories (especially perceptual and emotional flashbacks) feel as though they are passively endured,

narratives are the result of certain obvious choices (for example, how much to tell to whom, in what order, and so forth). This is not to say that the narrator is not subject to the constraints of memory or that the story will ring true however it is told. And the telling itself may be out of control, compulsively repeated. But one can control certain aspects of the narrative and that control, repeatedly exercised, leads to greater control over the memories themselves, making them less intrusive and giving them the kind of meaning that enables them to be integrated into the rest of life.

Not only present listeners, but also one's cultural heritage, can determine to a large extent the way in which an event is remembered and retold, and may even lead one to respond as though one remembered what one did not in fact experience. Yael Tamir, an Israeli philosopher, told me a story illustrating cultural memory, in which she and her husband, neither of whom had been victims or had family members who had been victims of the Holocaust, literally jumped at the sound of a German voice shouting instructions at a train station in Switzerland. The experience triggered such vivid "memories" of the deportation that they grabbed their suitcases and fled the station. Marianne Hirsch (1997) discusses the phenomenon of "postmemory" in children of Holocaust survivors, and Tom Segev writes of the ways in which the Holocaust continues to shape Israeli identity: "Just as the Holocaust imposed a posthumous collective identity on its six million victims, so too it formed the collective identity of this new country—not just for the survivors who came after the war but for all Israelis, then and now" (1993, 11). The influence of cultural memory on all of us is additional evidence of the deeply relational nature of the narrative self.

I am not suggesting that for this reason the memories of trauma survivors are less reliable than others' memories. In the above story, Tamir did not have a false memory of actually having lived through the Holocaust. Rather, the cultural climate in which she was raised led her to respond instinctively to certain things (a shouting German voice at a train station) in ways characteristic of those who had actually been deported. In any case, since all narrative memory involves reconstruction, trauma survivors' narratives are no less likely to be accurate than anyone else's.¹⁵

A further obstacle confronting trauma survivors attempting to reconstruct coherent narratives is the difficulty of regaining one's voice, one's subjectivity, after one has been reduced to silence, to the status of an object, or, worse, made into someone else's speech, the medium of another's agency. Those entering Nazi concentration camps had the speech of their captors literally inscribed on their bodies. As Levi describes it, the message conveyed by the prisoners' tattoos was "You no longer have a name; this is your new name." It was "a non-verbal message, so that the innocent would feel his sentence written on his flesh" (1989, 119).¹⁶

One of the most chilling stories of a victim's body being used as another's speech is found in the biblical story of the traveling Levite, a story that also reveals our long-standing cultural complicity in the refusal to see trauma from the victim's perspective. The Levite's host had been approached at his home by members of a hostile tribe who asked him to hand over the Levite, so that they could rape him. This the host refused to do: instead, he offered to the angry crowd the Levite's wife, who was then, with the clear complicity of the Levite, shoved out the door. The Levite's wife (who remains unnamed in the Bible, but is given the name "Beth" by Mieke Bal in her account of this story) was gang-raped all night, and when the Levite found her body in the morning (whether she was alive or dead is not clarified in the text) he put her on a donkey, took her home, and cut up her body into twelve pieces which were then sent as messages to the tribes of Israel.¹⁷

This biblical story is a striking example of a trauma victim's body used as someone else's language. Reflecting on this story reveals some parallels between the dismemberment and dispersal of "Beth" and the shattered self and fractured memory of the survivor of trauma. The trauma survivor experiences a figurative dismemberment—a shattering of assumptions, a severing of past, present, and future, a disruption of memory. Piecing together a self requires a working through, or remastering of, the traumatic memory that involves going from being the medium or object of someone else's (the torturer's) speech to being the subject of one's own.

The results of the process of working through reveal the performative role of speech acts in recovering from trauma: under the right conditions, *saying* something about a traumatic memory *does* something to it.¹⁸ As Shay notes in the case of Vietnam veterans, "Severe trauma explodes the cohesion of consciousness. When a survivor creates a fully realized narrative that brings together the shattered knowledge of what happened, the emotions that were aroused by the meanings of the events, and the bodily sensations that the physical events created, the survivor pieces back together the fragmentation of consciousness that trauma has caused" (1994, 188). But one cannot recover in isolation, since "narrative heals personality changes only if the survivor finds or creates a trustworthy community of listeners for it" (1994, 188). As Levi observes, "Part of our existence lies in the feelings of those near to us. This is why the experience of someone who has lived for days during which man was merely a thing in the eyes of man is non-human" (1993, 172). Fortunately, just as one can be reduced to an object through torture, one can become a human subject again through telling one's narrative to caring others who are able to listen.¹⁹

Intense psychological pressures make it difficult, however, for others to listen to trauma narratives. Cultural repression of traumatic memories (in the United States about slavery, in Germany and Poland and elsewhere about the Holocaust) comes not only from an absence of empathy with victims, but also

out of an active fear of empathizing with those whose terrifying fate forces us to acknowledge that we are not in control of our own.

As a society, we live with the unbearable by pressuring those who have been traumatized to forget and by rejecting the testimonies of those who are forced by fate to remember. As individuals and as cultures, we impose arbitrary term limits on memory and on recovery from trauma: a century, say, for slavery; fifty years, perhaps, for the Holocaust; a decade or two for Vietnam; several months for mass rape or serial murder. Even a public memorialization can be a forgetting, a way of saying to survivors what someone said after I published my first article on sexual violence: "now you can put this behind you." But attempting to limit traumatic memories does not make them go away; the signs and symptoms of trauma remain, caused by a source more virulent for being driven underground.

In *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, Milan Kundera writes, "The struggle against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."²⁰ Whether the power is a fascist state or an internalized trauma, surviving the present requires the courage to confront the past, reexamine it, retell it, and thereby remaster its traumatic aspects. As Eva Hoffman, who returns repeatedly in her memoir to a past in which she was "lost in translation" after moving from Poland to Canada, explains, "Those who don't understand the past may be condemned to repeat it, but those who never repeat it are condemned not to understand it" (1989, 278).

And so we repeat our stories, and we listen to others'. What Hoffman writes of her conversations with Miriam, her closest North American friend, could also describe the remaking of a trauma survivor's self in relation to empathic others: "To a large extent, we're the keepers of each other's stories, and the shape of these stories has unfolded in part from our interwoven accounts. Human beings don't only search for meanings, they are themselves units of meaning; but we can mean something only within the fabric of larger significations" (1989, 279). Trauma, however, unravels whatever meaning we've found and woven ourselves into, and so listening to survivors' stories is, as Lawrence Langer describes reading and writing about the Holocaust, "an experience in *unlearning*; both parties are forced into the Dantean gesture of abandoning all safe props as they enter and, without benefit of Virgil, make their uneasy way through its vague domain" (1995b, 6–7). It is easy to understand why one would not willingly enter such a realm, but survivors' testimonies must be heard, if recovery from trauma is to be possible.

Laub quotes a Holocaust survivor who said: "We wanted to survive so as to live one day after Hitler, in order to be able to tell our story" (Felman and Laub 1992, 78). As Laub came to believe, after listening to many Holocaust testimonies and working as an analyst with survivors and their children, such survivors of trauma "did not only need to survive in order to tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive" (78).

Notes

Earlier versions of some sections of this chapter originally appeared in Brison (1997). In addition to the many people I acknowledged in that article, I would like to thank the participants of the 1996 Dartmouth Humanities Institute on Cultural Memory and the Present for commenting on my work and enabling me to learn from their approaches to questions of cultural memory. I am especially grateful to Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer for helpful suggestions about remaking this chapter. I completed this chapter while on an NEH-supported fellowship at the School of Social Science, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton.

1. Quoted in Langer (1995b, 14). The irony of calling the author of this quote a “survivor” is evident, but, it seems to me, linguistically unavoidable.

2. Shay (1994, 180). Shay writes, “When a survivor of prolonged trauma loses all sense of meaningful personal narrative, this may result in a contaminated identity. ‘I died in Vietnam’ may express a current identity as a corpse.”

3. Scherer (1992, 179). See also the accounts in Roberts (1989). I do not mean to imply that the traumas suffered by these different groups of survivors are the same, or even commensurable. They are not. However, researchers such as Judith Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, in *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma* (1992), have persuasively argued that many of those who survive life-threatening traumatic events in which they are reduced to near-complete helplessness later suffer from the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I would add that they also experience a disintegration of the self. In this essay, I use the term “victim” as well as the term “survivor” to denote someone who has been victimized by, and yet survived, such a life-threatening trauma. Clearly, many civilians are more traumatized by war (and with greater injustice) than the veterans to whom I refer in this article. I mention the latter simply because trauma research on survivors of war has focused on veterans, U.S. veterans in particular, whose trauma symptoms our federal government is obliged to attempt to understand and treat.

4. I discuss this experience and its aftermath in Brison (1993). In Brison (1995), I discuss the necessity for, as well as the pitfalls of, incorporating such first-person narratives into philosophical writing. For a discussion of the hazards of speaking for a group (for example, of survivors) larger than oneself, see Marianna Torgovnick, “The Politics of the ‘We,’” in Torgovnick (1994, 260–77).

5. I make this claim on the basis of extensive research of the literature as well as on personal correspondence (22 January 1998) from Bessel A. van der Kolk, who noted that “there is absolutely no controversy about the significance of constructing a trauma narrative, and telling it to an empathic other, in recovering from trauma.”

6. This is not (merely) because philosophers are a more disputatious lot, but rather because psychologists have greater need of at least the appearance of clarity and agreement in order to categorize illnesses, make diagnoses, carry out research, fill out insurance claim forms, and so forth.

7. This paraphrases Judith Herman’s description of traumatic events in Herman (1992, 33). This description and the following discussion of trauma are distilled from Herman’s book as well as from Janoff-Bulman (1992) and Shay (1994). Although the fourth edition of the DSM (1994) includes witnessing or being “confronted with” a traumatic event, in addition to suffering the event oneself, as a diagnostic criterion for PTSD, I am focusing in this chapter only on trauma experienced firsthand.

8. Baier (1985, 84). For further analysis of the concept of “second persons,” see Code (1991) and Bal (1996). For other discussions of the relational self, see Jaggard

(1983) and Meyers (1987, 1989, 1994). Virginia Held gives an excellent survey of feminist views of the relational self insofar as they bear on moral theory in Held (1993, 57–64).

9. I am using the term *narrative* not in any technical, literary-theoretical sense, but rather in the mundane sense of “a story, placed in time, with a beginning, a middle and an end” (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995, 177).

10. I used to make this point by alluding to the “cultural context” in which events are experienced and remembered until Mieke Bal drew my attention to Culler’s (1988) discussion of the usefulness of “framing” as an alternative to the concept of “context”: “The notion of context frequently oversimplifies rather than enriches discussion, since the opposition between an act and its context seems to presume that the context is given and determines the meaning of the act. We know, of course, that things are not so simple: context is not fundamentally different from what it contextualizes; context is not given but produced; what belongs to a context is determined by interpretive strategies; contexts are just as much in need of elucidation as events; and the meaning of a context is determined by events.” The concept of framing, in contrast, “reminds us that framing is something we do” (Culler, xiv).

11. See also the discussion of charged memory in Proust in Glover (1988, 142–45).

12. According to John Rawls, the possession of a “rational plan of life” (1971, 561) is essential to personhood, or, at any rate, to moral personhood. Diana Meyers argues that this ability to envisage, pursue, and carry out one’s rational plan of life is a prerequisite for self-respect (1986).

13. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 169f. (quoted by Shay 1994, xx).

14. Of course, not many rape survivors are fortunate enough to have such an experience with the criminal justice system, given the low rates of reporting, prosecuting, and conviction of rapists. I also had the advantage of having my assailant tried in a French court, in which the adversarial system is not practiced, so I was not cross-examined by the defense lawyer. In addition, since the facts of the case were not in dispute and my assailant’s only defense was an (ultimately unsuccessful) insanity plea, no one in the courtroom questioned my narrative of what happened.

15. Some discussions of so-called recovered memories emphasize the cultural pressures on certain individuals to “remember” things that may not have occurred (Hacking 1995; Sturken, “Narratives of Recovery,” this volume). Such pressures exist; in addition, trauma survivors may be urged, in a particular cultural climate, to remember and testify to traumas that, in other cultural climates, they would be urged to forget. For example, the testimonies of women raped by the enemy in wartime are *sometimes* encouraged and used as propaganda against the enemy, whereas women raped on the home front by those not considered the enemy typically experience being silenced by their culture. (See Grossman 1997 for a fascinating discussion of the use of accounts of rape of German women by Soviet troops as cultural propaganda serving the Germans’ self-characterization as “victims” of World War II.)

These phenomena should not obscure, however, the enormous pressure—both internal and external—exerted on trauma survivors to forget. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the current controversy over recovered memories, my discussion of the difficulties involved in testifying to trauma—including those of the listener—is pertinent to that controversy. Anecdotally, I can report that for many months following my assault—one for which there was considerable physical evidence as well as corroboration from others, including the perpetrator—I awoke each morning thinking: This can’t possibly have happened to me.

16. Levi writes that "at a distance of forty years, my tattoo has become a part of my body," one that no longer taints his sense of self (1989, 119).

17. Judges 19:26–28, which Mieke Bal mentions in Bal (1988b) and discusses at length in Bal (1988a) and Bal (1991).

18. A useful analogy can be drawn between performative utterances as described by J. L. Austin (1962) and trauma testimonies. Performative utterances are defined by Austin, in part, as those such that: "The uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which . . . would not normally be described as, or as 'just,' saying something" (5). In the case of trauma testimonies, the action could be described as transforming traumatic memory into narrative memory or as recovering or remaking the self. In the case of both performative utterances and trauma testimonies, cultural norms or conventions, as well as uptake on the part of some other individual(s), are required in order for the speech act to be successful (or, as Austin puts it, "felicitous"). In the case of trauma narratives, additional background conditions need to obtain in order for the speech act to be felicitous; for example, the psychological state of the narrator must be such that she is able to benefit from giving the testimony. (If her brain biochemistry is so altered by the trauma that she is incapable, without drug treatment, of recovering from the symptoms of PTSD, such testimony may not be healing.)

There is, however, an important disanalogy between performative utterances and trauma testimonies. According to Austin, performative utterances "do not 'describe' or 'report' or constata anything at all, are not 'true or false'" (5). Trauma testimonies do purport to describe events that actually occurred.

Claims of memory—of the form "I remember that *p*"—are ambiguous, however. In one sense of "remembering" (which might more appropriately be called "seeming to remember"), such claims are about a present act of consciousness and can be true regardless of any correspondence to any past experience or state of affairs. In another sense of "remembering," one can correctly be said to remember only things that were once experienced. It may be that the performative, healing, aspect of trauma testimonies is distinct from their functioning as reports of historical fact, but this controversial conjecture is too complex to explore here.

19. This is not to say that telling one's trauma narrative is sufficient for recovery or even always therapeutic. It does play a significant role in recovery from trauma, but it does not always lead to recovery. First, the conditions under which the narrative is told must be conducive to recovery. Second, other factors may play an essential role; for example, since trauma has been documented to affect the survivor's neurochemistry, in some cases drug treatment may be needed to facilitate recovery.

20. I thank Joan Bolker for reminding me of this quote, with which she begins her review (1995, 12) of Terr (1994). In this article Bolker also refers to "term limits on memory," which, she says, were what the U.S. electorate really voted for in the November 1994 elections (1995, 15).

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