

Dislocated Positions of Bearing Witness: From Historical Self to Revelation

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Abstract

This paper analyses the relationship between lack and possibilities of bearing witness in a “posthistorical” context. We wanted to see how discussions about indeterminacy and testimony change the way in which we understand possibilities of truth in relation to the speaking subject. The limit of the language of testimony and memory generate experiences of incompleteness and inadequacy which make us negotiate the position of the subject between an impossible historical truth and the non-discursive truth of revelation. We argue that the resistance to representation which drives the language of testimony reflects the improper position of the witness or between historicity and existence or between attention and inattention. There is always an already lost historical event that we have to testify for and that foreshadows possibilities of significance. The witness can only generate discourse from inside a dislocated position which also describes the layered discursive structure of revelation.

Keywords: testimony, memory, loss, representation, revelation

We have to place the discussion about testimony inside the post-industrial world in a postmodern context where history has already been defined as “a lost referential” (Jean Baudrillard). In order to refer to this nostalgia for a lost referential we would like to employ the term “post-historical” which illustrates the idea of a retrospective dimension of our historic present. Baudrillard talks about cinema in order to show that the ways in which we portray and perceive the “historical real” betray the hidden logic of the disappearance of history in its representation. We found the term post-history appropriate as it contains the nuance of disappearance and discontinuity, underlying our indebtedness towards a missed “real” or a missed discourse at the centre of our cultural meanings. Cultural memory with its empty representations and floating symbols points to the idea that we can no longer talk about bearing witness to history itself, but

about the attempt to testify for the idea of what Giorgio Agamben calls “the time that remains”. Our possibilities of bearing witness are no longer tied to the idea of a linear time that follows a scheme of progress, but to the feeling of a silent and closed figure of history which is still present through its marked and projected losses. Concepts of absence, lack and loss are fundamental to the discussion about the possibilities of testimony which are now drawing their forces not from the “the props of memory that prompt recall,”¹ but from the internal and public relationship of discourse with loss. For Stephan Feuchtwang, the objects that have been created to mark loss work “as screens for other senses of loss” and have their “own conditions of existence as an ordering practice.”² We want to argue that such mentioned icons of loss also construct a different phenomenology of testimony inside which we can no longer bear witness from inside the retrieved position of a historical “I,” but from “beyond” the subject or from a transcendental position outlined by the fundamental recognition of historical loss as personal dislocation. The already lost historical event that we have to testify for foreshadows possibilities of significance and the witness can only generate discourse from inside a dislocated position which marks subjective disruption. Techniques of distortion in arts point to this idea of embodying the missed discourse as long as the language of memory reveals its incompleteness as a gesture of remembrance. Literary geographies try to paint the picture of this incomplete inner space of inheritance that also reflects the gaps of cultural memory and the frailties of our symbolically mapped common “space”. After examining the language of testimony and the language of revelation as hollow structures we will turn our attention to fiction writing and particularly to W. G. Sebald, a writer that uses the language of traces and lost references to talk about history. What the languages of testimony and silent traces do have in common is the sense of incompleteness or the geography of vacant realities that makes room for the perception of rests and the *adjacent* as part of the experience of revelation.

The project of a culture that could be based on memory, retention and representation has failed and our testimonial language is no longer thought only in relation to the subject, to the memorable and the visible, but also in relation to the erasure of the subject and the non-memorable. Testimony has already been discussed as an impossible position after the Second World War and memory is no longer seen as “recuperation”. For Levinas, our encounter with the past is always mediated by a surplus of the trace that cannot be retained in a concept or fully inscribed in the

¹ Stephan Feuchtwang, “Loss: transmissions, recognitions and authorisations,” in *Regimes of Memory*, ed. Katherine Hodgkin & Susannah Radstone (London: Routledge, 2003), 76.

² Feuchtwang, “Loss,” 77.

self³. This excess gives voice to the speaking subject and makes direct and indirect witnessing possible. A certain rest or excess which eludes us is the underlying silent awareness that accompanies the linguistic shape of testimony. We want to argue that this residue or this lingering 'indeterminable' marks our relationship to the self as threshold between the possibility of testifying and the absent testimony inscribed in us. Derrida also thinks about testimony in terms of undecidability, because testimony is a unique alliance between the secret and the instant. According to Derrida, discourse bears the limit of that which refuses itself to testimony because of the uniqueness of the secret and the singularity of the instant. This relation to the instant conjures testimony and we can only bear witness to the absence of attestation, to the secret itself, recognizing, at the same time, the universality of that secret that becomes infinitely public through the workings of testimony. Thus, for Derrida, testimony constructs itself around an absence, around a secret which we testify for, but which is never fully revealed. For Agamben, the subject is a fracture between the living being and the discursive being, testimony springing from the ways in which man inhabits his own *non-place* and thus reconnects being with logos. The witness has to speak in the name of the dead, although he is a survivor. The discursive being triumphs over the silence of the dead and the witness has to tell the story from beyond himself paradoxically watching the story unfold as if it were his own, witnessing the replacement itself. That is why Agamben talks about imposture and the manner in which testimony is also built on the ruined voice of the dead other inside us. All these concepts associated with the idea of testimony (excess, undecidability, imposture) emphasize the fact that testimony is not only made possible by certain mechanisms of writing or saying, but by the way in which we can reassemble loss without completely substituting it with representational memory. Thus, we could also argue that testimony is the language of the unmemorable, the language of the residue or that of an uncertainty that opposes itself to the coherent experience of reality. As Bernard-Donals puts it, "the moment of saying disrupts history to the extent that it throws open the moments we'd try to recollect, and forces our attention to what can't be remembered or said."⁴ All these conceptualizations of the dissonant position of the subject that bears witness to history (or to reality itself) take into consideration the limits of language and the idea of a silent distinct testimony that contains the fragmentary

³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1974).

⁴ Michael Bernard-Donals, *Forgetful Memory: Representation and Remembrance in the Wake of the Holocaust* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009), 23.

ones. The limits of language open the discussion about a different metabolizing logic of loss. Thus, this adjacent second testimony that incorporates loss is what Alfred North Whitehead would call “the judgment of a tenderness that loses nothing that can be saved.”⁵

If we understand testimony as springing from the failure of representation or from the resistance to memory and language, we will need to ask ourselves whether we can bear witness to that which is “inter-said” or to that which we cannot represent. Sometimes the “inter-said” overwrites our own pre-written witnessing position in the world and makes testimony possible only as a dislocation of the subject. This dislocation of the witnessing self creates a certain temporality of the interval inside which the distance between personal memory and nobody’s memory, between the memorable and the non-memorable opens up the space of revelation. For Edith Wyschogrod, the breaks in historical narratives or the blank spaces in conventional stories “are the placeholders of revelation, a kind of white light that, unlike the formulae that announce them, illuminate the events recounted without ever becoming the focus of visibility.”⁶ Everything that is exterior to the narrative, because it has been lost or because it has not been mentioned, constitutes a space of revelation, where the past is always illuminated by a different concealed dimension of thought. We can argue that testimony is linked to revelation because they both rely on the experience of history and the self as fragment. That which cannot be contemplated articulates itself in the language of testimony as the ruin of representation. The language of testimony draws its force from that which cannot be expressed although it might be part of the witness’s experience. Bearing witness becomes the condition in which the ‘I’ reconstructs histories not around the sense of self, but around an absence which cannot be inscribed. This absence might be related to the resistance of the other, to the impossibility of linking nobody’s memory to the idea of personal memory or to the experience of the event as a disconnected fragment.

As we have argued, the language of testimony is articulated by the dislocation of the position of a central subject that can bear witness to the visible or testify for the invisible. Nowadays, when history is no longer experienced as event, but as an always mediated configuration of an “aftermath” of “grand narratives,” the ‘I’ can no longer bear witness to his own present from inside a situated historical position, but rather from beyond himself, substituting the already missed discourse with his own dislocated voice. The missed discourse and the “hyperreal” (Baudrillard) that this

⁵ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1929), 490.

⁶ Edith Wyschogrod, *Dwelling with Negatives* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 250.

sense of a lost “real” generates actually creates the post-traumatic and post-historical conditions of bearing witness. The obsession with representational memory and symbolic capital is a reflection of the need for totality (or an overarching testimony) as a reminiscence of the lost idea of eternity which surrounded historical time in the pre-modern frame of mind. Thus, if eternity can no longer foreshadow testimonial possibilities in the modern world, the subject can only have the experience of temporality as an unredeemed rest of the “time that remains.” The possibility of revelation no longer springs from the idea of historical time that participates in eternity, but it is rather related to an isolated experience of the rest and the adjacent which actually tears us from historical time. The sense of a missing feature and the acknowledged missed discourse in all our gestures of remembrance or testimony create the forms of attention that break the “hyperreal” and find the language of revelation as an isolated rest of historical time.

Another argument for the conception of a dislocated position of the witness comes from the idea that we do not bear witness to our own private worlds, but to the common, shared world as we move from the sense of private self to the impersonal that conveys possibilities of testifying. As Merleau-Ponty shows, we cannot witness the world as spectators, because “it is not a synthesis,” but a metamorphosis of appearances that results from the way in which perception both enters and withdraws corporeally from the world⁷. The world is always in and behind the body, inside and around the other and that is why attention and witnessing are also an “experience of the flesh” that cannot remain only the experiences of my private world, but they become “windows” of a private world that is no longer mine. “The propagation of my most secret life in another”⁸ creates the possibility of witnessing one sole world. We are not testifying only for our own private worlds, but we are actually bearing witness to the erasure of our private world as it becomes a shared world. We could argue that the historical subject is also marked by this lack of a private world, formulating possibilities of bearing witness as he fails to integrate the common world, the general world. Witnessing is also a passage from the private to the impersonal as we are also talk about that which the ‘I’ can no longer see by means of perception, but by means of an already formulated world of the other. The concept of the modern witness also contains a crisis of the self as discourse springs from the lacunae inside the self, meaning from the place where the world of the other begins.

A rich phenomenological tradition concerns itself with the study of the question of interior time which is separate or even opposed to historical

⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 8.

⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 11.

or objective time⁹. For Husserl, internal time is very much linked to the disappearance of the sensory stimulus and the possibility to elaborate this disappearance that marks our internal time consciousness¹⁰. Time does not constitute itself as a linear collection of lost perceptions that have become recollections, but it draws on the relation created between the new possibilities of recollection and the already existing internal layers of remembered experiences. Temporality springs from the tension between that lost sensation and an idea about the future that fantasy can draw out of this already lost past. Bergson was also preoccupied with this idea of an interior time understood as duration or as that tension of becoming which is separate from objective time¹¹. We could argue that the split between internal time and objective time defines our possibilities of bearing witness to the world based on the continuities and discontinuities that we draw between interior and external time. According to Samuel Beckett, there is a distinction made by Proust between that kind of memory which is governed by the laws of habit and that which can be recorded by our own *inattention*. This is yet another example of the way in which not only phenomenology, but also literature tried to explore the idea of an internal time that cannot be accounted for through the traditional idea of memory as internal storage. We could argue that this phenomenological tradition did not simply understand interior time in terms of personal memory, but tried to look for a different internal time that can be found by looking at the space between recollections or at that missed time we are not conscious of. We could say that internal time can be also seen as the presence of that “another” time inside our own temporal awareness. Interior time understood as the time in-between recollections or that “another” time inside our perceptions of temporality is fundamental to our discussion about testimony. Bearing witness draws our attention not only to the voice of the other inside us, but also to the voice of this interior opposing time inside ourselves which opens that distinct temporality marking our relation to the unsaid and to the workings of inattention. In other words, the language of testimony is also made possible by that time that is improper to the self although it is our most intimate experience of time (the time of inattention).

Absence and erasure play a fundamental role inside the folded structure of testimony. As we have seen, each testimony has to face time as disappearance, bearing a discursive orientation towards sealing out the trace of existence. Testimony re-tells the time of disappearance by covering the

⁹ Bill Schwarz, “‘Already the past’: memory and historical time,” in *Regimes of Memory*, ed. Katherine Hodgkin & Susannah Radstone (London: Routledge, 2003), 142.

¹⁰ Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 33.

¹¹ Henri Bergson, *Durée et simultanéité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 41.

empty space between existence as presence and life as vanishing impression with the narrative of survival, memory and transformation. This narrative of counter-oblivion marks a distinct idea of eternity as resistance to temporality and not as an 'after' or 'beyond' temporality. Thus, we could say that the language of testimony always negotiates the bridge between temporality and eternity starting from the idea of discontinuity. Testimony springs from inside the split, the void or the discontinuity between temporality and eternity. Alfred North Whitehead understands time not as an experience of the lasting objects, but as a reflection of an ongoing re-ordering created by the dialectics of temporality and eternity, actuality and potentiality¹². Eternal objects have their own trajectory into the universe of actual things. The time of disappearance that we talked about becomes for Whitehead a time of process and becoming which always bears witness to wreckage and ruins as shadows of an emerging re-ordering of the temporal into the eternal. Inside this logic, we could say that each thing has its own way of disappearing which is actually a distinct way of appearing. Thus, we could claim that the language of testimony encompasses the unconscious belief in a metamorphosis of loss that aims at eternity. Absence, loss, disappearance are the sights through which the language of testimony develops its symbolic structure that opens towards a space „beyond“ the real, a space of memory's incompleteness, a space of gaps and eternity. The division between temporality and eternity encapsulated in the symbolic structure of testimony is also expressed by the separation between the self that remembers the loss and the remembering discourses that the self uses to talk about experience.

Testimony gives us the possibility to speak on behalf of this counter-voice and this inner counter-time that opposes itself to history and creates that dislocation that confronts us with the improper and the impersonal inside us. The necessity to speak springs from this sensation of a time which contradicts our attention and our possibilities of retention, writing the narrative from the margins of this destitute place of the subject. This impersonal is defined by Lévinas as that "il y a," which is neither subject nor noun¹³. The "il y a" lies at the foundation of existence as anonymous vigilance marking that site of indistinctness from which the subject emerges as person. In our opinion, the "il y a" conjures that absence of an author, testimony and confession stemming from this need of replacing the absence of an author with the subject that speaks by drawing a passage through the impersonal. In historiography, this impersonal which calls for testimony is the "other" as absence. For Michel de Certeau, writing history means to encompass that separation between the past and the present, between the "other"

¹² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 54.

¹³ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Le temps et l'autre* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991), 25.

as presence and the “other” as absence and between discourse and the body¹⁴. Thus, writing history breaks the realm of knowledge from the immensity of the unknown and fills each page by withdrawing presence and conjuring absence. The silent body supports historical discourse and becomes the morphological ruin of consciousness. The language of testimony uncovers this silent body and places it in the position of an irretrievable beginning of a lost reality. As Van der Heiden argues, “the problem is not so much that the human might have two voices, but rather that these two voices cannot be separated in any strict sense. Somehow, the theoretical division of the articulate and inarticulate voice cannot do justice to the human reality that the inarticulate voice speaks in the articulate voice.”¹⁵ We could argue that this points to the idea of the lost unit of the self which speaks from inside this impossible totalization that opens the subject to the possibility of revelation that starts as a sense of incompleteness or a sense of the improper and division. As Van der Heiden proved, continental philosophy’s account of testimony has always struggled to bear witness to bare existence. Thus, philosophy has always understood the source of testimony as the attempt to speak for that realm which is beyond language, representation and symbolization. Bare existence lies at the core of the speaking subject who can never find that complete discourse which would integrate that rest of existence which transgresses narrative, erases discourse and always confronts us as that pure nakedness which renders the world incoherent. For Maurice Blanchot, the possibility of language itself is linked to the erasure of the presence of the self and its evasive linguistic reality which stands for the absence of being¹⁶. The language of testimony makes us bear witness not only to the absence of the other, but also to that absence of being among the symbolic order of language.

The ideas of bearing witness to bare existence and to the absence of being seem to lead to what Jean-Luc Marion would call the impossibility of constituting a horizon that leads back to an I¹⁷. In other words, that embedded impossible language of testimony points to that “saturated phenomenon” inside which we experience the “failure to objectivize” as unconditioned openness to revelation. “The witness plays his part in the interval between, on the one hand the indisputable and incontestable excess of lived intuition and, on the other, the never-compensated lack of the concepts that would render this experience an objective experience.”¹⁸ Through the

¹⁴ Michel de Certeau, *L’Écriture de l’histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 9.

¹⁵ Gert-Jan Van der Heiden, *The Voice of Misery: A Continental Philosophy of Testimony* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2019), 35.

¹⁶ Maurice Blanchot, *La part du feu* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 327.

¹⁷ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 31.

¹⁸ Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, 143.

disagreement between the subjective conditions of experience and its excess we remain the workers of truth, but we are no longer its producers, because we do not bear witness to ourselves, but to a certain lack of representation in us which marks the transgression of our subjective horizon. The truth of testifying is no longer concealed in the self's discourse, but in the self's impossible language of revelation. We can notice that this understanding of testimony no longer points to the human subject as a bearer of truth, but paints the speaking subject as a "worker of truth"¹⁹ inside this multiple instances of incomprehensibility. We could argue that the witness can only remain a "worker of truth" by playing out that dislocation which places him both at the center and at the margins of language, opening the possibility of revelation.

How can testimony account for particularity inside narratives of history? Particularity seems to belong to a politics of the rest inside narratives which try to render an image of the past. We want to argue that singularity cannot be addressed and conjured by means of available images of the historical past. Singularity is evoked by those instances in which the language of testimony calls upon forgetting and upon what has been lost in order to catch a glimpse of the radical singular experiences which left a mark upon language and significance, but which were not inscribed inside collective memory's discourses. The language of testimony accounts for the singularity of experiences inside images of the past by means of a poetics of traces which influence language and the creation of meaning. The workings of testimony are best illustrated by literature. Literature is in fact the field inside which the limits of bearing witness, the possibilities of testifying for what has been lost and the split position of the witnessing self are actually negotiated. We shall thus turn our attention to the ways in which the late 20th century novel tried to deal with the "impossible" representational memory or testimony that we have been talking about. The language of testimony is completely redefined in the postmodern world in which the post-historical condition has emerged together with the idea of an impossible truth and a different condition for the possibility of bearing witness to both personal histories and historical events. Literature managed to capture this new phenomenology of testimony constructed on the idea of a split subject divided between existence and history, between the non-memorable and the memorable or between inattention and attention. We will ask ourselves which are the ways in which literature talks about testimony and forgetting. We will also wonder whether or not metaphors of loss open up a parallel discourse inside which the particularity that the language of testimony tries to bear witness to appears as a virtual manifestation of what has been disregarded by narratives of history? The novels of W. G. Sebald will be relevant

¹⁹ Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, 44.

for our discussion about the re-negotiated limits of testimony seen through the lenses of a new phenomenology of traces. Sebald is one of the authors who tries to capture glimpses of the untraceable in order to account for the hidden faces of time and particularity inside the structures of memory.

The phrase 'literature of ruins' is coined in the text of W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, where he talks about Heinrich Böll as a writer capable of uncovering the secret amnesia of the postwar world. Sebald mentions a military American psychologist who narrates the conversations he had with the survivors of the bombings from Halberstadt and who drew the conclusion that "the population, although showing an innate will to tell its story, [had] lost the psychic power of accurate memory, particularly in the confines of the ruined city."²⁰ Amnesia and the fragmentary memory are the working material of this 'literature of ruins.' The 'literature of ruins' underlines these breaks and the strategies with which the mind covers and uncovers the event using a simple image that haunts narratives of history. Sebald asks himself why would we produce history in the face of total destruction. We want to argue that the 'literature of ruins' has this responsibility of the things written in spite of destruction, oblivion and the impossibility to testify.

In his last interview, Sebald gives a special importance to that kind of memory which returns after a period of time, although it has been kept locked. The force of objects and gestures comes from this initial dismissal which attracts the capacity to recall a certain temporary dimension of the 'long ago.' No matter how large this dismissal, there is something that always comes back, incompletely, opening the layers of communication between temporal dimensions. There is also an interesting dialogue between text and pictures in the novel. Images seem to bear a different silent but vivid testimony, while text fails in conjuring that sense of presence that the pictures talk about. In the novel, *Austerlitz*, the main character thinks he can recognize the face of his mother in a snapshot from a propagandist film about the camps. Later on, the picture of that woman proves not to be his mother, remaining unidentified. These zones of muteness allow us to get close to uncertain spheres of identity and significance that create the language of testimony out of a mixture between rests and revelation.

Sebald also uses pieces of archives in his novel, negotiating the fundamental role that the archive plays inside this double-layered language of testimony. The archive operates a certain split (but also a sharing) between what is significant and what is insignificant, between what is being said and what is not recounted. Knowledge is thus divided between the two fields: one of attestation and reification and the other one of the virtual and

²⁰ W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Random House, 2003), 25.

the unsaid. Sebald uses the archive in his own writing playing with the two fields opened up by the archive. This division of knowledge operates a split inside which the imaginary deals with the forgotten things turning them into forces of the virtual. Where the archive is missing, places of remembering are being created by means of blank objects which, deteriorated and deprived of connection with history, mediate between forgetting and language. Ruins are usually perceived as blank objects because, as we would like to argue, they create a connection with the radical idea of a different time by means of the disruption they represent between historical time and present time. The blank object opens a dialectics between what can be still traced, meaning the image of the past, and what is untraceable, meaning the time of origin and its relation to the present. For instance, while waiting for Austerlitz to recount his histories of forgetting, the narrator comes across an article with images of the fortress of Breendonk and the impression that this object creates upon him is one of contradiction and unsurpassed lack of comprehension:

From whatever viewpoint I tried to form a picture of the complex I could make no architectural plan, for its projections and indentations kept shifting, so far exceeding my comprehension that in the end I found myself unable to connect it with anything shaped by human civilization, or even with the silent relics of our prehistory and early history. And the longer I looked at it, the more often it forced me, as I felt, to lower my eyes, the less comprehensible it seemed to become.²¹

Those images of the fortress that are actually silent testimonies of a distant past function as blank objects opening up the impossible relational architecture of the past, disrupting the continuity of history and forcing the impossible gaze upon the past to return as a disconnected sense of time. Thus, the blank object is like an incomplete face of time prolonging itself into the unknown and the incomprehensible. We could say that the 'literature of ruins' encompasses both images of the past and their transfiguration inside perceptions of erasure. These perceptions of erasure are another sign of the failure of memory and discourse in the face of the possibility to remember or to represent the particular. In literature, the language of testimony operates with these blank objects turning them into visions of temporal distance which mark the narrator as an excluded witness of a past that can no longer be traced back to a particular 'I'. For Austerlitz, the search to discover his past is also revealed as a search to uncover a secret which is seen as the omnipresence of a different time from the very beginning. We would like to argue that particularity is rendered, in this case, by means

²¹ W. G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 37.

of a poetics of the secret, of a lost secret which is actually the key to the connection with a certain erased period of time. This feeling of a hidden reality is like the sense of an incomplete identity which is manifested throughout the novel as the lost means towards the accomplishment of the sense of self through remembrance. The possibility of remembering his own past rejects but also attracts Austerlitz like in a game between the forces of memory and antimemory. Forgetting is imposed here by means of a certain estrangement in relation to his own erased personal history. Although reconstituted throughout the novel by Austerlitz himself, the story he finds out remains like a narrative that cannot be completely appropriated. The process of interior remembering is poured inside the pre-established images of collective history. The "theater of history" is seen as the *mise en scene* of "frozen" gestures and events, while authentic testimony is seen as a search for a certain rest of these images.

In the case of Austerlitz, the whole search for memory becomes an impossibility of recomposing the world from the point of view of personal or collective remembering. An already defined image will always get hold of remembering and particularity will become a rest of these images. The blank points and the silences of these images are of real importance for Sebald, because they open up different ways of appropriation which are concerned with underlining the sense of "another time." The novel shows that the language of testimony is made out of blank points and silences that are not just the impossible roads of remembering, but also the mechanisms of a story that always evades us and cannot be recounted but by means of the internalized position of an excluded witness. Austerlitz tells his story to the narrator whom he encounters several times, mostly unexpectedly. The unknown family origins of Austerlitz creates the tension of the novel which weaves into this impossible testimonies, emphasizing the possibility of revelation that comes out of temporal distances and "shadows of reality."²² The split between the private self and the historical self generates that excess which shapes our perception of time, turning our attention to the possibilities of revelation inside an interrupted time. The language of testimony relies on these cracks, fissures and residues inside time and narrative.

We tried to observe the ways in which the figure of the witness and the gaze upon the past are being constructed through the literary language of Sebald's novel. We saw that the idea of a unifying, totalizing memory that can reconstitute the past through representations is no longer the inner grammar of our languages of testimony. Instead, forgetting, absence or lack are placed at the core of our the language of testimony. The displacement of the witnessing subject and the disfigurement of representation mark the event's singularity and the idea that experience is accounted for as a rest

²² Sebald, *Austerlitz*, 90.

of memory's integrative possibilities. That is why we tried to talk about the limits of the language of testimony and argue that *absence* has the *locus* of speech, the space of transmission and continuity, grounding knowledge's fundamental relationship with death, anonymity and revelation. The poetics of the rest define testimony and insists on bearing witness to the impossibility of totalization and to the inadequacy of language which opens the space of revelation based on the feeling of a missing feature. Our desire to inscribe the real and to find integral symbolic constructions is challenged by the distance inscribed in our horizon by that improper position of the witness between historicity and existence. In what we called posthistory, possibilities of truth through instances of bearing witness are no longer sought out inside personal or historic memory, but outside of the personal and the historical, in those disconnected margins of the "real" that make room for the silent language of revelation.

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