

**Be Deported...and Bear Witness!¹ Psychoanalysing, Bearing Witness:
A Double Bind?**

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The pedagogy of memory: its necessity, its perverse effects. Some survivors have expressed a growing wish to part with their history, to release, unburden their immediate family from it, to universalise it. Interviewers – whether trained or not in the practice of ‘listening’ – historians, sociologists, filmmakers, philosophers and other thinkers have given themselves to this wish, or have seized hold of it, out of an often lofty need or desire. But they all accuse one another of claiming a copyright on Auschwitz. Yet, one and all, including psychoanalysts among them, are in effect robbing the survivors and the dead. *Be Deported... and Bear Witness!* This is a rough title, rather targeted at my fellow psychoanalysts – at what they do and don't do with that History. I will try to explain myself on this. But rough it remains, and I must voice my admiration for the often exceptionally great serenity of some, of some fellow deportees. I'm not there yet and am probably mostly mad at myself: a deportee and a psychoanalyst, hard to hold these two terms together.

In 1986, a conference was held at the Sorbonne. Simone Veil² gave a talk, bearing witness to her absolute need to speak, upon [her] return [from the camps], to speak uninterruptedly as she might have wished. But the trouble was, she was constantly interrupted. Claude Lanzmann was there too. He spoke, barely. It was the year following the release of his film *Shoah*. In a smaller group, a bit later, I allowed myself to say: What if, instead of all those erudite speeches, we had shown this film, we might have learned a lot more.— ‘That would be the end of the Sorbonne as we know it!’, someone protested. But later on, Simone embraced me very intensely. At this point, I think somewhat differently, even though, with-

out knowing it, I then raised a fundamental question. Since then, many things have gone by. Others have gone on. For example, a professor got away with stating, in an insufficiently exposed slip of the tongue: “*The Shoah*’, that endless turkey!”³. Let me translate: the Shoah, the interminable history of the extermination of Jews (there are a few Jews left, mind you), as represented in a very long (interminable) film, *Shoah*, bland (like turkey meat), not exciting, not sexy like *Night Porter*⁴ or some other concentration camp porn. To that insistent slip, Claude Lanzmann ended up retorting: ‘The Shoah, that was Hitler, in my case, it’s *Shoah*’.

Henri Bulawko, one of those ‘professional deportees’ as they are sometimes dared to be called, wrote in 1990: ‘At a conference, recently, I heard some historians state that former deportees were ‘documents’ to them. This wasn’t the first time I ran up against the use of that term to refer to us. I expressed my puzzlement and was told in reply, with a genial smile, that we were ‘living documents’. I suddenly saw myself turned into an object of curiosity, locked up in a zoo in the company of other rare species. Historians came to examine me, asking me to lie down, flipping me over and over the way one flips the pages of a book, asking me questions too and jotting down a few notes randomly, loosely following my answers. (...) The term being used here seems infinitely shocking to me. You can go from being a ‘former deportee’ to being a ‘witness’ and from a ‘witness’ to a ‘document’. What are we then? What am I?’

In *Shoah*, the film, those who were in the *Sonderkommandos* are given a chance to speak: those whose spoken words we had to bear to hear, and to whom we had to lend a strong ear. Are they witnesses in the way it is now understood? They say nothing of their own personal history, of their lived experience. At any rate, the editing, barebones, leaves all this out. *Shoah* is not a documentary; it is not a pure masterpiece of the seventh art either. Rather, it is the inaugural work of an eighth art, by the yardstick of our time. As a result, it has in fact elicited, prompted, in one and all, a wish to express oneself, for each to bear witness in one’s own name. The people involved, actually, often have some connection with psychoanalysis, through a child, a partner, a friend, themselves. For psychoanalysis relates to subjects one by one—their petty little secrets,

their little history—even if it is tied to History. As a result, the film and its director can act simultaneously as an impetus and a burden through an effect of prohibition, of stoppage. This is where I locate a form of constraint, of double bind, which I will try to circumvent while considering it categorically all the same. Thus, some psychoanalysts congratulate themselves: Claude Lanzmann has arguably introduced a Hebrew signifier into the French language. I personally contend that, before the film *Shoah*, what Israelis referred to with the term ‘shoah’ remained Hebrew to them and that, since the film, the word, the name *Shoah* has become French in France, German in Germany, English in the United States.

The few words quoted from Henri Bulawko are featured – and this is no fortuitous fact – in the foreword to Gilles Cohen’s *Tattooed Numbers in the Camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau*.⁵ In there, there are photos: tattooed faces, tattooed arms, and texts written by the individuals these faces and arms belong to – among them, a Gipsy woman, untattooed people – bits of skin and a corpse from Struthof (among other corpses used as anatomical material by the medical students in Strasbourg). Serge Klarsfeld restored a name to this ‘document’ – no 107969. His name was Menachem Taffel (*Taffel*, plate, board, table?). He was deported from Berlin, immatriculated in Auschwitz on 13 March 1943, and selected for Struthof by German anthropologist Bruno Beger. He was born on 28 July 1900. If Bulawko rejects the term ‘document’, however ‘living’, it is precisely because it is applied to someone who is already tattooed, someone who already bears a written mark. A document: paper is also made from rags, tatters (paper, rags, scrap metal for sale?). What are we? What am I? He asks. This is what all deported-subjects, in truth, bear witness to: to those wrecks in tatters⁶ that they once were, that the others were around them, or that they were doomed to become. This is what deported-knowledge is, some knowledge about waste (*le déchet*), about tatters. But as a result of talking about it, of bearing witness to it, they cease to be wrecks in tatters. Robert Antelme writes this in relation to someone who was balking at an order during the Liberation: ‘there isn’t any more wreck underneath this wreckage’.⁷ Note that basic Jewish deportees were dressed in tatters from the outset, women at least, in tatters that the women of the previous con-

voy had been stripped of, for they were already gassed for the most part. Access to the striped uniform was restricted to those who were already part of a 'real' work *Kommando*.

Gilles Cohen dedicates his work to Wolf, his grand-father: 'In front of us, there were eight people, including a woman, all over sixty (...), six teenagers sitting on the floor (...), who initiated this? They started talking, telling what happened. The 'past'... An hour, two hours? How long could this last? I don't remember leaving the flat. Or even saying 'goodbye'. Gilles Cohen belongs to the third generation. And yet, he never left, he does not remember leaving the flat. Leaving that place.

Now, imagine a four or five-year-old boy, of the second generation. His mother and a friend have tea together, on a regular basis. Under the table, on a regular basis, the little boy plays, between his mother's pretty legs and the friend's very shiny black boots. The friend is an Auschwitz survivor. The two women chat: women's talk, family affairs, camp stories. The little one under the table takes it all in, directly. And later on, it will end up... under his skin. I call this *parenteral transmission*.⁸ All the people born afterwards have been affected by the seemingly anatomic fallout of Nazism and the camps. No need for that to have been a Jewish child. Yet, little Jews were injected a higher dose all the same. As for the rare Jewish babies of the time, 'hidden children' or, rather, the children of for ever hidden parents, the effect was not so much under their skin as *injected*⁹ into the very core of their bodies. Whether we want it or not, this *parenteral transmission* took place. Psychoanalysts come across its consequences in their patients, in the maddest mostly and the most somatising, in their other patients too. Often it is incomprehensible to them. (What do black boots make you think about, Doctor?) Some acting-out occurs as a result, some acting in the public sphere.

In 1979–1989, in the same public sphere, the rise of negationism was noticeable. As a deportee, I at once sought the help of my fellow psychoanalysts. But they failed to grasp the urgency of the situation. Lacan was already on his way out. And the others could not see that a lock—an ethical lock—was being broken. We all now know what rushed into that breach. One day, I was complaining about that deafness to my

friend and fellow-deportee Louise Alcan, then the Secretary of the Auschwitz Association. She handed me a book – ‘Here, that’ll cheer you up!’ It was the *Auschwitz Album*, still in the English edition, an album that had belonged to a Czech deportee named Lili Jacob. I leafed through it eagerly. ‘You already know all these photos’, Louise said, ‘on Auschwitz, these are the only ones in circulation’. True, but I had never seen them all at once like this, a facsimile tied together with a fine cord, a true family album! One photo stood out for me. In it, a winding line could be seen, made up of already selected people – elderly people, women, children. It first ran alongside the tracks, continued on the ramp, then turned at a right angle across the tracks, then back to its original direction, towards the crematorium. At that point, the line went past a low barrack. A pot of geraniums sitting on the outside sill of a window could be made out, barely. I told Louise: ‘I was there, behind that window’. (The only reason I was able to see the pot of geraniums on the photo is because I *knew* it was there.)—‘So what,’ Louise replied, ‘it sounds as if you wanted to provide evidence, there would be so much more to prove!’ I indeed wanted to provide evidence. I could prove to my fellow psychoanalysts that this concerned them, how this concerned them.

This barrack still exists. Jean-François Forges took a picture of it on my behalf. Next to the window, on the outside, on the wall, blown up to its life size, is a photo from the series I just mentioned. When I instructed him on the phone: ‘Here, to the left’, he rectified: ‘To the right’. That’s because I could re-visualise the topological situation of the time, from inside the barrack. Whereas he was describing what you can see today, at the camp of Birkenau, on the blown-up photo on the wall of the barrack.

I told this story – and the story of Lili’s Album – to Alain Jaubert, a TV director, later the creator of the TV series entitled *Pallettes*. We were actually neighbours and we found out that our fields of interest were also contiguous. We were more than neighbours, we shared a party wall. We used to borrow books and documents from each other all the time. When I mentioned the Album to him, he said: ‘But this is a film, this is already a film’. And we made that film, he directed it. We: i.e. four fellow deport-

ees, with sufficiently distinct voices.¹⁰ In this film, *Auschwitz, l'Album, la Mémoire* (*Auschwitz, Album, Memory*), we are not seen, only our numbers are, handwritten on cards, added on later. But—and this is a serious omission—the triangles labelling us as Jewish—i.e. as gassable—are missing under the numbers. For a film made before *Shoah*, it really wasn't bad. After *Shoah*, I don't think I would have found it necessary. The section I just mentioned, the one about the photo, went missing during the recording: the technician was so absorbed by the story that he stopped functioning. The section had to be added later. The sound quality is very low, we were hardly granted any financial aid. It was aired on Antenne 2, in February 1985.

An 'old-timer' who wished me well had recommended me for a job in this barrack, the *Schriebstube*, the accounts office, because I spoke German. This is where the lists of newcomers were being kept, the organisation of the blocks and the *Kommandos* were handled. I was plopped in front of a typewriter, so that I would practice. I was no good at it. Not used to that German keyboard. My desk was located on the right side of the window. Above it, on the wall, a small mirror was hanging, a slightly tilted toiletry mirror. Behind me, there was a large table and a few stools. A convoy had just been sorted out and, through the window, a few yards away from the geraniums, I could see a line of people moving to the left. Rather, they would pause, for long periods of time. The people framed by the window remained the same for a long time. It sent chills down my spine. It was very hot, I had a high fever and things were not working with the typewriter. There was some sense of restlessness about the room. An 'old-timer' popped in repeatedly and quickly hid a bucket—jam or fat?—behind the curtain of a broom closet, on the left side of the room. The door was behind me, in the wall to the right. Through this door, an SS came in; he was holding a handkerchief by its four corners and he spread it on the table. 'Take a look at that, you must know a thing or two about that'. It was jewelry. I was, precisely, meant to copy a list of jewels, watches, etc. I mumbled that I didn't, my head tucked in between my shoulders, trying not to look back too much.

Outside, a little girl aged three or four—she was holding a cup in

her hand—was trying to draw her grandmother out of the line, in the direction of the barrack. Finally, she moved forward on her own. So, in the blind spot where I couldn't see it, would there have been a tap? This question long troubled me. A *Posten* SS was there, a family man type with a moustache. I had seen him walk past the window. She went towards him, towards the tap, who knows. I could only see his arm, raised, involved in a wide forthcoming motion. He was pointing over there, to the left: 'Da unten gibt's Wasser'. Down there, there would be some water. There, not far, was the crematorium. The little girl returned to the line. Around her, around the grandmother, people started talking. They seemed a bit relieved. But the line was hardly making any progress. Like a stopping train, it moved forward a bit and then stopped. I could still see the same little girl and her grandmother, framed by the window. And at the same time, from the same eye, in the slightly tilted mirror, above the type writer, I could see the SS with the jewels, behind me. He now had a foot on a stool, near the table, so that an 'old-timer' could sew up a button on his fly more snugly. She was on her knees, giggling a bit. This is not an erotic scene. At some point, the gaze of the SS met my gaze in the mirror. He could read in it what I could see: behind me, this intimate, ridiculous, mad scene, involving jewels, family jewels, and outside, on the other side of the window, a little girl headed for death, with a promised tap,¹¹ promised water, headed for death with all the other people in the line. Too much, was it too much, even for an SS—who had read that other scene in my gaze—or for the old-timer sewing on her knees? Weren't my jewels typed well enough? In the afternoon, I didn't have to come back. I was no good for the job. I now think, I am now able to think: fortunately. A few days later, I went to the *Revier*—despite the risks of being selected. *Revier* referred to the hospital but the word itself means 'reserve', a place where animals can be kept safe from being hunted or, on the contrary, be handed over as a result of some surprise selection, handed over to the gas chamber. I never forgot that scene, but it had not come back to me either. It took the topographical occurrence of the photo taken from another point of view, from 'the other side'. As Lacan said, a window is often the frame of the unconscious fantasy. What I had seen through that window

was not a fantasy. Granted, what was reflected in the small tilted mirror could be connected to it. But that scene could not have come back to me if, thanks to some long psychoanalytic work, I hadn't investigated the full spectrum of the gaze, of the gaze as an object, of the function of the gaze. This must be taken into account, if we are to gauge the extent to which everyone, not only the survivors, struggles in, struggles with the Shoah—not to mention those who frolic¹² in it. That's because the tatter, the abject- object (*l'objet-déchet*) is inscribed in the psychic structure of each and everyone.

It is expected from us, it is demanded of us to bear witness 'before it is too late'. What kind of knowledge is thus hoped for, what kind of confession made on our death beds, what family secret? (Pertaining to the family)? What will be the outcome of all this collecting of survivors' oral testimonies on the part of people who are a little or much too psy-trained or psy-informed? I'm afraid the outcome will be soundbites, available for the use, the *jouissance* of the generations to come (and even now...). For no pedagogy of horror can fail to induce the production of *jouissance*. To the three impossible professions pointed out by Freud—education, government, psychoanalysis—a fourth one must then perhaps be added: namely, the art of bearing witness. In France, there are very few former deportees who have become psychoanalysts. Or else they do not make themselves known as such. There are a few more who were in internment and in ghettos while they were children. Among Lacanians, I think I am the only one. In the midst of my fellow deportees as well, my position is quite unique: unlike most, upon my return, I was reunited with both of my parents who had not been deported and were alive and who were Freudian enough to be able to hear everything—absolutely everything—I had to tell. My re-emergence from this, from the camps, from having told them everything, took long years of psychoanalysis. But this—along with my good fortune at the camp itself, the relatively small scale of my deportation compared to others—is also what elicited my becoming an analyst in spite/because of the camp. The inability to talk about it, as a result of not being heard, is something I experienced much later and, sadly, mostly amid the psychoanalytic community. All this needed to be

specified, for any elaboration originating from the outside is often offensive to other fellow deportees. What is elaborated on the basis of our flesh is generally unbearable to us, whether in history, in psychoanalysis, in philosophy, in politics and even sometimes in the various groupings of survivors. Inevitably, “it” (*ça*) is never conveyed. *Shoah* freed me from the sense of helplessness—and of obscenity sometimes—stemming from having to bear witness from the perspective of my own little history. On the contrary, it endowed me with the right to do so, paradoxically: for this film, in which one sees no horror, no archival footage, is a representation of the backdrop against which all our individual histories are inscribed, that over-there (*là-bas*) that we can see again, that we can feel again when we talk, one by one.

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Translated from the French by Dorothee Bonnigal-Katz (2012)

Notes

1) This presentation was given in November 1996, in the context of a colloquium on the Shoah organised by Annette Wieviorka, Claude Mouchard and Héléne Mouchard-Zay. Héléne Mouchard-Zay is the daughter of Jean Zay, the Minister of National Education who was murdered in 1944 by members of the Vichy Milice. She heads the *Cercil* (Research and Documentation Centre on Internment Camps and the Deportation of Jews in the Loiret Region). In Pithiviers and Beaune-la-Rolande, French policemen separated children from their mothers. One of the policemen’s grand-daughters might have been present among the audience.

2) Translator’s note: Simone Veil is a well-known French politician and an Auschwitz-Birkenau survivor. She was the French Minister of Health in the 1970s and is responsible for the legalisation of abortion in 1975.

3) Translator’s note: The idiomatic term used in French to refer to a bad or third-rate film and translated here as ‘turkey’ is ‘*navet*’ which means

‘turnip’ literally, hence the mention of blandness a little further. A dud is an alternative translation but it misses the reference to food.

4) On this film by Liliana Cavani (1973), see *Le Savoir-Déporté: Camps, Histoire, Psychanalyse*, p. 186- 187.

5) English translation of *Les Matricules tatoués des camps d’Auschwitz-Birkenau: Tattooed Numbers in the Camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau* (Paris: Sons and Daughters of Jewish French Deportees; New York: Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1992).

6) Translator’s note: In order to retain the important reference to torn and ragged clothing, ‘wreck in tatters’ is my suggested translation of the French term ‘*loque*’ used consistently throughout the section. ‘*Loque*’ means ‘rag’ literally (and is translated as such in places) but it can also mean ‘a wreck’ when applied figuratively to a human being.

7) Robert Antelme, *The Human Race*, transl. by Jeffrey Haight and Annie Mahler, Northwestern: Northwestern UP, 1998, p. 291.

8) Translator’s note: *Parenteral* translates the neologism ‘*parentéral*’, my guess is that it is a portmanteau word combining parental and colateral.

9) Translator’s note: I opted for a literal translation of the French term ‘*injoncté*’ which is equally non idiomatic and, in fact, does not exist, though it implies the implementation of a formal imperative.

10) One of them, Violette, can be seen in Claudine Drame’s film, *Témoignages pour mémoire* (1992). Louise is no longer with us. And Jeanine, hard-hitting and modest, donated her unique testimony to the French collection (led by Annette Wieviorka) of the Fortunoff Video Archives held at Yale University.

11) Translator’s note: The French word for ‘tap’ is ‘*robinet*’ which can also be slang for ‘penis’, a reference sadly lost in translation.

12) Translator’s note: The French verbs translated respectively as ‘struggle’ and ‘frolic’ are ‘*se débattre*’ and ‘*s’ébattre*’ but the translation could not retain the *débattre – ébattre* word play.