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Witnessing the Archive: In Mourning

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EDITED BY OREN BARUCH STIER
AND J. SHAWN LANDRES

**Religion, Violence,
Memory, and Place**

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2 Witnessing the Archive: In Mourning

William Robert

Several years ago, a letter to the editor of a French newspaper accused philosopher Giorgio Agamben of seeking to “ruin the unique and unsayable character of Auschwitz” by publishing an article on concentration camps. This perplexed Agamben, for while he agrees with Primo Levi’s assertion that “the phenomenon of Auschwitz is unique”¹ and hence that “the Nazi concentration camp still remains an *unicum*, both in its extent and in its quality,”² he disagrees with referring to Auschwitz as “unsayable”—a naming that, for Agamben, would confer on it mystical prestige. To claim that Auschwitz is unsayable, unspeakable, unwriteable, and hence incomprehensible follows the argumentative thread of John Chrysostom’s fourth-century treatise *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God* and makes Auschwitz “equivalent to *euphemein*,” that is, “adoration in silence.”³ Polarly opposed to this is Levi, who likens himself to Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner in seeing every situation as an occasion to tell his story to anyone and everyone: “I have done so, as best I could . . . and I am still doing so, whenever the opportunity presents itself.”⁴ In this way Levi is himself like the Auschwitz survivor he quotes as saying, “I wanted to survive, to avenge myself and bear witness.”⁵ Many survivor testimonies echo this sentiment, leading Agamben to remark, “In the camp, one of the reasons that can drive a prisoner to survive is the idea of becoming a witness.”⁶ Becoming a witness, standing and offering testimony, clearly holds powerful ethical and political significance for survivors—a significance noted not only by Agamben but also by others, in particular philosopher Jacques Derrida.

The present essay follows their lead in examining the figure of the witness and, more specifically, the act of bearing witness by exploring some of the many layers bound up in the question “What does it mean to bear witness?” It does this by a refraction (a turning or bending of light as it passes from one medium into another of different density) vis-à-vis the other essays collected here, many of which deal with historical and physical sites of atrocities and of the memory of atrocities (including Haiti, Japan, Rwanda, and New York). Rather than asking, “What happened?” or “How is what happened remembered?” I ask questions of a different order: “What makes bearing witness possible?” and “How does memory work?” Such questions implicitly underlie these other kinds of

studies so that this essay does philosophical work that refracts and complements the other essays collected here. It explores questions behind other sets of questions and in this way works in conjunction with, and in a certain way provides a ground for, these other essays (particularly insofar as my reflections stem from the atrocity of Auschwitz and the testimonies of its survivors). For example, my exploration of the archive connects with Flora Keshgegian's examination of memory, especially diasporic memory, of Armenian genocide insofar as both are concerned with the place of memory—since having a place to store memories is critical to maintaining them. Such a concern for the place of memory also plays a key role in essays by Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht, Tania Olden-hage, and James Young, as they investigate concretely (in terms of particular cases) what I investigate theoretically (in terms of philosophical questions). What does it mean to bear witness?

To bear witness is to respond. It is to say, "Here I am." Echoing Abraham's response to God's call in Genesis 22:1, the witness responds to a call, and in doing so, she identifies a place, a person, and a presence. This triad figures the act of bearing witness and the testimony that the witness gives by marking both with a unique singularity: a particular person is present in a particular place at a particular time to offer her own testimony. This framework gets at the heart of the act of bearing witness—and it is an act, an action that she performs, for to respond, she must act. To bear witness, to give testimony, is a speech act that, as a response, involves addressing another in responding to the other's call. "Here I am" is a response to a call issued from the other, and this call comes even before the other speaks in the form of ethical responsibility. This other, whom the witness addresses when she offers her testimony, is an other to whom she is bound by the bond of an infinite ethical responsibility. It is to this responsibility that the witness responds, for out of responsibility comes the need to respond: as Derrida notes, there is "no response, indeed, without a principle of responsibility."⁷ To recognize this obligation and to take responsibility for the other is itself a response, so that even before she speaks, she has already responded to her ethical duty. Because this duty, this responsibility for the other, remains infinite and is always already in place, she finds herself always (already) responding. Such a response performs an ethical enactment of a "Here I am" before she begins to speak.

When she does speak, when she does stand and offer testimony, the witness offers a double response to the other: the ethical response to her responsibility for the other and the discursive response that she addresses to the other. This discursive response integrally involves addressing the other; it involves facing the other and speaking directly to the other—even calling the other by name. A response of this sort operates as a form of address. Derrida points out that such an address contains within it "the form of a covenant" and hence a promise, since address and discourse depend on "the possibility of an elementary promise" involving an act of faith.⁸ That is, address depends on a promise implicit in all linguistic acts. Because "all language is addressed to the other . . . there is in

the simple fact that I am speaking to the other a kind of commitment to go to the end of my sentence, to continue, to affirm by making a commitment. . . . One cannot imagine a language that is not in a certain way caught up in the space of the promise." Hence the promise includes the testimonial promise to tell the truth, the ethical promise to recognize and affirm (say *yes* to) the other, and the linguistic promise at play in every language act. Derrida formulates this as such: "Before I even decide what I am going to say, I promise to speak to you, I respond to the promise to speak, I respond. I respond to you as soon as I speak and consequently I commit or pledge myself." Language, at bottom, depends on this promise, which is an act of faith. In this way, any speech act is always already a response insofar as language is addressed to and thereby responds to the other.

Testimony stands as one such speech act that depends on a double promise. Not only does the witness who offers testimony promise to speak to the other (for testimony is always addressed to an other) but she also promises to speak truthfully. The witness asks the other to believe her testimony as one would a miracle, since as Derrida points out, "even the slightest testimony concerning the most plausible, ordinary or everyday thing cannot do otherwise: it must still appeal to faith as would a miracle," an impossible event that nevertheless happens.¹⁰ Testimony must still "appeal to an act of faith beyond all proof."¹¹ The situation is only more extreme, and the necessity of faith is that much greater when the witness testifies to an atrocity, to an event that stands beyond belief.¹² This "act of faith demanded in bearing witness exceeds, through its structure, all intuition and all proof, all knowledge"—hence the figure of the miracle.¹³ Ultimately, this double promise of testimony opens onto an understanding of its religious significance. Derrida's remarks about the promise that underlies testimony reveal that testimony, like religion, is tied "to a very singular experience of the promise."¹⁴ For Derrida, there can be "no religion without the promise of keeping one's promise to tell the truth," so religion begins where "the promise promises *itself*" as "the sworn faith, the given word, and hence the response."¹⁵ Religion begins with the promise and thus with the response necessitated by the promise to the other. It draws from the "testimonial pledge" of every speech act that is always also an address to the other.¹⁶ Still, one must respond, and religion is the response (at least for Derrida). Because it figures itself in terms of the promise issued by an individual's infinite ethical responsibility to the other, religion names the response necessitated by that promise and by that responsibility. One can name religion as the response precisely because religion essentially involves the act of faith that remains at the heart of the promise and hence of all testimony. That act of faith, that "radical phenomenon of believing"—whether named law, ethics, religion, or bearing witness—remains as "the only relationship possible to the other as other."¹⁷

Bearing witness, then, is a response. It stands as an individual's response to the call of responsibility and to the promises carried by that call. In responding, the individual stands face to face with the other for whom she is responsible. Hence this response necessarily involves addressing the face of this particular

other standing there.¹⁸ Likewise, this response necessarily issues from a particular individual: a singular individual who addresses the other in the ethical, political, juridical, and religious act of bearing witness. In any sort of legal trial, the witness must appear in court to testify. That is, the witness must be present in that place at that time to be able to bear witness. Any testimonial statement “is not merely recounting, telling, informing, describing, remarking.” It does these things, but it does them in a particular place (“here”) at a particular time (“now”). In other words, bearing witness is a present act that requires the presence of the witness. Otherwise, the witness, as the bearer of the gift of testimony, cannot give herself as the ultimate form of this gift; she cannot offer herself in the act of testifying if she is not present to testify. Moreover, testimony “presents itself as a serious and non-fictional address to the other.”¹⁹ In addressing the other, an individual always does so from a particular location, from a particular address (namely, facing the other). She offers testimony from a particular place, at a particular time—always a “here” and a “now.” Derrida elaborates this point by writing that “to testify is always . . . to do it *at present*—the witness must be present. . . . One must oneself be present, raise one’s hand, speak in the first person and in the present, and one must do this in order to testify to a present, to an indivisible moment.”²⁰

This indivisible moment is the instant, the very specific “now” in and from which the witness testifies. Strictly speaking, the witness can offer testimony only from the instant in which she (and no one else) stands: in that place at that moment. “Consequently, for testimony there *must* be the instant.”²¹ There must be this form of radical, responsive, present “here I am” in which an irreducible, indivisible, incalculable moment ruptures ordinary temporality. The instant allows for “instantaneity and also the instance, the juridical instance and the instance as immanence”—all of which help to describe this very singular “now” in which testimony takes place.²² One moves to the very tip of irreplaceability and of immanence—and there is the instant. Derrida formulates this by observing that “the witness can only testify when he asserts that he was in a unique place and where he could testify to this and that in a here-now, that is, in a pointed instant that precisely supports this exemplarity.”²³ Here he illustrates that exemplarity characterizes the instant. For testimony to exist as such and for the witness to be able to stand and offer that testimony (and give it the weight of meaning one wants to give to testimony) requires being able to point to the instant of testimony as exemplary. This is precisely why the instant ruptures ordinary temporality: it must stand irreducible so that one can point to it as exemplary. Indeed, “a witness and a testimony must always be exemplary.” Both the witness and her testimony appeal to faith rather than proof based on this exemplarity. The witness says to the other, “You must believe me *because you must believe me* . . . you must believe me because I am irreplaceable. When I testify, I am unique and irreplaceable.”²⁴ This irreplaceability echoes Paul Celan’s claim that “no one bears witness for the witness.”²⁵ Locating testimony in the instant allows the witness to claim uniqueness, to claim irreplaceability, to claim

to stand outside ordinary experience in a very specific “here” and “now.” The figure of the instant names this specific, unique “now.”²⁶

The instant of testimony, because testimony always issues from a particular address, also carries with it a spatial dimension. The nature of bearing witness, of standing before the other and offering testimony to the other, entails that the witness stand in a particular place at a particular time. Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics of responsibility makes room for this spatial dimension; for Levinas, it is when an individual encounters the face of the other that she feels the full force of the call to infinite responsibility for that other. Coming face to face with the other—the encounter that launches Levinasian ethics in terms of the prohibition against killing the other—necessarily takes place in a particular space. Derrida’s notion of the response builds on this, particularly in the case of testimony, which he describes as an act for which the witness must be present “there,” “in that place.” It is important to keep in mind this spatial dimension of presence which corresponds to its temporal dimension in considering the act of bearing witness since the witness’s claim to irreplaceability—a claim that serves as one of the very conditions of testimony—depends on her temporal and spatial presence in a certain locale. Derrida recognizes this *vis-à-vis* the French word *demeure*. As expected, Derrida plays with the many meanings of *demeure*, the most important of which correspond to the English verb “to abide” and to the English noun “abode” (what Agamben calls “dwelling place”).

However, the playful *demeure* introduces a difficulty in this consideration of testimony, for the act of bearing witness, insofar as it takes place in the unique “here-now” of the instant, does not remain. Bearing witness, then, marks a site in which the witness stands while offering testimony, yet this site is precisely where she cannot remain. Testimony is not an abode in which she can abide. Testimony takes place, as Agamben suggests, on the threshold of such a *demeure*, on the threshold where inside and outside become blurred.²⁷ Agamben uses the philosophical paradigm of the limit situation and the political paradigm of the state of exception (in which the law or norm is suspended so that the exception becomes the rule) to point to this difficulty of testimony. The act of offering testimony presents itself as a limit situation and/or a state of exception in terms of spatiotemporality insofar as the witness, testifying in an instant, stands where temporality is ruptured. She testifies in an instant that takes place uniquely, one time only. Indeed, this marks a limit situation, a state of exception that suspends normal spatiotemporality under the conditions of the exception. As such, the act of bearing witness, in the case of survivors of Auschwitz, repeats the state of exception that marked Auschwitz and the concentration camp more generally, for “Auschwitz is precisely the place in which the state of exception coincides perfectly with the rule and the extreme situation becomes the very paradigm of daily life.”²⁸ Stated another way, “the essence of the camp consists in the materialization of the state of exception.”²⁹ The concentration camp is that biopolitical space in which the state of exception becomes the rule. The concentration camp thus stands as a threshold space because of

its exceptional status, because it is the place where inside and outside, where rule and exception, are blurred to the point of indistinction.³⁰

This figure of the threshold illuminates something about the very nature of testimony: testimony contains a lacuna at its foundation, since those survivors who offer testimony bear witness, Agamben claims, "to something it is impossible to bear witness to."³¹ Again, "in testimony, there is something like an impossibility of bearing witness."³² To see this completely involves turning to the witness. The status of the witness who testifies calls into question the very meaning of testimony and, along with it, the witness's own identity and reliability. This is because the witness, as a survivor, enjoys a degree of privilege, bears the mark of the elect. Agamben cites Levi and Elie Wiesel on this point, both of whom agree that an individual who has lived through a traumatic experience will never, "not really, not completely" tell of her experience.³³ She is one of what Levi calls "the saved," as opposed to "the drowned," the ones who did not survive the traumatic horror of the concentration camp. The drowned, the submerged, are for Levi (and for Agamben) "the complete witnesses."³⁴ The drowned are the "true" witnesses, the "complete" witnesses because they "touched bottom," because they drowned. The lacuna, the aporia of the witness, now comes into focus: the complete witness is one who has not survived and thus did not and could not bear witness. The complete witness is such because she did not survive, and because she did not survive, she cannot bear witness. Herein lies the lacuna. For this and other reasons, Levi writes that "they are the rule, we are the exception,"³⁵ meaning that the survivors are not the true witnesses but speak only in place of the drowned, "by proxy, as pseudo-witnesses; they bear witness to a missing testimony"³⁶ so that the survivor who offers testimony does so in virtue of having "lived longer than what has come to pass"³⁷ and knowing that "she must bear witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness."³⁸

This aporetic character of testimony points to another dimension of the lacuna at the heart of the act of bearing witness. Testimony marks the disjunction between two impossibilities of bearing witness: "It means that language, in order to bear witness, must give way to a non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness. . . . It is thus necessary that the impossibility of bearing witness, the 'lacuna' that constitutes human language, collapses, giving way to a different impossibility of bearing witness—that which does not have language."³⁹ This lacuna centers on the language of testimony, of bearing witness as a speech act. Here Agamben notes that for such an act to occur, for it to be possible, a non-language must enter into the language of the speech act. In the speech act of bearing witness, language must cede to nonlanguage, to an impossibility of language. It must incorporate the nonlanguage of the drowned—the one who is the complete witness—into the language of the saved—of the one who stands and bears witness in the face of the other but does so always by proxy, as a substitute. Testimony takes place "where the speechless one makes the speaking one speak and where the one who speaks bears the impossibility of speaking in his own speech." The drowned, for whom speech is impossible,

become the driving force behind the speech of the saved, of the one who bears witness, but her speech must itself bear witness to her proxy status. Her testimony must bear witness to the drowned as the complete witness whose nonlanguage drives her own language. In this way, testimony again marks itself as a threshold space where, Agamben writes, "the silent and the speaking, the inhuman and the human, enter into a zone of indistinction in which it is impossible to establish the position of the subject, to identify the 'imagined substance' of the 'I' and, along with it, the true witness."⁴⁰

To understand Agamben's claim involves turning with him to the linguistics of Derrida and Emile Benveniste, both of whom demonstrate that in the system of signs that is language, words (especially pronouns) function as shifters so that semantics are not essential but contextual. "I," for example, can be defined and can have meaning only in terms of an instance in which an individual stands and names herself as "I." Hence any speech act takes place because the speaking individual identifies herself with and in the very event of saying. She takes up the subject position in a particular performative utterance. This reveals that "the subject of enunciation is composed of discourse and exists in discourse alone."⁴¹ Hence bearing witness is a discursive act that depends upon and remains within discourse. Derrida develops this point further by remarking that the speech act of testifying is not only discursive but also dated; it bears the date of the moment of attestation, the moment when the witness stands and bears witness. In this way, the "I" may shift for the same witness across time, since the date marks a difference "between the one who says 'I' and the 'I' of the young man of whom he speaks and who is himself."⁴² In other words, the subject in the present who says "I" today cannot replace even her own "I" from her original dated testimony (an "I" that has become other), since she is no longer in that instant. She can, therefore, no longer replace herself. In testifying for the witness, she testifies for herself as the witness that testifies for the complete witnesses, thereby revealing a double displacement with respect to the discursive "I" of the testifying subject's position. It also shows that the speaking subject, the individual who assumes the subject position, gains access to an impossibility of speaking.

There is, then, an important disjunction (what Derrida would call an ordinary disjunction) constitutive of every speech act, especially every act of bearing witness where the witness always testifies only by proxy. This element of substitution points, for Derrida, to an infinite deferral that he names *différance*, writing, trace, hymen, among others.⁴³ Each of these names demonstrates the rupture between language and the human user of language, pointing to an impossibility of conjoining the living being and language, *phone* and *logos*, the inhuman and the human in testimony. Further demonstrating its threshold position, testimony reveals its taking place "in the non-place of articulation," in the subject position that never marks a real presence, a consistent dwelling place, but a demeure (to return to Derrida's earlier figure).⁴⁴ Testimony takes place in a no-place, on the threshold that is neither inside nor outside but is what Agamben calls "being-within an outside."⁴⁵ Here one sees the spatial correlative of the

instant as that point of temporal rupture, of that place that is finally no-place in the temporal schema. Just as the witness cannot remain in the instant, she cannot remain in the threshold, the subject position from which she offers testimony. Agamben expounds on this idea of testimony as a threshold space by giving the name "testimony" to the system of relations between inside and outside, between the sayable and the unsayable, between the possibility and the impossibility of speech. Testimony speaks (to) the nonspeakable that is inside and outside of language, inside and outside of the testimonial offering.

To bear witness is also an archival technology. It is a technology of the archive, the repository for records and memories.⁴⁶ It is a technology of remembering and of recording memory in the form of testimony. But like testimony, the archive is the site of a lacuna, a threshold, since testimony as performative utterance takes place between the said and the unsaid—even between the sayable and the unsayable. Hence the archival storehouse records not only what is said but also what is not said, which Agamben describes as a "mass of the non-semantic inscribed in every meaningful discourse as a function of its enunciation . . . the dark margin encircling and limiting every concrete act of speech." In other words, "the archive is the unsaid or sayable inscribed in everything by virtue of being enunciated; it is the fragment of memory that is always forgotten in the act of saying 'I.'"⁴⁷ Every act of bearing witness thus carries with it an archive as that element of the unsaid under and around what is said. The act of speaking in a particular place ("here") at a particular time ("now") by a particular "I" always bears the trace of that which remains unsaid. This points to testimony's ultimate unarchivability given its performative dimension and its taking place in a threshold between inside and outside, between said and unsaid. This is perhaps why contemporary archives contain many video testimonies, as in the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies located at Yale University or at the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation in Los Angeles.⁴⁸ In these cases, the witness, a particular "I," delivers her testimony on-camera so that her performance (including facial expressions, intonations, pauses, etc.) can be captured (though even this cannot erase the trace of the unsaid at the heart of her testimonial performance). Once recorded, this archival video technology makes her performance timeless, thereby displacing the conditions of "here" and "now" that govern testimony and, in doing so, locating the act of bearing witness in a spatiotemporal threshold.

Hence the archive highlights the said and the unsaid, since testimony moves between the said and the unsaid, between the sayable and the unsayable, between the semantic and the nonsemantic, between the possibility and impossibility of speech and, more specifically, of testimony. Because the archive moves between possibility and actuality (as well as between possibility and impossibility), figuring the archive inscribes what Agamben calls "a caesura in possibility."⁴⁹ It is in that space, in the breath of the caesura between possibility and impossibility, that the testifying subject and testimony itself are located; it is this caesura which makes way for these and allows for the figure of the thresh-

old. However, a more careful consideration of the archive demonstrates that it is not, as Agamben wants to claim, opposed to testimony but is instead integral to testimony and to the act of offering testimony.

Derrida's examination of the archive begins with the Greek *arkhe* that "names at once the *commencement* and the *commandment*." It names at once "the principle according to nature of history, *there* where things *commence*—physical, historical, or ontological principle—but also the principle according to the law, *there* where men and gods *command*, *there* where authority, social order are exercised, in *this place* from which *order* is given—nomological principle."⁵⁰ Hence the archive points always to "there," to "this place" that marks the beginning, the place from which things issue. This "here," this taking place (in the words that Jonathan Z. Smith uses to describe ritual), is a reminder that "taking place" has both spatial and temporal connotations, which recalls the situation of bearing witness as always taking place in a specific "here" (spatial) and at a specific "now" (temporal).⁵¹ The *arkhe* marks the originary cleavage; it separates inside and outside, leading to a series of cleavages that mark here and there, now and then, thereby making possible all such conditions of difference. This originary cleavage that makes way for all forms of marking locates itself in the *arkheion*, which is "a house, a domicile, an address."⁵² The archive stands, then, as the address that grounds all address, the place that makes way for place, the site that commands and commences. It is the address from which an individual responds, just as it is that which makes response possible, that to which everything is always responding. Everything issuing forth from the archive, which is to say, everything, bears its trace.

Moreover, this address was originally the house of the *archons*, those who commanded and thus had the power to make law. Their private home becomes the storehouse for official, public documents. Hence the archive is the place where private (inside) and public (outside) meet. It is the place of memory—where private memory becomes public history, where human finitude meets a form of infinity in language, in the document, in collective memory. In the archive, the private is inscribed in the public, and vice versa. In terms of testimony, the archive marks the space in which private memory becomes public record when the witness stands and offers her testimony. The witness offers her memory to the public, to be documented in the collective memory of history. This is the very movement of testimony: from private memory to public record, to memorialization as memory; in the act of bearing witness, testimony crosses the threshold from inside to outside. Derrida goes so far as to write: "testimony, one could even say archive."⁵³ Hence testimony is not, as Agamben suggests, opposed to the archive. Testimony is instead bound to the archive as its *arkhe*—as its starting point as well as its point of order. Like the nonsemantic margin that spectrally surrounds the speech act of testimony, the archive always leaves its trace on testimony. There can be no instant, there can be no other, and there can be no exteriority without the archive. Testimony thus depends on the archive because it depends on the instant and on the other and on a certain form of exteriority in general. The question of the archive is the question for the possi-

bility of testimony and of the act of bearing witness. In testimony, there is no escape from the archive, from its archaic trace that itself creates the possibility of inscription, of language, of memory, of re-presentation.

The witness is likewise a figure of the archive. She participates in the movement of the archive, for, Derrida notes, "to testify—not being a witness but testifying, attesting, 'bearing witness'—is always to render public."⁵⁴ In doing so, the witness moves into the space of the threshold, the space of the instant in which she bears witness irreplaceably, exemplarily. She responds to her responsibility to the other in making her memories a matter of public record. This movement of the witness into this threshold space binds her to the archive. The archive becomes, like the subject position of testifying, the demure, the impossible dwelling place of the witness. As the site of commandment and commencement, the archive opens the lacuna of bearing witness in which the witness finds herself. Claiming, with Agamben, that "*testimony takes place in the non-place of articulation*"⁵⁵ names (implicitly or otherwise) the archive as that non-place, as that ground upon which the witness stands when she offers testimony.

Just as the witness's testimony bears the trace of the archive—of that which makes possible such testimony—the witness herself also bears the trace. She is that trace, that remnant of having crossed the threshold between inside and outside, between human and nonhuman. Because the witness survives, because her humanity is not fully destroyed (Agamben goes so far as to claim that to destroy the human completely is impossible), she remains; she is this remnant. For Agamben, not only the witness as the subject of testimony but human subjectivity itself is a remnant—what Derrida calls a trace. The witness stands in the threshold between presence and absence, between speech and nonspeech. This is what it means to bear witness and thus to be always the witness by proxy, the pseudo-witness, the saved one who testifies in the place of the complete witness who drowned. The witness stands as the trace, as the remnant of the complete witness and of that to which she testifies. For this reason Agamben claims that "the remnants of Auschwitz—the witnesses—are neither the dead nor the survivors, neither the drowned nor the saved. They are what remains between them,"⁵⁶ what remains in the threshold, what remains only through a displacement.

As the remnant, the witness remains as an archival figure. Her trace—the trace that she is—can be recorded in that space where the private becomes public, where memory transforms into memorialization. As the trace of the promise, as the figure of the response, the witness as remnant stands in the archival space, in the archaic address marking the beginning of economy: of the movement that keeps, that reserves, that saves in the face of radical finitude and the possibility of forgetfulness. This radical finitude and this forgetfulness refer to the limits of the human, but they also refer to the archive itself as a kind of limit situation. The archive, the repository of memory made history, the storehouse of the traces of testimony, takes itself to the limit: from its inception, from the originary moment of the archive, it suffers from what Derrida calls "archive fe-

ver," since it "is made possible by the death, aggression, and destruction drive, that is to say also by originary finitude."⁵⁷ The beginning marked by the archive institutes the archive's eventual death, its eventual self-destruction. Like the instant of testimony—that point of rupture in which the witness cannot abide—what makes the archive possible is also what destroys it. Hence the archive is from its beginning a crypt, a place of ghosts and specters amid ashes. As such the witness stands as *the* remnant that remains, the one whose election saves her from death and from the archive. As a trace, the witness is not effaced but remains to testify. The witness and the testimony she offers are all that remains.

To bear witness is, finally, an act of mourning. To bear witness testifies to the archive as a place of memory and of death and to the witness as the remnant of both: of the public memorialization of private memories and of the death from which the witness as survivor was saved. The witness is the remnant, the one who remains, the one left to give testimony. In standing and offering herself in her offering of testimony, she stands in the testimonial instant. There she assumes the responsibility to respond to death as that which "can never be taken, borrowed, transferred, delivered, promised, or transmitted." This response demonstrates that, as Derrida writes, "death would be this possibility of *giving and taking*," for "it is only on the basis of death, and in its name, that *giving and taking* become possible."⁵⁸ It is only on the basis of human finitude that there can be the possibility of giving (giving oneself, giving testimony) and taking—which is to say, the possibility of testimony, of economy, of responsibility, of ethics. Just as an individual comes face to face with the ethical other, she encounters—face to face, so to speak—death as absolute alterity, as the absolute Other. This encounter makes possible all of these figures: ethics, responsibility, economy, and testimony.

To bear witness, then, always bears witness to death. To stand and offer the gift of testimony remains in some sense to give a form of eulogy. The witness addresses herself "directly to the other," thereby assuming her responsibility to the other, to what Derrida calls, in his eulogy for Levinas, "the absolute anteriority of the face of the Other."⁵⁹ That face, like the inevitability of death itself, inscribes itself in the archive from which issues forth the call of responsibility, the call to which the individual always responds. Like a eulogy, this response of testimony comes from an individual's memory and, in the act of testifying, of transmitting those private memories into speech addressed to others (in the case of the eulogy, both the other survivors and the deceased), transfers those private memories into public record. Thus the movement of the eulogy is archival: from private to public, from memory to memorialization, in mourning. Delivering a eulogy—testifying to the life of the other who has in some sense drowned—is the work of mourning issuing forth from the "here I am" at the root of all testimony. In a eulogy, an individual says, "Here I am to testify to the life of the other who has died; here I am to bear witness to her life and to my memory of her." The eulogy stands as the individual's response to the life and to the death of the other. It is "to say *adieu* to him, to call him by his name, to

call his name, his first name, what he is called at the moment when, if he no longer responds, it is because he is responding in us . . . in us but before us, in us right before us—in calling us, in recalling to us: *à-Dieu* [to God].²⁶⁰ The survivor who has outlived the other is the remnant, the one who remains to bear witness. The witness, like the archive, remains, as that remnant, that trace capable of—and responsible for—this gift of memory, this offering in mourning.

Notes

1. Agamben 1999: 31–32.
2. Levi 1989: 21.
3. Agamben 1999: 32.
4. Levi 1989: 83.
5. *Ibid.*, 53.
6. Agamben 1999: 15.
7. Derrida 1998: 26.
8. *Ibid.*, 47.
9. Derrida 1995b: 384.
10. Derrida 1998: 64.
11. Derrida 2000: 75.
12. This is in part what it means to be an atrocity: to stand beyond belief, even for those who experienced or have knowledge of the event. For survivors of the Shoah, the tragedy was so immense, the dehumanization so totalizing, the scope so incredible that even years later its traumatic impacts make it literally unbelievable. The events of 9/11 are likewise beyond belief, for I can recall that even as I watched and experienced the TV coverage of the plane crashes and the collapse of the twin towers, I could not believe that it was really happening; I could not believe that it was real.
13. Derrida 1998: 63.
14. Derrida 1996: 36. I will return to the singularity of this experience, but here I focus on religion as it relates to the promise and thus to testimony.
15. Derrida 1998: 30.
16. *Ibid.*, 28.
17. Derrida 1996: 94.
18. Invoking figures such as call, responsibility, face, and gift implicitly invokes the ethical thought of Emmanuel Levinas, to which Derrida and others owe a considerable debt. For relatively accessible accounts of the ethical figures Levinas employs, see Levinas 1996: 11–31, as well as Levinas 1985. For the best and most detailed account of his mature ethical thought, see Levinas 1997. For more on Derrida's reflections on the gift, see Derrida 1992, esp. 1–70, and Derrida 1995a, esp. 35–52 and 61–73.
19. Derrida 2000: 37.
20. *Ibid.*, 32–33.
21. *Ibid.*, 33.
22. *Ibid.*, 49.
23. *Ibid.*, 41.

24. *Ibid.*, 40, my italics.
25. Celan 1986: 74; quoted in Derrida 1994: 35. Celan's original German is "Niemand zeugt für den Zeugen."
26. In this way the instant marks the same sort of space as the date as figured by Derrida in reference to circumcision, which, like a date, takes place only once. The date, like circumcision, is unique, a one-time-only. It is signed, it is inscribed, it is entered "not simply to sign as of a given year, month, day, or hour . . . but also to sign from a given place." For Derrida the date marks a certain address and hence marks a certain "now" and a certain "here," which makes the date a witness insofar as it marks something an individual can point to as "this one," as in the case of the instant. The date remains in a specific "here" and "now," and it does not move, and it does not repeat itself. See Derrida 1994: 14–15.
27. Agamben 1999: 36.
28. *Ibid.*, 49.
29. Agamben 1998: 174.
30. For a more detailed consideration of the figure of the threshold in reference to the concentration camp, see Agamben 1998: 136, 159.
31. Agamben 1999: 13.
32. *Ibid.*, 34.
33. *Ibid.*, 33.
34. Levi 1989: 83–84; quoted in Agamben 1999: 33.
35. Levi 1989: 84.
36. Agamben 1999: 34.
37. Derrida 2000: 45.
38. Agamben 1999: 34. Recent thinkers have developed these ideas more fully, incorporating especially the philosophy of Jean-François Lyotard, to remark that Shoah is an event without witnesses. This is the case in two senses, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub observe: "The Shoah is an event without witnesses in the double sense that it is impossible to bear witness to it from the inside—since no one can bear witness from the inside of death, and there is no voice for the disappearance of the voice—and from the outside—since the 'outsider' is by definition excluded from the event." Hence "it is not really possible to tell the truth, to testify, from the outside. Neither is it possible . . . to testify from the inside." They go on to describe a space that is neither inside nor outside but "both inside and outside," which ties into Agamben's remarks on the figure of the threshold. See Felman and Laub 1992: 232. For Lyotard's own thoughts, see his interview with the author in Weber 2004.
39. Agamben 1999: 39.
40. *Ibid.*, 120.
41. Agamben 1999: 116.
42. Derrida 2000: 65.
43. Agamben points to Derrida's analysis of the sign in Husserl's phenomenology that appears in Derrida 1973. See also Derrida 1997: 141–64. Levinas also develops a central chapter of *Otherwise than Being* around this notion of substitution that underscores in terms of ethics much of what Derrida develops in terms of language. See Levinas 1997: 99–129.
44. Agamben 1999: 130.
45. Agamben 1993: 68.

46. Both "archive" and "technology" conceptually relate to the thought of Michel Foucault. For Foucault "archive" designates "the positive dimension that corresponds to the plane of enunciation, 'the general system of the formation and transformation of statements.'" See Foucault 1972: 130. By "technology" Foucault names a philosophical (primarily ethical) technique corresponding to Stoic *askēsis*, to a certain exercise of subjectivity related to forms of understanding that can, moreover, manipulate things such as signification, communication, domination, and transformation. See Foucault 1997: 177, 238, 244. Agamben 1999: 144.
47. For an excellent discussion of video testimony, see Stier 2003, esp. 80–81, 90–91, 101–103.
48. Agamben 1999: 145.
49. Derrida 1996: 1.
50. For Smith's discussion of ritual in terms of taking place, see Smith 1987: 96–117.
51. Derrida 1996: 2.
52. *Ibid.*, 75.
53. Derrida 2000: 30.
54. Agamben 1999: 130.
55. *Ibid.*, 164.
56. Derrida 1996: 94.
57. Derrida 1995a: 44.
58. Derrida 1999: 2, 4.
59. *Ibid.*, 13.
- 60.