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## ► To cite this version:

Ewa Bogalska-Martin. Educating and transmitting for the world of tomorrow: The new witnesses on the changing field of memory. *Journal of Educational Sciences* , 2016, XII (2(34)), pp.20-31. halshs-01913737

**HAL Id: halshs-01913737**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01913737>**

Submitted on 6 Nov 2018

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# Educating and transmitting for the world of tomorrow: The new witnesses on the changing field of memory<sup>1</sup>

Ewa Bogalska-Martin<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

A collection of texts "Witnesses and Memory" published in 2003 in the USA under the direction of Ana Douglass and Thomas Vogler begins with this quotation from Maurice Blanchot in his "Last Man": *even God needs witness*<sup>3</sup>. Today we are confronted with the accelerated disappearance of the last direct witnesses of the stone world, named by one of the Great Witnesses, Tadeusz Borowski, who, defeated in his relation to reality, committed suicide in 1951.

Is it only this disappearance of the last witnesses of the atrocities of the second war that definitively confronts us with the forgetting against which Pierre Nora and many others warn us? Not without reason, Nora emphasizes that our concern for the memory of the past reflects the fact that the latter does not cease to be hidden. The memory arranged, fictitious, even false, is constantly making its appearance, it establishes, sometimes usurp, a link with the testimonies that bear on events that have nothing to do with the history of the holocaust, Shoah or other collective trauma. Arranged memory helps to create a climate of confusion. In the long run, reversals of meaning, even abuses, are no longer impossible!

On the other hand, is saturated memory, as Régine Robin calls it<sup>4</sup>, able to contain something more without the world sinking into a general anaesthesia that affects those who have the sensation of having already seen everything, Have set up expert institutions that carry out their work of vigilance without, however, preventing the renewal of the acts of inhumanity? The Canadian sociologist, who, like all of us, sees the disappearance of the surviving witnesses of the Shoah, the change of generation raises the question of dispossession, *expropriation of memory*, as Imre Kertész wrote in his article in about Begnini's in the movie *La vie est belle*<sup>5</sup>.

In a poem written during the war, before he was deported to Auschwitz in 1943, Borowski<sup>6</sup> wrote this premonitory phrase which testifies to his tragic lucidity in the face of the future: *there remained only scrap metal and deaf and mocking laughter of future generations*. How can this be contradicted? How can we transmit the memory of the past without reserving it only to those who have had the misfortune to live in an epoch of terror? How can we safeguard the meaning, avoid confusion and misuse of meaning and draw lessons that can be used by future generations? These are the questions before us and the generations to come.

## Memory effervescence

According to some writers, the crusade against forgetting begins in the late 1970s, when the disappearance of witnesses is felt, but especially when the wind of Holocaust denial begins to blow strongly. Beginning in the 1980s, historians and social scientists became active, particularly in the United States, where holocaust sciences were to find a legitimate place in teaching and university

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<sup>1</sup> Published in : *Journal of Educational Sciences*, an XII n°2(34) 2016, pp. 20-31.

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<sup>3</sup> *Witness and Memory. The Discourse of Trauma*. A. Douglass et T.A. Vogler (dir.), NewYork and London, Routledge, 2003, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> We use the term - Great witnesses, to talk about the unique posture of these men, survivors of the Shoah, other authors, for example Régine Robin, uses the term Meta-witnesses, those that everyone knows. R. Robin, *La mémoire saturée*. Paris, Stock 2003, p.271

<sup>5</sup> R. Robin, *La mémoire saturée*. Paris, Stock 2003, p.243.

<sup>6</sup> Tadeusz Borowski (1922-1951), Polish writer, deported in 1943 to Auschwitz. His testimony, collection of the news, the world of stone appeared in Polish in 1945 and in French with the editions of Calmann-Lévy in 1964.

research. The "memory moment" is thus born. Researchers, historians, philosophers who have not known the war, appeal to witnesses, they address those who have never before witnessed<sup>7</sup>. Consequently, important collections of archives are constituted, some include more than 50,000 testimonials<sup>8</sup>. However, in spite of this, the memory of the past is more than ever facing new dangers of diversion, even destruction of meaning, falsification and abuse.

If Maurice Halbwachs could deplore the absence of social frameworks of memory in order to be able to account for traumatic events, today we are, on the contrary, confronted with the polyphonic memorial production that fits and fulfills the discursive fact of the multitude of unequal facts and yet placed "side by side". They are elaborated from the testimonies of the survivors of traumatic eventually incomparable. This discursive fact has become so broad, so multifaceted that it can contain everything and serve for different purposes including those opposed to those who have animated the intentions of the witnesses.

The purpose of this paper is to show how the memorial field constructed from testimonies of survivors of the Holocaust (direct witnesses) is gradually undergoing changes introduced by new witnesses who carry out an educational work of first order. We will consider here that the *new witnesses are those who have not seen anything live, including artists, children of direct witnesses who adopt a proxy witness position and express themselves in the public alert consciences.*

### **Direct witnesses - construction of a memorial field**

Before turning to the topic announced in the title, a small detour is needed to decide on the sociological figure of the witness, on the place and on the social role that the surviving witnesses (direct witnesses) have accomplished and still accomplish before their disappearance.

As Giorgio Agamben writes, *the witness is the one who remembers, who carries the memory*<sup>9</sup>. At the beginning, it is the one who is the eyewitness and direct witness of the facts, the one who has seen and often experienced them. The witnesses imposed themselves in our eyes in *the figure of survivor*. ... The twentieth century was without doubt the century of witnesses. The 21st century follows in the footsteps of it by broadening the scope of events and events that can give rise to testimony and direct our gaze to the past. The memories of colonization, deportations, carrying harsh experiences of hostages or terrorist attacks like that of September 11 in New York or Madrid, are introduced on the global, national or local memorial field. The saturation of the testimony, evoked by R. Robin, is waiting for us.

Since the First World War, gradually, first of all, the practice of epistolary testimony followed, after the second, the witnesses themselves appeared in the public space and later, legal (Eichmann's trial). From then on, a process of encounters, sometimes through traumatic confrontations, of the general public with direct witnesses who have lived the horror. The witnesses are no longer abstract figures, the missing, on the contrary, they have a face, a precise name, a life before and after horror. Facilitated first by the democratization of writing and then by the appearance of techniques of recording sound and image, testimony has resurrected before all a part of Western societies, not only the writings but also the voices and then the faces of the victims of the atrocities. The visual appearance of witnesses in the public space establishes and asks for a kind of resemblance between the victims and their audience. The question "why him and not me?" It arises for the audience, it abolishes the distinctions it questions the notion of destiny and chance. Reflection on these issues will be mobilized in the staging of commemorative exhibitions, such as the one at the Holocaust Museum in Washington.

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<sup>7</sup> E. Bogalska-Martin, « Témoins – victimes. Le sujet moderne – porteur de l'expérience et de la mémoire », Dans : *Victimes du présent, victimes du passé*. E. Bogalska-Martin (dir.), Paris, Harmattan 2004, p. 235.

<sup>8</sup> As an example Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies was founded in 1982 at Yale University. In 1989 it has 1400 visual testimonies recorded, in 1995 they are 3600. Other archives will be founded later as the foundation Spielberg - at the end of 1998 - 40 000 mobilizing several thousands of interviewees.

<sup>9</sup> G. Agamben, *Ce qui reste d'Auschwitz*, Paris, Payot et Rivages, 1999, p.31.

With the new means of communication, with the new memorial practices, the testimony ends by establishing a kind of proximity between those who lived and those who were willing to accept the meaning of their testimony. As a consequence, since the 1980s, although the visible signs of these changes have been visible since the 1960s, we are seeing an even broader sense of the concept of vulnerability and the victims.

Forty years ago, “the hairier” (in French : les poilus)<sup>10</sup>, often mute witnesses of the atrocities of trench warfare, came up against the problem of the absence of a frame of memory to accomplish the warning work that seems to be one of essential dimensions of witness. Their testimonies, save a few memorable publications<sup>11</sup>, have been condemned to remain confined in the intimate sphere. In the absence of frames of memory, the trauma experienced by “the hairier”, although rapidly recognized and qualified as traumatic psychosis by psychoanalysts, remained communicable between them, without being able to assert themselves and produce a collective effect of revelation. The few letters of hairier, published before the Second World War, did not have a large audience. In addition, they have not been able to escape (especially in Germany) the problem of misuse of meaning. It is perhaps not unimportant to note that the book by Ernst Jünger “War and Warriors”, published in 1930, in which the authors express their deepest attachment *to the art of war, the art for art*, an apotheosis of the German genius, became an apology for war. In this text, as sarcastically remarks Walter Benjamin, who published a poignant and premonitory critique of this state of mind, *the German* is presented as *the inheritor of the Greek mission and the mission of Greece was to bring forth heroes*<sup>12</sup>.

Things will look different after the Second World War. Before the Great Witnesses, survivors of the extermination universe, Primo Levi, Tadeusz Borowski, Robert Antelme, Elie Wiesel, to name a few, were able to publish their stories and find (often 10 to 15 years after the publication), many readers, eyewitnesses, those who often do not survive had already begun collecting memories. They were to facilitate the (still unfinished) work of revelation of the facts, a description of the world filled with barbarism. Annette Wieviorka recalls this reflection of Rinceaux on the attitudes of the inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto in the 1940s, *where everybody wrote*<sup>13</sup>. The Jews in the Warsaw ghetto were acutely conscious of the existence of exceptional horror events, they did not want to disappear without leaving traces. Difficult to ignore the importance of the imperative *you do remember* in the Jewish tradition to which answers their testimony often disappeared in the ashes of the ghetto burned by the German troops in 1943.

The activity of revelation, of collecting testimony, precedes the moment of advent of witnesses. This moment undoubtedly corresponds to the meeting between the witnesses and the general public, with those “who have not seen anything”. A. Wieviorka situates it at the time of Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in 1961. The turning point in the construction of the pedagogy of memory! Recorded, transmitted by television, instructed for pedagogical purposes, the trial was addressed to those who neither saw nor experienced the horrors organized by the adoption of the “final solution”. Selected by virtue of a true sociological vision of the universality of witnesses. They were, according to Gidéon Hausner's wish, to constitute a representative sample of an ordinary society, invited to the bar as eyewitnesses 111, witnesses already known from their writings. The witnesses quickly surpassed this framework set by the court of law. Their testimony, often contradictory at the level of the facts, was already marked by oblivion and by confrontation with that which was incorporated into their memories, not by lived experience, but by readings or encounters with others. The testimonies presented in Jerusalem have resurrected the globality of the world, *the planet Auschwitz*, organized by the Nazi authorities.

Thanks to the work of the first generation of direct witnesses, today we have an accurate view of the

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<sup>10</sup> The name given to the French soldiers of the first war.

<sup>11</sup> *Krieg und Krieger*. Ed. Ernst Jünger, Ed. Junker und Dünnhaupt, Berlin 1930. E. Jünger, *Orages d'acier*. Ed. Christian Bourgois 1970, G. Buckeridge, *Memoirs of My Army Service in the Grand War* Documents de l'Imperial War Museum

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Walter, *Théories du fascisme allemand*. Dans : Benjamin Walter, *Œuvres II*.Ed. Gallimard, Paris 2000, p. 219.

<sup>13</sup> A. Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin*. Pris, éd. Plon 1998, p.45.

facts, including their human dimension (feelings of shame for surviving, unavoidable conditions of survival). The traces of trauma are always visible and mark the life of one or even two generations who did not live at the time of the events. The tragic truth of the world of stone far outweighs the inhuman deeds experienced by the disappeared and the survivors.

We also owe to the first generation of direct witnesses the existence of a semantic basin, that is to say *the set of symbolic and archetypal crystallizations, all the mythical traces, perceived in a specific space and time, adapted to a context*. Composed of the words-images-archipelagos, coming from different languages: *Auschwitz, Drancy, Holocaust, Shoah, Lager, Nuremberg*, this basin gives access to the understanding of facts evoked but, at the same time, used as frame of reference. Has the power to introduce other facts into the memorial field. If it sheds light on historical facts and human experience, in the form of the discursive fact, which calls for interpretations and uses, it facilitates confusion, for even at the level of language, when everything becomes Auschwitz, the very meaning of this fact evades Understanding (comparison of French colonization in Algeria with a genocide by President A. Bouteflika in April 2006). We often find ourselves powerless to the trivialization of the facts described by the first witnesses, to confused comparisons, to abusive generalizations. However, the semantic basin constructed through testimonies is also composed of ordinary words, belonging to specific languages, which now convey a particular meaning: *selekcja* (in Polish), *heraus* (in German), *collaboration* (in French). These very ordinary words are definitely attached to the memorial field, and if we understand them we can be careful to avoid using them in other contexts.

Thus, gradually, by surpassing the imposed frameworks, that survivors of the Lager were able gradually, in particular, from the sixties, build the memory frames on the concentration camp universe, on the practices of genocide, and participate in the construction of a universal knowledge of these facts. Through an effect of social objectification, individual memories summoned to describe the world of the Shoah have become accessible and understood by the general public. A zone of inter-comprehension was thus established. The advent of witnesses constructs the memorial field encompassing all the facts of the past, but also opening up the capacity of reception of the new facts in connection with the structure of the field itself. The existence of this memorial field made possible the receipt of a set of facts relating to crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, violence and atrocities committed well after the end of the Second World War and often far from the 'Europe. For Philippe Mesnard, the Shoah *remains a reference from which other historical and political violence acquire legibility*<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, gradually, the constellation of a real memory field was born and it became independent. It is structured around the search for truth, around the fight against forgetting, it has a meaning as a frame of reference to be able to think of other phenomena related to barbarism, it aims at the pedagogy of memory.

This context of openness has had only positive effects. Is the particular, absolutely novel dimension of the Shoah becoming trivialized, or on the contrary crystallizing itself into an inimitable reference, absolute evil? Today, on the USC Shoah Foundation Institute website, we can view and hear the testimonies of survivors who link their experience of the Second World War with the tragic events of September 11, 2001. The broadening of the victim context place, the memorial field has found its independence.

The memorial field on which witnesses, historians, lawyers and politicians and listeners are activated is governed by the same rules as the other fields described by Pierre Bourdieu. *It is not enough to say that the history of the field is the history of the struggle for the monopoly of the imposition of categories of legitimate perception and appreciation; It is the struggle itself which makes the history of the field; It is by the struggle that it becomes temporalized. The aging of authors, works or schools is quite different from the product of a mechanical slippage in the past: it is engendered in the struggle between those who have made history and who struggle to last, and those who can not Date in turn without referring to the past those who have an interest in stopping time, to eternalize the*

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<sup>14</sup> P. Mesnard, *Consciences de la Shoah. Critique des discours et des représentations*. Paris, éd. Kimé, 2000, p.31.

present state (...) <sup>15</sup>.

## "We" survivors, victims and "others"

Primo Levi was the first to observe that *the survivors are not the true witnesses, they are an exception*<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, Levi suggests that the surviving witnesses are merely proxies, bearers of the memory of those who have remained locked in the fate of *destinyless beings*, to take up the metaphor of the title of a Hungarian writer's book Imre Kertész.

No wonder that in many testimonials, the posture "I" is transformed quickly and easily into "we" which becomes the true subject of testimony. *Are we good men?* - asks Borowski in "To the showers gentlemen-ladies"<sup>17</sup>. "We", me and you, the French comrade to whom he addresses this question in the text. "We" who have had to share the world of stone, but it is likely that this "we" already encompasses the listener, the one who will read.

Borowski knows that the legitimacy and strength of his testimony rests on this "we" and expresses it clearly: *we take off our bonnet before the SS returning from the forest; When they look at their lists, we go to death - and nothing. We die of hunger, in the rain, we are taken away from the nearest beings (...) And our unique weapon is our number that no gas chamber will contain.*<sup>18</sup> "We," the victims! Faced with "us", "them", "others", Germans, Nazis, executioners. A comforting and tragic alterity! With this "we", an enlargement of the victim's universal posture is made possible, but with this "we" abuse of this posture is not far.

In 1980 Alain Finkielkraut published a short book entitled "The Imaginary Jew" in which one dimension of the posture we have just described is described in these terms: *I had received the best gift that a child of the " After genocide. I inherited a suffering that I did not suffer; Of the persecuted I kept the character but I endured more oppression. I could enjoy, in all tranquility, an exceptional destiny. Without exposing myself to any real danger, I had the stature of a hero*<sup>19</sup>. In some ways, by the graft of an imaginary repository, we have all become German Jews, which the pedagogies of memory have allowed to settle in us. But where does resemblance end, how do we set limits to visible victim compassion everywhere? Does this resemblance has a meaning and contributes to freeing us from an ill-assumed guilt?

In Germany, since 1990 the history of the flight and expulsion of the Germans from the former territories of eastern Germany and central and Eastern Europe has become an important subject in the public debate. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the war, the Bund der Vertriebenen (Union of the Expellees) formulated plans to set up a centre for commemoration and exhibition on forced displacement in a central location in Berlin. In the Foundation created for this purpose we find survivors and witnesses such as Imre Kertész, a Hungarian Jew, the 2002 Nobel Prize for Literature. According to Wolfgang Bens, Director of the Center for Research on Anti-Semitism, This project was designed to counterbalance the monument to the memory of European murdered Jews. He speaks of *guilty pride that contrasts with the tearfulness of feeling victimized*<sup>20</sup>. Is it a confusion, an abuse that can eclipse the memory of the Shoah or, on the contrary, is it a legitimate recognition of the suffering of the ordinary Germans who have had to assume the disastrous political choices Their political elites and the consequences of the war lost on the military ground and on the land of values? Can we think, as the authors of the project do, that all victims of genocide and expulsion *need a place in our hearts and in our historical memory?* Where is the limit? What grid of reading can enable us to address the memory of the genocide and the expulsions that took place in 1945 and afterwards in the same field, in the same place, called "Centre against expulsion"? Does the German suffering counterbalance Jewish, Polish, Czech suffering? It seems to us that with these kinds of initiatives, we are confused.

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<sup>15</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art, Ibid*, Paris, Seuil 1998, p. 261

<sup>16</sup> P. Levi, *Les naufragés et les rescapés. Quarante ans après Auschwitz*. Paris, Gallimard, 1989, pp. 82-83.

<sup>17</sup> T. Borowski, *Le monde de pierre*, Paris, Calman-Levy, 1964, p.108.

<sup>18</sup> T. Borowski, *Chez nous à Auschwitz, op.cit.*, pp.137-138.

<sup>19</sup> A. Finkielkraut, *Le Juif imaginaire*. Paris, Seuil 1980, p.14.

<sup>20</sup> D. Heimler, *Allemagne et les expulsés, quel centre pour quelle mémoire ?*, Note du CERFA 34, juin 2006, p.8.

And yet in the Polish villages where the Poles and Germans have lived together for a long time, when the memory of expulsion from the latter is summoned by a historian concerned with the truth lived the testimony brought today by the Poles who saw this Departure brings an unexpected dimension. Some of the witnesses who witnessed this departure expressed sadness and pity for the women and children, neighbours, who were not always loved, but who had never been loved, in a cold, black night of December 1944. Never known another "homeland" (heimat) than this village in the hollow of the hill. This testimony brings to light the emotions of the shared suffering caused by the war lost in their relation to humanity for each other. What to do with this suffering? Do all the sufferings caused by war deserve commemoration? What is the true object of memory?

### **Generation change - new witnesses**

The surviving witness was, to some extent, still a bearer of *the true story*, but that said bearer does not say owner. The meaning of testimony rests, among other things, on the existence of the audience, on the transmission, on the creation of spaces of intercomprehension, on the construction of the memorial field that goes beyond the mere fact of testifying. To testify according to Enzo Traverso is an expression of *the ethical duty* that transforms states of consciousness<sup>21</sup>. This duty does not stop at the threshold of the new generation.

In a way, the passage of witnesses corresponds to the gift of trust awaiting responsibility in the fulfilment of the duty of remembrance. It is a moral legacy, the education of future generations. Those who have read, heard, who have seen the surviving witnesses, then become the heirs (voluntary or involuntary) of the memory. If we take Paul Ricœur's proposals, we can consider that the memorial field is composed of three memories: the living memory (that which corresponds to the lived experience of the direct witnesses), the public memory that circulates in the public space. Between the two lies the memory of loved ones, those who have had access often be legitimated by an emotional bond, to bear this memory. In turn, they are introduced into an expanded memorial field, they become the new witnesses. The memorial field carries a bond that is woven between generations and whose watchword is Biblical "you have to remember".

If the victim witnesses, the survivors, had suffered a traumatic shock due to their direct victim status, the new witnesses, those who have not lived, are not yet unharmed. For some, it was a ricochet shock (they shared the world of their loved ones, talkative or silent survivors, they are their children, or grandchildren) for others (artists, researchers) Is a trauma that we propose to call *reflexive one*. It is relative to the state of shock produced by the need to understand the incomprehensible.

The new witnesses do not carry the experience around which the memorial field is articulated, but they also have a personal relationship with this field. They are bearers and guardians of the memory and the meaning that it carries, but they question it in their own way. They are not only the new proxies, their role is not limited to the protection of meaning, to the struggle against the trivialization of evil, they seek to open the memorial field on the new dimensions to complement it. Somewhere they personalize and singularize their relation to the past. It seems to us that the particularity of positioning of the new witnesses rests on the adoption of the posture of the "reflective subject". *The preliminary act for the constitution of new witnesses is an act of understanding*. It was made possible through the work of direct witnesses of survivors. Their testimony is the first instance of legitimacy for everything that can be said, written, explained. On the other hand, by adopting a reflexive posture, new witnesses introduce memory into their relationship with the present and, above all, with the future of humanity.

We consider that the act of understanding, a preliminary fact for the appearance of new witnesses,

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<sup>21</sup> . Traverso, *Pour une critique de la barbarie moderne. Ecrits sur l'histoire des Juifs et l'antisémitisme*. Lausanne, éd. Page deux, 1997, p.111.

encompasses several facts. It has a *cognitive dimension*, the facts are there they are real, they can not be contradicted or deleted. And yet so often the Holocaust deniers do. It also has a *moral dimension*, nothing can excuse the facts committed, the evil they contain is contrary to all human principles. But the essence of this understanding rests on the fact that it carries within it the reference to ethics suggested by E. Levinas, it erases the distinction between "me" and "the other" and opens an area of responsibility for the future.

After understanding their own vulnerability and considering the reversibility of the postures of victims, between those who have been trapped in history by the mere chance of being born a Jew *at that time* and themselves, the new witnesses now pose new issues that relate to those ordinary people who have accomplished, accepted, closed their eyes to the crimes of the past. In turn, they seek the answers to the questions that all the witnesses have already asked, how this was possible and, above all, how to avoid the reproduction of such facts? When questioned by Anna Bravo, Primo Levi answered that he was not able to answer these questions<sup>22</sup>. And yet these are essential questions, to which people who care about the future of humanity are seeking answers. The understanding of the past must illuminate the future; it must be open to what Emmanuel Macron names *the darkroom and the forgetfulness of stockpile*<sup>23</sup>.

After having established the memory of the victims, we find in the darkroom, which preserves the forgetfulness of reserve, the figure of the allegedly guilty Germans, then we discover those who were opponents of the regime, even victims. The light lit by the new witnesses brings Schindler out of the shadow, then this German officer who had helped the pianist Szpilman whose story is the subject of Roman Polanski's film. Through the staging of their figures, new witnesses, contemporary artists seek to rebalance the content of memory, to break the established framework. There were good Germans, they say. Is it then that one finds them among the victims of the regime and the war that had to be delivered to him?

In his book of memories, intellectual autobiography; The German philosopher Hans Jonas quotes a letter from his old friend, a painter, a soldier in the German army, who, during the war, wrote to his wife in 1943: *after what I saw of the destruction of the early times, I can give me an idea of the destructions of the last days, I can get an idea of what the precious Cologne looks like. Yes, a people who admitted the destruction of the Jewish churches does not deserve to own its traditional churches either*<sup>24</sup>. Further in the same text, Jonas recalls his memories of his return to Germany in 1945 as a sergeant in the Jewish brigade (created in 1944) in the British army. Many German friends have lived the war in Germany while being aware of the sinking of the German people with a strong feeling of guilt, others on the contrary, despite the defeat that points to the horizon, do not want to acknowledge having participated Traumatic events. However, we are only in 1945, the principle of collective German responsibility is not yet elaborated. The Manichean conception of memory can not be taken for the whole truth.

To enter the darkroom leads is to open the memorial field to the memories of ordinary people, and to recognize the plurality of these memories.

The question of *the ordinary men* of their responsibility opens up very gradually. It is a reorientation of the gaze to construct a new logic of resemblances. The memory of ordinary people can be seen in the new stories, books, mostly from the late 1980s onwards, and most recently. They now illuminate the past on the side of the alleged culprits, on the side of the executioners. The vigilance of the memory is oriented towards the new interrogation, it is detached from the questioning on the reproducibility of the destiny victim and, what we have called the enlargement of the context of vulnerability, it focuses on the reproducibility of the conduct Of ordinary executioners. This problem was introduced already by Hannah Arendt when she speaks of "the banality of evil".

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<sup>22</sup> P. Levi, *Le Devoir de mémoire*, Paris, Mille et une Nuits, 1995, p.40-41

<sup>23</sup> E. Macron, « La lumière blanche du passé. La lecture de la "mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli" de Paul Ricœur », *Esprit*, n° 8-9, août-septembre 2000, p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> H. Jonas, *Souvenirs*, Paris, Bibliothèque Rivages 2005, p.166.



Although the subject was not completely absent before, the great breach was opened by Christopher Browning in 1992. *The ordinary men* of the 101st reserve battalion of the German police whom he describes from their own notebooks and narratives, Volunteered to participate in the eradication of Jews, shot and buried in mass graves in the forests of northern Poland. These soldiers, civilian accountants, teachers, workers, craftsmen, sometimes suffered from doing their dirty work, they had a stomach ache, sometimes they cried, but in general they assumed their missions and killed 38 thousand people. After considering all the scientific explanations now known (Milgram effect, Chomsky effect), the lesson Browning draws from his inquiry is more than disturbing, it is summarized in the last sentence of his book *if the men of the 101st Reserve Police Battalion Were able to become killers, what human group could not?*<sup>25</sup>. When Tadeusz Borowski in Auschwitz asked his question, *are we good men ?*, he already foresaw the ambiguity of the answer "side victims". This ambiguity is reinforced in light of Browning's work but this time, the "executioner side".

The vulnerability of potential victims, which we have so well understood through testimonies of the first generation, turns into vulnerability of the executioners (and the potential executioners) who make us discover the new witnesses. The vulnerability of potential victims, which we have so well understood through testimonies of the first generation, turns into vulnerability of the executioners (and the potential executioners) who make us discover the new witnesses. This is also the message of Jonathan Littell's book "The Benevolent" whose hero is an intellectual, academic, modern and respectable man, capable of a clear and lucid thought<sup>26</sup>. This is also the message of Jonathan Littell's book "The Benevolent," whose hero is an intellectual, academic, modern and respectable man, capable of a clear and lucid thought.

Littell's book begins with an appeal to the new witnesses: *Human Brothers, let me tell you how it happened. We are not your brother, you will retort, and you do not want to know. And it is true that it is a dark story, but also edifying, a true moral tale, I assure you. It may be a bit long, after all, a lot has happened, but if you're in a hurry, with a bit of luck, you have time. And then it concerns you: you will see that it concerns you.* Reader is invited to discover the world of cruel realities or to rediscover what he already knew. The hero is constructed in such a way that he resembles us to such an extent that often a reader can not finish this terrible book.

How then can one grasp this discovery without resorting to the concept of the Nietzschean superman? This is the fundamental question posed by Zygmunt Bauman in his book "Modernity and Holocaust"<sup>27</sup>. How do we build our world if we still do not know how to assume responsibility for the future? How can we deconstruct the modernity that produces mass crimes, genocides, victims and ... torturers? During the controversy and debate that had arisen after the awarding of Goncourt prizes to Jonathan Littell, one of the readers who wrote on a discussion forum: *I was in my thirties, so I did not live the Nazi period and I have no reason to complain of it. On the other hand, I am not asking myself about morbid fascination for genocide, but because I wonder what the springs were. I did not like the Lanzmann Shoah (which I watched as part of the college curriculum, so I was not asked my opinion), and I will not say that I like "The Benevolent" Which I read this time on my own initiative. But I simply find them both indispensable. They contribute to making me know the facts, to insert them in a context, and in a way to understand them without approving them (31/03/2007).* This reader affirms his posture of the new witness, the aspirant to understand.

In 2006, Günter Grass, Nobel Prize winner in 1999, published a book "Beim Häuten der Zwiebel"<sup>28</sup>, the content of which and the discussions that followed it are very exemplary of the problems raised by the appearance of new witnesses.

By disclosing his status as an ancient Waffen-SS in this autobiographical narrative, Grass, considered until then to be the embodiment of the moral conscience of good Germany, puts the should in the meshing of ambiguities experienced by him and those Contemporaries in the war years. It also

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<sup>25</sup> Ch. Browning, *Des hommes ordinaires*. Paris, les belles lettres, 1994, p. 248.

<sup>26</sup> J. Littell, *Les Bienveillantes*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Z. Bauman, *Modernity et holocauste*, Paris, la fabrique éditions, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> G. Grass, *Pelures d'oignon*, Paris, Seuil 2007.

raises the problem of interpretation of the facts and moral judgments that deal with the German past. Speaking in a literary program in German television in 2006, after the publication of his book, Günter Grass spoke of the feeling of shame that has lived since, but also of its consequences, that is to say choice and commitments alongside the good he did after the war when he understood the meaning of his youthful deeds. This testimony calls for recognition of the power of redemption, for man's ability to correct his faults, and to build good from evil. Rare were these compatriots who wanted to hear this message. The Manichean conception of history dominates thought over the past. In Germany, as elsewhere, notably in Poland, some voices have risen to demand the withdrawal of the Nobel Prize from Grass, others have given their support, thus showing admiration for the author's courage. Indeed, we must have the courage to publicly admit this type of *youthful fault* and to bring down the mask of innocence, and thus, as the great witnesses-victims have done, to express the vulnerability of the man who had to live the terrible times and did not understand his responsibility to the forces of evil.

Is it necessary *to weep and peel the onions* to identify the memories that illuminate the complexity of human destiny, the radicality of choices that man, as a historical actor, can be confronted with, the vigilance necessary not to be enclosed in a flock of Sheep and not only when German? The reflection on the social production of the executioners is as important today as that which allowed us to understand the production of the victims. We need courageous witnesses to illuminate the path.

## Conclusion

The appearance of the new witnesses, they repeat, are often artists belonging to the second, see third generations after the war, bearers of the memory of the executioners, complexifies the memorial field. It brings new elements, memories that were absent or obscured by the dominant discourse in the 60s and even 80s. Philippe Mesnard speaks of the norm due to the expectations that newcomers must meet on the field. Borowski wrote in the camp, *I do not know if we will survive, but I wish that we could one day call things by their true name, as courageous people do*<sup>29</sup>, this necessity has never lost its importance, even if today we have to face the disturbing vision of ourselves.

Ana Douglass emphasizes *that memory can be valued as a form of authentic knowledge based on direct experience that can be validated only at the individual level. It is contrary to the notion of history which corresponds to the discursive project, always transformed and inferior to memory*<sup>30</sup>. The witnesses, the survivors, testified. These testimonies await us in the archives; others still have to be recorded. Future generations must not be misled in their uses and interpretations. What is happening in Poland, Hungary and Slovakia in the context of a return to the disturbed past of the Communist era, on possible or likely collaborations between some (priests, politicians at the head of the opposition movement, in Poland, Lech Walesa) and others (artists, such as Milan Kundera, suspected of being collaborators) with the regimes in place, is a good example of the lack of vigilance, possible and accepted drifts, of the historians of these countries.

*Today, less than at any other time, the Holocaust is a private property (if ever it was). It is not the property of its authors liable to suffer a punishment; Nor that of its direct victims, who might demand a particular compassion, favors, or indulgence in memory of past sufferings; Nor that of his witnesses, in search of an expiation or certificates of innocence. The present meaning of the Holocaust is the lesson it contains for all mankind. This long quotation from Bauman underscores the immensity of the responsibility of new witnesses. It is as great as that of the survivors who, at the risk of their lives or the permanent renewal of traumas enclosed in their memories, have told their story as a warning for future generations*<sup>31</sup>. This long quotation from Bauman underscores the immensity of the responsibility of new witnesses. It is as great as that of the survivors who, at the risk of their lives or the constant renewal of trauma locked in their memories, have told their story as a warning to future

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<sup>29</sup> T. Borowski, *Chez nous à Auschwitz*, op.cit., p. 147.

<sup>30</sup> A. Douglass, « Introduction », dans : *Witness and Memory. The Discourse of Trauma*, op.cit. p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> Z. Bauman, op.cit. p. 253.

generations.

Today it is a question of removing the victim spectre from humanity, but also of understanding and elaborating social, legal, political and moral frameworks so that we can protect the future against enlargement of the figure Of executioners. And there we are even more destitute.

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