Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant and Robert Eaglestone (eds), The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism. Jane Kilby and Antony Rowland (eds), The Future of Testimony: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Witnessing.

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In her introduction to one of the most prominent foundational texts of trauma studies, and while offering her much debated reading of Tasso’s story of Tancred and Clorinda, Cathy Caruth wrote of the ways the traumatic experience can be voiced “not as the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past, but as the story of the way in which one’s trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another” (8). In the years to follow, however, and regardless of the catalytic influence of Caruth’s writings in the proliferation of trauma studies, this inherently connective, analogy-dependent and essentially productive approach seemed to be neglected and fade, to the extent that, as Stef Craps rightly notes in one of the essays included in The Future of Trauma Theory, “the founding texts of the field … largely fail to live up to this promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement” (46). In effect, the early years of trauma studies’ rapid growth, particularly in relation to the field’s integral tie to the so-called “memory boom,” were inexorably dominated by assertions of uniqueness and unprecedented-ness, specifically related to the event lying at these explorations’ core, the Holocaust.
Nonetheless, as is often acknowledged by scholars in the field, trauma studies in the 21st century is not what it used to be twenty years ago. While continuously preoccupied with the problematic of incommensurability that characterises the historical event in question, and invariably attempting to tackle the questions of (un)representability or ineffability of these occurrences, trauma and memory studies continually expand and redefine their parameters in a manner that underlines their multidisciplinary nature, constantly informed by the disciplines that are germane to the field and consistently reshaped by the theoretical turns that permeate these disciplines. More specifically, the urgency instilled by the persistent acts of atrocity and persecution already haunting the twenty-first century, therise of genocide studies, as well as memory studies’ turn towards the transnational or transcultural, the postcolonial or the affective, has resulted in a renewed emphasis on trauma’s comparative or analogue nature, the prompt acknowledgment that the singular is not tantamount to the unique. The most eloquent example of this shift is provided, again, through the study of the Holocaust which, “in the transnational movement of memory discourses,” as Andreas Huyssen observes, “loses its quality as index of the specific historical event and begins to function as metaphor for other traumatic memories and histories. … a powerful prism through which we may look at other instances of genocide” (14).

Routledge’s 2014 additions to the “Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Literature” series, entitled The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism and The Future of Testimony: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Witnessing, constitute a powerful demonstration of trauma theory’s infiltration of and interaction with numerous clusters and disciplines ranging from history and sociology, to cultural or literary studies, psychoanalysis and the arts. They reveal the field’s multiple nuances in the most eloquent fashion and trace the development of new models and paradigms seeking to address the turbulence of our times, starting precisely from trauma being perceived as a “knot,” a “point of intersection,” as per the editors of the former, and confluence. Most importantly, the selection of essays included in both volumes, and the multiple instances of suffering they address, resonate with the transcultural encounters effectuated by trauma and memory studies in the 21st century and pointedly depict the transcendence of—predominantly geopolitical—boundaries, the introduction of the non-Western traumatized subject into the analogy, and, eventually, the multidirectionality or connective quality of the traumatic experience.

The Future of Trauma Theory unfolds around the suggestion that “issues of trauma theory are characterized by a ‘knot’ tying together representation, the past, the self, the political and suffering” (4) and is divided into two parts: “History and Culture” and “Politics and Subjectivity.” The two inaugurating chapters of the book, Robert Eaglestone’s “Knowledge, ‘Afterwardness’ and the Future of Trauma Theory,” and Dominick LaCapra’s “Fascism and the Sacred: Sites of Inquiry After (or along with) Trauma” return to the Holocaust and renew the event’s power as a source of productive analysis. Eaglestone looks into Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death, the memoir of Otto Dov Kulka, with a view to discussing the ways in which trauma profoundly influences our sense of temporality and bears characteristics that may relate to a wider range of fields and disciplines, “imported into the wider humanities” (17), while also directly pertaining to a “structure of experience” that may be appropriated to examine other, non-traumatic texts. LaCapra uses Derrida’s “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone” to introduce the sacred, purification and regeneration into discussions on...
the Holocaust—specifically in the case of perpetrators—and argue that “the Nazi genocide may have involved ‘religious,’ purifying, apocalyptic, regenerative, even redemptive dimensions” (35), a “postsecular” prism that differs substantially from assertions of barbarism on the part of the Nazis and their collaborators, and points to an “intricate dimension of ‘modernity’” (36).

5 Chapters three to five offer a “productive counterpoint” (5), as the editors put it, to these discussions and, in a sense, point the reader to the core of the future direction of trauma studies by embracing the globalised, transcultural turn of the field and artfully taking the argument further, to the non-Western world. Stef Craps’s “Beyond Eurocentrism: Trauma Theory in the Global Age” is arguably the essay that most clearly and most eloquently presents the failure of trauma studies to deliver the promise of a wider cultural engagement, the marginalization and exclusion of non-Western traumatic experiences that result from the Eurocentric approach to trauma over the past two decades, and the consequent inherent risk of “assisting in the perpetuation of the very beliefs, practices and structures that maintain existing injustices and inequalities” (46). To this end—and while exemplifying his arguments through an analysis of Aminatta Forna’s *The Memory of Love* (2010), a trauma narrative set against the war in Sierra Leone—Craps criticizes Caruth’s reading of *Hiroshima, Mon Amour*, argues against the commonly held notion that trauma narratives are narratives of ‘impossibility’ and, thus, necessitate a format of fragmentation, and advocates the adoption of a theory where “the specific social and historical contexts in which trauma narratives are produced and received” (51) are taken into consideration.

6 Moving along similar lines, Ananya Jahanara Kabir’s “Affect, Body, Place: Trauma Theory in the World” seeks to investigate the blind spots created by trauma theory’s emergence from and development around a Eurocentric, Holocaust-focusing approach, by turning to mnemonic practices in India, Angola, Cambodia and Iraq. Kabir offers a fascinating analysis of the ways certain genres, such as poetry, the lyrical song or vernacular mythopoeoses, resist incorporation into a teleological testimonial narrative of the traumatic past, and turns our attention to the complex “affect clusters” (66) rising from kinetic or somatic acts of remembrance. In effect, she purports, models that promote overlapping and co-existing—yet not competitive or contesting—modes of remembrance, such as Michael Rothberg’s “multidirectional memory,” may compensate for the lacunae created by restrictions to a specific cultural context; still, it is necessary that “the body ... be returned to the centre-stage of analysis,” as a way of reviving the original meaning of trauma as a bodily wound, but also while taking into consideration that “the body does not exist in a vacuum: its return to the space of trauma is an act of reclamation” (72).

7 The necessity for non-linear, experimental testimonial narratives is also invoked in the fifth chapter of the volume, Nouri Gana’s “Trauma Ties: Chiasmus and Community in Lebanese Civil War Literature.” The essay starts with a warning against the canonization or institutionalization of violence and an admonition towards making a clear distinction between structural and historical trauma. While reading Elias Khouri’s *City Gates* (2007), Gana writes of the necessity for sense-making counter-narratives that will address the complexity of representing the traumatic experience without the risk of “legitimizing the very structural dominion of violence [they] set(s) out to denounce” (78). Such narratives, Gana argues, exhibit a “poetics of occlosure” manifest in the “chiastic oscillation” (79) between the magnitude of the traumatic experience and its unrepresentability, between the traumatized community and the empathy-related stranger, between the need for
closure and its impossibility, between fragmentation or the collapse of the narrative voice and recognition or acknowledgement. “Chiasmus is the figure of traumatic survival and vulnerability. Above all, it is the figure of connectivity between an *emurgent* (urgent and emergent) sense of post-traumatic subjectivity and an apprehensive revival of community” (88).

8 The sixth chapter of this collection, Sam Durrant’s “Undoing Sovereignty: Towards a Theory of Critical Mourning,” bridges the two parts of the volume as it discusses the biopolitical turn of trauma studies and argues that post-colonial practices of mourning and remembrance structurally reproduce the “pre-colonial homeland as an ideal, non-alienated state” (98), thus pertaining to processes of subjection. Following Judith Butler’s ruminations on the post 9/11 sense of vulnerability—as expressed in *Precarious Life*—as well as Walter Benjamin’s writings on modernity, Klee’s *Angelus Novus* and the dialectical image, Durrant suggests that “the end of trauma theory (its purpose, future, utopian horizon) is something like a shared consciousness of our common corporeal vulnerability” (94), and aims at theorizing “a properly critical mourning, a mourning that works to undo not simply the ‘idea of the sovereign subject’ but sovereignty itself” (94). To this end, he turns to poetry, the epic form and the realm of aesthetics in general, in parallel to the hearings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to contend that the artwork—specifically the dialectic process by which it performs both a revelation and a concealment of the traumatic event it addresses—constitutes the form that best enables the testimonial narrative to be corporealized and evolve into an empowering drive that may “allow the nation to move on” (105).

9 The issues discussed by Durrant are further elaborated in the following chapters that are grouped together under the general title “Politics and Subjectivity,” and are concerned with refugees and human rights, biopolitics, the relation between the individual and the community, personhood and subjectivity, thus tracing more shapes and manifestations both of human suffering and of the numerous directions the future of trauma studies holds. The genealogy of the discipline, as well as the connection of histories, is maintained by Lyndsey Stonebridge who, in “‘That Which You Are Denying us’: Refugees, Rights and Writing in Arendt,” contends that the deprivation of human rights in contemporary detention centers is directly associated to the concentration camps and the “legal limbo” experienced by the Jews. Taking the lead from Hannah Arendt’s writings on the ‘stateless’ and by way of reading Kafka’s *The Castle*, Stonebridge aligns herself in perfect accord with the other contributors to the book arguing in favor of trauma studies’ moving away from Eurocentric mnemonic models and “towards the traumas that exist beyond” (122). In consolidation of her arguments she reads refugee writing and detects a lyricism that, impressively, is pointedly reminiscent of the loss of language experienced by the stateless—as per Arendt—while at the same time introducing the idea of “a new kind of human beings” that, deprived of their “linguistic anchorage to nation and tradition” (115), bring forward humanity in its most fundamental sense.

10 Chapters eight and nine investigate further manifestations and senses of personhood and the biopolitical by drawing predominantly from the theories of Giorgio Agamben, among others. Jenny Edkins’s “Time, Personhood, Politics” stems from the writer’s own formulation of “trauma time,” a concept developed in her book *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, to discuss the ways in which traumatic temporality throws the linear time-dependent, sovereign power narratives into question. Edkins here returns to this notion

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with a view to suggesting that, by establishing a permanent state of exception, “the state has, arguably, attempted to take control of trauma time” (127), and uses Agamben’s contrast between “chronological time” and “messianic” or “operational time” to delineate the relations between personhood and the political. Edkins’s analysis of the ontically, ontologically, politically or biopolitically “missing person,” as well as her perception of the “neighbour,” which she defines as “the personhood that is missing in sovereign politics” (137)—and, therefore, a powerful figure of resistance—is truly intriguing, even though, perhaps, a clearer distinction between the operations and particularities of collective and individual trauma might be needed at times. Pieter Vermeulen’s more vigorous “The Biopolitics of Trauma” offers an analysis of a recontextualisation of trauma within biopolitics by shifting the focus to the former’s inherent connection to suffering and vulnerability and, thus, bringing to the fore issues of recrimination; “the drive to eradicate the effects of suffering ends up reaffirming the logic of violence” (141), writes Vermeulen. In order to construct his argument, the author turns, again, to Agamben, to trace the limitations presented by his writings, as well as Michel Foucault, whose formulations the author uses to foster the connections between trauma and modernity and reinforce his thesis, but also Roberto Esposito’s notions of communitas and immunitas, particularly their inseparability. In effect, according to Vermeulen, the perception of trauma through these lenses and specifically the situation of the field within the domain of biopolitics may, significantly, result in a formation where “trauma not only names a threat to life, but also functions as a technology that sustains and optimizes it” (143).

If Edkins and Vermeulen discuss subjectivity in its contemporary manifestations, Roger Luckhurst’s concluding chapter of the collection, entitled “Future Shock: Science Fiction and the Trauma Paradigm” literally brings trauma into the future. While preoccupation with the detection of “an appropriate aesthetics for the representation of trauma” (159) has resulted in a pointed neglect of the future and an indifference towards cultural forms such as science fiction, Luckhurst rightly argues, this genre, particularly “hard SF,” and the post-human, imagined future it depicts, may actually provide a schema that will enable a fertile exploration of this multivalent domain in ways that the preferred modernist narratives cannot achieve. To this end, Luckhurst looks into the works of J. G. Ballard, and Kurt Vonnegurt and proceeds with more detailed analyses of John Brunner’s The Shockwave Rider (1975) and William Gibson’s Pattern Recognition (2003) to suggest that SF operates in conjunction to contemporary technological, neurological or scientific understandings of trauma. In the writer’s own words, “[h]ard SF fictions ... explore a side of the multiform discourse of trauma that cultural and literary studies have been uncertain or even censorious about addressing ... these visions challenge us to address the rapid development of new scientific understandings that are likely to reconceptualize notions of trauma in the very near future” (166).

A propos Luckhurst’s article, particularly in relation to his interest in the ways trauma dismantles human consciousness and transforms subjectivity, it is interesting to note that the distinction between historical or collective and individual trauma that the author persistently maintains in his work, is not apparent in this collection. While not specifically mentioned or directly suggested, The Future of Trauma Studies seems to acquire a particularly (trans)cultural collective dimension that diverges from manifestations of everyday abuse and coincides mostly with historical or structural trauma. The political urgency of the present times notwithstanding and far from amounting to a failing or an
omission, this emergent tendency arguably constitutes an eloquent expression of cultural trauma’s dovetailing of the private with the public, of the ways in which the individual is integrally linked to the collective. This impression is further reinforced in the other volume of the series, *The Future of Testimony*, that by definition narrows the aperture to focus on the individual, the witness, while addressing a multitude of victims in a wide variety of contexts, including the former Yugoslavia, post 9-11 America, Gaza or Rwanda, as well as the Holocaust. In fact, if, as Dirk Moses has suggested, “[o]ver the past sixty years … the original master category, genocide, was replaced by a new one, Holocaust. Yet recent research is returning to the Lemkian origins of the concepts by stressing the links between the Holocaust and other instances of ethnically motivated mass murder and extermination” (535).

The essays included in both these collections unequivocally testify to such a shift.

13 *The Future of Testimony*, as its editors purport, is a direct result of a wide variety of critical developments, predominantly the rapid rise of human rights discourse, but also the renewed cultural interest in the perpetrators of mass violence, the torrential emergence of testimonial narratives and memoirs, and, by all means, the growth of genocide studies. In consonance to the essays included in the volume discussed above, contributors to this collection firmly acknowledge the fact that “violence and suffering have both changed and remained the same, thus requiring a continual engagement with history alongside exploration of the contemporary world” (1); most importantly, they resolutely underline the necessity to reach beyond the Western tradition and Eurocentric narratives. Mapping the future of testimony, as Jane Kilby and Anthony Rowland suggest, presupposes turning to the—indispensable even when inadequate—supplement of language as well as literature, albeit not necessarily maintaining the relations promoted by Felman and Laub at the advent of trauma studies. Yet, engaging with testimony in the 21st century also consists in (following Robert Eaglestone’s article discussed above) mapping “the affective, biographical, experiential and psychic forces at work when witnessing” (3), in addressing the political questions raised, in considering issues of formalism and genre. The essays included in this volume approach the multiple nuances of these stakes in diverse yet equally challenging manners and provide an intriguing kaleidoscope of the forms and shapes testimony is acquiring nowadays.

14 The first part of the volume, entitled “Witnessing in Psychoanalysis and History,” comprises five chapters that clearly and concisely remind the reader of the issues and debates that have permeated discussions on testimony and witnessing in the past decades, while echoing the more recent developments and pointing to some compelling new concepts. Dan Stone’s “History, Memory, Testimony” starts with a word of caution against the “blurring of history and memory in recent years” (17) and elaborates both on the former’s relation to the past as opposed to the latter’s orientation towards the future, and on the ways in which history is oriented towards retrieving and representing the truth while memory is related to the construction of an identity. In formulating his arguments, Stone turns to all the major critical thinkers of these fields and succinctly retraces the foundational scholarly work on the subject. Arendt’s rejection of survivor testimony as a means of perpetuating the horror of the event is discussed alongside Aleida Assman’s observations on the permeability of the past through the inclusion of “personal voices” in historiography; Felman and Laub’s “crisis of testimony” is presented together with Paul Ricoeur, Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Judith Butler and Hayden White or Wulf Kansteiner’s work, to name but a few; the arguments for and against the
inclusion of testimony in historiography are clearly and eloquently placed in a dialogic exchange and so are the concerns phrased in relation to the “banalisation of trauma,” testimony’s resistance to historisation, or the inherent risk of reiterating antagonism “as old grievances are given a new lease of life” (27). In effect, Stone concludes as a result of this impressive delineation of issues and debates, “testimonies ... should be read as monuments” (24); “whatever the methodological and cultural differences between history and memory, both have a duty to engage with testimony ... actually, without testimony, neither history nor memory has any meaning. At the root of history is the eyewitness, and at the heart of memory is the individual’s account” (27).

Chapters two and three arguably constitute one of the volume’s most powerful and invigorating features, as they reproduce Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman’s exchange on Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever* (*Mal d’archive*). Caruth’s “After the End: Psychoanalysis in the Ashes of History,” a preview, in a sense, of the thinker’s latest book, reads Derrida through his references to Freud’s writings and contends that, when read together with *The Interpretation of Dreams*, this text “ultimately enable[s] a rethinking of the very nature of history around the possibility of its erasure” (31). To this end, Caruth discusses the archival drive as integrally connected to the tenets of psychoanalysis since, particularly in relation to the traumatic events that have been silenced or erased, both the archive and psychoanalysis are concerned with the hidden or the repressed; and submits that what we are dealing with is “a collective history that is beginning to disappear even as it is being produced” (36). Admittedly, Caruth’s discussion of the “disappearing history” strongly resembles her previous perception of history as an unclaimed experience, and signals, in fact, a return to her proposition that history is trauma, rather than a move forward addressing the political complications of the 21st century or the precarious position of the “implicated subjects” and the numerous other points of concern raised as a result of her previous work. Nevertheless, her analysis of these texts offers an insightful close reading and a thought-provoking working hypothesis.

Felman’s “Fire in the Archive: the Alignment of Witnesses,” on the other hand, makes a significant contribution to the future of testimony by introducing the concept of “alignment” and elaborating on the workings of a chain of witnesses. Felman embarks on her discussion starting with the premise that “the archive is not testimony, but it is what remains as documentary records from the testimonies, once they are deposited in an external place, in a collection of documents” (48); and she reminds us that, as suggested in Derrida, “there would be no archive without the possibility (and danger) of forgetfulness” (49). What is most interesting in this chapter is that Felman bases her analysis on Derrida’s original French text. She points to the page missing from the English edition (*Prière d’insérer*) to make a connection to the Holocaust and—following a reference to Arendt and Kafka—proceeds to present *Mal d’archive* as a “palimpsest of texts” (53) that, in effect, constitutes a “chain of witnesses” (54). The formation of this chain, according to Felman, is effectuated by each writer inscribing their own present in their (re)interpretation of the past and, thus, aligning “with the horror experienced by previous witnesses” (54), in a gesture that is highly reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s “art of repeating stories” (56) and renders testimony an act of salvaging the dead from oblivion, “from their annihilation and their dehumanization” (66).

Chapter four, Robert Eaglestone’s “The Public Secret,” as well as chapter five, Kirsten Campbell’s “Testimonial Modes: Witnessing, Evidence and Testimony Before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia” take the issue further, by
investigating distinctly different testimonial texts. Eaglestone starts his discussion with an elaboration of the concepts of “public secret” and “passive complicity” and an extended reference to the ways these notions are manifest as “secrecy ... at the core of social formations” (72), by example of the German silence that surrounded the Holocaust. He then turns to a work of literature, Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005), and constructs a peculiar yet intriguing metaphor whereby the story of the clones in the novel—specifically their creation with a view to extermination—actually constitutes an instance of genocide; and the workings and repercussions of the silence surrounding their fate delineates both the concept of “public secret” and the sort of “un-community” the sharing of such a secret creates. Campbell, then, moves from the literary to the literal and investigates what might be termed as factual or evidentiary text, namely the minutes of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) trying two sexual violence cases. Campbell traces these testimonial modes by engaging in a systematic analysis of each case that pertains to the witness, the defense, the persecutor, as well as the tribunal itself and concludes with delineating four kinds of testimony: testimony as experience, testimony as fallibility, testimony as truth and testimony as evidence respectively. Quite interestingly, she also focuses on the cultural factors and communal ties permeating these testimonies and underlines their paradoxical position since “testimony in such international trials describes and relies upon shared communities, while also demonstrating the broken social relations of conflict” (105).

The second part of the volume, entitled “Beyond Western Testimony” comprises four chapters that are equally diverse in breadth and scope while, nonetheless, commonly addressing the functions and value of literature in the inscription and dissemination of testimony, and consistently reiterating the necessity to move beyond a Eurocentric focus of analysis. Lyndsey Stonebridge makes another contribution that maintains the correlations suggested in her article mentioned earlier, yet, rather than focusing on the particular qualities of refugee writing, examines the ways in which such (testimonial) writings preserve the memory of horror and transform it into a “cause of the drive to rights legislation” (115). “Hannah Arendt’s Message of Ill-Tidings: Stateless, Rights and Speech” takes the lead, again, from the thinker’s writings, specifically her reference to Gurs detention camp, to discuss the stateless people’s “right to have rights” (117) as directly linked to testimony and, more concretely, speech. Speech, according to Stonebridge, may lead to “an anthropological figuring of ethical obligation” (122) and, thus, by listening to “the voice of the poets,” as per Arendt, we may productively reconstruct the human condition “out of the ashes of the rights of man” (126).

Chapters seven and eight address the question of witnessing and, while also raising issues of aesthetic rendition and representation, introduce the concept of “hybrid testimony” whereby professional witnesses—writers, for instance, or (photo)journalists, forensic experts and people working in human rights or charity aid organizations—inscribe the voice of the victims. Interestingly, “hybrid testimony” differs from the “second-degree witnessing” that Felman and Laub discuss in their foundational *Testimony*—an eloquent example of which is Claude Lanzmann’s documentary *Shoah*—in that the authors do not merely transcribe the testimony of the victims, but also assist in the process of articulation and cultural interpretation, predominantly in a post-colonial context. Accordingly, the authorial interventions with the diction and phrasing, and the consequent blending of voices differentiates “hybrid testimony” from Felman’s “chains” of testimony where, even when influenced or guided by their interlocutor, the victims
maintain their own separate voice. Two such examples of hybridity are presented in Zoe Norridge’s “Professional Witnessing in Rwanda: Human Rights and Creative Responses to Genocide” that engages in an exploration of British cameraman Nick Hughes’s feature film 100 Days (2001) and forensic anthropologist Clea Koff’s memoir The Bone Woman (2004). Norridge insightfully describes these acts of “professional witnessing” as a direct result of a need to comprehend the horror of the event and rightly purports that the resort to aesthetic forms of representation is aligned with a “profound and enduring connection with Rwandan people” (132) to the extent that “the events became sensual, emotional and existentially challenging” (133). What is more, she detects a piercing sense of failure and regret permeating the totality of these narratives, stemming from the witnesses’ professional priorities failing to coincide with the needs of the victims, as well as from the gaps in knowledge of the country and its culture. Nevertheless, Norridge suggests, the personal tone of these narratives and their inherent self-reflexivity reinforce the creative act effects as, in fact, they function as powerful testimonies while at the same time staging the activity of witnessing and enabling the emergence of connections and similarities.

Mathew Boswell’s preoccupation with hybrid witnessing, in “Beyond Autobiography: Hybrid Testimony and the Art of Witness,” adds significantly to this discussion, as the author employs the term not only in relation to these texts’ (double) authorship but also with reference to the language used, their style, form and cultural content as well as in terms of experience and recollection. Is this a new genre in its own right? Boswell asks. Turning to Eaglestone’s arguments on the matter, as well as Rothberg’s conception of multidirectional memory and his call for testimony’s intervention in the public sphere, the author’s explorations unfold around two texts referring to the civil war in Sudan: Slave: The True Story of a Girl’s Lost Childhood and Her Fight for Survival (2004), co-authored by Mende Nazer and English writer Damien Lewis, and What is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng (2006), also subtitled “A Novel,” by the American writer Dave Eggers. His observations pertain both to the stylistic and formal elements of the texts and to the overlapping of authorial voices, the characteristics of this idiosyncratic ghost-writing and the ways in which the survivor’s voice is often shadowed by that of the writer. “Hybrid testimony always lacks the authenticity of first-hand eyewitness,” writes Boswell, “because the first principle of hybrid testimony is that the survivor’s voice cannot survive” (151). Still, the production of a testimonial account that is neither purely factual nor exclusively fictional but, instead, a combination (or conflict) of elements is valuable for the ways these “autobiographical” narratives invite us to renegotiate the modes and purposes for reading such literature. In effect, Boswell submits, by dismantling the borders between the documentary and the imaginary “Hybrid testimony ... specifically demands that we navigate beyond the oppositional logic of silence and language, inside and outside, fact and fiction, truth and lies” (153).

Rick Crowshaw’s “A Natural History of Testimony?” concludes this part with an equally compelling discussion on the traumatic effect of the Hurricane Katrina, by way of Jesmyn Ward’s Salvage the Bones (2011)—which the author categorizes as a “post-naturalistic novel” (161)—that brings natural disaster and environment-related trauma to the fore. Crowshaw’s piquant play with Walter Benjamin’s definition of natural history—that also alludes to W. G. Sebald’s work On the Natural History of Destruction—and his unfolding of the processes that result in the substitution of “national” with a “natural,” or, in other words, nature-instigated history denotes more connections emerging from a traumatic
experience and unravels more nuances of this multiformal field. More specifically, “[t]his testimony to the Hurricane Katrina orchestrated by Ward’s novel,” Crownshaw claims, “invites new ways of thinking about testimony that relate environmental disaster to, in particular, African-American life and, more generally, notions of the human” (160). His working hypothesis is founded mainly on Henry Giroux’s notion of “disposable lives,” as well as on Donald Pease’s discussion of “carnal” life, ensuing as a result of the state’s failure to protect its citizens; and it is supported by Jane Bennett’s theory of “vibrant materialism,” according to which the “locus of agency is always a human-nonhuman working group” (173). In effect, Crownshaw argues, post-Katrina New Orleans “became … a scene reminiscent of slavery” (164), natural disaster worked towards revealing the social disaster, and the prevalence of non-human agency instated an ecological paradigm that incites us to think in terms of a natural, rather than national history, which “widens both the temporal and spatial parameters of historical thought” (169).

22 The chapters comprising part III, “The Enduring Aesthetic: Literature and Testimony” move, for the greater part, along similar lines, with the exception, perhaps, of Stef Craps’s “Holocaust Memory and the Critique of Violence in Caryl Churchill’s Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza,” that the author considers as “an example of how art can bear witness to and address some of the most important issues of our day in a serious and sensitive manner” (180-1). Following a description of the play and its stage directions, Craps traces the multivalent reactions and controversial comments its staging evoked by referring to the fervent reviews and reactions, particularly in relation to its thematic arching from Jews as victims of persecution to Jews as perpetrators of violence towards the Palestinians, and to whether the play actually equates the Holocaust and Gaza. Albeit not extensively underscored, the formal qualities of this type of testimony prevent such direct parallels from being established; “depending on where the emphasis is placed, lines can take on completely different meanings” (185), Craps notes, and, thus, testimony in the form of a play is mostly about invoking connections, drawing parallels, and, eventually, as Rothberg would have it, establishing “an ethics of comparison that coordinates the asymmetrical claims of … victims” (188).

23 Ursula Tidd’s “Living Among the Ruins of Memory and Language: Jorge Semprún and Testimony,” on the other hand, returns to an already widely-discussed aspect of the testimonial process, namely language, and elaborates on the writer’s use of bilingualism, cultural and philosophical intertextuality, as well as the intensely self-reflexive nature of his texts, as a means of conveying the survivor’s experience in a manner that may facilitate the reception of this experience. Semprún’s original approach, Tidd contends, the circumnavigation of the experience through an associative, non-linear method and the imaginative recreation of facts, not only “mimes the creative process of memory in its staging of facts” (197), but also points to a transformation and assimilation of painful memories, so that “the process of retraumatization of the writing subject” (197) may be staved off, and the writing process be facilitated. In a sense, Semprún’s “particular testimonial idiolect constitutes an attempt to write against the disaster” (205) and creates a viable possibility of transmission, of finding listeners that may “imagine the hitherto unimaginable” (193).

24 Chapters twelve and thirteen may not constitute a groundbreaking move forward or work towards the articulation of challenging concepts, such as the alignment of witnesses or hybrid testimony, yet they provide this volume with an eloquent conclusion that, situated in accord with Tidd’s appreciation of the value of literary testimony, accentuates
literature’s privileged position as an enduring and potent form of testimonial account. David Miller, in “Impossible Histories: Adorno and the Question of Lyric” reminds us of the philosopher’s fascination with lyric poetry and its potential to “poetically sensualize or reach beyond [the] language of destructive history” (209) or, differently put, to elude the paradox of attempting to provide testimony of the survivor in the “contaminated language” (209) of the victor. Paula Martín Salván, in “‘The Writer Begins in the Towers’: Don DeLillo, 9/11 and the Ethics of Testimony,” looks at the writer’s much-quoted essay “In the Ruins of the Future” as “enacting the testimonial drive meant to oppose the violence of terrorism” (216), through a constant shifting of phatic and emotive structures. Both scholars engage in in-depth analyses of the works they explore and delve into the particular characteristics of lyric and prose respectively that signal literary language as uniquely equipped to address mnemonic aporias and restore meaning, or at least affability, to the event they represent, without, nonetheless, shunning the difficulties that are inherent to testimony.

All in all, consistent with the high quality, innovative thinking and groundbreaking criticism Routledge’s “Interdisciplinary Perspectives” series professes, these two volumes map trauma theory’s and testimony’s multiform progression into the future in all its productive dynamic. Especially when read together, they contribute to the charting of future territories by painting a picture whose primary colors reflect, precisely, the complexities, intricacies and multiple nuances of trauma, but also the many points of convergence lying at the root of the traumatic experience; more importantly, they articulate a commonly acknowledged necessity to address these complexities by comparison and through a drawing of analogies that include more experiences, occurring outside the borders of Europe and the Western world. Naturally, not all of the essays included in these volumes actually look into the future, nor do they all formulate a straightforward argument that directly pertains to the issue at hand; yet, in their compilation, all essays are useful in constructing continuity and relating trauma theory’s future endeavors to its past preoccupations. A special reference should also be made to the volumes’ introductory passages and editorial comments: quite interestingly, The Future of Trauma Theory is introduced with a Preface by Michael Rothberg that succinctly and forcefully raises the questions surrounding the discipline’s development in the 21st century, as well as the editors’ customary outline of the issues discussed and a brief presentation of the essays to follow. The editors of The Future of Testimony, on the other hand, opt for an introductory essay that forsakes the habitual linear presentation of the separate contributions and focuses, instead, on the thematic threads and shared problematic permeating the book’s chapters, thus providing the reader with a mapping of current debates on testimony that may, in essence, stand independent of the volume at hand. These introductory pages place added value to the collections since, when read alongside each other, present a complete review of the renewed stakes of trauma studies and its interdisciplinary partners and a comprehensive study of the recent developments.

Are all questions answered and all issues addressed? Obviously not. Interestingly, apart from Kirsten Campbell’s exploration of the sexual violence cases and Felman’s insightful suggestion that “[u]nconsciously or consciously, Caruth reintroduces women to the archive” (The Future of Testimony 62), questions of gender are consistently eschewed. What is more, perpetrator fictions seem to be conspicuously, albeit understandably, absent from this expansion of knots and borders. And the prevalence of literature as a means of addressing the traumatic experience and a form that may successfully counter the
difficulties rising with(in) testimonial language shadows the importance of other art forms in achieving an affective understanding of these events. The question of representation also obviously persists. Apart from a couple of exceptions that tangentially point to the visual or performing arts, the contributors to these volumes’ manifest preference to literature seems to suggest that the greatest problematic of all—that of representation, of circumventing the unfathomable and grasping the unimaginable—may be resolved through fictional renditions, or, at the very least hybrid combinations of the factual and the fictional. Indeed, the question of representation—particularly with reference to events of such extremity or in relation to a subject that, as these collections blatantly prove, is so manifold—is profoundly complex in itself and can only be approached, perhaps, as a potentiality. Still, the acknowledgement of the comparative nature of trauma, as these two volumes wonderfully indicate, leads to the recruitment of alternative paradigms and, thus, opens up new fields of research, promises new kinds of understanding and certainly suggests a future that will add more elements to these intricate knots.

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