

## Preface

“Waking teaches you pain,” says Paul Monette in the last paragraph of his AIDS memoir, *Borrowed Time* (342). My book too is about waking to pain. But Monette goes on to describe how, anticipating the phone call from the hospital that would bring news of his lover’s death, he tried to forestall the awakening by taking a strong sleeping pill. “When the phone rang at six I drifted out of bed and went into the darkened study.” And then, after receiving the news (allowing the hospital to record the message rather than taking the call in person), “I swam back to bed for the end of the night, trying to stay under the Dalmane.” My book, also, is about our reluctance to awaken to pain, the pain of which we already, like Monette, have foreknowledge. It’s a book, more specifically, about the messages concerning pain that try to get through to us through the fog of our cultural Dalmane. These are messages of witness, testimonial writing.

Phone calls that bring bad news, not always from the hospital, are frequent in the writing of AIDS witness; but we find the motif of the wake-up call, also awaited with dread and also bringing pain, in at least one Auschwitz narrative, Primo Levi’s *Se questo è un uomo* (a title poorly translated as *Survival in Auschwitz*). Throughout nights of “alternating sleep, waking and nightmares,” Levi writes (63), “the expectancy and dread of the moment of reveille keeps watch” (or in Italian, “*vigila . . . [il] momento della sveglia, vigilare, to keep watch, and sveglia, awakening, being cognates*). Anticipated by the inmates, announced by the ringing of the camp bell, the moment arrives when in the block the night guard, going off duty, “pronounces the daily condemnation: ‘*Aufstehen,*’ or more often in Polish: *Wstawać.*”

The night guard knows [about this anticipation] and for this reason does not utter it in a tone of command, but with the quiet and subdued voice of one who knows the announcement will find all ears waiting, and will be heard and obeyed.

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The message can be a quiet one—a “voce piana e sommessa” [even-toned and cowed]—because it is less annunciatory than confirmatory; in that respect it foreshadows the chastened tone in which Levi addresses his readers. In his book he wants to invite us, he says (9), not to retributory justice or chastisement, but to quiet contemplation, a “studio pacato di alcuni aspetti dell’animo umano.” The translation, here, reads: “a quiet study of certain aspects of the human mind” (9); but “pacato” implies the idea of pacified, and “animo” is more that which *animates* us, as humans, than the intellect per se.<sup>1</sup> Levi understands that the tone of his wake-up call to us can be quiet, like the night guard’s wake-up call, because the fearful implications of Auschwitz with respect to the nature of humanity are already known to us, if not acknowledged.

Yet the *strangeness* of the call, as well as its subdued tone, is what the passage about reveille in Auschwitz most calls attention to. “Like a stone, the foreign word falls to the bottom of every soul” [al fondo di tutti gli animi] (63). The voice that awakens and falls to the bottom of our spirit comes, as it were, from regions remote from everyday experience; it speaks a language whose import we grasp although it is foreign to us; it constitutes what I will call a discourse of extremity. And it is for that reason, it seems, that it persists and penetrates. The command to waken “keeps watch”; *it* does not sleep even when *we* may do so, and is capable, therefore, of returning whenever circumstances work to divert us, like Dalmane, from the pain of knowledge. Thus, having written *Se questo è un uomo*, Levi went on to write a companion volume, *La tregua* (*The Reawakening*, in what is this time a peculiarly apt English translation). *La tregua* is about the odyssey of Levi’s homecoming from Auschwitz. But its epigraph is a poem dated January 16, 1946, about the persistence of Auschwitz’s “comando straniero.” We have returned home, the poem says, filled our bellies, and told the story. Yet:

It’s time. Quickly we’ll hear again  
The alien command:  
“Wstawać.”

What, then, I ask in this book, is the nature of this urge to witness, to awaken those who sleep, and to *reawaken* them, with a message of extremity that has trouble getting through the cultural haze of Dalmane—things like being comfortably at home, well fed, able to persuade ourselves the story has been satisfactorily told and is consequently “over”

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—but does not lose its power to interrupt, disturb, trouble, and remind the sleepers (an anamnesis or counterforgetting in the strictest sense) of what they (we) had never ceased to know? It's as if in everyday life we all sleep, but fitfully, knowing that we are figuratively “in Auschwitz,” and that however hard we may cling to our sleep, and return to it when awakened, a still but persistent voice, “piana e somnessa,” remains vigilant, imperturbably ready to awaken, and if necessary reawaken us. To reawaken us to “Auschwitz” as the true context of our slumber. *That* knowledge troubles our sleep, even if witnessing's wake-up call never succeeds in truly or definitively awakening us.

Amy Hoffman was never literally in Auschwitz as Levi was; her metaphor for that to which normalcy seeks to remain oblivious is “hospital time,” as she experienced it on the occasion of the death from AIDS of her friend Mike Riegle. Even though she knew Mike was in his last hours, she still managed to be asleep when the call from the hospital came:

I'd been at the hospital all evening, and Roberta and I were going out to dinner. Our coats were on. One of us had her hand upon the doorknob, about to turn it, and the phone rang. “I'll get it,” I said, out of habit, not because I thought it might be the ultimate call. I was going out to dinner. I wasn't thinking about death. Or, rather, I knew it was close, that it could happen any second, but I wasn't thinking that it might be *now* or *now* or *now*—this second. (*Hospital Time*, 77)

And even then, her cycle of awakening and reawakening wasn't over, for she had yet to discover that after a death someone ends up with the ashes. One can never get back to sleep, because “in ashes begin more responsibilities” (85). Just so, too, a phone call from a friend of her mother's is enough to remind Jamaica Kincaid, comfortably at home in Vermont, of her unbroken connection with the island of Antigua:

I was in my house in Vermont, absorbed with the well-being of my children, absorbed with the well-being of my husband, absorbed with the well-being of myself. When I spoke to this friend of my mother's, she said that there was something wrong with my brother and that I should call my mother to find out what it was. I said, What is wrong? She said, Call your mother. I asked her, using those exact words, three times, and three times she replied the same way. And then I said, He has AIDS, and she said, Yes. (*My Brother*, 6–7)

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She too, like Hoffman, her “absorption” notwithstanding, has foreknowledge of the news; but the message, here, is not only quiet and distant, yet persistent; it is also oddly indirect. Because Kincaid is in one of the periods when she is not speaking with her mother—a circumstance clearly symbolic of her exclusion of “Antigua” from her life—the message must come not only by long-distance telephone but also through a friend. Deleuze and Guattari would surely speak here of an *agencement*, the “agencing” through which messages must pass, or more accurately the agencing that constitutes them, when supposedly direct connections (an oxymoronic phrase in any case) are unavailable. Discourses of extremity inevitably rely on agencing. They come in foreign languages, are recorded on answering machines, depend on the intermediary of a friend who cannot speak their true content. Agencing is only possible, of course, because of our foreknowledge; but what makes it necessary is the ease with which we blot that (fore)knowledge out with “Dalmane.”

For these reasons, too (distance, agencing), there is no closure; the message is never completed, the awakening always foreshadows a reawakening. “Le téléphone sonne. C’est fini,” Bertrand Duquénelle writes, much too hopefully, at page 50 of a narrative of 116 pages, just as Amy Hoffman receives her call on page 77 of a 146-page book. Swimming back to bed after having been unwillingly wakened from his Dalmane-induced sleep by the call that he allows his answering machine to take, Paul Monette knows that he is just putting off a reawakening—“the desolate wakening to life alone—the calamity . . . that will not end until I do” (342). It is never over; there is no end to the business of waking and reawakening, just as (and perhaps because) trauma is the hurt that never heals.

Now, of all the historical traumas the twentieth century has undergone and witnessed, there are two that have particularly infamous, and as it were originary, status: the Holocaust is one, the so-called Great War the other. In his classic book, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell made the claim for the originary character of the trench warfare of 1914–18; it established, he demonstrated, what were to be the major themes of twentieth-century sensibility (let’s add, at least in the West). Certainly there have been wake-up calls through history; but it does seem that the witnessing writing that the Great War gave rise to, especially in German, French, and English—writing that happened before anyone knew, it seems, to call it “witnessing”—established some crucial parameters for the spate of witnessing writing and testimonial narratives that have been one of the legacies of our century, down to the AIDS writing that is my own particular

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corpus and beyond. Not, of course, that memoirs of trench warfare figure themselves as phone calls; but they do tend to conflate two important themes. These are the theme of the message of witness as a call from afar that awakens sleepers to pain, but of necessity goes on repeating, resonating endlessly (like a bugle call), and the theme of the dead who cannot rest or who refuse to lie down, so great is the injustice of their manner of dying. A theme of distant audibility; a theme of haunting. The French soldiers who were being herded to certain massacre at the infamous chemin des Dames (near Verdun) in 1916 made mooing and baaing noises as they moved up to the line; it was a way of signifying—since they had no other means of protest—that they were being led to slaughter. For me, at least, those animal noises resonate insistently in the first line of Wilfred Owen’s “Anthem for Doomed Youth” (“What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?”), a poem written in 1917 that is possibly the paradigmatic witnessing text of the 1914–18 war, a poem in which, not at all coincidentally, “bugles calling for them from sad shires” (calling, that is, for “these who die as cattle”) are nominated as a figure both of mourning and of witnessing. Those two major themes—of unjust death and of calling—thus come together and become inseparably associated in Owen’s poem.

Was Owen thinking of the call known as “taps” in the United States and as the “last post” in other parts of the English-speaking world? Possibly, but not obviously so. More likely, the reference is to the bugles that at the front line sounded reveille and stand-to, wake-up calls and calls to alertness, at the gray hours of dawn and dusk when attack from the opposite lines was most likely and most to be feared. The strangeness of the “shires” from which they emanate designates them, clearly, as forerunners of Levi’s alien *Wstawać* and of all the unwelcome phone calls that traverse AIDS writing—“shires,” indeed, is an almost totally unexpected word in the context of the poem, so *English* is it (and thus anticipatory of the move toward England that occurs in the sonnet’s sestet), but rhyming nevertheless with the “choirs” of demented shells (which themselves rhyme with passing-bells), and slant-rhyming—a practice highly significant in Owen’s war verse—with words that aren’t in the poem, like “shores” and also “shares” (an indicator of community). But perhaps the important point is that, if these bugle calls are wake-up calls and calls to alertness directed toward “us,” the poem’s living, surviving readers, safe at home “in England,” the poem specifies with some emphasis<sup>2</sup> that they call “for them,” that is, they call to us but in lieu of these who die as cattle. And so too, we may safely extrapolate, Levi’s *Wstawać* calls to us, but for those he names the *sommersi*, those who have gone

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under in the camps. Similarly the phone calls in AIDS writing are agencings through which—even as they disturb *us* in our obliviousness—the voices of the dead, of Roger Horvitz, Mike Riegle, Kincaid's brother Devon, Duquénelle's lover Jean-François, and all the rest, continue to be heard, as if all the intervening technology spoke "for them."

Certainly Pat Barker understood things in this way, in writing her historical novel *Regeneration*, published in 1991—the title is as apt in its way as the translation of Levi's *La tregua* as *The Reawakening*, for it refers to the "regeneration," over time, of the capacity to experience pain. Barker imagines a scene, crucial to the novel, in which late in 1917, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon work together on Owen's "Anthem." They are safe and warm in Craiglockhart, a hospital in Scotland, but outside a storm is rising, leading Sassoon to recall the misery of the men he has left in the trenches, exposed in all weathers. As the two men discuss the noise made by various weapons, Sassoon hears, not a bugle call, but a tapping sound at the window, which continues as, in due course, he retires to his room and sleeps. Barker here is conflating an episode of visitation related by Sassoon in his memoirs with the poem's interest in the sounds of war and its suggestion of their ability to reach as far as distant England, like a message of extremity. (The boom of cannon could in fact be clearly heard from the coast.)

He woke to find Orme standing immediately inside the door. He wasn't surprised, he assumed Orme had come to arouse him for his watch. What did surprise him, a little, was that he seemed to be *in bed*. . . . After a while [Sassoon] remembered that Orme was dead.

This clearly didn't worry Orme, who continued to stand quietly by the door. But Sassoon began to think it ought to worry him. Perhaps if he turned his head it would be all right. (*Regeneration*, 143)

Orme's visitation, then, is a wake-up call, but a deathly quiet one; it is a message from the dead, delivered (silently) by one of their number and speaking (silently) for them, like the bugles calling from strange shires in Owen's poem. It comes to one who sleeps warmly in a comfortable bed (perhaps indeed Sassoon is only dreaming that it has awakened him), and who seeks, in a way now familiar to us, to dispel it or ignore it by looking the other way. It produces "worry," an anxiety—as Sassoon's eventual decision to return to the front will suggest—that we are invited to understand as entirely salutary. But also, and this is new, the sleeper in his warm bed

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is transported by the coming of Orme to another scene, in which it is the bed that is the alien element: the scene of the front, so easy to forget when one is in Scotland.

Witnessing texts are like Orme's visit. Their uncanniness lies ultimately in their ability, not only to "return," as a ghost, and quietly to deliver strange, unwanted and unwonted wake-up messages from sites that are otherwise consigned to the extreme limits of consciousness, like a tapping at the window that causes an inexplicable anxiety, but also to produce this anxiety as of such a kind as to make us feel we have been transported *there*, to the scene of extremity, even as we continue to lie comfortably, warm and safe, *here*. The anxiety of waking to pain counts, at least for certain readers, as a vividly plausible mimesis, not just a "report" from the front or from an extermination camp or from the scene of a horrendous epidemic, but a means of "transport" able to make us feel that we are "there" when we are not. This hallucinatory effect of hypotyposis (vividness) is, of course, an exact reversal of the situation of foreknowledge that precedes the call: in one case, the context of "here" derealizes that of "there"; in the other, "there" becomes so vivid it makes "here" in turn feel like an oddity or an illusion. But in both cases the implication is of time "out of joint"; an uncanny conflation of there and here signifies also an eerie coincidence of past and present, an intimation of the untimely.

Of course, it isn't so, we aren't really there; like Sassoon, readers of witnessing texts tend to hope they can dispel the eerie impression of the presentness of the alien by just turning their head. But the impression can itself still leave an indelible psychic trace—an imprint—and thus have cultural valency. My students report something like this effect—of living the historical reality as a kind of vivid waking nightmare—when they read certain passages of Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz et après* (Auschwitz and after) or Tadeusz Borowski's story "This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen," or when they view Tom Joslin's video *Silverlake Life*. One of the tasks I set myself in what follows is to explore the causes of the anxiety that can translate, in certain crucial instances of aesthetic reception, into the sensation (in Greek: *aisthesis*) of goosebumps and/or something approaching hallucination.

The dance critic Arlene Croce can be thought to have foreseen such a mode of reception, and to have sharply turned her head, when she heard of the performance of *Still/Here* that was being prepared by the Bill T. Jones dance company in 1993. *Still/Here* is about surviving in the face of termi-

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nal illness, and it was conceived in part as a response to the death from AIDS of Arnie Zane, Jones's long-term partner in dance and in life, proclaiming him to be also, in some important sense, "still here." Bill T. Jones had himself announced that he was HIV-positive. Misled by these facts, and more especially by false rumors that the members of the company were themselves all "AIDS victims," and understanding therefore—quite erroneously—that the dancers would be both cruelly overexerting their depleted bodies and performing the spectacle of their own mortality, Croce announced angrily in the *New Yorker* (December 1994) that she would neither attend a performance nor review it, denouncing "victim art" as a morbid aesthetic perversion, in which representation and its object were unduly conflated. This argument was a prescription for cultural Dalmane. The true circumstances, though, were otherwise, and they are interesting in themselves. They can provide us with an introductory example of how witnessing representations actually proceed, semiotically, in contradistinction to the rhetorical wake-up effect they are sometimes capable of exerting.

Jones had conceived a work on the theme of the commonality of human mortality. In preparation for it, he organized what he called Survival Workshops across the United States, with people already sick or dying from a range of fatal diseases. He coached these people through a series of exercises in which they were asked to translate into gesture and movement in space their feelings about illness and mortality, their understanding of the course of their lives, their image of the moment of their own future death. "I encouraged each of the group members to hold on to one individual as he or she 'walked us' through his or her life" (Jones, 253). To judge by the video documentary Bill Moyers produced for PBS, the signs the participants came up with were of the type that C. S. Peirce would have called *iconic*: a person who felt boxed in by disease drew rectangles around herself with her arms, one whose life had become labyrinthine darted in random directions. But Jones and his company then retranslated these gestures to make movements, "phrasing" them into the more fluid movements and gestures of choreography. "My own process involved the intuitive combining of the survivors' gestures to make phrases, plumbing my own body's imagination, or borrowing from existing forms—capoeira and karate among them—to create expressive dance sequences" (258). Quotations from the survivors' words, set to plangent music by Kenneth Fragelle ("Still") and Vernon Reid ("Here"), combined with video portraits (in "Here") and what had by now become extraordinarily inventive, indeed innovative choreography, to form a performance that appears to have been



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imagined as a long moment of *suspension*, suggestive of the state of being under suspended sentence that is survival, a suspension that Jones understood to imply the question: *When that part is over, what happens then?* (268).

The signs, that is, had by now ceased to function as iconic representations of the feelings of various individual survivors (a function still respected by the dancers in rehearsal, who named various attitudes, gestures, and movements after the survivors who had suggested them), in order to function *for an audience* in a way that Peirce would doubtless have classified as *indexical*. Indexical signs do not mimic their object through various forms of resemblance; they are indicators, “pointing” to an object that can only be deduced from the signs, in the way that a fire one cannot see, feel, or smell can be deduced from the presence of smoke. The smoke in this case is the dance, whose signs ask: when still/here is over, what happens then?—a question that can scarcely be ignored or avoided by anyone who attends a performance of *Still/Here*, although any answers one might venture will vary in style and content according to what Peirce would have called the “interpretants” furnished by the audience members themselves. Indexicality, then, is the semiotic category that governs what, in aesthetics and literary criticism (but *not* Peircian semiotics), is called symbolism.<sup>3</sup>

Now I am not trying to say that witnessing texts make use of indexical signs to the exclusion of other types of signs (*Still/Here* itself abounds in Peircean iconic and symbolic signs as well as indexical ones). My claim is rather that the cultural function of the witnessing texts themselves is indexical, in that their characteristic form of “aboutness” is indicative, “pointing” to an X that the culture’s conventional means of representation are powerless, or at least inadequate, to reference, precisely because it lies at a point of supposedly distant extremity with respect to what the culture regards as its normal, and thus central, concerns. Such indexicality, I propose, as a pointing-towards that has an object, but an object by definition obscure, dubious, hard to envisage or realize, is inevitably experienced by its audience (to whom, as a wake-up call, the pointing is addressed) as a vague anxiety: what is being “said”? why is it being “said” so indirectly? (Imagine someone talking to you while casting sideways glances in another direction . . .) The apprehension thus produced—I mean it in the double sense of the word: something that is *feared* is simultaneously *grasped*—is, in my opinion, the characteristic cultural effect of witnessing practices, an effect that can sometimes, as in the case of Arlene Croce’s imagining of *Still/Here*, be reinterpreted as the uncanny mimeticism, the transportation into the other scene, that Barker describes Sassoon undergo-

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ing in *Regeneration*. My guess, furthermore, is that both the anxiety caused by witnessing's "indexical" functioning and its reinterpretation as hyper-vivid mimeticism are particularly likely to occur in cultures such as those of the West that have inherited a long tradition of understanding representation itself mimetically—as for example we do in legal definitions of testimony, in which the witness is expected to give an exact account of experience, or in the desire of many historians to recapture the past *wie es eigentlich gewesen* (as it really was).

Of course, it is not just that some cultures are more mimetically oriented than others, and thus particularly sensitive to—or squeamish about—witnessing effects. It should also be pointed out that there are cultures whose history has been of such a kind that they have tended to develop traditions of lamentation and resources for testimonial that other, happier cultures—such as those I am interested in in this book—do not *normally* have need of, and so have not (until recently) invented or acquired. Close to the cultures of the West, and so rather readily available on occasion for “borrowing” from, are Jewish culture, with its millennial tradition of lamentation, and (in the United States) Black culture, with its performance arts—blues, jazz, gospel, dance, etc.—forged in the long history of slavery and its many social sequels. Of his style of dancing, Bill T. Jones (141) recalls a dismissive characterization by, again, Arlene Croce: “He works himself into a tizzy”—but comments: “This ‘tizzy’ is something I have claimed as an inheritance.” Similarly, in Marlon Riggs’s extraordinary video, *Tongues Untied*, the collective repertoire of culturally Black performance art, including in this instance the poetry of Alex Hemphill and others, is deployed in the service of a breaking of silence—the silence surrounding white racism and Black homophobia, the silence that is both protective and damaging for those these social ills oppress, the silence that finally AIDS, functioning as a kind of last straw, leads them to break—an untying of tongues, then, that is also a call to awakening. Of contemporary Black witnessing one might readily say what Bill T. Jones says of his art (23): “Rebellion I always knew. Transgression I have had to learn.”

But consider also the case of Rigoberta Menchú, whose *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (*Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú, y así me nació la conciencia*) founded the Spanish-language, Latin (especially Central) American genre known as *testimonio*. In her book we quickly learn that there is a tradition in her Quiché-speaking, Mayan culture of what might be called cultural induction. Babies at birth, children turning ten, couples marrying are solemnly addressed by parents and other representatives of the community, who

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speak to them of the dire conditions of existence, the folly of expecting one's dreams to be realized, the responsibilities one has toward others; it is a kind of lesson in the solidarity of suffering. Of one such moment, in which the post-Conquest history of the indigenous people of Central America is rehearsed, Menchú says (67): "This is, in part, a recalling of history and, in part, a call to awareness." This is a clear reference, of course, to her own coming to consciousness; but it would also be hard to define more economically the point of her having sought out the anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos-Debray in Paris, with the purpose of entrusting to her, for transmission, eventually, to a worldwide audience, Menchú's own garrulous and seemingly all-encompassing narrative about the life of her people. Her idea has been simply to extend to a cross-cultural audience—for which purpose she learned Spanish—a practice already familiar to her own people, performing in this way a form of translation and, as Jones might say, of transgression. But *recalling* history, *calling* to awareness—that is, awakening to pain—also constitute a good definition of what the genre of witnessing writing, as a whole, is all about, even though the word *witness* itself is foreign to Menchú's vocabulary.<sup>4</sup>

There are other cultures, though, and these are my main concern in what follows, in which the need to witness may be quite frequently experienced—as was the case in the West throughout the twentieth century and indeed the whole history of industrial and capitalist modernity—but without discursive models of witnessing coming readily to hand. These are the cultures in which drastic failures of justice, decency, tolerance, humaneness—of "culture" itself in one of its senses, in which it is synonymous with civilization—are experienced, not so much as part of an everyday experience of misery (as AIDS is added to homophobia and racism or to the harshness of ghetto existence, in urban America; or as military and judicial violence, torture and rape are added, among Menchú's people, to ordinary daily oppression and exploitation), but as something *unique*, without precedent and consequently unspeakable. Trench warfare seemed like that to all the combatants, but especially to the very young members of the officer class who were exposed alongside their working-class men to its unmitigated rigors, in the carnage of, most particularly, 1916, 1917, and 1918. The Holocaust and more generally the concentration camp system were so experienced, in Nazi Germany and then in Nazi-occupied Europe, first by its victims, and then, especially after April 1945, by a horrified and incredulous world. HIV disease, which has raged and continues to rage in many parts of the world (central Africa, South and Southeast Asia, the

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Caribbean, and Brazil) as an epidemic of immense proportions that is virtually out of control, was experienced—and described in innumerable witnessing texts—as a unique visitation by members of the largely middle-class or middle-class-oriented gay male communities of large Western cities like Paris, London, New York, San Francisco, or Sydney during the 1980s and into the 1990s. These are cultures in which, simultaneously and for convergent reasons, traditions of witnessing are rare, while it remains relatively easy for “unaffected” majorities (domestic populations at the time of the Great War; those outside of the range of the Axis powers in 1939–45; nongay, non-IV-drug-using, middle-class white populations in the West) to sleep on, more or less blissfully oblivious or indifferent to, and undisturbed by, what is nevertheless *happening*, or has happened to others, at the limits of their culturally blinded awareness. And these, then, are the kinds of cultures, with special reference to the problematic situation of the writing of AIDS witnessing in France, North America, and Australia, to which my book is devoted.

I have met the missing link, writes Midas Dekkers in substance (142), and it is us. According to a widespread perception, human evolution has resulted in a hybrid species, neither simply animal in nature nor yet fully or genuinely cultured, if culture signifies civilized or humane, in contradistinction to animal. Culture, this perception goes, chronically fails us, therefore, as we lapse into animalistic behavior unworthy of our own best ideals. However, try as one might to write this problem of hybridity in terms of a nature-culture distinction, the evidence is always that the brutalities, atrocities, and acts of violence of which humans are so obviously capable are themselves the products, not of an animal nature, but of culture—of culture, that is, in the sense of the general mediator of relations, or as Raymond Williams more colloquially put it, a “whole way of life.” It is culture as way of life that keeps failing culture as civilization. United States culture condones and underwrites the jurisprudence of revenge (punitive sentencing, capital punishment), the scourge of homelessness, the continuing injustices that arise from the history of slavery and the colonization of the country, and other forms of social and economic discrimination. The Great War was a product, on the one hand, of cultural phenomena—of European nationalisms, including international and colonial rivalries—and on the other of greatly advanced technological resources for warfare. The Holocaust, which is sometimes understood theologically as a manifestation of pure Evil, is unthinkable without cultural preconditions

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such as a political philosophy of totalitarianism, forms of racism that emerged during the nineteenth century, the economic history of Weimar Germany, and highly developed organizational and technological capacities for moving and destroying vast numbers of people. AIDS, which feels to some like a scourge of God and to others like an accident of nature, likewise has the culture of modernity as its precondition: its origins appear to lie in the colonial and postcolonial modernization of Africa, which shrank the habitat of simian species and brought them into close contact with humans, as well as in the avenues of rapid communication (highways, the movement of armies in war, air travel) that ensured the virus's epidemic and in some cases pandemic spread through human populations. HIV disease piggybacks also on poverty and what used to be known euphemistically as "uneven development," on prostitution and the traffic in women, on sexual tourism, on the drug trade (particularly the trade in heroin), on governmental irresponsibility, squeamishness, puritanism, indifference, and denial (on these factors in Southeast Asia see Beyrer). Nor would AIDS be the disease it is without the social effects of stigma, shame, and discrimination that it generates almost universally. The human animal is cultural all the way through.

But if culture (as way of life) is responsible for these kinds of failures of "culture," it is "culture" (as civilization) that requires such disturbing events to be treated, not as evidence of a chronic deficiency or of arrested evolutionary development, but as merely occasional or exceptional lapses, accidental happenings that can be explained by special circumstances and rare contingencies and are therefore able to be minimized, marginalized, dismissed, or forgotten by those who have the luxury of judging them to be remote from their own lives and circumstances, and hence irrelevant (on "states" of denial, see Cohen). What witnessing texts—like calls from the hospital, an alien *Wstawać*, bugles calling from strange shires—therefore work to require us to acknowledge is that the "alien" scene, the "other" context, is *also* a part of culture, and thus relevant to the very context in which the form of communication we call witnessing arises. Witnessing is, in that sense, an ethical practice (rarely much politicized, except in the case of the Latin American genre of *testimonio*) that seeks to inculcate a sense of shared (because cultural) responsibility that it is only too easy—for other cultural reasons—to deny. And it is because of the facility with which relevance, responsibility, and involvement can be denied—because of the ready availability of cultural Dalmane—that witnessing, like a wake-up call, takes the form of seeking to cause some *disturbance* in well-established

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cultural regularities and routines: routines of thought (or its absence), regularities of discursive habitus.

In Bill T. Jones's vocabulary, then, it is a matter of transgression: something grounded in rebellion but that one has to learn how to do. It requires a certain knack or skill, forms of know-how or *savoir faire*, but also (as I'll propose later) of making do or bricolage. Bill T. Jones's "rebellion" might be thought of, then, in witnessing terms, as a first ethical moment: that of the withholding of one's assent in the face of injustice, barbarity, atrocity, a withholding that is witnessing's essential precondition, taking as it often does the form of a desire or need, an urge or urgency, to *tell the story*. But the second ethical moment of witnessing is that of one's actual coming to witnessing, when one takes on the task of cultural transgression that is required, in an environment of complacency (the comfortable sense of being at home; full bellies; the illusion that the story has already been satisfactorily told), if one is to *get the story across*. What it takes to have the story attended to or, in the strong sense of the word, heard.

In the chapters to come I will go into some detail about the nature of the cultural transgression witnessing texts perform, using the vocabulary of a modernized version of classical rhetoric: a theory of the appropriability of genres and of the instrumentality of figuration. What I have wanted to sketch in this preface, though, is why that theory matters, why it may sometimes (often) be appropriate to disturb genre expectations, and to make use of the tricks and turns of troping, things of which honest folks are often, and understandably, suspicious. It matters because the occasions on which—with increasing frequency, it seems—"culture" lets us down are the occasions on which human culture reveals something crucial about itself: an essential fault-line running through it, or a "dark side" that is not accidental but rather constitutive, definitional. The violence "culture" pretends to hold at bay is actually something that culture is itself perfectly capable of producing, something that it does produce, qua culture, with frightening regularity. It is worth noticing, I think, that witnessing texts very rarely fall into the easy moralism of "this atrocity must never be allowed to happen again." They are too realistic, and perhaps too honest for that. Their point, and occasionally their explicit burden, is rather that such an atrocity—the same or another—*can* always happen again; it can happen any time, *now* or *now* or *now* (as Amy Hoffman puts it), and it does. *That* is what we need to know and acknowledge—if only we can be awakened sufficiently from the effects of cultural Dalmane to take it in; *that* is why the timely interventions of testimonial are needed, *again* and *again* and *again*.

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All day long, on September 11, 2001, as we waited for the president to speak and he did not appear, the journalists, thinking on their feet, told us that this was the day when America lost its innocence. Such a phrase, in theory, can only be pronounced once—or at least in relation to only one event—so it was odd that I had the sense of having heard it many times before. Didn't we lose our innocence in Oklahoma City? Or at Waco? At Columbine? Wasn't it Vietnam that dispelled our illusions? Before that Pearl Harbor? The Great Depression? Back in the nineteenth century, the Civil War had already been experienced as a loss of innocence. And if we did not lose our innocence until 2001, does that mean we were innocent of slavery?

The kind of society in which innocence is lost and regained regularly (I'm not sure there is any other) is what I call an aftermath society, one regulated by a culture in which collectively traumatic events are denied, and if necessary denied again.<sup>5</sup> This is the case whether the deniers be sufferers, perpetrators, or bystanders in relation to the event and whether the denial bear on the event's injustice, the sense of guilt it produces, or the pain of its aftermath. The denial can take any number of forms, from the categorical denegation ("It never happened") to the strategic *but* ("It happened, but it did not have the character that has been attributed to it," or "It happened, but we are united and strong"). Stanley Cohen has recently catalogued these forms. But denial, when you think about it, is not the same thing as the event's never having happened, or the inexistence of the ensuing pain. Denial ensures a perpetually renewable state of cultural innocence, but it does so at the cost of inevitably betraying some knowledge of the injustice, the guilt, or the pain that the act of denial fails (or refuses) to acknowledge, and of which it is, therefore, as Freud taught us, a symptom. Cohen (253) tells the story of an Indonesian student in the United States who learned of the bloodbaths in her country's postindependence history by receiving from her embassy a letter containing tips about how to "spin" this issue should it arise in conversation in her presence. So such cultures of denial are simultaneously sites of survival, in which the definition of trauma as the hurt that does not heal holds true, even in the effort the culture makes to hold its trauma at bay and assert its innocence. A sense of the pain, the injustice, the suffering, and the guilt inevitably returns, like a phone call cutting through Dalmane, or like a tacit acknowledgment piggybacking on an explicit denegation.

Aftermath cultures—a category conceivably coextensive with culture itself—are thus defined by a strange nexus of denial and acknowledg-

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ment of the traumatic such that innocence can be lost and regained over and over. For if denial functions as a readable symptom of collective pain, acknowledgment of the pain is inevitably conditioned, in turn, by the atmosphere of denial in which it arises and with which it must negotiate: the pastness of the event, its apparent insignificance relative to the affairs of the present, the obliviousness in which most people seem to manage, without difficulty, to live. Acknowledgment will therefore always seem inadequate in relation to the known magnitude of the event because it is necessarily a matter of counterdenial, involving indirection, deferment, appropriation, makeshift devices of indexicality that function—as in the case of denial—as a symptom of a certain reality, but not the reality “itself.” Thus, like the affirmative statement in a negation (“No, I did not take the plums from the refrigerator”), it acquires a kind of smuggled-in quality. Monette is initially able to defer the unwanted message from the hospital by allowing his answering machine to pick up. But in so doing he ensures that the following morning, when the Dalmane will have worn off a little, it will still be, obstinately, there, although still deferred.

The survival of the traumatic, then—trauma’s failure to heal—takes the form in aftermath culture of “surviving trauma,” a phrase that might be allowed to imply both the fact of one’s having survived a traumatic event and the contrary fact of the pain’s surviving into the present, the fact that one has not survived it so much as one is (still) surviving it. In this sense, surviving trauma is an experience that is traumatic in itself, because it is the experience of the trauma’s not being over when one wishes it to be in the past: as an after-math of an initial “math” (the etymological metaphor is of a second mowing of grass in the same season as the first), it is a repetition—in transformed guise—of the initial traumatic event. Thus we shall see at some length (in chapter 5) that Charlotte Delbo’s title *Auschwitz et après* (Auschwitz and after) signals simultaneously that Auschwitz *is* in the past, and that between after-Auschwitz and Auschwitz there is nevertheless a kind of equivalence. The word *aftermath*, then, although it is regularly taken to refer to the sequential relation of a cause to its consequences, can also be taken to signal a strange dedifferentiation of the received categories that divide time into past, present, and future and make cause and consequences distinguishable.

And it is not solely that the past, in this way, fails to pass, but that the present itself was already also part of the past. For those who “have survived” (are surviving) Auschwitz, Auschwitz was already the experience of



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surviving Auschwitz (unlike the many who did not survive it), so that Auschwitz itself was a forerunner of the experience of surviving Auschwitz (not of “having survived” Auschwitz) that defines the traumatic character of aftermath. Primo Levi, for example, refers to the predictive after-Auschwitz nightmares that were part and parcel of the trauma of the camp. It seems, then, that *untimeliness* of this kind, the breakdown of reassuring categories that place trauma and survival of trauma in separate compartments, is of the essence in aftermath and consequently a prime object of aftermath denial (and hence of testimonial affirmation). Which in turn means that such untimeliness is of the essence also with respect to trauma itself, which—for those who have once experienced, and continue to experience trauma as the pain, not just of being traumatized but also of surviving a traumatizing event, of having failed as it were to succumb to it in the way that, in Auschwitz, the so-called *Muselmänner*, Levi’s “sommersi,” succumbed—becomes almost indistinguishable from the aftermath of trauma, and the difficulty of returning “from” trauma to an untraumatized life.

Aftermath’s potential for dedifferentiation does not stop at such untimeliness, however. The class of those who “have survived” and so are surviving Auschwitz extends readily enough, not only to former prisoners but also to all those who, by outliving the camp unlike those the camp destroyed, have inherited the burden of living (in the wake of) such an event. Thus in aftermath former victims, perpetrators and bystanders, who once had quite distinct roles to play, all have in common the burden of surviving; and this is true not only of those among the bystanders who were aware of Auschwitz at the time but also of those who were unaware of it; and not only of Auschwitz’s contemporaries but of members of following generations as well. All are, in a certain seemingly infinitely elastic sense, Auschwitz survivors, so that distinctions that may once have been relevant and do remain helpful, perhaps also comforting (because they tend to confine the event and its effects), tend simultaneously to break down and to blur. Similarly, too, among all these survivors, those who have taken a good strong dose of antitrauma Dalmane and those who are more readily attentive to the evidence of pain’s survival have in common the conditions of aftermath that these attitudes reflect, and must acknowledge their participation in a culture that makes acknowledgers of deniers and deniers of acknowledgers. In such ways aftermath makes trouble with all the differentiating categories to which survivors might cling. Anyone’s *now* has the potential to feel like an *again*, because innocence, once lost, can be and is lost again and again.

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That said, the class of the former victims, from which the authors of much (but not all) testimonial writing come, has one particularizing trait that cannot be overstressed. *Their* education in trauma, unlike that of other survivors, has involved extremely close proximity, a proximity not only physical but also moral and psychological, with those who did not survive the trauma. Their preferred self-identification, then, is less with the survivors Delbo calls “the living,” among whom they too live on, than with those whom the event destroyed in the most literal of senses, and who are often described therefore, particularly by victim-survivors, as its real victims. For these victim-survivors, to be surviving Auschwitz now is—as it was then—to have betrayed/be betraying those who, in Auschwitz, went under, Levi’s category of “the submerged.” And consequently it is to know the continuance of pain, the failure of the trauma to heal, in a way much more intense and much more troubling than others who live on are capable of imagining, because the pain of surviving is doubled by the guilt of having outlived others who didn’t, with the result that those of the living who are not also surviving victims inevitably seem, to victim-survivors, uncomprehending and dismissive, oblivious of trauma’s reality. Which in turn means that victim-survivors bear a brunt of denial and undergo the pain of having their own history denied, to a degree that causes many to fall silent (cf. Wajnryb) and some to turn to testimonial writing (and other forms of witness), but simultaneously leads very many among them, in contrast with those who appear to have forgotten the dead and even to be indifferent to their fate, to identify most characteristically, in their heart of hearts, with those to whom they remain loyal—as loyal as their sense of having betrayed them is intense.

And such identification *with* the dead amounts finally, for many victim-survivors, to a self-identification *as* dead. Dead because one’s personal history, vividly present as it is to oneself, is bafflingly irrelevant and unreal in the eyes of others. But strangely, weirdly dead too because, unlike the real dead, one has in common with the living survivors the fact of being still alive, and of suffering all the pain of survival. “It seems to me I’m not alive,” writes Mado in the third volume of Delbo’s trilogy (*Auschwitz and After*, 257). “Since all are dead, it seems impossible I shouldn’t be also.” And in the slash in Bill T. Jones’s title, *Still/Here*, it seems to me necessary to read that very *particular* pain of survival, which is the pain of a double continuity, with the dead and the living, combined with a double separation, from the living but also from the dead, with whom one nevertheless identifies and who are, so to speak, one’s closest kin, as is death itself.

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These survivors, like all survivors, are haunted, but unlike most of us they *know* themselves to be haunted. Their task as bearers of this knowledge, when they turn to witnessing, will consequently be one that is, for them, both doubly necessary and doubly problematic. As a matter of loyalty to the dead, the task is to give them the presence among the living that is denied them (the presence to which the survival of victim-survivors, the living dead, is witness), but as a matter of duty to the living (with whom survivor-victims share the fact of survival) it is to make perceptible to the living, despite the power of denial, the presence of the dead—and hence of death—among the living, a presence that signifies the continuance in aftermath of pain. Or, to put it another way, their task is to transmit their own sense of aftermath (as a state of acknowledged hauntedness) to those survivors who seem not to know, or at least to fail to acknowledge, that they too, as survivors, are haunted. To become the ghosts, themselves haunted, who haunt the living with their own hauntedness. To enact the dedifferentiation they suffer as victim-survivors, between living and being dead, as a dedifferentiation, rendered perceptible to the living, between the living and the dead, the dedifferentiation of aftermath as “surviving trauma.”

But if testimonial writers are, in this way, ghosts who haunt because they are haunted, it becomes evident that the category of victim-survivors that they represent is extensible to all others among the living to whom the proximity of the dead, and of death, may be or become similarly palpable. To those, for example, who, still undergoing a primary trauma (people in the final stages of AIDS, men in the trenches of 1914–18, people herded into the ghettos of occupied Poland), may feel that they are themselves already dead or as good as dead, classifiable and classified as they are, as *morituri*, among the dead although still able to act among the living (and in that sense, in the threshold situation of ghosts). These are frequently diary writers or—in the trenches, or among AIDSers in North America—poets, and their writing has the urgency that leads me to refer, in this book (see part I) to “discourses of extremity.” Equally, however, those who themselves identify with those who, in this or other ways, self-identify with the dead and share with them a common trauma and the sense of a common burden, are likewise ghosts motivated to haunt because they are haunted; and such are those testimonialists who, writing in the genres I call “dual” and “collective” autobiography, share with other haunted souls and seek to make perceptible to the oblivious (who know but do not acknowledge the hauntedness of aftermath) their identificatory sense of what I will call (in part II) “phantom pain.” What I think is common to all those who come to testimonial in these and similar

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circumstances, and what I hope will become sensible also to readers of this book, is therefore this: experiencing their own survivorhood as burdened with what Delbo calls “useless knowledge”—that is, the weight of the dead—all such haunted survivors are conscious of themselves, simultaneously, as physically marginal and/or morally *marginalized* in the space of the living (relegated to the edge of things) and *residual* in time (left over from another time because as good as dead). It is from this marginal(ized) and/or residual position—which, I hope to suggest, they seek to transform into positions of “obscurity” and “untimeliness”—that they write. Thus Harold Brodkey, for example (see chapter 1), writes as one who, still alive and *able* therefore, to write, but no longer the protagonist of his story, occupies, as he says, the position of a “rock in the garden.”

But a rock in the garden that writes has odd powers. A *moriturus* like Brodkey, faced with death-at-the-door, may well be capable of giving readers a sense that what is happening to him is also happening to them; I mean that the felt proximity of death that makes Brodkey a residual figure is not without relevance to others less conscious of that proximity but to whom it can be made, through writing, as close as it is to him. Writing, that is, is capable of transforming the marginality/residuality of the witness into an experience of *liminality*—the death-at-your-doorstep effect—that can be felt, in turn, by readers. A discourse of extremity, the vehicle of phantom pain, functions, or seeks to function, for its readers, as an agent of threshold experience; it is a mediating instance that, like a ghost, makes possible, or wants to make possible, a form of contact or encounter between, on the one hand, the living—those from whom the victim-survivor/witness is alienated but who inevitably constitute the text’s addressee—and on the other the phenomenon of death, with which the haunted victim-survivor/witness, already counted like Brodkey as dead, is identified. Thus it is the text that haunts, rather than the author, because it takes a rhetorical intervention to transform an author’s sense of residuality into readerly liminality. But it haunts by making available to reading, in this way, the hauntedness that impels the author to write. As a consequence the textual haunting of the living by the dead may outlive “the death of the author” in the literal sense of that phrase, thanks to the same phrase’s theoretical implications, as I proposed in my earlier book on AIDS diaries (Chambers 1998b).

So, setting aside for now the question of marginality and the obscene, to which I’ll return in chapter 1, let me briefly point out here that because in aftermath cultures the fact of survival, as in “surviving trauma,” is crucial

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because definitional, the category of the residual, which *manifests* survival (endows it with meaning), is both central and deeply contested. We must think in this respect not only of residual people like victim-survivors and residual phenomena like memories, but also of residual places and objects, which can be seen as either insignificant and easily dismissed (in conformity with the phenomenon of denial), or alternatively as liminal and, therefore, untimely. So too with writing, when it works to manifest survival in a culture given over to denial. Writing that seeks to liminalize the residual is readily dismissed, most usually on the grounds that its representation of events is inadequate and even suspect: it is traversed, that is, by the very effects of denial that it seeks to counter. But it can also be understood, on what are in fact closely related grounds, not as insignificant but as significant and even hypersignificant, in that it has a power to signify that operates culturally as the power of hauntedness to haunt. For the hauntedness of such writing, that is, the loss or lack that it makes manifest, derives specifically from its inability to represent, a function of the mechanisms of denial that, as I've briefly said and will illustrate at some length in this book, has the effect of making the return of the traumatic a matter of assemblage and indexicality, implying indirection and deferment, appropriation and bricolage—that is, of inflicting a kind of death on the author, understood as the master of language's power to represent.

In short, the potential power of the residual to become haunting is realized through writing that rewrites its own representational inadequacy as an index of the survival that is denied, and thus as the haunting power to become a marker of liminality. The kind of indexicality I am referring to is known in rhetoric as troping or figuration, the “turning” of speech from direct representation in the direction of symbolic utterance. It is as spectral evidence of a past that is still, surprisingly and even weirdly, present that the residual, made liminal through writing that is more figural than it is directly representational, can function culturally as a surviving indicator through which the reality of trauma and injustice, so readily denied, can be made inescapably, and sometimes very vividly, to “return” from the oblivion to which the power of denial tends to consign it, and to “happen” to those who read.

Perhaps you have noticed that the ringing of a telephone—a mostly conventionalized indexical sign—can readily be ignored and even go virtually unnoticed, although it signifies that someone wishes to speak to us. But on certain occasions—if it is in some way untimely, if it persists, for example,

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or occurs in the middle of the night, or seems to confirm a premonition or even to respond to a kind of foreknowledge, as in the examples of Paul Monette, Jamaica Kincaid, and Amy Hoffman that I've mentioned—it can disturb us, jolting us out of complacency and habit and into a kind of wakefulness, even though we may not have been literally asleep. The sound of the phone confirms, perhaps, a nagging anxiety, or brings sudden and unexpected awareness of danger, disaster, or loss. And some people, I among them, are particularly disturbed when they respond to the ring, pick up the phone, and hear only silence on a nevertheless open line. It is as if, in those cases, the indexical works by indicating something, let's call it "news," that, however, it does not specify, but only signals. In response to such signaling we must attend to something, but without knowing, necessarily, much more than that we must attend. When Bill T. Jones worked with the iconic representations he had learned from patients in his Survival Workshops and transformed these readily readable signs into the indexical choreography of *Still/Here*, he was quite similarly focusing our attention as spectators and directing it toward something to which the choreography referred but that perhaps neither he nor we could formulate. This something was thus rendered readable, but in a sense considerably more disturbing than the much easier interpretability of the patients' signs he had started with. I would say he was enacting as *liminally significant*—that is, haunting—the state of residuality designated by the words "still/here," of which the patients had given a less troubling, albeit quite dramatic, iconic representation.

In so doing, he asked his audience (signaled them) to attend to a signified that "lay beyond" the threshold of the choreographed gestures, movements, groupings and images, the phrasings of dance. In this he was apparently confident that we could acknowledge as (fore)known to us—recognizable and hence familiar—something that was being given to us as beyond the reach, precisely, of more conventional representations, as if the dancing was an extremely complex equivalent of one of those intrusive and untimely phone calls in the night that remind us of the reasons we have to be anxious but do not designate them. It figured for us that which eludes representation in its ordinary modes, because through denial it is lost to or lacking in those modes. For figuration is the way what poets sometimes call the "silence" that makes language haunted becomes—through language—haunting. I am committed, then, in what follows, to theorizing how it is that figural discourse, like the choreography of *Still/Here*, can give us more to be read than language conventionally permits us to say, how it utters

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what is unstatable, and does so by making of that inability-to-state the actual object of its utterance—what signals us to attend—as Bill T. Jones made it the object of his choreography.

Meanwhile, if testimonial writing is a way of rewriting insignificant residuality into hypersignificant liminality, it is perhaps worth pointing out that the reverse of this process of haunting will be familiar to many readers. Over a period of time, residual objects that have liminal significance can become merely insignificant. Such is the case, for example, when a person to whom we are close dies. The objects left behind—a toothbrush, say, or medical equipment, or items of clothing—acquire at first an uncanny presence. As metonymies of the person they become metaphors of the loss we have undergone, signifying simultaneously in this way both the person and the person's loss. The deceased is oddly present, *and* absent, all at once. But the process of mourning, a form of denial by which the loss is integrated into our own psychic development and ends up “forgotten,” causes these haunted and haunting objects to revert, eventually, to a status of insignificance or near-insignificance. The medical equipment gets returned to the supplier, the shoes are given away, the toothbrush ends up in the trash. They have lost their liminal character and become simply residual.

Aftermath cultures, though, are melancholic in character; in them, mourning can never really be complete for the reason that trauma, although it has happened and has the status of a historical event, is never over. And we know that years later, rummaging in a little-used drawer or prowling the attic, we can come upon an object—some trinket, perhaps—that reminds us of the person who died, and be re-minded—overcome with unexpected, and unexpectedly strong, emotion. We are shaken, perhaps we weep uncontrollably, more grief-stricken than ever. This re-minding is the phenomenon that witnessing writing seeks to bring about—but it does so for people we never knew, for people who underwent extremity before we were born, perhaps, or in a remote place and under circumstances we might not previously have thought relevant to our own lives, and for whom we have therefore never really mourned. Our forgetting was only the illusion of their having been forgotten, our mourning a sham mourning. For the injustice has not been repaired, and perhaps it is irreparable. The pain survives.

Sheshy, to whom this book is dedicated, returned to me, as I worked on it, in much this way. A residual person, long forgotten, she nevertheless became for me an index of the long history of Aboriginal dispossession and suffering in my native Australia, a history I knew and thought I had grieved over but had never previously been forced to acknowledge, as per-

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sonally *close* to me, until that moment of Sheshy's return, which was triggered by my reading of a report on what is known in Australia as the "stolen children"—a report not coincidentally entitled *Bringing Them Home*. In the dusty farming town in southwestern New South Wales in which I spent part of my childhood, she lived alone, an elderly Koori apparently without family or friends, in a tiny cottage—almost a shack—not far from my parents' house, amid a sea of white people (well, actually more of a puddle, perhaps). She helped my mother in the house occasionally, and sometimes babysat us kids. Her name, presumably, was Mrs. Shepherd, which points to (indexes) the generation of indigenous people who found themselves forced off the land of which they had guardianship and obliged, without access to water, to indenture themselves and work, under conditions ranging from condescending paternalism to extreme exploitation, on the new settlers' sheep-stations. I loved Sheshy. But when my family moved on—I was perhaps nine by then—I of course forgot her, as children do. And she returned, a good sixty years later, to make an untimely, spectral intervention in my tranquil affairs. I hope it's fair to say she hasn't left since.

It has long seemed to me that what we in the humanities call research, certainly the kind of research I do, is very largely a matter of educating oneself. One passes on the results in the hope that they may be helpful to others engaged in the same task. For of course others contribute to one's self-education at least as much as, and probably more than, one puts into it oneself. It is anything but a purely individual or solipsistic practice.

This book is also about education, as it happens—most explicitly so in the chapters (2 and 8) in which, symmetrically, I address the question of the witness's education (and of testimonial as an account of the education of a witness) and the issue of the kind of education in reading that might best respond to the nature of testimonial writing. The matter of my own education, however, I address here, by way of thanking those who have contributed to it, some of whom I can name, while I will have, regrettably, to leave many others unnamed. Such people are easy to recognize if not always easy to identify, so true is it that sometimes one learns best by explaining things to others, while what others teach us is usually an effect of *après-coup*, absorbed unconsciously and as it were inattentively, only to surface later (by which time it feels like a perception of our own). Sheshy, in this respect, would be my archetypical educator. But so too are all the testimonial writers whose books I've read and the growing number of scholarly writers who have discussed them, the many colleagues and



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friends who have asked helpful questions or made thought-provoking comments on formal occasions or over coffee, and the very large number of students who wrote diaries, reaction-papers, and term papers whose honesty helped to keep *me* honest in class, and who—with sharply angled questions and observations, with body language, and the very patience with which they heard me out—kept me on my toes in other ways.

Some of the institutions at which I was privileged to teach courses or to give lectures are the University of Toronto, the Universities of Queensland and Melbourne and Monash University in Australia, the Université du Québec à Montréal, the University of British Columbia, the University of London and the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom, the University of Colorado at Boulder, Northwestern University, Emory University, the Institut d'Etudes Françaises d'Avignon (Bryn Mawr), Louisiana State University and, of course, my home institution, the University of Michigan, which further subsidized my work by agreeing to employ me half-time for a few years preceding my retirement. But institutions, of course, are really people, and so I give warm thanks for their help and hospitality, to Roland Le Huenen, Linda Hutcheon, Anne Freadman, Peter Cryle, Helen Tiffin, Joanne Tompkins, Tony Stephens, Philip Anderson, Hector Maclean, Martine Delvaux, Sima Godfrey, Shirley Neuman, Michael Worton, Jean-Pierre Boulé, Murray Pratt, the late Jill Forbes, Warren Motte, Mireille Rosello, Michal Ginsburg, Michael Johnson, Lara Eastburn, Nathaniel Wing, Jeff Humphries, Brigitte Mahuzier, Lincoln Faller, Patricia Yaeger, David Halperin, and Tobin Siebers. People who encouraged me by soliciting work for publication include Roland Le Huenen, Michael Worton, Martine Delvaux and Nancy Miller. Some of the many students from whom I have borrowed ideas are named appreciatively at appropriate moments in what follows.

For more specific intellectual help as well as moral encouragement, let me begin by naming Keith Thomas, who has probably forgotten that he encouraged me to give testimonial poetry a place in my work (which, I know, remains haunted by the absence of Celan). It was *Testimony*, by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, that first interested me in witnessing writing, and I have been stimulated more recently by Shoshana's work on "trials of the century," which shows how the genre of the trial can be, and is, taken over by a witnessing function. Toward the end of my work, the coincidence of reading, in the same month, Peter Carey's *Thirty Days in Sydney* and Ruth Wajnryb's *The Silence* while team-teaching a course on autobiography with Anne Freadman and Sergio Holás helped me to draw

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together some final threads having to do with the character of aftermath cultures. In between, Aaron Nathan was still officially an undergraduate when he forced me to think through the implications of the “ideology of civilization” (as I, not he, came to call it). Alexandre Dauge-Roth wrote a dissertation on French-language AIDS writing from which I took copious notes and have borrowed an epigraph. I had crucial conversations with David Halperin (about “flaunting the haunt”), Tobin Siebers (about disability and indexicality), and on a number of pleasant occasions with Patricia Yaeger (about aesthetic pleasure and real pain, about trauma and survival, about *Dirt and Desire*). Vaheed Ramazani’s work on the interrelation of sublimity and irony in the writing of historical pain in nineteenth-century France fed into my thinking about the nexus of denial and acknowledgment and hence underlies my conception of aftermath. Tom Trezise kindly made available to me his deeply reflective work in progress on Charlotte Delbo’s *Auschwitz et après*, and Mireille Rosello bolstered my confidence when I was writing chapter 8 by permitting me to read an advance copy of her book *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest*. I do not know how to thank Martine Delvaux for the example and inspiration of her work: she is inventing a way of writing about testimonial that is itself a form of testimonial and a writing of pain.

If all these people, along with others I do not name, have constituted a kind of intellectual support team—a bit like the nurses and doctors who surround the patient’s gurney in ER with a whole armamentarium of drips and manipulations and treatments—my “dial 911” or emergency response team consists of three indispensable paramedics, without whose help I could not have written this book. Steven Spalding has been an exemplary research assistant, without whose technical help the enterprise would have fallen victim to my own technoplegia. David Caron, who has a specialist’s knowledge of the cultural and political scene in France, including most notably “AIDS culture,” has assiduously—and tactfully—made good my informational and intellectual gaps, deficiencies, and dysfunctions, supplying references, lending books, tracking the Internet, reading drafts, correcting slips and errors, keeping me informed, and through his own work supplying me with needed frameworks of thought, notably concerning disaster and the nature of communities, including their vexed political status. Together with Alex Herrero, whom I hereby thank also as a deeply valued friend, David has kept me going, in ways small and great.

Anne Freadman, for her part, has made a contribution—also a combination of moral and intellectual support—that feels to me like a kind of coau-

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thorship, although I am sure she would repudiate the suggestion (and in any case the book's faults are all my own). Anne is always encouraging but her encouragement is never empty; her criticisms are rigorous, beautifully formulated, and always helpful. Her own work in the pragmatics of discourse (rhetoric, semiotics, culture) has been my most reliable guide and in matters relating to genre and to the work of C. S. Peirce an indispensable companion. She has been a generous reader of my most inept drafts. In countless conversations we have tried out ideas on each other, always to my intellectual advantage and I hope occasionally to hers. My section on Benjamin Wilkomirski, which became the fulcrum on which *Untimely Interventions* turns, was written for her; a draft of the chapter on indexicals in her forthcoming book *The Machinery of Talk* (Stanford University Press), was for me a major intellectual turning point out of which a theory of the cultural role of testimonial writing emerged. Inevitably, an influence so pervasive is underacknowledged in what follows—indeed it has already been underacknowledged in what precedes; perhaps these few words may somewhat repair that injustice.

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