Introduction

STAGING MEMORY AS PALIMPSEST

Scenario 1

In François Emmanuel's novella *La Question humaine* the narrator, a psychologist working in the French branch of a large German firm in the 1990s, is given the task of investigating the strange behaviour of the company's Chief Executive Officer, Mathias Jüst.[1] In the course of his investigation he unearths details linking Jüst's father to the Nazi policy of the extermination of the Jews in the Second World War. More disturbing still for the narrator are anonymous letters that he receives linking his own role in the selection of employees for redundancy in the company's recent 'down-sizing' operation to the Nazis' Final Solution. The device employed by the sender of the letters to suggest this link between different events, separated in time by over fifty years, is to insert parts of the famous SS memorandum of 5 June 1942 on technical modifications needed to improve the efficiency of the so-called 'gas-vans' operating at Kulmhof and Chelmno extermination camps (which Claude Lanzmann reads out in his film *Shoah*) into technical documents drafted by the narrator justifying his company's selection process in 'down-sizing'.

> Certain sentences revealed a different origin; they were founded on the first text and seemed to push the logic of this text to its extreme, introducing evil connotations and thus corrupting its texture, to the point that certain familiar technical terms became charged with a meaning that one would not normally have associated with them.[2]

The narrator describes the effect created by this device as follows: 'I immediately had a feeling of "doubling" and found myself hesitating over words whose meaning had suddenly become strange';[3] 'it appeared (and here the comparison of the two letters left no doubt) that the first technical text had been invaded and as if devoured by the *other* text'.[4]

Scenario 2

The novel by the crime fiction writer Didier Daeninckx *Meurtres pour mémoire* ends with a short epilogue in which the narrator, Inspector Cadin, and Claudine pass the metro station Bonne-Nouvelle in the second *arrondissement* in Paris.

> A dozen workmen on scaffolding were busy tearing off the successive layers of posters covering the advertising hoardings. Further down, at the end of the platform, two other workmen were scraping the white ceramic tiles with metal spatulas. As they were torn away, the posters revealed old advertisements pasted up ten or twenty years before .... Claudine stopped in front of the wall. She pointed to a tile still partly covered in shreds of yellowing paper that an Algerian workman was having trouble getting rid of. Only some of the text was visible but its overall meaning was not affected: '*... prohibited in France ... guilty liable to be sentence ... court mart ... Ger ... Anyone carrying ... Jewish natio ... maximum sentence of ... irresponsible eleme ... support for the enemies of Germany. ... ilance ... guilty themselves and the population of the occupied territories. Signed: the Militaerbefehlshaber Stulpnagel.*'[5]

This superimposed layering of posters recalls an earlier moment in the text when a wall opposite the police headquarters is described by Cadin as covered with traces of different political slogans to constitute a sort of collage of letters, each one referring to a distinct moment of violence (Indo-China in the 1950s, Iran after the Revolution of 1979, Israel-Palestine) but, when overlaid in this fashion, producing a dense condensation of meaning.[6]

Daeninckx uses these images of superimposed adverts and slogans as a metaphor for the interconnections between the two major events at the heart of the book, the massacre in Paris of peacefully demonstrating Algerians on 17 October 1961 at the height of the Algerian War of Independence and the round-up of Jews in France by French police for dispatch to the extermination camps during the Second World War (hence the uncovering of the posters from the Occupation by an Algerian workman in the passage cited above). In the text, it is the character of André Veillut – a barely-concealed portrayal of the real French official intimately connected with both events, Maurice Papon – who provides the link between the two different moments of racialized violence. In the novel, Veillut is the administrator charged with dealing with 'Jewish affairs' in Toulouse in 1942/3 (Papon himself was in Bordeaux) and, nearly twenty years later, is head of a team whose mission is to liquidate leaders of the Algerian Front for National Liberation (FLN) in Paris (Papon was Prefect of Police in Paris at the time and responsible for the events of 17 October 1961).

Scenario 3

A novel influenced by Daeninckx's themes and, more specifically, his device for drawing together different events of racialized violence is *La Seine était rouge* by the Franco-Algerian writer Leïla Sebbar.[7] This work also deals with the events of 17 October 1961 and puts them into contact with not only the Second World War but also other moments of violence and trauma. In the course of the documentary film he is making on 17 October 1961, Louis visits different sites in Paris and superimposes commemorations of the Algerian War of Independence onto official memorial plaques to the Second World War. In the rue de la Santé, where there are commemorative plaques to the Republic and to heroes of the French resistance to the Germans ('On this site were imprisoned, on 11 November 1940, pupils and students who were the first to respond to the call by General de Gaulle to resist the occupier'),[8] Louis adds and then films his own commemoration: '1954–1962. In this prison were guillotined Algerians who resisted the French occupiers'.[9] He repeats this act at the Place de la Concorde ('On this site Algerians were savagely machine-gunned by the police under the command of the prefect Papon on 17 October 1961),[10] at Saint-Michel ('On this site Algerians died for the independence of Algeria on 17 October 1961')[11] and so on in the streets of Paris.

These examples demonstrate two major aspects of the work of memory that I wish to explore in this book. First, the present is shown to be shadowed or haunted by a past which is not immediately visible but is progressively brought into view. The relationship between present and past therefore takes the form of a superimposition and interaction of different temporal traces to constitute a sort of composite structure, like a palimpsest, so that one layer of traces can be seen through, and is transformed by, another. Second, the composite structure in these works is a combination of not simply two moments in time (past and present) but a number of different moments, hence producing a chain of signification which draws together disparate spaces and times. A significant part of the intrigue in *Meurtres pour mémoire* derives from the fact that the investigation into one buried memory (the events of 17 October 1961) turns out to be an investigation into another (the round-up of Jews during the Second World War). Or, rather, the two are shown to be profoundly connected, so that what one might have thought of as distinct moments in time and space are recomposed to create a different spatio-temporal configuration. The overlaying of different texts in *La Question humaine* and of different inscriptions in *La Seine était rouge* creates a similar straddling of multiple moments in time and space. The 'history which returns' to shadow the present is therefore not a linear history but one that condenses different moments, and recreates each due to the connection between them, to resemble Walter Benjamin's famous 'constellation'.[12]

It is my contention that, in the vast field of memory studies of recent years, insufficient attention has been devoted to these features of the work of memory. I will argue that, in the immediate post-war period when returnees from the camps, commentators on the catastrophe that had just occurred and the victims of colonial dehumanization were attempting to understand the nature of racialized violence and horror, the perception of interconnections between different moments of violence was an important part of the reappraisal of the human in the wake of extreme terror. In more recent decades, however, histories of extreme violence have tended to compartmentalize memory on ethno-cultural lines and, hence, blinker the attempt to see multiple connections across space and time. The superimposed traces of different histories at the heart of the works by Emmanuel, Daeninckx and Sebbar are a model for a concept of cultural memory which re-engages with the post-war attempt to seek interconnections. I will argue that, in a sense, art has never lost track of this fact, despite the sociological and historical turn towards more reductive readings of extreme violence and horror. Many of the works that I consider testify to this ongoing engagement with the hybrid and dynamic nature of memory, though they are not always read in this way. This version, like any other, is not without its dangers, a number of which I will outline in the course of my discussion. However, I believe that the aesthetic, political and ethical lessons that we can draw from this understanding of memory far outweigh the dangers. This book is therefore an intervention in the debate around cultural memory in a transnational age, not in order to contribute to the memory wars which beset us (and which are a source of much conflict around the globe) but, on the contrary, to propose a different way of viewing past violence and its relation to the present and future.

I have chosen the term 'palimpsestic memory' to discuss this hybrid form because, of all the figures which connect disparate elements through a play of similarity and difference (analogy, metaphor, allegory, montage and so on), the palimpsest captures most completely the superimposition and productive interaction of different inscriptions and the spatialization of time central to the work of memory that I wish to highlight. I will, at different times, talk of composite memory, 'concentrationary' memory, Gilles Deleuze's *mémoire-monde, noeuds de mémoire,* memory traces and a Benjaminian understanding of memory as 'image'. The link between all these terms, as will become apparent, is their palimpsestic structure whereby one element is seen through and transformed by another. There are obvious dangers in applying the same model to literature and film. Yet I believe the notion of the palimpsest can bring into focus the dynamic activity of interconnecting traces common to both media without necessarily obliterating the differences between them.

Chapter 1 sets out the broad scope of the book in more detail. I discuss how the perception of interconnections between different forms of racialized violence in the post-war period has given way to a comparative and competitive view of histories of violence. I challenge this concept of memory to propose an approach which neither universalizes nor particularizes histories but views memory between sameness and difference. I suggest that the politics of this non-competitive concept of memory is dependent on a poetics of memory. The staging of memory across different times and spaces works according to a number of poetic 'figures', including metaphor in Proust, condensation and displacement in Freudian dream-work, Freud's notion of the palimpsest as a metaphor for memory, Benjamin's use of allegory and montage to inform his ideas on history (which are 'crystalized' in his notion of 'the constellation'), and Jacques Derrida's (non-)concept, or concept 'under erasure' ('sous rature') of the trace. The notion of memory as palimpsest provides us with a politico-aesthetic model of cultural memory in that it gives us a way of perceiving history in a non-linear way and memory as a hybrid and dynamic process across individuals and communities.

Chapter 2 considers three films of the 1950s and early 1960s by Alain Resnais, Jean Cayrol and Chris Marker through the prism of what I call 'concentrationary memory'. I consider Resnais's *Nuit et brouillard* from the point of view of Cayrol's ideas on 'concentrationary' or 'Lazarean' art, by which the present is haunted by the past and life is haunted by death to create an overlapping layering of time and space. I suggest that the concentrationary art of *Nuit et brouillard* institutes a notion of memory as the haunting of the present and an uncanny superimposition of the visible and the invisible. This version of memory, detached from a linear notion of time to open up the becalmed aftermath of the war to the persistence of horror, translates the interconnections between different moments of radical violence proposed by David Rousset, Hannah Arendt and other post-war theorists into a politicized aesthetic in which the present is always contaminated by multiple elsewheres. It can be distinguished from Holocaust memory in that its gesture to other spaces and times and its refusal to define the singularity of the event as the genocide of the Jews means that it is a memory which puts the present into contact not with one past and one ethno-cultural community but (dialectically in a Benjaminian sense) with a complex history.

The second section of this chapter analyses Chris Marker's *La Jetée* and Resnais and Cayrol's *Muriel ou le temps d'un retour* through a similar lens. *La Jetée* epitomizes the idea of the 'Lazarean image' (the concept of images drawn from a life after death) and is also founded on a superimposition of layers of time. Memory – in which dream, imagination and the historical 'real' are no longer distinguishable – is transformed into a present process of questioning the image after catastrophe. This is not a 'psychological' memory but, like Deleuze's notion of 'mémoire-monde', one in which individual consciousness and history are profoundly related. Like *La Jetée, Muriel* blurs the distinction between the present and different moments of catastrophe, especially those connected with the Second World War and the Algerian War of Independence. The commodified objects of post-war modernization are invested with the charge of different traumas and a complex history. In this way, Resnais proposes a political rather than a purely formal aesthetic as the film raises fundamental questions about the relationship between post-war consumer society and different moments of horror.

In chapters 3 and 4 I read a number of works 'against the grain' of habitual interpretations. Chapter 3 considers three 'anti-colonial' or 'post-colonial' works to highlight the intersections between colonial violence and other forms of racialized violence. Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire masques blancs* stages multiple encounters between different histories of violence, especially between anti-semitism and anti-Black racism, to constitute an intertextual and transcultural poetics and politics. My analysis of Mohammed Dib's *Qui se souvient de la mer* explores Dib's poetic language of memory in the light of his question in the postscript to the novel, 'How should we speak about Algeria after Auschwitz, the Warsaw Ghetto and Hiroshima?'.[13] As in Marker's *La Jetée,* Dib's novel blends science fiction and dream to create a new post-apocalyptic language of trauma and desire. In the final section of chapter 3 I consider how Assia Djebar's *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* overlays the critique of Delacroix's orientalist painting with other stories from elsewhere. Djebar's poetic language transforms a monologic version of History into the pluralized, transcultural and transgenerational voice of memory.

Chapter 4 reverses the gaze of the previous chapter by viewing three works that have become central to the canon of 'Holocaust literature' in French – Charlotte Delbo's trilogy *Auschwitz et après,* Georges Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* and Patrick Modiano's *Dora Bruder* – to show that 'Holocaust literature' is always in dialogue with other stories of racialized violence (a lesson we can take from Cathy Caruth's groundbreaking work on trauma, *Unclaimed Experience*). Delbo's 'testimony' is a polyphonic play in which the voice of memory is a layering of the subjective and the inter-subjective and only emerges through the connections between different traumas. The poetics of Perec's text, consisting of constant substitutions and displacements of meaning, stages catastrophe in terms of an endless deferral of meaning from one site to another. Perec's use of Rousset's *L'Univers concentrationnaire* at the end of the text not only refers to the concentration camps of the Second World War but to a broader 'concentrationary' mentality in our cultural and political imaginary. *Dora Bruder* transforms Parisian city space into a palimpsest of traces of violence and loss in which the Occupation and the Holocaust are connected not only with colonialism (especially Algeria) but also with dehumanizing modernity in general. Seeing the intersections of different traumatic moments in these three works displaces the singularity of Holocaust memory across different sites, not in order to conflate them in a universal theory of trauma or to efface the specificity of the event, but to define a tension between one and another, and between singularity and generality inevitably contained in representations of trauma.

In chapter 5 I use the term 'the memory of the image' as a way of redefining Benjamin's notion of the dialectical image and apply it to Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and Michael Haneke's *Caché*. Godard's use of montage aligns his non-linear approach to history with Benjamin's notion of the image as a constellation in which past and present collide in a flash. Godard creates literal palimpsests in which different images are overlaid and dissolve into each other, connecting the disparate in fascinating and provocative ways. Though very different in practice from Godard's approach in *Histoire(s)*, Haneke's technique also reinvests the image with a hidden memory composed of intersecting histories of violence and trauma and, consequently, provokes us into reading history in the moment of the image. I compare the first and final scenes of *Caché* to demonstrate how the return of a complex history is related to a sort of pedagogy of the image, 'the image that is read' as Benjamin puts it.

Chapter 6 applies Freud's notion of the memory trace refashioned by Jacques Derrida to discuss intersections between histories and memories in works by Hélène Cixous, Derrida, and Patrick Chamoiseau and Rodolphe Hammadi. In the first section I compare two texts by Cixous and Derrida which both refer to their childhood as French Jews in Algeria and both evoke the abrogation by the Vichy state in October 1940 of the Crémieux decree of October 1870 (which had granted full citizenship to the Jews of Algeria) as a mark of the other (and history) inscribed on the self. In her story 'Pieds nus' Cixous transforms her Algerian childhood into a complex personal and historical conjuncture in which colonialism, anti-semitism and patriarchy intersect in conflicting ways. In Derrida's *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre* the trace or mark of the other disturbs the singularity of language and renders problematic all essentialist accounts of the self and the community. The tension in both works between the singular and the plural, and the individual and the collective, opens up the possibility of viewing 'different' histories in terms of interconnecting sites in which the trace of one is always in the other.

In their collaborative photo-text *Guyane: Traces-mémoires du bagne* Chamoiseau and Hammadi view the remains of the famous penal colony in French Guiana through the lens of the memory trace. Their approach opens up monolinear, 'monumental' national history to a pluralized space of memories of transportation, imprisonment and dehumanization. The memory trace is a hybrid network of echoes and reverberations across space and time (a '*noeud de mémoires*' as opposed to Pierre Nora's famous '*lieux de mémoire*').[14] Many of these echoes are of the concentrationary universe evoked by Resnais and Cayrol in *Nuit et brouillard* so that memories of French penitentiary practice, French colonialism and the Nazi camps are connected to create an image-constellation of meaning.

The final chapter considers the politics and poetics of cultural memory in a transnational, transcultural and information age. Not only are we beset by an invidious competition between memories as part of an identity politics; we are also challenged by the deterritorialization of memories as they are increasingly mediatized on the global stage and, conversely, a new amnesia as information overload risks reducing our capacity to remember to that of the zombie. Palimpsestic memory offers a vision of memory which has always been deterritorialized in the sense of being a hybrid rather than pure category. But it is also a critical space in that it opens up the bland surface of the present to the 'knotted intersections' of history. Derrida proposed a post-Enlightenment 'cosmopolitics' to replace the Enlightenment cosmopolitanism of Kant, and challenge the binary distinction between universalism and particularism and the notion of the self-presence of the human on which Kant's vision is premised. I argue that palimpsestic memory offers us a non-foundational approach to the human in keeping with Derrida's 'cosmopolitical' vision of the 'democracy-to-come'. It would be a dynamic and open space composed of interconnecting traces of different voices, sites and times, and it would hold out the prospect of new solidarities across the lines of race and nation.

Notes

1. François Emmanuel, *La Question humaine* (Stock, 2000).
2. 'Certaines phrases trahissaient une autre provenance, elles se fondaient au premier texte et semblaient pousser à l'extrême la logique de celui-ci, constituant des inclusions malignes qui tendaient à en corrompre la trame, au point que certains mots d'un vocabulaire technique pourtant familier se retrouvaient chargés d'une potentialité de sens que l'on ne leur soupçonnait pas', Emmanuel, *La Question humaine*, p. 74. All translations from the French are my own, except where otherwise stated.
3. 'J'éprouvais brusquement une impression de dédoublement, je me voyais hésiter sur des mots dont le sens m'était soudain étranger', Emmanuel, *La Question humaine*, p. 76.
4. 'il apparaissait ici (et la comparaison des deux lettres ne faisait aucun doute) que le premier texte technique avait été envahi et comme dévoré par *l'autre* texte', Emmanuel, *La Question humaine*, pp. 77–78. Emmanuel's novella makes explicit links between past and present but not between the Holocaust and colonialism. However, in their 2007 film of Emmanuel's text, Nicolas Klotz and Elisabeth Perceval overlay the links between the Holocaust and contemporary management systems with references to a colonial imaginary and present immigration controls. For an excellent discussion of these connections in the film, see Libby Saxton, 'Horror by Analogy: Paradigmatic Aesthetics in Nicolas Klotz and Elisabeth Perceval's *La Question humaine*' in Michael Rothberg, Debarati Sanyal and Max Silverman (eds), '*Noeuds de mémoire*: Multidirectional Memory in Post-war French and Francophone Culture', *Yale French Studies* 118/119 (2010), pp. 209–224.

Chapter 4

COLONIAL HAUNTINGS OF THE HOLOCAUST IMAGINARY

History is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas.[1]

The way in which we have come to perceive the Holocaust in recent decades, with its specific focus on the (racial and genocidal) extermination of the Jews, has tended to obscure the broader post-war approach to memory that I discussed in chapter 2. What I am calling the 'concentrationary memory' of that period, with its examples in the work of Cayrol, Resnais, Marker and others, registers the totalitarian and dehumanizing potential of modernity and the shadow that the legacies of the concentration camps, the gulag and colonialism cast over modern consumer society. Yet just as screen memory in general does not mean that one memory completely effaces another for which it is a substitute but, instead, enters into a complex relationship with it, so we could argue that 'concentrationary memory', though obscured by 'Holocaust memory', can still be located in the interstices, so to speak, of contemporary formulations.

Let us take, for example, questions of trauma, testimony and representation which have been central to the debates of recent years on Holocaust memory. The gap between trauma and cultural memory is often seen in terms of the incommensurable distance between event and representation and, hence, the limitations of culture to carry the affective weight of the traumatic moment. The anti-representational stance that characterizes Claude Lanzmann's justification of the absence of archive footage in his film *Shoah*, and the central importance given to Lanzmann's approach in the work of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub on trauma and testimony, reconfirmed the notion established by Elie Wiesel of the radical singularity of the Holocaust, that is, that the Holocaust occupies a sacred space beyond all human comprehension (and outside history?) as a sort of 'negative sublime'. In this scenario, any form of relational contextualization of the Holocaust is not only a denigration of its singularity but also a blasphemy. However, while supporting the refusal contained in this approach to clothe the Holocaust in a banalizing or sentimentalizing aesthetic, and hence devalue its import, we could nevertheless focus not so much on the limitations of culture in the face of extreme horror but rather on the inevitable cultural mediation of trauma once it returns belatedly in testimony and other memorial works. The critical engagement by Jacques Rancière, Georges Didi-Huberman, Gillian Rose and others with Lanzmann's effective prohibition on representation of the Holocaust (what Rancière calls Lanzmann's imposition of an 'aura of holy terror' and Rose his 'Holocaust piety') is illuminating in this regard.[2]

In his essay 'Are Some Things Unrepresentable?' ('S'il y a de l'irreprésentable?'), Rancière strips away the erroneous premises of the anti-representational argument to suggest that nothing is unrepresentable in the light of 'the *aesthetic* regime' ('le régime *esthétique*') which regulates all art forms in the modern era.[3] Rancière shows how a description in Robert Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine,* which conjoins human pathos with a detail of material existence, employs the same paratactic device as that employed by Flaubert in *Madame Bovary.* The effect is the same in both works. Lanzmann's *Shoah* itself does not exist outside the aesthetic regime but is as much a part of it as all modern art. In *Mourning Becomes the Law,* Rose talks in terms of 'the fascism of representation' by which we are implicated (inevitably) in the regime of representation which constitutes the limits within which we struggle to make sense of our selves and our world. In *Images malgré tout,* Didi-Huberman responds to Lanzmann's prohibition on representation to argue for the link between the image and the real once we remove the image from the regime of resemblance. Between Rancière's aesthetic regime, Rose's 'fascism of representation' and Didi-Huberman's *'images malgré tout',* we are always within the field of representation.

I mention briefly these critiques of the anti-representational position (but will return to all three writers in later chapters) to suggest that viewing testimony not as bearing witness to the failure of language but as the belated cultural configuration of trauma obliges us to see it as regulated by the same aesthetic choices as other writing: the same use of figures of speech and the same substitutions and displacements of meaning, and occupying the same intertextual space. The passage from trauma to cultural memory of any sort leads to an impure form of representation (can any form of representation be pure?) because trauma is inevitably refracted through an imagined and hybrid symbolic order. This perspective displaces the problem of whether representation facilitates or denies access to the real to focus instead on the imaginary channels which inform representation and which representation, in turn, refracts.[4] Second order memory (the memory of the second generation that Marianne Hirsch has named 'postmemory') is more clearly mediated in this way, as the trauma described is 'second-hand' rather than 'first-hand' experience.[5] Yet even first order memory (the testimony of the survivor) is subject to the same 'aesthetic regime', as Rancière demonstrates in the case of Antelme.[6] Paul Ricœur says, 'to remember, even in a solitary and private way, one has to have access to the medium of language .... There is no memory without language. And the mediation of language is immediately a social question'.[7] In this sense, the most personal Holocaust memory can never be unequivocally related to a specific and singular event but is always indirectly implicated in (or contaminated by) other regimes of sense.

Cathy Caruth's ground-breaking work on trauma, *Unclaimed Experience*, is therefore particularly significant in this regard. It seems strange that trauma theorists have not engaged more seriously with the ideas of cultural intersection and interconnection that Caruth proposes in this work. It is no coincidence that one of her chapters is on Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959), one of whose central features is the emergence of a hybrid or pluralized memory between different traumatic experiences connected with occupied France and Hiroshima during the Second World War. Caruth proposes that one traumatic event cannot be told in terms of its singularity and specificity but only indirectly through other stories: 'I would suggest that the interest of *Hiroshima mon amour* lies in how it explores the possibility of a faithful history in the very indirectness of this telling.'[8] This, of course, raises profound ethical and epistemological questions about truth and authenticity. Theories of trauma have often stressed that sufferers feel that the experience does not belong to them but to someone else. A 'truer' reading of history may therefore be dependent on showing 'through other stories' rather than the idea of the 'purity' and 'authenticity' of first-hand experience (an argument that I will pursue in the next chapter). Once again, the substitution of one thing for another that this process entails can only be viewed as a 'screen memory' if that expression is understood in terms of a complex dynamic of condensation and displacement of meaning which often accompanies the experience of trauma rather than as an instrumentalist tool to efface another memory.

Seeing the intersections of different traumatic moments in cultural memory (one of the lessons we learn from Caruth's approach) displaces the singularity of Holocaust memory across different sites, not in order to conflate them in a universal theory of trauma (which is the possible danger of Caruth's approach) or to efface the specificity or betray the 'authenticity' of the event, but to define a tension between one and another, and between singularity and generality inevitably contained in representations of trauma. In the terms I am using here, then, one might say that Holocaust memory and concentrationary memory are interconnected in the same way, so that the specificity of the genocide and the more general idea of the concentrationary universe which places humanity as a whole at risk are neither opposites nor the same but occupy a space between the two.[9] This chapter considers this tension between Holocaust memory and concentrationary memory by focusing on the overlaps and intersections between representations of the Holocaust, colonialism and other forms of extreme violence. Reversing the gaze of the previous chapter, I will view three works that have become central to the canon of 'Holocaust literature' in French – Charlotte Delbo's trilogy *Auschwitz et après*, Georges Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* and Patrick Modiano's *Dora Bruder* – to show that Holocaust literature is always in dialogue with other stories of horror and violence.

Charlotte Delbo: *Auschwitz et après / Auschwitz and after*

Charlotte Delbo only decided to publish her writings on her experience in Auschwitz-Birkenau twenty years after the end of the war, first in the form of a text entitled *La Convoi du 24 janvier* (1965) and then a trilogy under the general title *Auschwitz et après* (1970–1971). However, she had earlier published *Les Belles lettres* (1961), an essay consisting of letters and comments on the Algerian War of Independence. In his fascinating analysis of this often overlooked work, Michael Rothberg suggests that the essay illustrates the '"multidirectionality" of memory' in a post-war France 'buffeted simultaneously by the non-identical, yet overlapping and equally conflictual legacies of the Nazi occupation and the unraveling project of colonialism'.[10] Rothberg seeks to demonstrate how Delbo's essay intervenes in the construction of collective memory in the public sphere. He suggests that, by bringing together and 'recirculating' literature on French torture in Algeria and genocide in Europe twenty years before, Delbo's text actively refashions a public conception of memory of both, without conflating the two events or losing sight of the specificity of each. Rothberg notes that the 'multidirectional' aspect of Delbo's work that he identifies in *Les Belles lettres* can also be seen in the *Auschwitz et après* trilogy, specifically with regard to questions of 'voice, testimony, and public intimacy'.[11] Colin Davis reinforces this important point. In relation to the epigraph to the first volume of the trilogy, *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, where Delbo writes, 'Today, I am not sure that what I wrote is true. I am certain it is truthful',[12] Davis observes 'the author or narrator cannot simply *tell the truth* because she does not fully possess the meaning of her own testimony'.[13] In Delbo's terms, and those of Caruth mentioned above, a more 'truthful' testimony cannot avoid the stories of others because they are an integral part of her own voice. Using these insights as a guide, I would like to demonstrate how the testimonial memoirs of *Auschwitz et après* are premised on a poetics and politics of interconnected memories.

The title of Delbo's trilogy, *Auschwitz et après*, is a key to a vision which operates not only in relation to one time but across time. Two incidents in the second book in the trilogy, *Une Connaissance inutile*

(*Useless Knowledge*) explicitly connect two distinct moments of brutality and resistance through a perceived similarity: the first is a description of the resistance and execution of four prisoners of the Nazis during the Second World War, which is related to a similar act of resistance and execution of an Algerian in 1960 (recounted in the magazine *L'Express*); the second is a description of one of the most brutal SS officers helping one of the prisoners rethread her shoelaces, which is related to a similar incident in the Vietnam War when Lieutenant William L. Calley, who was to be tried for the assassination of 109 South Vietnamese civilians, is described by his sister as having saved and cared for a lost Vietnamese girl and having suffered distress when she eventually fled from him (recounted in the *New York Post*, 28 November 1969).[14] These analogies might seem strange interruptions in Delbo's narrative of Auschwitz. However, a poetic structure of blurrings and overlappings of time and place has already prepared us for slippages of this sort. In the first text in the trilogy, *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, in a section entitled 'The Dummies' ('Mannequins'), the sight of naked bodies laid out on the snow triggers a Proustian recall of a hot summer's day in Paris before the war when the narrator saw the delivery of a number of unclothed and hairless tailor's dummies outside a shop.[15] This uncanny moment leaves the narrator (and the reader) in a strange in-between state as she tries to comprehend the dividing line between living and dead bodies, the one haunting the other. Shortly after this flashback, a description in the camp of watching a skeletal, child-like woman in the snow, whose naked body is covered only in a blanket, is suddenly interrupted by a jump forward in time to the moment of writing after the war: 'Presently I am writing this story in a cafe – it is turning into a story'.[16] Here, Delbo blurs the moment of the *énoncé* in the past with the moment of the *énonciation* in the present to create an *entrecroisement* of times. Moreover, the slight modification of the language describing the present moment of writing when it is later repeated ('And now I am sitting in a café, writing this text')[17] enhances the (uncanny) sensation of sameness and difference which the conflation of times creates and which is reproduced elsewhere in this text through the incessant repetition and modification of statements: for example, the repetition of 'there is/ there are' ('il y a') at the beginning of the text which confuses the time of departure and the time of arrival at 'the largest station in the world' ('la plus grand gare du monde'); or the section headings 'One Day' ('Un jour'), 'The Next Day' ('Le lendemain'), 'The Same Day' ('Le même jour'), 'Daytime' ('Le jour'), 'Night' ('La nuit'), 'Morning' ('Le matin'), 'Evening' ('Le soir') and 'Sunday' ('Dimanche'), which highlight the fragmentation of clock time into a returning and overlapping cycle of time; or the modification of tenses at the end – 'None of us will return. None of us was meant to return' ('Aucun de nous ne reviendra. Aucun de nous n'aurait dû revenir') – which again constructs an uncanny temporality between past, present and future according to a blurring of sameness and difference. Delbo's poetic temporal structure interrupts our idea of the time of the camps by overlaying it with multiple times from elsewhere.

The same is, of course, true of place. The opening of *Aucun de nous ne reviendra* not only blurs the distinction between departure and arrival but also draws together space outside the camp ('Some came from Warsaw ..., some from Zagreb ..., some from the Danube') with camp space ('This is the station they reach, from wherever they came').[18] These connections are central to the tensions established between 'normal' life and camp life, horror and the everyday. The effect is to shock each space out of its separateness and specificity, not in order to conflate them but to create an uncanny overlap of distance and proximity. The specificity of the experience in Auschwitz cannot be told without reference to numerous 'elsewheres' invading the narrative. Delbo's narrative technique is more akin to the overlapping of times and places, and the blurrings of horror and the everyday and life and death, that one finds in *Nuit et brouillard*. It would therefore be more accurate to describe the trilogy as 'concentrationary' texts rather than Holocaust texts as such, as the singularity of the event is constantly disturbed (or haunted) by the shadow of other times and places.[19]

Delbo's 'testimony' is never singular, or rather it is a pluralized singularity (in the way that Jacques Derrida describes the 'singularity' of monolingualism in *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre, ou le prothèse de l'origine*, as I shall argue in chapter 6). Other voices speak through the narrating voice (other women, men, Jews, Roma and Sinti, other nationalities and so on) so that the relationship between the narrator and these others is again held in an in-between state in which the self is (in the terms of Cayrol and then Julia Kristeva) a stranger to itself.[20] In other words, Delbo's testimony (if one can call it that) is a polyphonic play in which the individual subject, other subjects and the collective (or collectives) are neither distinct nor the same but are profoundly interconnected in a new formation. If testimony is an acting out of trauma (as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub famously argue),[21] then Delbo makes us ask: 'Whose trauma is being acted out?'. This is a presentation of testimony in which it is not simply the unspeakable nature of the event that returns (and, with it, the recognition of the limitations of human comprehension to capture the event) but also, in the words of Cathy Caruth used to introduce this chapter, 'the way we are implicated in each other's traumas'. Caruth's observation about *Hiroshima mon amour* is also applicable to Delbo's dramatization of trauma: 'The problem of knowing Hiroshima is not simply the problem of an outsider's knowing the inside of another's experience; more profoundly, the film dramatizes something that happens when two different experiences, absolutely alien to one another, are brought together'.[22]

Palimpsestic Memory

The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film

Max Silverman

In this timely book, Max Silverman deepens our understanding of the transcultural and transnational dynamics of memory. Lucidly written, boldly argued, and wide-ranging in its cultural and theoretical references, Palimpsestic Memory *challenges sectarian, competitive approaches to the past. It derives a critical politics of remembrance from an openness to memory's multiple layerings and poetic haunting—its "palimpsestic" nature. Inspired by early postwar theorists of extreme violence such as Arendt, Césaire, Fanon, and Rousset, Silverman reveals the interconnected histories of genocide and colonialism that have been there all along, but are too frequently ignored or repressed. Through nuanced readings of French-language literary, cinematic, and theoretical texts—from Assia Djebar and Georges Perecto Alain Resnais and Jean-Luc Godard, by way of Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous—he offers a necessary new understanding of both the work of memory and the ethics of the human in a post-Holocaust, postcolonial world.* **Michael Rothberg**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Max Silverman's Palimpsestic Memory *is a significant contribution to the renewal of memory studies over the past decade. Silverman argues for a model of memory that is non-linear and non-exclusive, not bound to the cultural narrative of a single group or nation but pointing simultaneously to diverse histories. This model suggests coexistence and mutual reinforcement of memories of specific events, rather than competition among groups vying for "uniqueness." Silverman aims for a paradigm shift in building bridges between post-colonial studies and Holocaust studies.*
Susan Rubin Suleiman, Harvard University

Max Silverman is Professor of Modern French Studies at the University of Leeds. He has written on cultural memory, representations of the Holocaust, post-colonial theory and cultures, and immigration, race and nation in France. His recent publications include *Concentrationary Cinema: Aesthetics as Political Resistance in Alain Resnais's 'Night and Fog'*, co-edited with Griselda Pollock (Berghahn Books, 2011).

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