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**Interrogating Europe's Voids of Memory:
Trauma Theory and *Holocaust Remembrance between the National and the
Transnational***

by Larissa Allwork

Abstract

Reflecting on the research process for Holocaust Remembrance between the National and the Transnational (HRNT), which explores and analyzes the significance of the European and global politics of the commemoration of the Holocaust and Nazi-era crimes in the late 1990s and 2000s, this article will consider the influence of the intellectual context of trauma theory for this book. It will offer a response to the increasing critique of Eurocentric trauma theory which developed during the period spent researching the Stockholm International Forum (SIF 2000) and the first decade of the Task Force for International Co-operation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF, now the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, IHRA). This article will discuss how a revised trauma theory, along the lines suggested by scholars such as Joshua Pederson, continues to offer important possibilities for European studies of the histories and memories of the Holocaust in singular and comparative terms.

Introduction

Part One: Encountering Trauma Theory

Part Two: Questioning Trauma Theory

Part Three: Rediscovering Trauma Theory

Introduction

This article will reflect on the impact of contemporary trauma theory as a key intellectual horizon line for research on the histories and memories of the Holocaust in twenty-first century Europe. It is based upon research completed for my monograph *Holocaust Remembrance between the National and the Transnational: A Case Study of the Stockholm International Forum and the*

First Decade of the ITF (henceforth *HRNT*). The book analyzed the significance of the politics and symbolism of the commemoration of the Holocaust and Nazi-era crimes in the late 1990s and 2000s at the European, international and transnational levels.¹ The work was a historical study that analyzed archival documents, media representations and oral history interviews in an attempt to reach balanced judgements about post-Cold War developments in Holocaust memorialization. At the same time, the research process for *HRNT* was also alert to history's limitations, although these were not extensively commented on in the book owing to space restrictions. These limitations included the dangers of the narrative seductions of progressive rationalism, non self-reflexive 'objectivity' in which the disciplinary norm of empirical analysis became 'theory in denial' as well as the dominance of the Rankeian orthodoxy that has focused on the nation-state as the primary container of historical analysis. Other potential issues included History's tendency to subordinate the 'unreliable' quirks of the individual's perception to the greater perceived reliability of the archive as well as the genre's sometime failure to give due attention to what is absent, opaque, intangible: traumatic.

These limitations do not necessarily apply to all history writing *tout court* as the discipline is incredibly diverse and sophisticated. This is evidenced by the impact of deconstructivist method, narrative analysis and trauma theory particularly on scholars of gender history, the imperial past and the Holocaust.² Nor is it simply

¹ Larissa Allwork, *Holocaust Remembrance between the National and the Transnational: A Case Study of the Stockholm International Forum and the First Decade of the ITF*, (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015). Preliminary discussions of this material occurred as part of Sonya Andermahr's trauma research group at the University of Northampton and at the University of Zaragoza's 'Acts of Remembrance' conference (24-26 April 2013). I would like to thank Maite Escudero and Constanza del Rio Álvaro, alongside the *Quest* editors and reviewers for their advice in relation to this article. An alternative version of this article will also appear as a book chapter in *Traumatic Memory and the Ethical, Political and Transhistorical Functions of Literature*, eds. Susana Onega, Constanza del Rio Álvaro and Maite Escudero, (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave, forthcoming). A note on terminology. The word 'Holocaust' refers to the Nazis and their collaborators mass murder of approximately six million Jews during World War II. 'Nazi-era crimes' is used to describe both the Holocaust and the Third Reich's broader atrocity crimes. The use of the term 'genocide' refers to the standard definition offered by the United Nations Genocide Convention. An analysis of the limitations of these terms is offered in *HRNT*, x-xii. A discussion of what is meant by the 'national' and the 'transnational' is also available in *HRNT*, ix-x.

² Anna Green and Katherine Troup, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); Dan Stone, *Constructing the Holocaust*, (London; Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003).

the case that trauma theory has all the answers. Any theoretical paradigm too rigidly and non-self-critically imposed risks becoming a distortive construct. It may reveal a great deal about the intellectual predilections of its author but it might risk hiding more than it illuminates in relation to intellectual understandings of past and present human political, social and cultural relations. Given this skepticism, this article is the story of how a historian of Europe encountered trauma theory, questioned its paradigms and rediscovered its analytical potentials.

Part one will delineate the ‘state of play’ in regards to trauma theory during my research on the Stockholm International Forum on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (SIF 2000) and the first decade of the Task Force for International Co-operation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF, renamed the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance or IHRA in December 2012). Parts two and three will reflect on this pre-existing use of trauma theory and specifically address how it impacted on the writing of *HRNT*. These sections will address the limits of trauma theory for this particular research project. However, they will also offer some initial thoughts on how a revised trauma theory remains useful for understanding aspects of European memory cultures. This continued use of trauma theory will particularly be considered at the intersections of what Richard Ned Lebow has called ‘individual’ memory (personal testimony), ‘collective’ memory (communal grassroots remembrance rituals) and ‘institutional’ memory (formal discourses about the past by political, social and cultural elites).³

Part One: Encountering Trauma Theory

Trauma Studies scholar Cathy Caruth has written that in the German and English languages the origins of the word ‘trauma’ derived from the Greek term meaning a ‘wound’ inflicted on the body, but that since the incursion of Sigmund Freud and subsequent psychoanalysts, the meaning of the term ‘trauma’ has shifted in its dominant although not uncontested signification.⁴

³ For definitions and an in-depth discussion of these terms see Richard Ned Lebow, ‘The Memory of Politics in Post-War Europe,’ in *The Politics of Memory in Post-War Europe*, eds. Claudio Fogu, Wulf Kansteiner and Richard Ned-Lebow, (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2006), 1-39.

⁴ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 3.

Freud's explorations in trauma began with his studies in hysteria in the 1890s which introduced the key concept of *Nachträglichkeit* ('belatedness'), but it was in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) that he began to explore the idea, now central to interdisciplinary trauma studies, of the individual's experience of compulsive repetition following the incursion on consciousness of sudden, violent overwhelming stimuli.⁵ Since Freud's explorations, Caruth has argued that the use of the term 'trauma' has often denoted the individual's experience of an unexpected shock: a wound inflicted on the mind, which causes the victim of trauma to experience a radical breach in their sense of time, self as well as their relations to others and the world. Moreover, the radical shock experienced during a traumatic episode renders the traumatic event un-knowable to individual consciousness in its immediate impact, and instead makes its presence known after a latency period through the repetitive actions and nightmares of the survivor of trauma.⁶

While as Caruth indicated this understanding of trauma was initially formulated in relation to Freud's foundational reflections, Roger Luckhurst has suggested that since the resurgence of interest in trauma theory following the Vietnam War and particularly since the 1980s, Freud's ideas have become increasingly questioned and disputed within certain discourses of trauma.⁷ For example, the third edition of *The Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders* (1980) rejected "Freudian psychoanalysis as a classificatory template in favor of a model that considers psychic disorders on the model of neuro-biological, organic illnesses."⁸ Equally, building on Freud's legacy but moving far beyond his initial formulation that collective trauma weakens community cohesion, scholars such as David Lloyd and E. Ann Kaplan have stressed the importance of studying group as opposed to individual experiences of trauma. They applied their considerations to the traumatic aftermaths of colonialism, the Second World War and 9/11 for collectives such as the family and the nation-state.⁹ Furthermore, various creative practitioners have attempted what has been

⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writing*, (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

⁶ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 3-4.

⁷ Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, (London: Routledge, 2008), 10-11.

⁸ Summary of third edition of the DSM from Irene Visser, "Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47/3 (2011): 270-282, 273.

⁹ David Lloyd, "Colonial Trauma/Postcolonial Recovery?," *Interventions* 2/2 (2000): 212; Kaplan, E. Ann, *Trauma Culture*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 19.

interpreted by scholars such as Caruth and Felman as the paradoxical, aporetic task of finding ways of representing in literary and visual forms the at once ‘knowable’ and ‘unknowable’ experience of individual and collective forms of trauma.

Bearing in mind this context, and perhaps unsurprisingly given the excessive and shocking brutality of the events of the Second World War, an understanding of the significance of the experience of trauma became an important component of psychological, intellectual and artistic responses to the atrocity crimes of Nazism in the immediate decades after 1945. This can be seen in Niederland’s 1961 study of the psychological difficulties encountered by Norwegian Holocaust survivors,¹⁰ as well as from the opposite perspective of the perpetrator nation in Alexander and Margaret Mitscherlich’s psychological analysis of West Germany’s collective failures to ‘come to terms’ with its Nazi past.¹¹ The release of Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1985) was also particularly significant in the context of trauma studies, with Shoshana Felman interpreting it as a radical experiment in the aesthetics of absence, trauma and voice which correlates closely with the questions asked by psychoanalytic theory.¹²

While Lanzmann’s film is now perceived to embody a not unproblematic canonical ideal of representation of trauma that stresses aporia, repetition and disruption,⁴ the 1980s also witnessed the publication of Art Spiegelman’s *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History* (1986). Provocative in its comic strip format which on first glance seems the opposite of Lanzmann’s vision,¹³ the themes tackled in the narrative of *Maus* nonetheless raised profound questions in relation to forms of transgenerational trauma between Holocaust survivors and their children. Spiegelman’s text engages with his father Vladek’s experiences of incarceration in Nazi occupied Poland, his mother Anja’s suicide after the war, his brother Richieu’s death during the war, and the author’s own psychological breakdown as a young man. For these reasons, *Maus I* and its 1991 sequel *Maus II* remain two

¹⁰ William G. Niederland, “The Problem of the Survivor: The Psychiatric Evaluation of Emotional Disorders in the Survivors of Nazi Persecution,” *Journal of the Hillside Hospital* 10 (1961): 233-247.

¹¹ Alexander and Margaret Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn*, (New York: Grove Press, 1975).

¹² For example, see Felman’s introduction in Claude Lanzmann, “The Obscurity of Understanding: An Evening with Claude Lanzmann,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth, (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 200-220, 201-204.

¹³ For a collection of critical approaches to *Maus*, see Deborah R. Geis, *Considering Maus: Approaches to Art Spiegelman’s “Survivors Tale” of the Holocaust*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2007).

of the most moving and accessible texts on the psychology of ‘survivor guilt’ and the transmission of inter-generational trauma.¹⁴

However, it was not until the 1990s and 2000s that there was a particular flowering of trauma studies critical theory, literature and visual culture in relation to the processes of researching and writing about the histories and memories of the Holocaust. This outpouring of literature on the relationship between trauma studies and the Holocaust included works as diverse as Caruth’s important 1995 edited anthology *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, which explored the theoretical paradigm of trauma and its application to the fractured memory of a number of painful and difficult individual and/or collective experiences which have scarred the twentieth century including the Holocaust, Hiroshima and Aids.

However, the literature on trauma has reached far beyond the boundaries of analyzing the psychological damage experienced by survivors of the Holocaust. In this sense, trauma theory has also concurred in shaping questions of the narrative construction of Holocaust historiography, approaches to collective memory studies, the representational form embraced by memorials to the Holocaust, Nazi-era crimes and human rights abuses more broadly. In terms of Holocaust historiography, Dominick LaCapra wrote a number of essays in the 1990s and 2000s on how in spite of professional historians’ aspirations towards objectivity and balanced archival research, the processes of ‘Acting Out’ and ‘Working Through’ still have the potential to affect their narratives of historical trauma in secondary ways associated with processes of ‘identification:’

In acting out, one relives the past as if one were the other, including oneself as another in the past – one is fully possessed by the other or the other’s ghost; and in working through, one tries to acquire some critical distance that allows one to engage in life in the present, to assume responsibility – but that doesn’t mean that you utterly transcend the past. It means that you come to terms with it in a different way related to what you judge to be desirable possibilities that may now be created, including possibilities that lost out in the past but may still be

¹⁴ Art Spiegelman, *Maus: My Father Bleeds History, Vol. 1 – A Survivor’s Tale*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986); Art Spiegelman, *Maus: And Here My Troubles Began, Vol. 2 – A Survivor’s Tale*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991).

recaptured and reactivated, with significant differences in the present and future.¹⁵

Demonstrating the application of this approach in his book, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (1994), LaCapra analyzed two German neo-conservative histories of the Third Reich published in the 1980s by two members of the ‘Hitler Youth’ generation, Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hillgruber. LaCapra perceived ‘denial,’ ‘acting out’ and the failure to ‘work through’ the trauma of the Holocaust in Hillgruber’s portrayal of Eastern Front Nazi soldiers as ‘victims,’¹⁶ as well as in Nolte’s controversial argument that the Holocaust was an extreme version of Soviet terror and that the Nazis defended western civilization by opposing the Bolshevik threat.¹⁷ LaCapra’s critique demonstrates that the most ethically sound uses of trauma theory in relation to analyzing the legacies of the perpetrators do not abuse trauma theory in order to obfuscate responsibility for atrocity crimes; rather they seek to demonstrate how intergenerational acceptance of the realities of perpetration can be difficult, complex and ongoing processes.

However, it was not only in critical approaches to historiography that psychoanalytic frameworks were impacting on the methodological and narrative approach in established disciplines. For example, in the field of collective memory studies of the Holocaust and Nazi-era crimes, the work of Henry Rousso on *The Vichy Syndrome*, which was first published in 1987 but also appeared in a post-1991 revised edition, drew in Richard J. Golsan’s words on “the classic Freudian model of trauma, repression and the return of the repressed.”¹⁸ This was in order to suggest that the French collective memory of Vichy had moved through four distinct chronological phases since 1945: ‘Unfinished Mourning’ (1944-1954), ‘Repressions’ (1954-1971), “Broken Mirror” (1970-1974), and “Obsessions” (1974 to the 1990s).

¹⁵ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 147-148.

¹⁶ Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 51.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 49.

¹⁸ Richard J. Golsan, “The Legacy of World War II in France: Mapping the Discourses of Memory,” in *The Politics of Memory in Post-War Europe*, eds. Claudio Fogu, Wulf Kansteiner and Richard Ned-Lebow, (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2006), 74.

Moreover, trauma theory impacted also on the architecture of museums and monuments. One of the key figures in relation to these developments in the 1990s and 2000s was the architect Daniel Libeskind, who commented that:

I think about trauma not only as an architect but also as someone who was born in the post-Holocaust world, with two parents who were themselves survivors of the Holocaust. The theme of culture and trauma, the void and the experience of architecture can be talked about in conceptual terms as well as expressed in concrete reality.¹⁹

In this way, Libeskind's architecture investigates how the experience of trauma can be represented and mapped onto the geographies, material spaces and urban landscapes that resonate with collective memories of the Holocaust and Nazi-era crimes. For example, a number of Libeskind's architectural projects have been fundamentally "structured by a void and by trauma,"²⁰ including his competition entry for the re-design of Alexanderplatz, Berlin, his realization of Osnabrück's Felix Nussbaum Haus (1993) as well as his engagement throughout the 1990s with the memories of persecution and slave labor at Germany's former Sachsenhausen concentration camp complex. However, he is best known for his realization of the architecture for the Jewish Museum in Berlin (2001). Bringing questions of trauma to the scarred landscape of Germany's re-united post-Cold War metropolis,²¹ the museum itself is architecturally divided into a number of pathways which are symbolic of the roads travelled by many members of Berlin's Jewish community in the twentieth century. These lead to the 'Garden of Exile and Emigration,' the 'Stair of Continuity' or the chill starkness of the 'Holocaust Void.'²² The museum is also sliced by a jagged 150 meters long, 27 meters high, 4.5 meter wide void which disrupts the building and stands for Libeskind's post-Holocaust assessment that "Berlin was organized around a void and a star that no longer shone. That star was assimilation, the total integration of Jews in Berlin."²³

¹⁹ Daniel Libeskind, "Trauma," in *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust*, eds. Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobwitz, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003), 43.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 43-58.

²² *Ibid.*, 54-56.

²³ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

Although the Jewish Museum was clearly designed in relation to Berlin’s specific history, literature and cultural studies scholar Andreas Huyssen has pointed to how Libeskind’s design may have influenced the fractured structure of the Monument to the Victims of State Terror in Buenos Aires.²⁴ The traces of Libeskind’s style in this memorial to the *desaparecidos* or the estimated 30,000 citizens who endured state terror under the Argentinean military dictatorship (1976-1983), has been used by Huyssen in order to inflect the intersection of trauma studies and the iconographical study of public monuments with an overtly transnational and comparative dimension.²⁵ This is because Huyssen has suggested that ‘memory screens’ of the Holocaust may be at work, or the Freud-inspired idea that direct confrontation with local and national traumas can be either heightened or displaced, depending on how they are mediated by international discourses associated with the commemoration of the Holocaust.²⁶ Indeed, the use of tropes primarily associated with Holocaust representations in other symbolic depictions of collective experiences of trauma has resulted in scholars such as Robert Eaglestone asking the provocative question as to whether trauma theory would not be better known as ‘Holocaust theory’?²⁷

Within this context of the Holocaust acting as a ‘memory screen’ in some Argentine public art-works, a practice that takes on additional symbolic resonance given the fact that Jewish activists were one of the groups targeted by the dictatorship, Huyssen has also pointed to the practice of Argentine photographer and installation artist Marcelo Brodsky. Brodsky is a member of the Buena Memoria Human Rights Organization and the Pro-Monument to the Victims of Terrorism Commission that oversaw the construction of the Memory Park and the Monument to the Victims of State Terror in Buenos Aires. Huyssen has observed how Brodsky’s practice has sometimes used symbolism associated with Holocaust memorials in order to provoke remembrance and discussion about human rights in the Argentine context. For example, Brodsky’s photographs of Tucuman University’s “Bosque de la Memoria” (“Memory Forest”), in which a tree has been planted and dedicated to each ‘disappeared’ individual in the region is interpreted by Huyssen as resonating with the

²⁴ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 105-109.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

²⁷ Robert Eaglestone, “Holocaust Theory,” in *Teaching the Holocaust in Literature and Film*, eds. Robert Eaglestone and Barry Langford, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 28-36.

iconography of Yad Vashem's "Avenue of the Righteous among the Nations."²⁸ More directly, Brodsky has re-appropriated the list form of Berlin's Wittenbergplatz memorial "Places of terror we must never forget" (1967), locating and photographing a similar sign in front of ESMA (the Naval School of the Mechanics), a former Buenos Aires clandestine detention centre and now human rights and remembrance site. Whereas the Berlin memorial lists a number of Nazi extermination and concentration camps, Brodsky's 2001 temporary installation names former Argentine detention and torture centers.

While Huyssen uses the case of Brodsky to illustrate how the use of symbolism associated with the Holocaust can act as "an international prism" that encourages discussion of atrocities in other historical and geographical contexts,²⁹ not all commentators have been as positive about the transnational potentials of Holocaust symbolism. This critique has not just come from Holocaust "uniqueness" advocates, but also from those who are concerned that the Holocaust is becoming problematically de-historicized or alternatively may symbolically struggle to publically resonate in some regions of the world. For example, Stef Craps has questioned the linking of contemporary discourses of Holocaust memory with human rights activism in the works of scholars such as Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder. For Craps, rhetorical invocations of Holocaust memory have not always been utilized in the service of human rights, specifically within contexts such as the Israel/Palestine conflict and the Iraq war.³⁰

Moreover, despite Michael Rothberg's call for a 'multidirectional memory,'³¹ a number of postcolonial critics have suggested that the centering of the Holocaust in trauma theory can be problematic if it uncritically reinforces the Eurocentricity of a particular paradigm of Western trauma theory. This Euro-centric cultural paradigm of trauma theory has been criticized by among others Craps and Irene Visser as important yet inadequate in many indigenous postcolonial contexts. This is because of the tendency of Western models of trauma theory to reject the importance of non-Western ritual and belief systems in dealing with

²⁸ Andreas Huyssen, "The Mnemonic Art of Marcelo Brodsky," in *Nexo: A Photographic Essay by Marcelo Brodsky*, (Buenos Aires: la marca editora, 2001), 7-11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-11.

³⁰ Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 201; Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*, (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 77-79.

³¹ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 21-22.

individual and societal experiences and representations of trauma. It also relates to the tendency of some Western models of trauma theory to fetishize experiences and representational tropes that, stress ongoing aporia and melancholia as opposed to an emphasis on recovery and recuperation through the survivor's strategies of narrativization and collective forms of social activism.³²

Part Two: Questioning Trauma Theory

The intellectual background of trauma theory was one of the key critical contexts in which the study of 'institutional' memory embodied by *HRNT* was realized. However, *HRNT*'s assessment of the causes and public impact of Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson's global millennial conference on promoting Holocaust research, remembrance and education initially seemed to problematize rather than embrace the lessons of trauma theory. For as Wulf Kansteiner has commented, one of the primary weaknesses of trauma theory for understanding twenty-first century social and political interactions with Holocaust representations is that it provides few "insights into the experiences of most of our contemporaries who encounter the history of the Holocaust primarily as a tool of education, entertainment or identity politics."³³ Moreover, as the analysis moved to cover the importance of subsequent Stockholm conferences on 'Combating Intolerance' (2001), 'Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation' (2002) and 'Preventing Genocide' (2004), given Craps and Visser's critique, the potential Euro-centrism associated with many of the dominant melancholic paradigms of trauma theory may have been of questionable value in analyzing certain speeches and interviews. Indeed, interviews with genocide survivors Esther Mujawayo-Keiner (Rwanda) and Youk Chhang (Cambodia) in the Stockholm anthology *Beyond the 'Never Again's'* are characterized by their speaker's activism, desire for redress and resilience.³⁴ However, a useful avenue for further research would be

³² Visser, "Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies": 270-282, 270-280; Stef Craps, "Beyond Eurocentrism: Trauma theory in the global age," in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*, eds. Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant and Robert Eaglestone, (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 45-46.

³³ Wulf Kansteiner, "Testing the limits of trauma: the long-term psychological effects of the Holocaust on individuals and collectives," *History of the Human Sciences* 17/2-3 (2004): 97-123, 99.

³⁴ See interviews with Mujawayo-Keiner and Chhang in Eva Fried, *Beyond the 'Never Again's'* (Stockholm: Swedish Government, 2006), 11-16 and 19-24. For an illuminating analysis of testimony and issues associated with universalizing the PTSD construct, particularly in the case

to consider how international events such as the SIF 2002 on 'Truth, Justice and Reconciliation' may have contributed to the further institutionalization and universalization of Western therapeutic discourses such as PTSD at the global level.

The second way in which *HRNT* implied a critique of trauma theory was through its interest in exploring possible Cold War global precursors for the SIF 2000 and the ITF as part of its historical critique of the heavy emphasis placed on the post-1989 period as the engine of transnational Holocaust memory in Levy and Sznajder's 'New Cosmopolitan' interpretation.³⁵ Scholars such as Hasia R. Diner, David Cesarani, Eric J. Sundquist, Laura Jockusch, Roni Stauber, Michael Rothberg and Kirsten Fermaglich have suggested the neglected importance of the 1940s and 1950s in fostering transnational, international, national and local cultures of the remembrance of the Jewish Catastrophe and Nazi-era crimes. For example, Diner has demonstrated how American Jewish individuals and organizations contributed financially to the founding of the Centre De Documentation Juive Contemporaine and Tomb of the Unknown Jewish Martyr which was opened to the public in Paris (1956).³⁶ This new historiography has not only thrown into question the underlying assumption that the 1950s were a relative period of 'silence' in relation to the commemoration of the Holocaust which was structurally reproduced in works as diverse as Levy and Sznajder's, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (2006); Peter Novick's, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience* (1999); and most controversially, Norman Finkelstein's, *The Holocaust Industry* (2000), but has also eroded the psychoanalytically inflected historical narratives of collective memory associated with scholars such as Henry Rousso.³⁷ These Rousso-style interpretations theoretically allied the constructed historical pattern of 'silence' with 'latency' and 'return of the repressed' style narratives. This pattern of 'latency'/'return of the repressed' has been expressed by LaCapra in the following terms:

of descendents of the Cambodian genocide residing in Cambodia and Canada, see Carol A. Kidron, "The Global Semiotics of Trauma and Testimony: A Comparative Study of Jewish Israeli, Cambodian Canadian, and Cambodian Genocide Descendant Legacies," in *Marking Evil: Holocaust Memory in the Global Age*, eds. Amos Goldberg and Haim Hazan, (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), 146-170.

³⁵ See *HRNT*, 140-143; Levy and Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*.

³⁶ Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and with Love*, (New York; London: New York University Press, 2009), 30.

³⁷ Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome*.

As many people have pointed out, right after the events there was a rush of memoirs and diaries, and then it all sort of died down for a long period of time – what is tempting to interpret as a period of latency after a traumatic series of events. One of the reasons is that survivors found - in different countries, for different reasons – that they didn't have an audience that they didn't have people who wanted to listen to them.³⁸

This assessment of a possible 'latency' period after the Holocaust in various nation states sits uneasily with the findings of scholars such as Alan Rosen and Rachel Deblinger who have touched on the continued American funding in the 1950s of David Boder's 1946 series of interviews with survivors in Europe's DP Camps,³⁹ or Michael Rothberg's assessment that from the late 1940s until today there has been a sometimes culturally 'underground' but ever present tradition of decolonized Holocaust memory in Western and non-Western societies.⁴⁰ Moreover, it seems to especially conflict with David G. Roskies' analysis of Yiddish and Hebrew communal forms of memory, which highlights the anthologies, diaries, memoirs, memorial books and novels created by amongst others Ka-Tzetnik (Yehiel Diner), Zvi Kolitz, Leyb Rochman, Mordechai Strigler and Abraham Sutzkever in the 1940s and 1950s.⁴¹ What emerges particularly strongly from Roskies' work is a picture of an often forgotten cultural history of the immediate post-war era, or the fact that, as David Cesarani described it, "Scholarship in Yiddish flourished. However, the precipitous decline of Yiddish and the contraction of language competency closed off much of this source material, finally creating the illusion that it had never even existed."⁴²

Thus, while Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has recently reasserted the 'latency' thesis with reference to post-war Germany,⁴³ significant immediate post-war discussion

³⁸ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 158.

³⁹ Alan Rosen, "We know very little in America: David Boder and un-belated testimony," in *After the Holocaust*, ed. David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, 102-114; Rachel Deblinger, "David P. Boder: Holocaust memory in Displaced Persons camps," *After the Holocaust*, ed. David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, 115-126.

⁴⁰ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 22.

⁴¹ David G. Roskies, "Dividing the ruins: communal memory in Yiddish and Hebrew," in *After the Holocaust*, eds. David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, 82-101.

⁴² Cesarani, "Introduction," *After the Holocaust*, ed. David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, 1-14, 11-12.

⁴³ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *After 1945: Latency as the Origin of the Present*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

of the Jewish Catastrophe and Nazi-era crimes was carried out by a considerable number of Jewish survivors, liberal intellectuals and those engaged in the politics of decolonization. The problem was that sometimes this multi-lingual discourse fell on the ‘deaf ears’ of mainstream Western societies. Nonetheless, even when it comes to Germany, it can be inferred from studies such as a Dagmar Herzog’s analysis of sexual politics and the memory of Nazism after 1945 that this perceived lack of mainstream public chatter about the charnel house of the Second World War was nonetheless pregnant with deeper discursive meaning. For Herzog, the German churches’ advocacy of sexual sobriety during the 1950s was intimately intertwined with post-war religious discourses about Nazism which suggested that the movement’s broader criminal immorality could not be disconnected from those Third Reich policies that had permitted promiscuity and illegitimacy.⁴⁴ Rebelling against their upbringing and drawing on alternative post-war intellectual movements such as the Frankfurt School, many members of the German generation of 1968 would argue the opposite: that it was sexual repression that enhanced the Nazi regime’s propensity for violence.⁴⁵ Whilst perpetrator motivations are not the central concern of this article, this example from Herzog is relevant because it suggests that historians should listen hard to the alleged ‘silence’ of the 1950s as the legacies of the Holocaust and Nazi-era atrocities have the potential to reveal themselves in the most unlikely of places.

Part 3: Rediscovering Trauma Theory

Despite these limitations of some aspects of trauma theory for *HRNT*, specific examples of research, interviewing and teaching demonstrated the ongoing relevance of trauma theory for this project. The first example relates to encounters with what Lebow might call the ‘individual’ memories of survivors. Bearing in mind Friedländer’s ideas in relation to the construction of historical narratives, survivor perspectives were integrated into my analysis of the historical significance of the SIF 2000 and the ITF British/Lithuanian ‘Liaison Project.’ This included using pre-existing material by survivors on the significance of the conference (eg. Hédi Fried, Irena Veisaite, Joseph Levinson), speaking to Lithuanian Holocaust survivor Rachel Kostanian, as well as conducting new semi-structured interviews with Holocaust survivors, education activists and

⁴⁴ Dagmar Herzog, “‘Pleasure, Sex and Politics Belong Together’: Post-Holocaust Memory and the Sexual Revolution in Germany,” *Critical Inquiry* 24/2 (1998): 393-444, 397.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 397-398.

members of the British SIF 2000 delegation Ben Helfgott and Kitty Hart-Moxon.⁴⁶

Although aware that survivor accounts are fundamentally shaped by their context of recall and while semi-structured interviews were always prepared for in the same way (research about the interviewee; preparation of questions; production of an informed consent form), dialogues with survivors were nonetheless always remarkable and took on a dynamic of their own. For as Laub has noted in relation to the importance of listening and acknowledging camp experiences to the recovery of Holocaust survivors, in the moment of the dialogue “the interviewer has to be... both unobtrusive, nondirective, and yet imminently present, active, in the lead.”⁴⁷ While these interviews were quite different to Laub’s in the sense that the interviewer was neither a Holocaust survivor nor a trained psychoanalyst, a situation which allowed the narrator to speak “as an expert about his or her own experience,”⁴⁸ themes relating to trauma and how survivors coped with it were either addressed by direct interview questions or developed organically as the interview progressed. Drawing potential parallels with Laub’s interview with a female survivor of the Auschwitz-Birkenau ‘Kanada’ commando, which detailed the horrors experienced as well as the extraordinary occurrence of the Auschwitz uprising in the autumn of 1944,⁴⁹ one of the most powerful moments was when Hart-Moxon was asked about how she had coped with the atrocities that she had witnessed during her incarceration in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Like Laub’s interviewee, Hart-Moxon had also worked in ‘Kanada,’ where the confiscated possessions of those who were gassed were sorted for delivery to Germany. As a result, Hart-Moxon had been within short distance of the gas chambers between March 1944 and mid-October 1944. Of her experiences, she recalled:

We just saw people going in, all the time columns going in, more people coming from the trains and going in, that’s all you saw, all day long and all night. That went on 24 hours a day. But it just didn’t go into your head that you had all of these people going into a building and they

⁴⁶ *HRNT*, 65-66, 117, 124.

⁴⁷ Dori Laub, “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening,” *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, (Oxford; New York: Routledge, 1992), 71.

⁴⁸ Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*, (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 42.

⁴⁹ Laub, “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening,” 59-63.

never came out. And you heard them scream and you saw the fire, and you saw the smoke, but you couldn't believe...It just isn't something that your brain can accept. And that's why it's so difficult for people to understand it. If I couldn't take it in when I was watching it, how can people today understand it? It's difficult isn't it? I knew it was happening but you made yourself believe that it wasn't happening. You didn't want to know. And when your friends said, "Look what's going on" and you said, "I don't want to look. I don't want to see it." But it was all around you of course. I mean the smoke came all down. At times it was all black, all the smoke and debris coming down from the chimneys. But you just couldn't accept...yet you saw the ash come out, and you saw the corpses being heaped up at the side of the gas chamber and you saw all of the tins of gas and you could smell the gas very often, because sometimes they opened up the gas chambers too soon. You could actually smell it. But you simply couldn't get it into your head that all these people were dying. You just couldn't. I think it is more than your brain can accept. Most people would tell you, they couldn't take it in. That was presumably just to protect yourself, because if you could take it in, you would commit suicide. And quite a lot of the Sonderkommando people did commit suicide.⁵⁰

Overwhelming and horrifying, Hart-Moxon's testimony of Birkenau stresses not the single, shocking wounding event nor the experiences of amnesia and unspeakability central to Caruth-inspired readings of trauma narratives. Rather, what is striking about her testimony is the atrocious daily repetition of violence and its cumulative wounding assault on her senses of comprehension, hearing, vision and smell. Here Joshua Pederson's recent rethinking of trauma narratives, building on the work of psychologist Richard McNally is illuminating. McNally has argued that trauma is describable and may even lead to more heightened memories characterized by "disassociative alterations in consciousness (time slowing down, everything seeming unreal)."⁵¹ Consequently, and contesting the Caruth-inspired trauma theory orthodoxy of the 1990s, Pederson argues that in terms of analyzing trauma narratives, scholars should "turn their focus from gaps in text to the text itself,"⁵² pay close attention to "narrative detail" and analyze

⁵⁰ Kitty Hart-Moxon, "Kitty Hart-Moxon interviewed by Larissa Allwork," Unpublished Transcript, interview date: 19 August 2013.

⁵¹ Richard McNally, *Remembering Trauma*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 182.

⁵² Joshua Pederson, "Speak Trauma: Towards a Revised Understanding of Literary Trauma Theory," *Narrative* 22/3 (October 2014): 333-353, 338.

“depictions of experiences that are temporally, physically or ontologically distorted.”⁵³ Thus, the paradox can exist that while Hart-Moxon repeatedly claims that her experience of Auschwitz was more than her mind could process, she nonetheless can still, in Pederson’s terms, “speak trauma” in all its sensorial detail, from the sounds of the death camp to the stench emitted by the chimneys of Birkenau.

Hart-Moxon was also asked about the processes associated with the writing of her memoirs *Return to Auschwitz* (1981), and in particular her first book, *I am Alive* (1961).⁵⁴ Hart-Moxon completed *I am Alive* in breaks and gaps of time that she grasped from working in an X-Ray department in the UK after the war. Unlikely as it may seem, it could be argued that this splintered process of writing ended up being an important part of helping her find a mechanism of dealing with the traumatic events of Birkenau that were so powerfully described during the interview:

I just managed to switch. I just learned to switch. And I think that was actually good for me. Because I learned to switch off. Which I can do now. It actually trained me to do this switching off, this switching over. So, immediately a phone rang and I had to go and x-ray this patient, I just left everything and I went back to my work. Because I had to do it. If I wouldn’t have had to do it, I probably couldn’t have done it, I think. There was nobody else in this x-ray department, I was on duty, my casualty was there and I had to cope with it. So, I think, it goes back to what Auschwitz taught you, which is to cope...with extraordinary situations and you just learn to cope. But that’s what it actually taught you, you need to cope with whatever life’s going to throw at you. And I think that’s what happens, or at least that’s what happened to me.⁵⁵

Writing and learning to ‘switch’ from the pain of the past to reclaim agency in the present, thus seems an important part of Hart-Moxon’s rebuilding of her life after 1945, though her approach should not be perceived as a normative coping strategy for all survivors of genocide. For as Anne Karpf, daughter of Holocaust survivor Natalia Kapf has written in her February 2014 *Guardian* article on the

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁵⁴ Kitty Hart-Moxon, *I am Alive*, (London; New York: Abelard Schuman, 1961); Kitty Hart-Moxon, *Return to Auschwitz*, (London; Toronto; Sydney; New York: Granada Books, 1983).

⁵⁵ Hart-Moxon, “Kitty Hart-Moxon interviewed by Larissa Allwork.”

passing away of survivor of Theresienstadt, concert pianist and relentless optimist Alice Herz-Sommer:

Herz-Sommer was remarkable, we'll never know what enabled her to manage her traumas with such optimism, or why she was able to feel such profound gratitude towards life. But we should never hold her up as an ideal towards which all traumatised people should aspire. Nor should we apply the psychobabble concept of closure to genocide – when reams of historical evidence – from the Armenian genocide to the Holocaust – show unequivocally that many traumas cannot be processed in the lifetime of the individuals who underwent them, and indeed are passed on to successive generations.⁵⁶

The second way in which trauma theory connects to work arising from *HRNT* is based on the observations of Felman in relation to the transmission of memory through the 'institutional' context of undergraduate teaching, although in contrast to Felman, here the Holocaust related pedagogy focused on history, memory and testimony rather than literature and testimony. In her essay on 'Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching,' Felman described the exceptional responses provoked by exhibiting two films of survivor testimony in her Yale class for "Literature and Testimony." According to Felman the showing of the video testimonies instigated a kind of crisis in the classroom which was marked by a silence within the seminar alongside a profusion of discussion outside of the class.⁵⁷ Following a consultation with Laub about this situation, Felman decided that this contagiousness of trauma in turn required 'working through' via the means of an address to the class by Felman and an assignment that called for the students to express their understanding of encountering the testimonies. For Felman, this process of "creating in the class the highest state of crisis that it could withstand, without 'driving the students crazy,'" reflected her "job as a teacher."⁵⁸ Given the changing economics of British higher education since 2010's Browne report and current debates on US campuses about the need for 'trigger warnings' in relation to potentially explicit or disturbing material on

⁵⁶ Anne Karpf, "Alice Herz-Sommer is not a one person truth, justice and reconciliation commission," *The Guardian*, February 25, 2014.

⁵⁷ Felman, "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, eds. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, (Oxford; New York: Routledge, 1992), 42-56.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

university syllabuses,⁵⁹ the idea of taking Felman’s principles of ‘crisis’ into the university seminar room seems increasingly institutionally problematic. This poses important questions for Holocaust educators as they probe the limits of pedagogy in the neo-liberal classroom.

No experiences encountered on this project have been as dramatic as Felman’s and it is important to bear in mind LaCapra’s criticism that it is dangerous “to obscure the difference between victims of traumatic historical events, and others not directly experiencing them.”⁶⁰ However, teaching the Holocaust does present the tutor with some specific challenges,⁶¹ which have been outlined in detail by Holocaust and genocide educationalists such as Paul Salmons and Matthias Haß.⁶² These are not just in relation to the presence of ‘identity politics’ in the seminar room, but also relate to student responses which might be found on other courses but which are arguably intensified by the emotive, violent and provocative subject matter associated with studying the Holocaust, Nazi-era crimes and genocides. For example, throughout a course taught in 2011 there were instances where, despite class members’ distance from the events being studied (no student said that they had lost a relative in the Holocaust, through the Nazi terror system or as a result of any other genocide), the material on display nonetheless occasionally evoked painful personal memories in students which threatened to surface in class. For example, one mature student excused themselves from a seminar on memorialization and restitution because it reminded them of recent struggles in relation to a very close personal bereavement; while another worried that they might break down during their end of term presentation because of the recent death of a close relative. ‘Acting Out’ or an over-identification with the suffering of the victims is a misleading conflation and too strong a term for these encounters. However, it is arguable that the themes of death, bereavement and loss which are entwined with the study of the Holocaust can be challenging for some students. Here the delimited use of ‘trigger warnings’ could be helpful, but only within the context that it is

⁵⁹ Jennifer Medina, “Warning: The Literary Canon Could Make Students Squirm,” *The New York Times*, May 17, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/18/us/warning-the-literary-canon-could-make-students-squirm.html?_r=0 [accessed August 4, 2016].

⁶⁰ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, ix.

⁶¹ This refers to teaching carried out on the BA History module ‘The Holocaust and its Histories’ in the spring term of 2011 at the University of Northampton.

⁶² Paul Salmons and Matthias Haß, “Comparing genocide in the classroom: challenges and opportunities,” in *Holocaust Education in a Global Context*, eds. Karel Fracapane and Matthias Haß, (Paris: UNESCO, 2014), 105-111.

understood that as suggested by Stef Craps, a degree of productive discomfort is central to the pedagogical and educational experience of studying the Holocaust and genocides at university level.⁶³

Third, despite the limitations discussed, certain elements of trauma theory can still be particularly germane in thinking about aspects of what Lebow might call 'collective' memory, in particular in offering a critical framework for beginning to unpick discourses of communal identity politics. For example, LaCapra's highlighting of the dangers of stereotyping and the need to challenge pre-existing paradigms of identity politics holds particular resonance for the representation of my authorship in a community newsletter following an invited lecture on the British/Lithuanian 'Liaison Project' for the Northampton Hebrew Congregation in February 2012. Although a low-key local event for a small, regional Jewish community organization in the UK, the audience for this event nonetheless shows how in Raphael Samuel's terms history is a "social form of knowledge"⁶⁴ produced not only in academia's 'ivory towers' but also in family and communal circles. What happens when these two worlds intersect is the subject of this short analysis.

This lecture was based on *HRNT*'s research on British/Lithuanian intercultural efforts to promote Holocaust, research, remembrance and education in the late 1990s and early 2000s.⁶⁵ A review of the lecture contained the following quote:

Dr Allwork pointed out that the Lithuanians believed themselves to be the victims of Nazi persecution, as they had been under both the Nazi and Soviet yoke. The Lithuanian nation is ultra-nationalistic, and as Dr Allwork pointed out, the link between Communism and Nazism seems to be embedded in their psyche.⁶⁶

⁶³ Stef Craps, Bryan Cheyette, Alan Gibbs, Sonya Andermahr and Larissa Allwork, "Decolonizing Trauma Studies Round-Table Discussion," *Humanities* 4/4 (2015): 905-923, 916.

⁶⁴ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, (London: Verso, 1994), 8.

⁶⁵ Chapter four of *HRNT*, 111-132. An initial version appeared as Larissa Allwork, "Intercultural Legacies of the International Task Force: Lithuania and the British at the Turn of the Millennium," *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 19/2 (2013): 91-124.

⁶⁶ Northampton Hebrew Congregation, "Northampton Hebrew Congregation News 2012."

The use of stereotypes in this description was perplexing and a letter was addressed to the congregation, clarifying my position.⁶⁷ What provoked my response was the use of stereotypes in the article. The talk had certainly been critical of specific failures by the Lithuanian state to deal with the legacies of the Nazi past as well as continuing expressions of ultra-nationalism by some individuals and groups within Lithuania. The lecture was also strongly critical of comparative approaches towards the Nazi and Soviet regimes that do not increase historical knowledge of the similarities and differences between these two ‘totalitarian’ systems, but rather serves a perturbing agenda of blaming all Lithuanian Jews for the Soviet occupation during the Second World War, with the intent of downplaying the responsibility of Lithuanian collaborators in the Holocaust.

However, using essentializing terms such as ‘psyche’ or stereotyping the Lithuanian state in 2012 as ‘ultra-nationalistic’ was both inaccurate and ultimately unhelpful in encouraging constructive dialogues between Lithuanians, Jews living in Lithuania and Lithuanian Jews living in the wider world and Israel. Admittedly, authorial intentions in the synagogue review are impossible to locate. It cannot be known if the reviewer’s comments were based on a misunderstanding of me, my failure to communicate effectively or a simple slip in the reviewer’s writing style. In any case, LaCapra’s assessment of the pain of traumatic pasts, the challenges of working beyond entrenched subject positions and moving towards new dialogues seems pertinent: “I think that one of the great problems in research is that there is a grid of subject positions, and through processes of identification or excessive objectification, one remains in that grid.”⁶⁸

This article has reflected on trauma theory as a key context and intellectual horizon line for the research underpinning *HRNT*. It has been suggested that the limitations of trauma theory for the scholar of the history of collective remembrance are all too apparent. This is particularly due to the Euro-centricity of trauma theory in global comparative approaches, the dangers of front-loading melancholic trauma theory, as well as the limitations of constructing psychoanalytic narratives of national and communal pasts that simplify the diverse remembrance practices of the Shoah in the 1940s and 1950s. As Robert

⁶⁷ It was requested that this letter be distributed to members of the congregation although it has not appeared on the organization’s web-page. A copy of this letter can be found in the University of Northampton’s online NECTAR research database.

⁶⁸ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 175.

Moeller has pithily noted, there are key “methodological challenges involved in putting an entire nation on the couch.”⁶⁹ Nonetheless, this article has also suggested that the lessons of a revised and self-reflexive trauma theory remain relevant, holding important analytical possibilities for scholars working at the intersections of the over-lapping public and private spheres of ‘individual,’ ‘collective’ and ‘institutional’ memory.

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⁶⁹ Robert Moeller in Doris Bergen, Volker Berghahn, Robert Moeller, Dirk Moses and Dorothea Wierling, “The Changing Legacy of 1945: A Round-Table Discussion,” *German History* 23/4 (2005): 519-546, 528.