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1. Witnessing in Contemporary Art and Politics

Kia Lindroos and Frank Möller

In this book, we are exploring the practice of bearing witness to politics through art. The contributors to this volume reflect on the concept of art and selected aspects of understanding the role of art and different artistic genres in connection with political witnessing. While exploring art as political witness, the contributors focus on art or politics or witnessing or a combination of the above but, essentially, all of them utilise – implicitly or explicitly – concepts of witnessing. They acknowledge, discuss and build upon the existing literature in light of their individual subject matter, regarded from different disciplinary angles including art history and political science. They elaborate on the politicalness of artistic witnessing and explore the concept of witnessing as a form of political activity. The book addresses both conceptual and theoretical questions and presents theoretically reflected case studies, including selected artistic works.

The contributors to this volume explore the work of both professional artists and non-artists' use of artistic forms of expression when witnessing politics. The chapters reflect the current interest in the humanities and social sciences in the idea – or the question – of being a witness. They address this idea by interrogating and expanding concepts of witnessing and their uses in artistic, historical and political practice. In the present chapter, we review the existing literature on the concept of being a witness and correlate it with the following chapters.

Being a Witness

A witness is someone who is "present as a spectator or auditor".[1] If this someone is the only one who can testify from personal observation, and if material evidence with which to support this testimony is lacking, then testimony appears to be especially important because it reveals things we would otherwise not be aware of. Such testimony, however, "relies on an act of faith: we must choose whether we believe the witness or nor" (Korhonen 2008: 115).

1 *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, Vol. II, p. 2562.

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Traditionally defined, a witness is someone "who is or was present and is able to testify from personal observation".[2] In the criminal justice system, as well as in the social sciences and humanities, this understanding of being a witness – especially an *eye*witness – has been widely applied to testimony to violent, tragic and traumatic events such as the Holocaust. This approach to witnessing is a rather narrow one: in order to qualify as a witness, you have to see something with your own eyes at the exact point in time when this something happens. As the following discussion will show, much of the emerging literature on witnessing is interested in expanding our understanding of what it means to be a witness.

To be able to be a witness includes some form of visual and/or bodily connection to the matters witnessed. For example, Gideon Hausner, the Attorney General of the State of Israel and chief prosecutor at the Eichmann trial, wanted "people who would tell what they had seen with their own eyes and what they had experienced on their own bodies" (quoted in Wieviorka 2006: 70). Hausner adds to the *eye*-witness who testifies from personal observation the *body*-witness who testifies on the basis of what he or she experienced on their own body. Indeed, *observation* – being a spectator – is often deemed insufficient in order for a person to qualify as witness. As David Simpson notes, the "person who simply notices but does not act" – the spectator, the bystander, the onlooker, the *voyeur* – "has been deemed most intolerable" (Simpson 2006: 3; for a defence of the *voyeur* in the context of witnessing people in pain, see Ledbetter 2012: 3–14). Simpson couples two words – *simply* and *notices* – the connection between which should be carefully reflected upon (Möller 2013: 47): is noticing simple, and who simply notices? In any case, reflecting scepticism about the moral position of the spectator, Diana Taylor (2003: 243) defines the "role of witness" more ambitiously "as responsible, ethical, participant rather than spectator to crisis". Building on Taylor's approach, the *participant* witness has been introduced into the literature as someone who (self-)critically engages with the conditions depicted in an image, including his or her own subject positions in connection with these conditions (Möller 2013: 36–55). Thus, in order to be considered a witness some form of engagement beyond being present and being able to testify from personal observation is often deemed necessary.

With regard to the 1970s and early 1980s, Annette Wieviorka (2006: 96) writes compellingly about *the era of the witness* characterized by "the systematic collection of audiovisual testimonies" as regards Holocaust experiences and memories of experiences. Both terms are important here – *era* and *witness*: *witness* as understood in Hausner's sense as above (eye and body), and *era* because the issue at that time was not only one of people testifying on the basis of their own

2 *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, Vol. II, p. 2562.

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experience, but also one of general interest in their testimonies among a wider audience. Such interest had largely been absent during the first period after the Holocaust. It was during the Eichmann trial and thus before *the era of the witness* that "[f]or the first time since the end of the war, the witnesses had the feeling that they were being heard" (ibid.: 84). The trial helped transform *witnesses* into *survivors*, recognized by society "as such" (ibid.: 88).

However, Primo Levi (1989: 83–84) notes that "we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses". He specifies:

> We survivors are not only an exiguous but also an anomalous minority: we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the 'Muslims,' the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have a general significance. They are the rule, we are the exception.

The survivors can testify to certain events based on their own experience but their testimony is "a discourse 'on behalf of third parties,' the story of things seen at close hand, not experienced personally" (Levi 1989: 84). Giorgio Agamben, when discussing Levi's writings, comments that "[w]hoever assumes the charge of bearing witness in their name" – that is, in the name of Levi's "complete witness" – "knows that he or she must bear witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness" (Agamben 2002: 34).

Discourses and practices revolving around the Holocaust and the memory of the Holocaust have "become, for better or for worse, the definitive model for memory construction" (Wieviorka 2006: xiv). Such construction is not limited to the ways discussed by Wieviorka. In her chapter titled *Dancing Memory*, Dana Mills looks at the Holocaust as one of the biggest catalysers of the foundation of the state of Israel, as well as one of the most formative elements in the creation of Israeli identity (chapter 3, this volume). As such, it has been hugely influential in Israeli artistic language and specifically in Israeli dance. She focuses on readings of two dance works: *Ami Yam, Ami Ya'ar*, a dance work performed by the Batsheva Dance Company in the 1960s (choreography: John Cranko) and *Memento Mori*, performed by the Kibbutz Dance Company in the 1990s (choreography: Rami Be'er). These are two works in which the Holocaust plays a central role. Mills analyses the ways in which these dance works record shifting discourses of citizenship in Israeli society, from a republican discourse to a liberal one. Rather than paying exclusive attention to the complexities of the choreographies of these dance works, equal attention should be devoted to the complexities of identity the dance works engage with. Dance, as a method of witnessing, testifies to these complexities. Furthermore, dance, as Mills argues, "cannot only witness shifts in discourses of citizenship but [also] the price hegemonic discourses bear on the moving body. The moving body remembers the price it has to pay for joining in with collective enterprises".

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While Wieviorka does not explicitly address the question of art as political witness, she acknowledges that political testimony can be transformed "into a work of art" (Wieviorka 2006: 83).[3] Such transformation may not be the main purpose of testimony (see our discussion of Avishai Margalit's work below) but it is nevertheless important.

There can be observed a certain recent expansion of the concept of being a witness, illustrated by such qualifiers as *expert*, *moral*, *silent*, *transparent*, *convincing*, *secondary*, *post-factum* or *invisible,* to name but a few, all of which indicate the need for differentiation with regard to the concept of being a witness. The *expert* witness, for example, relies – and makes others rely – on the epistemological advantage resulting from specialist and exclusive knowledge based on his or her professional education. The criminal justice system and politico-historical contexts requiring specialist knowledge often rely on such a witness.[4] This approach is closely related to the *transparent* witness, a professional or non-professional documentarian who, in addition to demonstrating his or her own point of view, acknowledges the complexity of the events depicted and appears to be "fair" *vis-à-vis* the subjects and conditions depicted (Zuckerman 2014: 40–41). Here, transparency refers to verifiability and fairness.

Morality and Observation

Avishai Margalit identifies the *moral* witness in terms of "knowledge-by-acquaintance of suffering" (Margalit 2004: 149). In order to qualify as moral witness, "[h]e or she should witness – indeed, they should experience – suffering inflicted by an unmitigated evil regime" (ibid.: 148).[5] "Being a moral witness involves witnessing actual suffering, not just intended suffering" (ibid.: 149). It also involves experience of suffering, not just observing (the) suffering (of others). Recall that Levi (1989: 84), too, distinguishes "things seen at close hand" from things "experienced personally", the one attributed to the survivor, the other to the "true" witness.

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3 Her example is Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*. Importantly, the "witness is the bearer of an experience that, albeit unique, does not exist on its own, but only in the testimonial situation in which it takes places" (p. 82).

4 Wieviorka (2006: 57) reports that at the Eichmann trial, "[f]or the first time …, a historian, Salo Baron, then a professor at Columbia University, was called to the witness stand to provide a historical framework for the trial". In literature, the expert witness appears for example in James (1977).

5 We would like to decouple Margalit's discussion from "unmitigated evil regime[s]" and expand it to all political regimes.

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Margalit (2004: 149–150) stresses that an *observer* can also be a moral witness (although she or he cannot be a "paradigmatic case of a moral witness". An observer can be a moral witness on condition that, just like the sufferer, she or he is "at personal risk" (ibid.: 150) – risk both in the form of "belonging to the category of people toward whom the evil deeds are directed" (ibid.) and risk in the form of "trying to document and record what happens for some future use" (ibid.). The use of the present tense in these conditions for risk – deeds *are*, not *were*, directed towards a certain group of people, and witnesses record what happen*s*, not what happen*ed* – implies contemporaneity. Aftermath artists (see below) cannot be moral witnesses of the original event, only of the aftermath as "the authority of a moral witness comes from being an eye-witness" (ibid.: 173).

Artists who make record of their own suffering, inflicted on them by others, are paradigmatic moral witnesses. Artists can also be classified as moral witnesses if they belong to the category of people who were targeted even if they, the artists, were not themselves targeted. If they do *not* belong to the same category of people, then artists documenting or recording the suffering of others can be, but do not necessarily have to be, moral witnesses: in order to qualify as moral witness, their "testimonial mission has [to have] a moral purpose" (ibid: 151) and they have to take risks. "To be a moral witness … is all about taking risks" (ibid.: 157).

If an artist does take risks as an eye-witness, then she or he would seem to qualify as moral witness even though the production of art "for some future use" (ibid.: 150) appears to contradict Margalit's insistence on testimony's "intrinsic value", its non-instrumentality: in Margalit's understanding, testimony is not a means to an end. Indeed, the testimony of the paradigmatic moral witness is given "intrinsic value …, no matter what the instrumental consequences of it are going to be" (ibid.: 167). Thus, an artist documenting, with a moral purpose and for future use, the suffering of others at the same time that this very suffering occurs can, if – and only if – she or he takes risks, be a moral witness; however, due to both the lack of personal experience of suffering and the documentation's instrumentality, he or she cannot be a *paradigmatic* one.

Furthermore, Margalit differentiates the *moral* witness from the *political* witness who "believes that the incriminating evidence that she gathers is an instrument in the war effort" (ibid.). In light of the title of the present book, a longer quotation seems to be necessary here:

> The political witness, by temperament and training, can be a much better witness than the mere moral witness for the structure of evil and not only for episodes of evil. And thus he can be a more valuable witness in uncovering the factual truth. The political witness can be very noble in fighting evil against all odds. And yet as an ideal type, although his features partly overlap with those of the moral witness, the political witness is still distinct, not to be confused with the moral witness. Both are engaged in

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uncovering what evil tries to cover up. The political witness may be more effective in uncovering the factual truth, in telling it like it was. But the moral witness is more valuable at telling it like it felt, that is, telling what it was like to be subjected to such evil. The first-person accounts of moral witnesses are essential to what they report, whereas political witnesses can testify from a third-person perspective without much loss (ibid.: 168).

The distinction between "telling it like it *was*" and "telling it like it *felt*" (ibid.; italics added) is an important one. It is equally important that there is overlap between the moral and the political witness; these two subject positions are not mutually exclusive. Margalit's understanding of "political witness", however, is a very specific one – one that the contributors to this volume do not necessarily share. While it has been said that art is political on condition that it "extends the thread of recognition and understanding beyond what previously was seen and known" (Elderfield 2006: 44), any work of art is susceptible to politically informed analysis. Such analysis will reveal, for example, that art is eminently political even if it confirms "what previously was seen and known" (ibid.). Indeed, art, while bearing witness to politics, lacks criticality if it mainly reconstructs or anticipates the motives of the political elite (Krippendorff 2000: 91). Such art is political but hardly critical (Möller 2016). Art, thus, is always a contribution to political discourse, shaping "what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought" (Rancière 2009: 103). In other words, art contributes to our understanding of what is possible, envisioning what Jacques Rancière calls "a new landscape of the possible" (ibid.) or rendering the emergence of such a new landscape difficult.

Bearing witness to politics through political analysis of art reveals as much about art as it does about the political constellations within which art operates. Neither art nor bearing witness to politics through art is necessarily or automatically critical or politically progressive. Political analysis can reveal whether it *is* or not. Such analysis, however, "should not … aim at the closure of 'interpretation' or 'analysis' of the work, but rather aim toward a dialogue wherein the work of art retains its power to challenge the preexisting theories, be they political, philosophical, or literary" (Hyvärinen and Lisa Muszynski 2008: 20). Thus, witnessing politics through art is always an ongoing project.

To resume our explication of Margalit's conceptualization we would like to stress that being a moral witness is linked to hope – hope "that in another place or another time there exists, or will exist, a moral community that will listen to their testimony" (Margalit 2004: 155). Applied to the artist as moralist, Alex Danchev (2009: 3) specifies that the artist hopes "that there is, or will be, an audience of sentient spectators, viewers, readers, absorbed in the work: a community, a moral community, for whom it stands up and who will stand up for it". Witnessing without a receptive audience appears futile.

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Time Witnesses

A receptive audience is one that combines different temporalities of events, memories and experience. The question of the temporality of the witnessing poses the dilemma, whether or not the position of witnessing an event and artistically documenting it, for instance in war photography or other forms of witnessing violent activities, carries on throughout time, and how different temporalities of events, memories and experience are merged in the spectator. Kia Lindroos, in chapter 4, sees the manner of cinematic witness as closely related to bearing witness of controversial images of the historical and contemporary political world. The chapter discusses Chris Marker's work through selected examples of his films such as *Les Statues meurent aussi*, *Sans Soleil* and *Le Tombeau d'Alexandre*. Marker's aesthetic work is not only intertwined with rethinking cinematic political history and the philosophy of time. He also experiments with new technologies, with reproducing different aesthetic modes in order to narrate political and historical events. Marker's cinema has taken the form of personal essays, combined with the genre of documentary. Thus, as much as being an artist who documents different aspects of political history from the 1950s to the end of the millennium, he is also a personal witness of these times. His films are a combination of visual imagery with philosophical speculation and erudition. The commentaries he creates to accompany the film-images come close to streams of consciousness and they can be very poetic. The poetry of the text combines with rather subjective seeing and hearing experiences. Besides the documentary film on Alexander Medvedkin (*Le Tombeau d'Alexandre*) that is discussed in this chapter, Marker has made several cinematic portraits, for instance on Akira Kurasawa, Christo, Andrei Tarkovsky and Simone Signoret.

Different temporalities of witnessing and the inter-connection among the artistic, the historical and the political are also thematised in Sally Butler and Roland Bleiker's contribution on indigenous art in Australia (chapter 5). Indigenous art is used worldwide to promote Australia; at the same time, however, its creators are politically, economically and socially marginalized in Australia, continually exposed to stigma and exclusion. This exclusion is also reflected in the extent to which the political dimension of indigenous art, including its emphasis on indigenous rights, self-determination and social equality, is often disregarded when this art is incorporated into mainstream culture and the art market. In the chapter, Butler and Bleiker direct our attention to performance and analyse the political witnessing function of performative role-playing aspects of art, utilised by indigenous artists in their fight against the colonial legacy, or, to use Derek Gregory's (2004) apt term, *the colonial present*. The authors' focus on embodiment and performance helps divert

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our attention from the visual ingredients of artistic witnessing to the body's full sensory network (see Bacci and Melcher 2013). Indeed, the visuality of witnessing cannot be reduced to that which can be seen but always involves the whole body, and this involvement transforms the eyewitness necessarily into the body-witness. Art employing the body – the body as art; the body as witness – testifies to the human condition under duress and influences the viewer's perception by means of subconscious sensory stimulations.

A recent popular British TV series (*Silent Witness*) helped popularize the *silent*, *post-mortem* witness.[6] Roland Barthes (2000), too, identifies as the essence (or 'horror', as he notes) of the photograph that it certifies that the corpse is alive. Thus, the witnessing momentum here is that it maintains the memory, trace or images of the people who have passed away: this connects the historical witness to contemporary experience. Cynthia Milton, in her contribution to this volume, pays attention to art after loss (chapter 6). Milton analyses post-conflict representations of the violence visited upon Peru, especially its indigenous population, in connection with the conflict between state security forces and *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) in the 1980s and 1990s. She engages with art's capability of contesting large-scale violence and restoring the humanity of citizens who suffered – and in case of traumatic memories, continue to suffer – from this violence. Milton not only explores the connection between art and affect; she also critically discusses the notion of art as historical evidence, noting that art can contradict official histories and represent individual and group memories that deviate from such histories. Importantly, Milton notes that "*art is not bound to truth*", i.e. the issue is not – or not primarily or exclusively – one of verisimilitude in the sense of being true or real. Rather, art interrogates competing narratives of the past, acknowledging both that each narrative may be true from the perspective of the narrator (as people remember the same event differently) and that no narrative is true (in the sense of historically accurate). Memory is always exposed to and influenced by narrative structures of other memories; and all memories evolve, especially when narrated in form of a story (see also Levi 1989: 24).

Post-mortem witnesses also appear in connection with forensic photography (see Dufour 2015) in such contexts as the (reappearance of the) *desaparecidos* – the disappeared (Sánchez 2011a and 2011b). The dead are not "required to make sense of their deaths", as Jim Crace (2000: 192) poignantly writes, but their remains can help others explain and, to some extent, cope with these deaths – bones are "the most reliable witnesses to atrocity" (Danchev 2009: 41). Forensic photography may not be capable of providing closure (Sánchez 2012:

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6 See http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007y6k8/episodes/guide.

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192). In contrast to other forms of photography,[7] however, it may provide assurance.

The *post-factum* witness depicts "the space in which [the trauma] occurred" after it occurred (Lowe 2014: 228). Aftermath photographs and photographers, thus, are post-factum witnesses. This photography and these photographers focus either on people experiencing and suffering from trauma even when the event that caused the trauma in the first place seems to be over (e.g. Torgovnik 2009) or on landscapes, built environment and ruins within which trauma-causing events occurred and which testify to such events (Lisle 2011). Aftermath artists may engage with an event that occurred before they were born – in which case they may be referred to as *secondary* witnesses (Apel 2002) or *post*-witnesses (Popescu and Schult 2015), a term derived from Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory[8] – or they may recreate an event they witnessed personally but did not artistically engage with at the time it happened.

A photographer can be a *convincing* witness if he or she uses "lenses that approximate the breadth and magnification of average human vision" so as to "neutralize our skepticism" (Adams 1994: 147) and thwart allegations of manipulation which are omnipresent in the digital age. However, photography can also appear to be convincing if it operates fundamentally differently. Referring to the satellite images then-US Secretary of State Colin Powell used in his testimony before the UN Security Council on February 5, 2003, Jane Blocker introduces the *invisible* witness. According to Blocker, such a witness is a core character in current cultural configurations because "the godlike invisibility of this witness lends it a legitimacy and authority that allow it to control in alarming ways what we understand 'the real' to be" (Blocker 2009: xvi). Powell, however, seems to have been more sceptical about the power of this witness. In connection with selected images, he explicitly referred to "a human source" corroborating the visual evidence seemingly provided by the images: "So it's not just the photo, and it's not an individual seeing the photo. It's the photo and then the knowledge of an individual being brought together to make the case".[9] One might ask: what case? Indeed, by combining image and eye-witness, Powell combined two notoriously unreliable sources. It is arguable that he did so in order to illustrate the US administration's pre-existing beliefs

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7 Hirsch (1997: 119) notes that the photograph normally reveals less than it promises to reveal.

8 "Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (Hirsch 1997: 22).

9 US Secretary of State's address to the United Nations Security Council, February 5, 2003, at http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/feb/05/iraq.usa.

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on Saddam Hussein's Iraq as a country in possession of weapons of mass destruction.

Artists engage in the politics of witnessing by utilizing all of the above – and many other – understandings of and approaches to being a witness. They are not the only ones. For example, "the role of the photographer as witness" is regularly referenced in the literature, especially in connection with photo-journalistic representations of wars and violent conflicts (Kennedy 2014: 46). Louie Palu's contribution to this volume (chapter 2) shows why it is appropriate to refer to photojournalists as witnesses. Such photojournalists as Palu himself are eyewitnesses; they exemplify contemporaneity by being on location when something happens; and they take risks. Their work also follows strict ethical standards. They do not normally belong to the group of people originally targeted by the regime; however, as Palu's contribution shows, they become targets in their capacity as photographers, testifying visually to gruesome events for some future use. In his chapter, Palu also raises the important question of image control. Witnessing through art and visual culture reflects practices of control and selection. Palu asks: "*Who controls what you see?*" Who controls what you bear witness to? That witnessing through images is not always possible does not imply impossibility of witnessing through art, as several contributions to this volume show.

It is more intriguing, perhaps, that even soldiers are referred to as witnesses documenting, by means of smart phones, their own involvement in the politics of violence (Allan 2014: 187; see also Kennedy 2009 and Struck 2011). These witnesses document, perhaps, their own suffering but they also document the suffering they inflict on others. Can perpetrators be witnesses?

The Artist as Witness

Why does this book specifically engage with artists? After all, in many cases artists represent other people's experiences without having been invited or asked to do so; their work is not commissioned by those who it is meant to reference. Why, then, should artists be expected to be capable of representing other people's experiences adequately? Often they tell the story of things *not* "seen at close hand" (Levi) but from afar – temporally and spatially, lacking "knowledge-by-acquaintance of suffering" (Margalit). Why, then, do artists believe that they have the right to represent other people's experiences in the first place? And who can judge the appropriateness of artistic representations beyond aesthetic judgments? Some commentators insist that what matters is not the truth of the artist but, rather, "the truth of the 'victim'" (Roberts 2014: 150)

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but is there any guarantee that artists are capable of grasping the victim's truth? If not, do they exert violence upon the victims by disregarding their, the victims', truth? Aesthetic judgments would ultimately be of only secondary importance in the context of art as a political witness where judgments have to be political, not aesthetic, ones.

For example, a purely aesthetic judgment of the photographs Dorothea Lange and other photographers produced while on assignment with the Farm Security Administration (FSA) would be misleading. As Jay Prosser notes, underlying their photographic work was a political mission, disguised to some extent by the seemingly documentary character of the photographs. While appearing to be a documentary "mode of witnessing", this photography "did not *portray* victims …; it *created* them" so as to help gain support for the US administration's resettlement policy (Prosser 2005: 90; italics added). The photographer's "non-neutrality" (ibid.) may explain the success of their photographs but their work cannot adequately be grasped with exclusive reference to being a witness.

This photography can also be referenced to illustrate the occasionally rather problematic relationship between artists and subjects, much discussed in the existing literature. Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites report that one of the subjects of one of the most famous photographs produced in connection with the work of the FSA, Florence Thompson, later complained about the "commodification of her image that completely divorced the woman in the photograph from the living Thompson" (Hariman and Lucaites 2007: 62) and her reduction in public perception to a *Migrant Mother*. We note the publisher's striking insensitivity when reproducing this very photograph on the cover of the book, thus contributing to the very same commodification and exploitation Hariman and Lucaites so eloquently describe in their book.

If we follow Walter Benjamin's notion in discussing the complexity of artistic representations, we would notify that beauty, thus the aesthetic value per se, is included in the secrecy (*Geheimnis*) of the work, but not necessarily in its presentation. Beauty includes the possibility that it be recovered in the moment of critique (Benjamin 1991 [1922]: 196). In the moment at which the illusion that the aura represents is becoming transparent the work might also appear differently in its perception. Benjamin positions himself in relation to the Platonic idea of art as illumination and Heidegger's idea of beauty that is connected to being and truth.[10] In his *Work of Art* essay, originally from the year 1936, Benjamin plays with the double meaning of *illumination*, as it is formed from the illusion towards presentation. Here, Benjamin also emphasises the

10 Heidegger's idea is presented in *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (1960, originally from 1935).

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aesthetic polarity of the concepts of play and illumination (*Spiel und Schein*) in which the idea of the origin as truth has already disappeared.

For Benjamin, play and illumination are both included in the concept of *mimesis* (Benjamin 1991 [1936]: 668). The decay of the ancient idea of creation is to be found in the mimesis itself, which is understood as the *original phenomenon* of all artistic creation. What the imitation (the work of art) does to the subject imitated occurs only in an illusory way, like in a play (ibid.: 368). Benjamin suggests that the definition of art should find a balance between these two extreme ways of interpretation; Schiller stresses the importance of play (*Spiel*), Goethe stresses illumination in aesthetics (ibid.: 667). It is possible that a balance between these two could be found. The rethinking of art in the modern era allows the work of art to be conceived of in a way in which play (*Spiel*) and illumination are brought together, and in which art not only imitates the surrounding world, but also begins to *imitate itself* as copies are reproduced. This viewpoint also has its effects when we think in more contemporary terms, about how and in what ways art can be a witness. Thus, what is art actually witnessing in these terms? Is it the play of, illumination of or mimetic experiences of the events and their witness?

For instance, Martin Seel remarks upon the importance of Benjamin's idea in overcoming traditional philosophies of aesthetics (Seel 1993: 771–773). The idea to which Benjamin's thought leads is that here, art is not conceived of as the presentation of something else, such as 'reality' or 'truth', but is *understood as the presentation itself*. Here, presentation is actually the idea that connects to the witness: art has (or might have) the capacity to be a witness in the very act of its presentation.

Wieviorka (2006: 101) notes, in connection with the television mini-series *Holocaust,* anxiety among survivors that they might be "dispossessed of [their own] history by someone outside the experience who claims to be telling it". This someone could be, and often is, an artist. And Jill Bennett reminds us that the experience of violence – or, for that matter, the experience of anything else – "is fundamentally *owned* by someone" (Bennett 2005: 3; italics added). Artists' attempts to speak on someone's behalf and to represent someone's experiences – someone marginalized, someone silenced, someone misrepresented in official discourse or mass culture, someone victimized, even someone killed[11] – might amount to expropriation of such ownership and dispossession of survivors' intimate stories and memories. If artists engage with someone else's experience from the outside by, for example, showing up on location after the event, they

11 Wieviorka (2006: 101) reports that "one of the recurring themes in both oral and written survivor testimony is of a promise made to a friend or relative who is about to die, a promise to tell the world what happened to them and thus to save them from oblivion – to make death a little less futile. Survival itself is often explained and justified by this will to honor the legacy of those who perished".

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enter the “event-as-aftermath” (Roberts 2014: 107), thus contributing to its discursive reconstruction (see below). In other cases, artists are themselves survivors. Rather than engaging with someone else’s experience from the outside, they are themselves inside the experience they engage with. Like Edilberto Jiménez in Milton’s chapter and Chris Marker in Lindroos’s chapter, they are artists *and* they are eyewitnesses.

Representation necessarily transforms. It may give voice to people whose voice would otherwise remain inaudible. Indeed, the question of “who gets heard” is, “fundamentally, a political question” (Couldry 2000: 57). Furthermore, *giving voice* does not necessarily result in *getting heard* in any substantial sense. Often, however, it is the artist’s voice we hear, not the voice of the people the artist claims to represent. This problem can be observed not only in connection with the work of artists but also in connection with the work of scholars, treating victims’ testimonies as mere *data* with which to produce knowledge. Tensions occur even in those cases where no open conflict can be observed between individual memories and personal truths on the one hand and academic discourse and knowledge production on the other (Wieviorka 2006: 128–132).

Artists may speak on behalf of others – others who cannot themselves speak or who do not have access to channels of communication. However, artists may also try to give voice to people who would prefer *not* to speak, perhaps because they want to avoid “being trapped in an image in which one does not quite recognize oneself” (ibid.: 140) and to which one does not want to be reduced – the image of a witness, a victim, a survivor, a ‘migrant mother’ (see above). In any case, regardless of *Photovoice* and many other participatory and photo elicitation projects (Harper 2012: 155–206; Delgado 2015), ours are still “societies and cultures where individuals are spoken *for*, much more than they speak in their own name – and they are not necessarily spoken for accurately” (Couldry 2000: 58).

However, the issue is not primarily one of accurateness. Indeed, as Bennett explains, it is not at all a question of “faithful translation of testimony” but rather a question of art “exploit[ing] its own unique capacities to contribute actively” to what she calls “a politics of testimony” (Bennett 2005: 3). It is art’s unique capacities to serve as a political witness that this book is interested in exploring.

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In the context of being an eyewitness, Susan Sontag has extensively reflected on the ways in which the *camera* is a part of witnessing. In particular, she notes, photography has captured the moments that remain parts of our memories of the vanished past and the departed: keeping company with death (Sontag 2003: 24). Quoting Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938), Sontag notices that photographs are not arguments; rather, they are "a crude statement of fact addressed to the eye" (ibid.: 26). (The facticity of photographic statements has, however, been controversially discussed in photographic discourses, establishing that a photographic representation is never identical with the 'fact' it seems to represent.) The brain registers as memory the connection between the photograph and a certain kind of testimony experienced through the eye and in the human nervous system. The memory also becomes a moment that connects present and past times. Thus, the photograph as a 'witness' is also a temporal witness.

Sontag's discussions of Holocaust photography are well-known and often referred to. However, she also pays attention to war photography, including differences between the eras that are being documented. Sontag claims that we are living "in a world saturated, no, hyper-saturated with images" (ibid.: 105), but that not all wars are documented equally; for instance, the long civil war in Sudan, the Iraqi campaigns against the Kurds or the Russian invasion of Chechnya are relatively under-photographed (ibid.: 37). Similarly, Rancière (2009: 96) has directed our attention to processes of selection in connection with the publication of images of violent conflict and human suffering indicating that, while we may be over-exposed to images of some conflicts, other conflicts may very well be invisible to the public. This assessment, in tandem with Sontag's claim (2003: 89) that people "remember only the photographs", raises the question of how to witness conflicts that cannot be seen. In this volume, several contributors pay attention to forms of artistic witnessing other than narrowly visual ones (poetry, literature, dance, theatre and performance).

The dilemma is that although it is problematic to trust media images and war photography as witnesses of certain conflicts and political events, the lack of images documenting a particular conflict affects our understanding of the significance of that conflict and the human suffering it engenders. It also facilitates the politicization of images, as discussed by Bruno Lefort in chapter 7. Lefort explores the "politics of fear" in a 2013 short film that appeared on the Internet to commemorate the 2006 looting of the Danish Embassy in Achrafiyeh, the heartland of Christian Beirut, Lebanon, following the publication of the Prophet cartoons in a Danish newspaper. The video plays on

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various temporalities – dis-articulating events to re-articulate them in a predefined chain of meaning – so as to stage a memory of communal violence and fear.

Lefort discusses how this representation is enunciated around the tropes of territorial invasion and struggle for survival, embodied by the continual evocation of Martyrs (*shuhadâ'*) whose meaning is to testify (*shahada*) the validity of the experience of intergroup violence conveyed in the film. Further, he argues that the film calls upon a political unconscious to activate an affectivity of communion addressed to the Lebanese Christians. Indeed, the images work as witnesses of their past suffering, of the memory of their internal strife, and of their precarious common fate in a region politically dominated by Islam. Conceivably labelled as political propaganda, this representation ultimately sustains a present day actualization of politics as factionalism: it witnesses the composition and mediation of an alleged resilient existential confrontation between everlasting identities.

Video (from the Latin *videre*, to see) combines both meanings of being a witness – testifying and seeing (see below) – and invites a double act of witnessing: video, as a "social act […] asks that we bear witness to its act of witness" (Saltzman 2006: 30). Photography is said to be uniquely qualified among the visual arts to contribute "to the pathetic understanding of an *other*" (Thompson 2013: 78). "Pathetic" here refers to *pathema* – "an experience passively received: acquiescence to what is seen" (ibid.: 14) – but is the experience of looking at a photograph entirely a passive one? Film and photography are capable of visualizing "the commonalities of being human" (MacDougall 1998: 246). By so doing, they may interrupt stereotypical constructions of 'us' and 'them' evoked in processes of witnessing and help viewers *empathetically* but *partially* identify with the people and the conditions depicted in film and photography – 'empathetically' because "*feeling for* another … entails an encounter with something irreducible and different, often inaccessible" (Bennett 2005: 10) and 'partially' because one's own *mediated* perception of an other's experience is necessarily different from the other's *personal* experience and should not be identified with it. In photographer Diane Arbus's laconic words (quoted in Dyer 2005: 47): "somebody else's tragedy is not the same as your own". You can *feel for* an other but you can neither be this other nor feel what the other feels. Art can evoke this *feeling for*.

Poetry "is the most explicit engagement with the very essence of who we are and what we do: language" (Bleiker 2009: 4). Poetry, thus, can be seen not only as a witness of certain events but also, as Tommi Kotonen shows in his contribution, as a witness to the language with which these events get constructed. In chapter 8, Kotonen analyses different linguistic tools and theories on language and communication that Charles Bernstein brings to the play when trying to register and deconstruct US-American politics and

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mythology after 9/11. Indeed, the question of language – "where does one testify from, and what does one testify to?" (Wieviorka 2006: 32) – is as crucial in the context of political witnessing as is the question of what language one uses when testifying. American poet Charles Bernstein was coming back from LaGuardia airport on September 11, 2001. He was one of the millions who witnessed the attacks on the World Trade Center. During and after that day he wrote several poems where he reflected on the mood in Manhattan, and pondered hate and differing personal and political reactions. As one of the so-called *language poets*, Bernstein has for his entire career been opposing the presence of the lyric, first-person voice in poetry. When 9/11 unfolds in front of his very eyes, he becomes an unwilling "witness to the unspeakable" (Kotonen, in this volume), to events which also affect his poetry. In his first poems after the attack a witnessing poetical 'I' providing personal knowledge is present. The rest of the collection can be seen as a commentary to this 'I' and his reflections; a commentary that refuses to impose a singular 'I' as a connecting element but instead dwells on insecurities and ambivalences, and tries to talk with no 'voice'. From the first reactions, and from their prosaic poetry to more distanced, formalistic pieces, Bernstein deciphered the events and their politics and, in the end, the reader, too, becomes one of the witnesses.

The concept of being a witness, traditionally connected with "public recognition of atrocities" (Kaplan 2005: 122), is increasingly decoupled from tragic events and applied to the everyday: people *witness* a football match rather than *watching* or *attending* it. This application is in accordance with another dictionary entry defining witness, in "loose writing", as "a synonym of 'see'."[12] A certain trivialization of our understanding of being a witness may follow. However, this tendency can be valued positively as an indicator of the increasing appreciation in public and academic discourse of the everyday lives and everyday experiences of ordinary people (Sheringham 2006). These experiences, while often decoupled from tragic and traumatic events, are important to people's sense of place and identity. The "temporality of the everyday" can be, and has been, represented in artistic work, including work by such photographers as Robert Capa, which is often reduced to representations of "the everyday overturned" (Dell 2010: 46).

An 'everyday' witnessing might also happen in unexpected spaces. In her chapter, Suvi Alt reflects the role of abandoned places that have received increasingly popular and academic interest during the past decade (chapter 9). Drawing on research that examines the ways in which derelict spaces enable contestation of capitalism and power, Alt combines an auto-ethnographic account of visits to several abandoned sites with a theoretical elaboration of

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[12] *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary of Historical Principles*, Vol. II, p. 2563 (all quotations).

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Giorgio Agamben's concepts of 'witnessing' and 'play'. In discussing 'urban exploration' as a practice of bearing witness to and playing with abandoned places, she deploys a notion of *onto-poetics* as a site of transformation connecting poetics, life and the political. *Onto-poetics* draws on a Heideggerian conception of art, which does not prioritise a preference for the aesthetic, but refers to the happening of being, and which is here understood as opening up a new space for politics. In this chapter, a twofold political argumentation is searched for. First, Alt argues that urban exploration is a practice of witnessing the past in the present, yet not in the form of recounting an event as a result of having been present as a spectator, but in the form of listening to absence through the materiality of the site. The second argument is that urban exploration is a free and common use of the order of places and identities: a playing with and using what used to be sacred. The *onto-poetics of abandoned places* lies in the ruins' potential to effect change in the way in which one conceives of life as well as one's environment beyond the ruin.

Being a witness is also disconnected from a given person who is a witness. Time periods appear as witnesses: the 1970s and early 1980s, for example, are said to have "witnessed an extraordinary craze for ethnological 'life stories'" (Wieviorka 2006: 97). Material objects such as photographs can also be witnesses. Ariella Azoulay, for example, notes that it is not a person who is doing the witnessing but a photograph: pictures "witness the moment of the outbreak of disaster" (Azoulay 2014: 129). Paul Lowe (2014: 213) refers to photographs as "social agents … bearing witness to past events". He explores "the possibility that the act of bearing witness to past atrocities can be located in the photograph itself, rather than in the photographer". Here, the photograph appears as "secondary witnessing", an "independent artefact in and of itself as well as serving as the visual testimony of the photographer" (ibid.). Both, then, the photographer and her photograph are witnesses, inextricably linked with one another but simultaneously separate from one another, both serving as social agents. Monuments, quintessential vehicles through which and with which people collectively remember, can be witnesses, too, as Lisa Saltzman (2006: 25–47) shows in her discussion of Krzysztof Wodiczko's work.

The concept of witnessing is also separated from presence on location when something happens. This is probably the biggest step away from the traditional understanding of being a witness, requiring, in one form or another, presence: contemporaneity. Photography, Sean O'Hagan (2015) writes in a review of a Jeff Wall exhibition, is seemingly "an act of instant witnessing". Wall's work, however, remakes something from memory – something that lingers in the photographer. Wall does not photograph something instantaneously but recreates it later from memory, insisting on "imaginative freedom" (Wall) as being "crucial to the making of art" (O'Hagan 2015). Recreating from memory amounts to the creation of something new that is

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linked with, but simultaneously decoupled from, the witnessed event, as memories invariably change over time. Wall's work, then, testifies to the artist's memory at a given point in time of a given event, not to the particular event.

Aftermath, post-factum and secondary witnessing all call into question the formerly defining identification of (eye-)witnessing with being personally on location when something, usually something tragic or unexpected, happens. Artists often arrive on location only after an event; they – and their works of art – nevertheless witness not only the aftermath of this event but also the original event. They witness – and reconstruct – "the event-as-aftermath" (Roberts 2014: 107). Recipients of these artworks also become witnesses, *distant* witnesses, remote in space and time, not only of the work of art and that which it represents – the aftermath – but also of the original event referenced in the artwork. Thus, testimony can be transferred from one person to another, transforming, for example, the beholder of an image or the observer of a theatre play that witnesses the *aftermath* of an event into a witness of the *original* event.

Combining the above observations with Butler and Bleiker's focus on the body, Susanna Hast's chapter elaborates on war experience: on the ways in which such experience touches us and we are touched by it (chapter 10). For Hast, the study of being touched by war means looking at war with the body as the locus of war experience. Children are important witnesses to war, consuming images and narratives of war even when they do not experience it directly. Through a theatrical play – *Wij/Zij* – Hast discusses the experience of war through a past time and place. The theatre play, performed in Belgium, is on the Beslan hostage crisis, which took place ten years earlier. The chapter discusses the variety of emotions involved in witnessing war and, in particular, witnessing war from a child's perspective. It addresses the potential of the theatrical play in representing new perspectives to experiencing war from a distance through the movement of the actor's bodies and the sound of their voices. Hast discusses the lack of typical emotions of war such as fear, anger and resentment and, also, the lack of social emotions such as compassion within the play. Her analysis reveals how awe and wonder of the hostage crisis are represented in children's matter-of-fact approach to war, and how suffering is represented through physiological needs rather than psychological states identifiable to the viewer. Being a witness may also imply reflection not only on the act of witnessing violence but also on the violence inherent in the act of witnessing.

In chapter 11, Frank Möller critically explores the space of architecture as a means with which to trick viewers into engagement with the conditions depicted in a given image. The space of architecture engages vision by creating obstacles, and obstacles create the wish to conquer them. The process of conquering obstacles can be understood as a process of reflection, in the course

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of which hitherto neutral and passive observers transfigure into participant witnesses who engage with the conditions depicted. However, the space of architecture also makes viewers wish to enter a space that is not their own and that has to be respected as someone else's. To respect someone else's space appears to be pertinent especially with regard to people in pain: intruding upon their space would seem to be an act of violence which disregards a person's most intimate sphere – and his or her right to intimacy – even if the intention is to empathize with this person and to acknowledge his or her experience. Witnessing human suffering through artistic representation utilising the space of architecture, then, can in itself be an act of violence. The problematic issues are not only gratification and pleasure, identified in the aestheticisation debate as parasitical, unethical, and unproductive. The issue is also one of intrusion and violence: the violence of the photographic act is followed by the violence of the act of witnessing. A discussion of engagements in film and photography with the 1994 genocide in Rwanda serves both to substantialise this assessment and to show that both acts of violence are ultimately necessary.

"Witnesses are vital not just for enlarging the scope of observational knowledge but even more for elucidating the significance of human actions, symbolic acts, and language itself" (Margalit 2004: 181). Art witnesses – and makes others witness – politics. As the following chapters show, it does so by shaping our vision of both life and (what we regard as) reality; by carrying time and thus connecting memory and immemory with our current situation; and by partly seriously, partly humorously, and partly ironically inviting audiences' active engagement with the conditions referenced in a given work of art. It does so by interrogating the authentic, the aesthetic. and the aesthesis as well as by employing the whole body. It does so by referencing not only that which is present, visible, and audible but also that which is absent, invisible, and inaudible. It does so by engaging with politics and political discourse in unique ways: art's language games direct our attention to the ways in which language conditions our perception of 'reality' just as art's visual games alert us to the intimate connection between what we see and what we believe this 'reality' to be. Art creates imaginary – and also utopian – alternatives reflecting that *what is* always includes (as yet unrealized) alternatives, marginalized in political discourse for a variety of reasons. Art, thus, is a political discourse, and bearing witness to politics through art is a political activity.

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