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NARRATIVE

Jakob Lothe

The relationship between trauma and narrative is close but problematic. On the one hand, a person who experiences an event in his or her life as traumatic, and who feels a need to tell others about the experience, may choose, and be able, to do so. On the other hand, a different person who experiences the same event may not feel the same need, or be able, to talk or write about it. While our memory of a traumatic event may prompt narration, it may also thwart narration. Moreover, although a person who tries to tell about a traumatic event may find the narrative activity helpful, narration inevitably takes him or her back to the event, thus perhaps making the person remember what he or she wants to forget.

This chapter will discuss three narratives that attempt to come to terms with the Holocaust as an example of human agency that resulted in the murder of millions of innocent victims. There are two main reasons why I want to highlight the Holocaust. First, it is a test case for the way in which different kinds of narratives are linked to, present and represent a particularly gruesome, in one sense unspeakable, series of events in recent European history. Second, there is a heuristic justification as I take a particular interest in the ways in which different ways of presenting and remembering the Holocaust illustrate narrative's ethical dimension.

Of the narratives I propose to discuss, one is filmic and two are verbal (written) accounts; moreover, while two of the narratives are non-fictional and one is fictional, they are told (and shown) by both women and men. The discussion will identify and discuss elements of trauma that necessitate, problematize and characterize narration in all three texts.

My understanding of narrative is linked to, and aided by, helpful definitions given by Mieke Bal, Ernst van Alphen and Hannah Arendt. For Bal, storytelling is "the presentation in whatever medium of a focalized series of events" (Bal 2018: 37). She identifies two properties of storytelling that make its ethical aspects more specific: "It concerns others, and it is always, at least in part, fictional" (37). All constituent elements of Bal's definition prove relevant to the following discussion. Emphasizing narrative's temporal dimension, van Alphen finds that "narrative can be seen as an existential response to the world and to the experience of that world" (van Alphen 2018: 68). Narrative, he observes, has functioned as "the medium of identity" (68). Referring to Paul Ricoeur, van Alphen calls this notion of identity "narrative identity" (68).

Although, as van Alphen notes, ongoing historical and cultural changes challenge the notion of narrative identity, this challenge does not in itself make the notion less significant – either generally or with a view to the relationship between narrative and trauma. Ricoeur's understanding of identity becomes more, not less, pertinent when seen in the light of the challenge that historical changes pose to narrative identity. Similarly, there is a sense in which the challenge makes Arendt's interlinking of human identity and narrative particularly relevant to a Holocaust survivor's painful experience. Developing an argument based on premises and observations quite different from Ricoeur's, Arendt claims that "*Who* somebody is or was we can only know by knowing the story of which he himself is the hero – his biography, in other words" (Arendt 1998: 186). I agree with Hanna Meretoja that Arendt's understanding of narrative identity tends towards, or aims for, a non-subsumptive, dialogic understanding of narrative communication and exploration that does justice to the other's individuality instead of subsuming it under a general explanatory grid. I also concur with Meretoja that this kind of understanding is closely linked to narrative's ethical dimension (Meretoja 2018b: 107). Both of these notions are illustrated and supported by the narratives considered in this chapter.

Implicit in these comments on narrative and identity is a sense that memory, including traumatic memory, is closely linked to both. It appears impossible to come to terms with the concepts of narrative and identity without activating, implicitly or explicitly, aspects of memory. If I cannot conceive of narrative divorced from memory, neither can I think of my own identity without remembering something of myself before the point or stage of my life where I am now.

This point also applies to a survivor of the Holocaust. If the concept of memory, in common with that of identity, is complicated because of the complexity of the mental processes to which it refers, it becomes even more difficult to understand when it describes, or aims to describe, a Holocaust survivor's attempt to remember a succession of traumatic experiences. I would argue, though, that seen from the perspective of narrative – which, as Jens Brockmeier convincingly argues, is associated with the process of remembering (Brockmeier 2015) – memory is also a resource. Even though there is something frustratingly elusive about memory, and even though the concept resists any precise definition, aspects of memory prove indispensable conceptual tools as we attempt to improve our understanding of narrative and identity. Moreover, I agree with Ricoeur that we should not only consider memory "on the basis of its deficiencies" but also "approach the description of mnemonic phenomena from the standpoint of the *capacities*". As he notes, "to put it bluntly, we have nothing better than memory to signify that something has taken place, has occurred, has happened *before* we declare that we remember it" (Ricoeur 2006: 21).

These observations on narrative, memory and identity underlie my understanding of narrative and trauma, which I provisionally define as the lasting effect(s) of a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. This working definition includes aspects of trauma as understood in disaster psychiatry (Ursano et al. 2017 [2007]: 6–7). Many Holocaust survivors were injured both physically and mentally; their wound is often, as the original Greek meaning of "wound" indicates, also physical. It does not follow that traumatic experience is inaccessible – the following narratives do not indicate that there is a stable or unchanging break between word and world, or between word (or narrative) and wound (Pederson 2018: 100). What the narratives to be considered do suggest, though, is that while narrative – including the decision to narrate, the attempt to narrate and constituent elements of narration – can enable a Holocaust survivor to come to terms with aspects of his or her traumatic experience, other aspects of that experience,

including the way it is remembered, resist narrativization. One reason for this kind of resistance – in spite of the fact that, as Brockmeier has noted, even latent memories include narrative elements – is that the attempt to narrate blends into an act of remembering that activates, or intensifies, painful memories of the traumatic experience (Brockmeier 2015: 119). For a Holocaust survivor, this experience includes being deported to the concentration camp, living (or existing) in the camp, and escaping from the camp – where, for many survivors, family members were murdered. Attempting to use words to tell about, and thus remember, a wound he or she has experienced in the world, a Holocaust survivor may thus be inclined to consider narrative both as resource and as a challenge involving an element of risk. Importantly, both the possibility of gain and the potential risk of narration change over time.

Before turning to my first text, I specify my understanding of narrative by stressing that narrative is a language of, and a tool for, "existential meaning-making" (Brockmeier 2015: 51). This narrative process of meaning-making includes a communicative aspect – the communication of a message (however vague or confusing) from a sender (author or film director) to a receiver (reader or viewer) and, importantly, the receiver's response to and interpretation of that message. Moreover, a narrative is told or shown by one or more narrators and characters from a given perspective or combination of perspectives. And, as it is temporally situated, a narrative "has at its core a dimension of distance" (Freeman 2010: 175). In all the texts that revolve around traumatic experiences discussed in this chapter, combinations of narrative perspective and distance engender and shape a range of ethical questions and effects. Moreover, the Holocaust survivor's decision to narrate – his or her attempt to transform a traumatic experience into a narrative – is also one possessed of an ethical dimension. Seen thus, this discussion of narrative and trauma is linked to, and aims to contribute to, narrative ethics, which, as James Phelan puts it, is "specifically concerned with the intersection between various formal aspects of narrative and moral values" (Phelan 2014).

Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*

A nine-hour documentary about the Holocaust, French film director Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) has become a key reference point in a thematic strand of film studies increasingly concerned with ethical issues (Grønstad 2016). The film is a "mixed generic performance" (LaCapra 1997: 134) in which Lanzmann not only rejects the use of archival film footage but also refuses an explanatory (and thus unavoidably didactic) voiceover commentary. Instead he makes himself (as interviewer and listener) a major presence in the film. His interviewees are mainly Holocaust survivors, partly bystanders (notably Poles who lived close to the concentration camps) and Holocaust scholars (especially Raul Hilberg). There are also interviews with a few perpetrators, that is, people who contributed to the crime of the Holocaust.

Provocatively stating that the film "is not a documentary", Lanzmann (1991: 96) says he wanted to transform the witness into an actor, albeit of the witness's own life and story, thus enabling him (as a director) to make a film that is not about remembering but about reliving. This narrative strategy is strikingly apparent in the film's opening, which I choose to comment on here. As the film begins, Lanzmann, making use of written text on the screen, informs the viewer that

> During the night of January 18, 1945, two days before Soviet troops arrived, the Nazis killed all the remaining Jews in the "work details" with a bullet in the head. Simon Srebnik was among those executed. But the bullet missed his vital brain centres.

This information, which the viewer has just read, simultaneously introduces and serves as a reference point for the first filmic images: I see a man sitting in a small river boat, singing a song in a language I cannot understand. When Lanzmann interviews the man, I learn that his name is Simon Srebnik, and that he was one of the very few (probably fewer than ten) survivors of approximately 150,000 Jews murdered by the Nazis in the Chełmno extermination camp in Eastern Poland. Since Srebnik had a good voice, the Nazis forced him to sing while rowing the boat from which they used to throw ashes from the crematoria into the river Ner.

Lanzmann thus begins *Shoah* by making Holocaust survivor Srebnik repeat an action he repeatedly performed for the Nazis as inmate of an extermination camp thirty years earlier. There is something uncanny, ghostlike, about this form of repetition. Srebnik does not, or cannot, talk much, but his singing is remarkably suggestive. In addition to its intrinsic value as a narrative fragment and an act of memory, it becomes an important leitmotif. In the filmic present, Srebnik is singing as a free man; when he sang the same song for the Nazi guards, he knew that his death was imminent. As a viewer I can see Srebnik in a small boat framed by a beautiful and peaceful landscape, but I cannot see the extermination camp that he miraculously survived. And yet in a way I can, for Srebnik's song in the filmic present establishes a forceful link to the same song sung by him for the Nazis; moreover, that particular temporal connection is strengthened by the fact that, in spite of the beautiful landscape, we are in the same place. This kind of tension is an essential part not just of the beginning but of *Shoah* overall. Lanzmann creates a powerful narrative beginning in which constituent elements of film aesthetics challenge the viewer to ask ethical questions, including difficult questions about the connections between moral values and human action.

One element of film form that contributes significantly to *Shoah*'s ethics is Lanzmann's insistence on the present both as starting-point and as point of reference. The written text I have quoted from the film's opening rolling title is preceded by this sentence: "The story begins in the present at Chelmno, on the Ner river, in Poland." Observing that the construction of a plotted series of events is a key feature of both factual and fictional film, Jacques Rancière has found this beginning "provocative" (Rancière 1996: 158), and in a way it surely is. Is Lanzmann morally justified to make Srebnik repeat what the Nazis forced him to do? His act of singing must be painful for him as it brings back, and probably intensifies, a traumatic experience. Yet his singing may also be a way of dealing with that experience.

There is something enigmatic about Srebnik, whose experience is described as if he died – he "was among those executed". For me as a viewer, there is a strong sense in which our confrontation with his unique individuality reminds us that there were six million other individualities that were ended by the Holocaust. This kind of representation is constituted by the combination of his song (both the words, which I cannot understand, and the melody), the place and the way in which features of Srebnik's face are accentuated by his singing.

The aesthetic impact of the filmic representation is strengthened by, and in one sense predicated on, the extra-textual information about Srebnik that Lanzmann gives the viewer as written text on the screen. Linking Srebnik's song to the narrative of *Shoah*, the information enhances the narrative dimension of the film's opening scene while at the same time problematizing narrative progression. This effect, which contributes to Lanzmann's exploration of trauma, is fortified by Srebnik's appearances later in the film. Although, or because, he says very little, the camera repeatedly focusses on his face; thus, for me as a viewer, it is as though his song, the act of singing that constitutes the film's beginning, continues. Thus

there is a sense in which the opening song, which is already a repetition, is repeated over and over again. If the song is, or becomes, part of Srebnik's narrative identity, it also problematizes that identity by demonstrating his memory of a repetitive event he might intensely want to forget.

While it proves a great resource for Lanzmann as filmmaker, for Srebnik the act of singing must have been inordinately difficult – as I think, though I cannot be sure, I can glean from his facial expression. In *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas highlights the importance of the human face, stressing the ethical challenge and responsibility represented by my encounter with the face of the other. I hasten to add that, for Levinas, the other's face is not an object; rather, it is, or represents, an expression that affects me in a face-to-face encounter. Seen from Levinas's phenomenological perspective, human beings, and characters who represent human beings in narrative fiction, are involved in projects directed towards others, and towards the world. This kind of relational project – which assumes the form of intentional orientation in the world, and which thus expresses a desire to achieve or accomplish something – is radically challenged in the face-to-face encounter (Levinas 1991: 194–219; cf. Davis 2018: 25).

When, using filmic repetition, Lanzmann activates this radical challenge for me as a viewer, he invites me to reflect on the fact that the Nazis who forced Srebnik to sing must also have seen his face while listening to his singing – and yet they attempted to execute him. Demonstrating that there are different ways of responding to the challenge Levinas identifies, the viewer's encounter with Srebnik accentuates the importance of a third temporal layer in *Shoah*: if Lanzmann makes Srebnik repeat, and thus in one sense relive, the traumatic experience of singing in the boat, my experience in 2020 of seeing, and reflecting on, the narrative presentation of Srebnik furthers my understanding of his trauma while simultaneously reminding me how much of that traumatic experience I cannot understand.

The Holocaust was a massive historical event that stretched over three years. But no single narrative could hope to capture the enormity of this event. As Zdenka Fantlová puts it in her testimony in *Time's Witnesses: Women's Voices from the Holocaust* (Lothe 2017 [2013]), "There were six million murdered. If they all survived, there would be six million different stories" (156–7). While in one sense this comment would seem true, in a different sense it is not. It is true that the narratives would have been different, but not all Holocaust survivors are able to transform their experience into a narrative. Whether this kind of inability or failure reduces their identity I am not sure, though it may problematize their narrative identity by making it more fragmented and less coherent. There is even a troubling sense in which it may problematize the experience: although experience extends beyond narrative, once (or if) remembered it tends to take on narrative shape. The enormous challenge of transforming a traumatic experience of this kind into a narrative (however fragmented and disconnected) is a warning against indiscriminate use of the concept of narrative identity. Yet although human identity is not dependent on narrative, narrative can make aspects of human identity clearer to the narrator – and to the listener or reader or viewer.

Edith Notowicz's testimony in *Time's Witnesses*

In order to illustrate this point I want to briefly discuss a passage from the testimony of Edith Notowicz. Notowicz is one of ten Jewish women who relate their stories from the Holocaust in *Time's Witnesses*. Before turning to the relevant passage I need to say a few

words about the book, which was prompted by my wish to document the Holocaust as a multifaceted historical event. During the autumn and winter of 1942–43, 772 Norwegian Jews were deported from Norway to the Nazi concentration camps, most of them to Auschwitz. Of these, 34 survived.

These 34 survivors were all men. Of the Jews deported from Norway, *no* children and *no* women survived Auschwitz. For that reason, there are no witnesses for these two groups of Norwegian Jews. The approximately 300 women and children who were deported to Auschwitz were murdered. Here there is a narrative void – a silence. However, four Jewish women who survived the Holocaust and who settled in Norway after the war were willing to meet me and tell me their stories. One of them was Edith Notowicz, who was deported from Hungary to Auschwitz in 1944. That Notowicz had not published her story prior to our meeting in 2013 is unsurprising given the content, and the implications, of the following quotation from her narrative: her Holocaust experience was, and still is, traumatic. Partly for that reason, I had to ask her a few questions in order to invite her to talk – even though, born after the war and with no camp experience, I could not be sure what questions it was appropriate to ask. The following passage is part of Notowicz's response to the question: "Can you tell me how you experienced your imprisonment?"

> The notorious Doctor Josef Mengele, also known as the "Angel of Death", operated in Auschwitz. I soon made his acquaintance. Mengele used children in his medical experiments. He had a special predilection for twins, but I can't go into details here. It is too horrible for me. He was also interested in finding new methods of sterilization and thereby preventing the Jewish race from procreating. In the camp he had more than enough test subjects, and I was one of those who were used in Mengele's sterilization experiments on Jewish girls. The pain is still with me, and in the dead of night it sometimes is as if I am back in the experimentation room in the camp.
>
> *(Notowicz 2017 [2013]: 96)*

If we did not know that Notowicz was one of the Jewish girls used in Mengele's sterilization experiments in Auschwitz, then this passage would be a glaring example of abuse of storytelling. In a way this part of her narrative is beyond belief, and one indication of the force of this possibility, the possibility of fictional intrusion into a first-person narrative that claims to be a testimony, is that Edith Notowicz asks herself that very question in the next paragraph:

> Is it true or not? What was the driving force behind the Nazis' intense attempt to exterminate other people? Is it possible that humans can be like this? Often I cannot believe it. But I have been there, so I know it happened.
>
> *(Notowicz 2017: 96)*

Although there is a sense in which "I cannot believe it" either, I choose to do so. For me, the trustworthiness of Notowicz's story is strengthened by her own disbelief and by the questions she asks. Moreover, the reliability of her narrative is paradoxically strengthened by a narrative ellipsis. Mengele "had a special predilection for twins, but I can't go into details here. It is too horrible for me." This ellipsis approximates to a paralipsis – a textual lacuna that takes on a particular significance precisely because something is omitted. Notowicz indicates that she knows "details" of Mengele's experiments with twins that that she cannot,

and does not want to, narrate. As a listener and reader, I respect her decision not to elaborate. I would even argue that the choice of excluding these details from her story increases her authority as a witness who recounts. The omitted parts of her memories of Mengele are reserved for, or cannot be excluded from, her thoughts and dreams "in the dead of night". That these memories are deeply traumatic does not, however, render Notowicz's account of Mengele's experiments on Jewish women and children in Auschwitz less credible, or less important.

W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*

I now turn to a fictional rendering of a traumatic Holocaust experience. For W. G. Sebald, the German-British author who was born in Bavaria in 1944, emigrated to the UK in the 1960s and died in a traffic accident outside Norwich in 2001, the Holocaust is a phantom that infiltrates his writings. Apparently irrepressible, traces of this multifaceted historical event are scattered across his work. In *Austerlitz* (2002), Sebald's last completed narrative and a major novel of the early twenty-first century, the Holocaust becomes an empty centre, a void towards which the narration hesitantly yet inevitably gravitates. The Holocaust is even inscribed in the novel's title: it is not coincidental that the first three and last three letters of *Austerlitz* and Auschwitz are identical.

This link is strengthened by the main character's name, which is identical with the novel's title. It is also furthered by Sebald's narrative strategy of presenting the narrative as a prolonged negotiation between Austerlitz, a British historian of architecture who turns out to be the child of parents who apparently died in the Holocaust, and an anonymous listener or narratee, who also lives in England but turns out to be German. Austerlitz discovers his true origin only as an adult: a Czech Jew, he was saved by his mother, Agáta, who managed to secure a place for her son on a *Kindertransport* from Prague to England in the summer of 1939, just before the beginning of the Second World War. Realizing that "his own idea of himself was based [...] on an autobiographical void, a narrative lacuna, he faces dramatic psychological and psychiatric consequences" (Brockmeier 2015: 291), prompting him to embark on a search for his parents even though, on a rational level, he knows that in all probability they were both murdered in Auschwitz.

Austerlitz is a victim of the Holocaust because both his parents were murdered and because he finds it extremely difficult to localize the traumatic experience in time and place. Yet as the narrative situations in the novel show, this difficulty, which may prove insurmountable, motivates Austerlitz to narrate while at the same time motivating the German frame narrator to listen. Although Sebald's narrative rhetoric includes elements of manipulation, and although narrative manipulation may involve an abuse of storytelling, I consider the narration of Austerlitz and his narratee who becomes a frame narrator – and of Sebald as the implied author representing both of them – to be ethical in the positive sense of the word. The values of narrative are not necessarily "good" values – or values I share and to which I subscribe. And yet, as far as this novel is concerned, there is a link between the values associated with Austerlitz, and increasingly with the frame narrator as an "empathetic listener" (Assmann 2018: 210), and *Austerlitz* as a storytelling project. There is even a sense in which the novel's narrative's ethics is an integral part of both narrators' attempt to give aspects of traumatic experience narrative form.

Strikingly, however, the character who most forcibly and unambiguously represents the moral values promoted by the narrative is absent from it. This character is Agáta, Austerlitz's mother, who saves her son's life. Agáta's ethics is diametrically opposed to that of the Nazis.

Although we should be wary of comparing directly narratives as different as Edith Notowicz's testimony and Sebald's novel, there is a sense in which Austerlitz's and the frame narrators' storytelling represent the ethics of Austerlitz's parents, while Edith Notowicz's storytelling represents the moral values of the 300 Norwegian Jewish women and children who could not bear testimony because they were murdered on arrival in Auschwitz.

If *Austerlitz* is a fictional account of a traumatic experience, the complexity of that experience is enhanced by the way in which Sebald punctuates the verbal narrative by including a number of black-and-white photographs and illustrations. These uncaptioned illustrations are linked to, and thus in one sense purport to represent, places or elements of space in historical reality. While the photographs figure, as Samuel Pane has suggested, as a particular locus of trauma (Pane 2005: 39), that locus gradually becomes indistinguishable from that of the narrative discourse as a whole. This effect, which I consider as an effect of trauma as Sebald presents it, includes a still from a film – that is, an artificially frozen image from a medium that demands movement, and thus temporal progression, to operate.

Searching for Agáta in Theresienstadt, Austerlitz manages to obtain a copy of a film made by the Nazis in the camp in 1944, "Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt". Watching the film, he cannot see Agáta anywhere. But when he sees an artificially extended version he notices the face of a young woman. The visual image is accompanied by this passage:

> Around her neck, said Austerlitz, she is wearing a three-stringed and delicately draped necklace which scarcely stands out from her dark, high-necked dress, and there is, I think, a white flower in her hair. She looks, so I tell myself as I watch, just as I imagined the singer Agáta from my faint memories and the few other clues to her appearance that I now have, and I gaze again and again at that face, which seems to me both strange and familiar, said Austerlitz [...]
>
> *(Sebald 2002: 350–1)*

It turns out that the woman probably is not Agáta, since Vera cannot recognize her, and since the words "imagined" and "faint memories" suggest that Austerlitz is not sure either. In my reading of this passage, the narrative presentation of Agáta's face becomes a fictional illustration of Levinas's description of the face-to-face encounter. Even though the need to remember seems momentarily to triumph the process of forgetting, thus signalling, for Austerlitz, a possible defeat of time, there is a sense in which his failure to identify the woman as his mother makes the face in the image express an encounter with the other. While unidentifiable, this other – or more precisely, the way the other reveals itself in, and through, the facial image – is imbued with an ethical urgency that justifies Austerlitz's search for his mother just at the moment it fails. Thus Austerlitz's traumatic experience, which prevails throughout, is generalized in a way that affects not just the frame narrator but also the reader and (as I can see the image) the viewer.

It is illustrative of the novel's storytelling resources that a fictional character such as Austerlitz thinks he can recognize his mother in a non-fiction film made by the Nazis. Thus there is a sense in which the historical film is fictionalized, while at the same time linking Austerlitz to historical reality. Moreover, fictionalization is also very much part of the film itself: as a Nazi propaganda film, it presents a picture of Theresienstadt that is entirely false. It was made to show how well the Nazis were treating Jews, while in actual fact weeks after the film was made many of those pictured were murdered.

Sebald's incorporation of this film image into the fiction of *Austerlitz* testifies to a strong ethical concern which builds on, and combines, the ethics of Agáta, who is absent from the

narrative, the ethics of her son Austerlitz, who is searching for her, and the ethics of the German narrator, who as an empathetic listener becomes Austerlitz's friend and proves himself to be worthy of his trust by passing the narrative on to the reader. Sebald's novel investigates not just the relations between history and fiction but also the relations between truth and falsity: the non-fiction film made by the Nazis has a historical existence but its purpose was not to fictionalize but to lie, while Sebald's narrative is fictional but its purpose is to capture truths and ask ethical questions that the propaganda film either denies or neglects. Sebald's fictional exploration of trauma – of Austerlitz's traumatic experience, which also comes to colour the listener's and frame narrator's experience – becomes indistinguishable from, and contributes significantly to, the novel's ethics. A feat of Sebald's imagination, *Austerlitz* gives narrative form to painful memories, thus endowing "the vicissitudes of individual lives with collective meaning" (Suleiman 2006: 10).

Conclusion

I make three concluding comments based on, and proceeding from, this discussion. First, in different ways all three narratives – Lanzmann's filmic presentation of Srebnik's Chełmno experience, Notowicz's testimony from Auschwitz and Sebald's fictional rendering of Austerlitz's search for his mother in Theresienstadt – support Meretoja's point that "the interplay between storytelling and silence is woven into their fabric so intimately that one does not exist without the other" (Meretoja 2018a: 305). While valid as a general observation about narrative, this insight is particularly pertinent, and critically helpful, with regard to narrative and trauma.

Second, the discussion has suggested that narrative – or perhaps more precisely, attempts to narrate, whether orally or visually or by writing – are an asset and a resource, possibly even an integral aspect of a human life – *and* that, understood thus, narrative is a resource also with a view to the uphill task of coming to terms with, and living with, a traumatic memory. Implied in this concluding point is the accompanying one that, partly because narrative means so much to us, storytelling can be not only ethically dubious but dangerous, creating myths and constructing lies that are politically or ideologically motivated. An illustrative example is the Nazi propaganda film briefly considered above.

Finally, the narratives by Lanzmann, Notowicz and Sebald suggest that although there is a link between narrative and traumatic experience, elements of trauma can complicate attempts to give them narrative shape. For example, not all aspects of Notowicz's Auschwitz experience can, or should, be narrated. This said, "the dialogicality of narrative and subjectivity" (Meretoja 2018a: 303) in the three narratives considered in this chapter suggests that experience, including traumatic experience, is not stable or constant but changing over time. In combination with memory, and as an integral aspect of memory, experience can thus enable Srebnik to repeat in 1985 the song the Nazis forced him to sing on the river Ner in 1944, it can make it possible for Notowicz to tell, in Trondheim in 2013, about her meeting with Mengele in Auschwitz in 1944, and, in the realm of narrative fiction, it makes the fictional character Austerlitz embark – as an adult, many years after his mother saved his life – on a search for his parents although, and because, he knows that they were both victims of the Holocaust.

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