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Testimony of Death: From Extermination Camps to Clinical Practice: A Discussion with Winnicott, Blanchot and Derrida.

Abstract:
Is there any witness to death? As detailed by Jacques Derrida, any testimony is detached from the direct perception of the event it reports. Thus, a testimony may report one's encounter with death, not only with the death of the other, but also with one's own death, even though it can never by experienced as such. In particular, reports from "survivors" ought to be taken un-metaphorically as they confront us with what Maurice Blanchot related as "the encounter of death with death." In line with such testimonies, Donald Woods Winnicott helps us here in considering an "anterior death," a death that already happened without being experienced as such and which may haunt the subject until it remembers it. But how may one remember a past that has never been present? And how may one remember death without dying? In dialogue with Maurice Blanchot, we are guided toward a manner of considering silence as an oblivious remembrance of that which can be brought back from death.

Keywords:
death, memory, extermination, psychoanalysis, Winnicott, Derrida, Blanchot

What is the psychic place of death? Is there any place for death in clinical encounters? One possible reply relies on what is seemingly evident: no one ever experiences death; death is not a possible experience. Yet reading together Jacques Derrida and Maurice Blanchot leads us to suspend this evidence, to consider that one can testify to one's death. Death is not some state one can perceive in the present, and yet, according to Blanchot,

one's death can be reported – and this, according to Derrida, is the very structure of a testimony: a speech which occurs precisely in the absence of its object. These literary and theoretical considerations are concretely supported by witnesses of exterminations who report their own death. Giving due justice to these testimonies implies a recognition that one's death can belong to the very structure of one's mind. In turn, this history sheds light on clinical work. As Donald Woods Winnicott details, one may be haunted by a constant fear of dying, as one may have gone through one's own death in early infancy, while failing to put any end to this early distress. It is then the responsibility of the clinician to accompany the patient to relate to his own death, without dying, but, on the contrary, to live it as such and finally leave it behind as part of one's own history.

Winnicott specifies: "In trying to receive the communication that [some] patients attempt to make when we give them a chance, as we do especially in psychoanalysis, what we find looks like a fear of madness that will come."[1] More precisely, "a significantly large number of persons, some of whom come into analysis or into psychiatric care, live in a state … dominated by a fear of dying." [2]

Maurice Blanchot also testifies to "the encounter of death with death?"[3] But is that saying too much already? What Blanchot wrote there – is it a *testimony*? In *The Madness of the Day*, he writes: "I have loved people, I have lost them. I went mad when that blow struck me, because it is hell. But there was no witness to my madness."[4] No one bears witness to madness, no one bears witness to death where "the one who says 'I'… says… that he does not manage to be a narrator… that he does not manage to identify himself enough with himself, to keep himself in memory in order to gather the history and the story that one demands from him, that… some representatives of the law, forensic doctors … demand of him, and first, it seems, in his own interest."[5]

The requirement to narrate neglects that the impediment of one's story marks a collapse which Derrida describes as "unthinkable, irrepresentable, un-localizable."[6] If it had to report such a collapse, the story could only be the story of the collapse of the story, by the collapse of its subject. It is impossible, therefore, in these conditions, to obtain "a testimony guided by the sense of history, ordered by reason and by the unity of an *I think* or an *originally synthetic apperception, accompanying all representations*."[7] Derrida has never ceased to deconstruct the Husserlian subject, but he nevertheless affirms that, in order to testify "one must oneself be present… speak in the first person and in the present"[8]; the testimony "always calls for the presence of the live voice in the first person" (D 42). No testimony without subject.

In his dialogue with Blanchot, Derrida explains, however, that this "first person" comes to counter both the psychological reduction and the eidetic reduction which, each in their own way, would make of the subject a "case," an "example." If the *singularity* of the subject falls "in the phenomenological parentheses," if the philosopher abandons to the psychologist the *uniqueness* of the "experience itself," then, Derrida says, the subject "is *only* the witness"[9] through which we can read "a universal essence," while "what comes down irreducibly" to the subject, each time unique, fails to be considered as such. For Derrida, on the contrary, "I can only testify, in the strict sense of the word, from the instant when no one can [testify] in my place" (D, 30). "I am the only

1) Winnicott, *The Psychology of Madness*, 124.

2) Ibid.

3) Blanchot, *The Instant of My Death*, 5.

4) Blanchot, *La folie du jour*, 10; my translation.

5) Derrida, *Parages*, 268; my translation. Here Derrida reads Blanchot.

6) Ibid.

7) Ibid.

8) Derrida, *Demeure*, 33. Hereafter referenced parenthetically in text as D along with page number.

9) My emphasis.

one to have [experienced] this unique thing…. When I testify, I am unique and irreplaceable… but at the same time… anyone… in my place, at that instant, would have [experienced] the same thing and could repeat exemplarily, universally, the truth of my testimony" – such is the "testimonial condition" (D, 30).

"Anyone… in my place… would confirm my testimony" (D, 41) – but *no one* is *ever* in *my* place. "The addressee of the witnessing… does not see for himself what the… witness says he has seen; the addressee has not seen it and never will see it."[10] What the witness testifies is not perceptible. Derrida insists: "*bearing witness* is not *proving.* Bearing witness is heterogeneous to … the display of an object produced in evidence" (SUP, 188). And it must be underlined that "the witness is not present either, of course, [he is not] present in the present to what he recalls, he is not present in the mode of perception, inasmuch as he bears witness, at the moment when he bears witness" (SUP, 189). "This direct or immediate non-access… to the object of the witnessing is what marks the absence … to the thing itself" (SUP, 189). We are here reminded of the last lines Derrida writes in *The Voice and the Phenomenon*: "contrary to what phenomenology … has tried to make us believe, contrary to what our desire cannot fail to be tempted into believing, the thing itself always escapes."[11]

The non-immediate access to the thing itself; the absence of what the witness testifies, the absence of the signified, of the object of the testimony; this absence is precisely that which requires the witness to *present his word*. Whereas, according to the Derridean reading, phenomenology "is always a phenomenology of perception,"[12] on the contrary, "a witness, as such, is always blind. Witnessing substitutes narrative for perception."[13] The witness does not have the phenomenological authority of a transparent self-presence, the apodictic evidence of his experience in the first person is not what we rely upon: we can only believe him *on his word*.

And this word is "dissociable from what it bears witness to"(SUP, 189) – all testimony is structured by this "dissociation"[14]: all testimony is a Saying dissociated from what it says. The Saying and the Said of the testimony thus being dissociated, I may *not* believe what the witness says, yet, my disbelief would *not* fragilize the presence of his Saying. A phenomenological reaction may lead us to reduce the Saying to its subject, and we would then recall that, if no one testifies without words, it logically means that no one testifies without being a subject – we would then be brought back to a reassuring *cogito*: I testify therefore I am. The Saying would thus be interpreted as an attestation of presence of the transcendental ego, a testimony of the Saying subject.

However, it would then be a Saying that would retain nothing of the Said – a word emptied of its content, a signifier without anything signified. Such an approach would thus operate a double twist upon the testimony. First, its object is put in parentheses and then becomes contingent. Second, its words are reduced to the speaking subject and this subject is that alone which remains a source of knowledge – because it alone resists the radical doubt inaugurated by Descartes, and renewed by Husserl. In this view, I could question the content of a testimony, I could believe it to be false, I could bracket the object of the testimony, but I would not lose anything of the testimony: the witness would testify to nothing more and nothing less than his own living and lived presence at the very moment of the testimony. The witness could then say anything, whatever he would say, we would always hear the same thing, irreducibly, we would hear: I testify therefore I am, I live, I am alive and not dead.

How then could we hear Maurice Blanchot? "*Often I died,*" says Blanchot.[15] One could hear this "I" as the attestation of presence of the witnessing subject, as the attestation of his life, and therefore as the attesta-

10) Derrida, *A Self-Unsealing Poetic Text*, 189. Hereafter referenced parenthetically as SUP along with page number.

11) Derrida, *Speech and Phenomenon*, 104.

12) Ibid.

13) Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 104.

14) Ibid.

15) Blanchot, *La folie du jour*, 19; my translation. Translated by Derrida as "Often I was dying," in *Title to be specified*.

tion of his lie: *no, Maurice, with all due respect, it is not true that often you died: I hear you but I suspend the object of your testimony, I suspend the death to which you testify, for the benefit of the subject of your testimony: you, alive and therefore not dead*.

Yet the phenomenological reduction thus performed is put into question by the death of Blanchot, the death which he testifies to – and he insists: "alienation goes much further than is said by those who, through a need for logical security, hold on to the *ego cogito* (understood as the inalienable foundation of every possibility of being alienated)."[16] Blanchot writes without any security net. He deprives himself of the inalienable base that the transcendental ego would provide, he suspends its epistemological necessity – and its existential possibility.

He practices an *epoche*, one could say, but this *epoche* is not phenomenological, it is more radical: he practices a suspension without reduction, outside the transcendental framework. He thus goes so far as to suspend the very subject of the suspension. This suspension is so radical that it cannot be reduced to the suspenseful "I": the living and lived presence of the "I" is itself suspended – "often I died."

But no! Is it not obvious that if you die then you do not live anymore and you do not testify anymore? Is it not obvious that no one testifies to death? If from the start one glues one's thought on this supposed evidence, one cannot read Blanchot. This assumption makes one deaf: if, even before listening, I assert that *no one testifies to death*, I make myself incapable to hear any testimony of the death of the very subject who testifies. Thus, we must suspend this assumption to read Maurice Blanchot. And we must suspend this assumption as well to read Charlotte Delbo when she writes: I am "dying over again."[17] Likewise we must suspend this assumption to read Paul Celan who wrote, while going through death, while death was going through him, "we were dead, and we could breathe."[18] And without suspending this assumption, I could not hear the woman I met two weeks ago who told me: "I am dead, it's all black in my head … time goes on but I stopped." And again, we must suspend this assumption to hear an old Armenian woman testifying: "During the massacres I was six years old. That day, at noon, I died."[19] As a *survivor*, she first and foremost testifies of *survival*: she testifies to the life that bears the trace of death – she bears witness to her ineffaceable effacement.

To hear these testimonies – to hear them without prejudging that no one testifies to death, without prejudging that if a subject testifies it means he is not dead, without prejudging that any testimony, whatever it is, attests always and firstly that (even in the depths of devastation) the witness will have remained alive and moved by a lived subjectivity, to hear these testimonies without judging that those who testify to death are liars, fabricators, counterfeiters, or that they are sincere, but that they are novelists, poets, fools, or chatty talkers who rely on exaggerated metaphors – to suspend these judgments and hear these testimonies implies to think that the subject can be "from beyond the grave" in the sense that Dionys Mascolo gives to this term: "'From beyond the grave' would… be those of whom it is possible to think … that a mortal limit has really been reached and crossed by them, by the only crossing there is, which allows the return. What they will have thus known … is what, from death, can be brought back."[20]

To hear this proposition we must be able; to think anew about death, to suspend what we think we know already about death, to assume an *epoche* of the evidences we hold about death: something could be brought

16) Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, 130.

17) Delbo, *Useless Knowledge*, 223.

18) « Wir waren tot und konnten atmen ».

19) Kébadian and Avédikian, *Sans retour possible*. Voir Rollet, "Personne ne témoigne pour le témoin."

20) Mascolo, *Autour d'un effort de mémoire*, 53; my translation. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in text as AEM along with page number.

back from death – here Dionys Mascolo uses the French term "*rapporter*" and this verb designates at once two actions: to bring back and to report. Thus, the one who crosses the mortal limit can *bring back* something from beyond death and/or *report* something of death; and as this ambivalent word leads us to hear, perhaps he can *bring back* from death a *report*, a word, a saying, a testimony. Dionys Mascolo tells us here that a deadly limit has been reached by his friend Robert Antelme in the camps of Buchenwald and Dachau – he has crossed this deadly limit, and since then he testified to *what can be reported from beyond death*. And Mascolo immediately specifies and emphasizes: "*Death to oneself is always there*" (AEM, 53): what can be brought back from beyond death is always *my* encounter with death, it is always my death to myself. Mascolo then takes up the words of Maurice Blanchot to make it even clearer; everything that Robert Antelme says tends to make him understand "how he ended up finding himself … 'constrained to be the other *[autrui]* for [himself]'" (AEM, 54). Let us recall, Blanchot asks, "let us once again recall that [in the concentration and extermination camps], all [deportees] found themselves (in a movement that was necessarily painful, partial, unfinished, and impossible to realize) deprived as it were of a self and constrained to be the other *[autrui]* for themselves"(AEM, 134).

"Man can do anything" Blanchot says coldly, "man can anything and first of all, he can deprive me of myself"(AEM, 130). "The untiring power to kill"(AEM, 134) can "take from me the power to say 'I'."[21] "Man reduced to the irreducible"[22] is not the man reduced to the irreducible power to say "I"; the man reduced to the irreducible is "attached in a way that must be called abject to living."[23] This abjection is the abjection of dehumanization, a dehumanization that begins with indifference – indifference which is first and foremost non-difference, an abrasion of differences, an erasure of singularities. There is *no one* in the concentration and extermination camps, not one person, not people: "nothing here, nobody," says Robert Antelme, "nothing but these square chunks of a thousand each"[24]; for the SS, for the kapo: "we are numbers, nothing but numbers; and for him, neither can we have names" (HR, 20); "the guard counts. We let him count. You can't be more indifferent than you are when you're being counted" (HR, 30).

> Of the same striped outfits, of the same shaved heads … for each of us what finally appeared generally amounted to a collective, anonymous face. Whence that sort of second hunger which drove us all to try to rediscover ourselves through the magic of the mirror.… Only the one in the mirror was distinct.… It was what one could – really could – become again tomorrow, and that was impossibility itself. (HR, 52–3)

Impossible to become singular again tomorrow – and *this* is being dead, it is being dead to oneself, it is being the other for oneself or more precisely it is being no one for oneself, no singular one: "since it's impossible here to fulfil anything of that singularity, you are able to believe sometimes that you are outside life" (HR, 87) says Antelme.

But he rebels right away: "this is a life we are leading, it is our real life; we don't have any other to live" (HR, 87). One might feel oneself dead, but what remains of life is not nothing, nor is it some impersonal, abject, neutral, anonymous life, it is a life, *one* life, one's own life.

And it is *a* death that one encounters there, it is not only *some* death, impersonal: it is one death, singular, each time unique, and maybe this call for singularity is precisely "a furious desire to remain men, down to

21) Blanchot, The *Infinite Conversation*, 130–1.

22) Ibid., 133.

23) Ibid.

24) Antelme, *The Human Race*, 22. Hereafter referenced parenthetically as HR along with page number.

the very end" (HR, 5). A concentration and extermination camp is not only "a world of furious hostility to the living," it is also, and by the same token, a world that is "calm and indifferent before death" (HR, 11). To fight against this world is to resist indifference to death. It is primarily for the torturer that death is impersonal. For the victim and survivor, if it is a man, the death of the other is not an encounter with *some* death that falls as the rain falls, anonymously, impersonally, indifferently. Death, if it is singular, if it is singularly the death of the other, I receive it.

For Leïb Rochman, encountering death is the only way to counter "the ultimate punishment, the cruelest one: not to leave even the trace of a grave."[25] "Disappearance is worse than death,"[26] he says. The survivor can do nothing against death, but he can fight against disappearance, effacement, annihilation. For this, he must become the host of dead people. Thus, Rochman writes, "sixteen-year-old girls, left alone, carried in their womb their missing parents. They had locked them in themselves and, in order not to lose them, wore them as a secret pregnancy in the first months."[27] To encounter death is here to carry death in oneself, to bear the dead within oneself, to give the dead a grave; to fight against extermination is to give one's surviving body to the dead person, to give him one's voice, one's writing. Here, giving a testimony to death is not writing an autobiography. And it is not either what Derrida has named a "hostobiography" (DEM, 44), literally an inscription that gives hospitality to life, hosto-bio-graphy, a writing of life to which the other gives hospitality by reading it. Neither autobiography nor hostobiography. Rochman does not write a biography, but an obituary, a hostonecrography, so to speak, that is: an inscription that gives hospitality to death, a writing of death to which the other gives hospitality, first by writing it, then by reading it. Through the words of Rochman, it is the dead who writes to entrust his death to a host, that is, to the surviving author who thus becomes a witness and who will henceforth be responsible for the death of those who disappeared – precisely so that they do *not* disappear. And at the same time, Rochman writes (of) himself, and he does so in the manner of Blanchot: "To write (of) oneself is to cease to be, in order to confide in a guest – the other, the reader – entrusting yourself to him who will henceforth have as an obligation, and indeed as a life, nothing but your inexistence."[28]

The writing of Rochman bears a double trace of this inexistence. He writes a delirium of more than 800 pages, and each page makes of the other a host in the double sense of this term: the host, I receive him *and* he receives me. Rochman receives the death of the others, of the Jewish community of which he is a survivor; he gives hospitality to death, he carries the weight of this non-existence, he now has this inexistence for life. Thus, he crosses the mortal limit and he testifies to this crossing; he writes it and by writing it – what he then brings back from death, what he reports from death – he entrusts it to a host, another, a reader: he confides his inexistence in us.

We then understand that an encounter with the death of the other can lead me to cross the mortal limit. Jorge Semprun, returning from Buchenwald, had "the sensation … not to have escaped death, but to have crossed it over. To have been, rather, crossed over by it. To have lived it, so to speak." "Death is not something that we might have … escaped from as from an accident from which we would have emerged untouched. We have lived it … We are not survivors [*rescapés*] but ghosts [*revenants*]."[29]

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25) Rochman, *A pas aveugles de par le monde*, 391; my translation. Leïb Rochman is a Yiddish writer, born in 1918, in Poland, in Minsk Mazowiecki. In 1940, he is blocked into the ghetto with 5,242 Jews. The ghetto is effaced from the map in 1942, and Rochman is transferred to a labor camp out of which he escapes with his wife. He will then be hidden until the end of the war on a farm with three other refugees, he remains captured between two walls, with no other possibility than standing silently and motionless all day long. He then lives in Lodz, works there as a journalist and finally moves to Jerusalem in 1950, and dies in 1978 in Israel.

26) Ibid., 741.

27) Ibid., 131.

28) Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, 64. Hereafter referenced parenthetically as WOD along with page number.

29) Semprun, *L'écriture ou la vie*; my translation.

Maurice Blanchot also testifies to death, not through his encounter with the death of the other but through the encounter with his own death: facing the firing squad, "I know – do I know it – that the one at whom the Germans were already aiming, awaiting but the final order, experienced then a feeling of extraordinary lightness, a sort of beatitude (nothing happy, however) – sovereign elation? The encounter of death with death?"[30]

If at the instant of your death what happens is the encounter of death with death it means that – even though your death is still only imminent, even though your death did not occur yet – nonetheless "you are dead already" (WOD, 65). "I am alive" Blanchot says to himself; "No, you are dead,"[31] he replies. Within this little dialogue we can hear that, for Blanchot, the encounter of death with death is first of all an encounter of death with life. Thus, the kind of elation that Blanchot cannot translate is not the feeling of death, of inexistence, nor is it the feeling of life, uninjured – perhaps it is more precisely the feeling of *survival*, the feeling of the *encounter of death with life*. Blanchot testifies to this: he does not say "I am dead," he says "I am alive" – in quotation marks in the text. Who does he say it to? He says it to who answers him: "No, you are dead." The one who does not say either "I am dead" but "you are dead," this other, as he testifies to my death, can only be myself because no one could testify to my death in my place. This dialogue, as short as possible – "I'm alive. No, you are dead" – this dialogue then lets us understand how, testifying to my death, I am "constrained to be the other *[autrui]* for [myself]": this other who I am for myself, I tell him: "I am alive," he answers to me: "No, you are dead"; "You are dead," I say to the other who I am for myself, and in your place I would not try to analyze your death.

Rather than enduring an analysis, Blanchot wants to give hospitality to death. "You are dead already" (WOD, 65); I thus ought to give hospitality to this anterior death, to host the disaster where I am "constrained to be the other *[autrui]* for [myself]." According to Blanchot, such a manner of hosting disaster differs from any analysis which would be "designed… to furnish a representation for the unrepresentable; [or] to allow the belief that one can… fix in the present of a memory … the immemorial unknown" (WOD, 66). Death has taken place already, but *this* death is not a death whose instant would be memorable. On the contrary, the anterior death to which Blanchot testifies took place "in an immemorial past" (WOD, 65). Unlike death at the instant of my death, immemorial death is "a death which was not yours, which you have thus neither known nor lived" (WOD, 65), it is a death that has occurred but is not inscribed in a story that would be yours.

It is a death which Donald Woods Winnicott has named a "phenomenal death," "death as a phenomenon," it is an "annihilation," an interruption in the "continuity of being" which can take place in the early infancy, when one is "not mature enough to experience" it.[32] A lack of infant care would lead the infant to encounter death, his own death – and as an adult, he may then fear a death that already "happened but was not experienced": a "breakdown has… happened, near the beginning of the individual's life" but "the patient was not there for it to happen to [him]," subjectively. The subject was not able to "gather [this breakdown] into its own present time experience."[33] Therefore, according to Winnicott, "the original experience of primitive agony cannot get into the past tense," the breakdown is not registered in time, it haunts perpetually the present and the future of the patient. Blanchot also describes it: this death, not past, immemorial, is a death which already occurred but which keeps menacing you, you wait for it to come in the future, and you may even construct "a future to make it possible at last – possible as something that will take place and will belong to the realm of lived experience" (WOD, 65). For example, as Winnicott reports, a patient,

30) Blanchot, *The Instant of My Death*, 5.

31) Ibid., 9.

32) Winnicott, *Fear of Breakdown*, 93.

33) Ibid., 91.

> pointed out that her happiness was due to the fact that some things had been happening to her but that she was the same underneath. I interpreted that if nothing was happening for her to react to then she came to the centre of herself where she knows that there is nothing … nothing but a void; it is only emptiness and when this emptiness comes alive she is nothing but one huge hunger.[34]

This void, this nothingness tied to an infantile breakdown, Winnicott claims, is not possible to remember insofar as it has never been inscribed in time; it is impossible to remember it, and yet, "the patient needs to 'remember' this" – here Winnicott puts "remember" in quotation marks and he adds right away: "The only way to 'remember' in this case is for the patient to experience this past thing for the first time in the present." What Winnicott is talking about here is therefore a paradoxical memory: a memory of what is impossible to remember and what brings the subject to experience *for the first time* a past that was never lived in the present. The memory is not here the trace of a past experience but an *inaugural* experience: for the first time, one *experiences* what has already happened, the infantile void, the anterior death, the discontinuation of one's being. Specifically, one needs to "remember nothing happening when it might have happened."[35] What has happened to the subject is not *something* which, afterwards, he could discover or build a memory of: what happened is a blank, an annihilation – nothing. And if what is at stake here is a matter of remembering nothing, then we can understand that, in Blanchot's terms, one is confronted with oblivion.

A strong link appears here between Blanchot and Winnicott, but according to Blanchot himself, Winnicot would explain anterior death "simply by the vicissitudes characteristic of earliest childhood"; yet Blanchot criticizes this firmly: "this understanding of Winnicott is only an explanation, albeit impressive – a fictive application designed to individualize that which cannot be individualized" (WOD, 66). What Blanchot is here criticizing has been defended, on the contrary, in psychiatry and psychology. According to Thomas Ogden, for example, the clinician ought to help the patient recovering part of his own life which was not lived through but which should be lived through in order for the patient to unfold her self more largely. The presence of the clinician would allow for transformation of what is unlived into some lived experience which can then be integrated psychically and physically by the patient. Thus, according to Ogden, "a good deal of analysis might be thought of as centrally involving the analyst helping the patient to live his unlived *life*."[36] Yet here Ogden seems to neglect that, clinically, according to Winnicott, the whole point of going through an experience that would have remained unlived is not to *integrate* it but to get *out* of it.

It is crucial not to confuse life and death and it is crucial not to confuse what is not lived through but *could* be lived through with what is *unlivable*. We must not downplay the fact that death is and will always remain unlivable, be it in infancy or in adulthood, be it when it is endured with parents who are not good enough or who are too good to be true, or with a good enough clinician. We must not confuse a state of sufferance where "there is some ego-organisation able to suffer," on the one hand, and on the other hand, "the core of madness [which is] something so much worse because of the fact that it cannot be experienced by the individual who by definition has not the ego-organisation to hold it and so to experience it."[37] We are here at once below ego-psychology, and below transcendental phenomenology. About this "below," Winnicott gets more precise – he says: "It is normal for the infant to feel anxiety if there is a failure of infant-care technique.… Inherent in growth, then, is pain,

34) Winnicott, *Nothing at the Centre*, 50.

35) Winnicott, *Fear of Breakdown*, 94.

36) Ogden, *Reclaiming Unlived Life Experience*, 59; my emphasis.

37) Winnicott, *The Psychology of Madness*, 128.

anxiety in respect of these various phenomena that result from failure of infant care."[38] By contrast, the fear of death is "a fear of a *lack of anxiety*," it is a fear of an "absence of a sense of living in the body" associated with "no anxiety, that is to say, [a fear that] there will be a regression, from which there may be no return."[39]

Winnicott gives us here a piece of clinical advice: the analysis of the death that is feared "is not reached without the provision of a new example of infant care, better infant care in the analysis than was provided at the time of the patient's infancy. But, please note, the analysis does and must get to the [death], although the diagnosis remains neurosis, not psychosis."[40] Going through anterior death is not going through a pale version of early infancy, a version which would remain bearable and that would safely avoid madness. Rather, radially, Winnicott aims at leading the patient to avoid withdrawing from the fear of death, he acknowledges a need to encounter it and he does accompany the patient into the realm of anterior death, in order to inscribe this unlivable experience *as unlivable* and get *out* of it.

To emphasize this point once more, I quote Winnicott again: "if… the breakdown is met by a psychiatric urge to cure then the whole point of the breakdown is lost because in breaking down the patient had a positive aim and the breakdown is not so much an illness as a first step towards health … cure only comes if the patient reaches to the original state of breakdown."[41]

But how may one return to death without dying? There are here at least two options to be extracted from our reading of Winnicott. One involves perception. The other involves speech. First, one may understand that the manner in which one may go through death is not knowledge or intellectual interpretation but perception. According to Pierre Fedida's treatment of melancholia, "the dream of the night … gives a perception of events which have not been lived as such."[42] The dream is, in Fedida's term, a "memory of oblivion": that which occurs with a dream is a lived experience of oblivion, that is, a lived experience of an event which has not been lived as such, and which is and *remains* forgotten. The dream is not a memory of *something* which occurred at a given moment in the past but a memory of that which has *not* been memorized and could never be memorized because it has never been lived through experientially in the first place. Yet it could be perceived, *après-coup*, secondarily, dreamily, oneirically. In a phenomenological vein, Fedida underlines that perception, rather than cognition, is that which allows the past to come into a lived experience. Yet perception is here specifically oneiric perception, that is, it is not perception of that which is, but perception of that which is not.

Yet one may like to go one step further. According to Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, the essential idea in Winnicott's clinical work is that "what determines the whole functioning of the [psychic] apparatus is out of grasp.… What has not been lived, [what has not been] experienced, what escapes any possibility of memorization is in the core [of the psyche].… This blank [this gap] … is, in its presence-absence, witness of a non-lived."[43] The point here is to come to testify to the non-lived. What is involved here is a testimony – which is always in the present – a testimony of an immemorial past, and a testimony which, by definition, leads us out of the realm of perception, onto the scene of speech. We testify precisely when we do not perceive, and here we specifically testify to the non-lived, we respond to the call of emptiness. We do so not to sink into it, but to recognize it. We enter into a relation with it in order to report it. Such is one of the possible readings of the clinical proposal of Winnicott, a reading which allows us to flip around the testimony of death from impossibility to necessity.

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38) Winnicott, *Anxiety Associated with Insecurity*, 100.

39) Ibid.

40) Ibid.

41) Winnicott, *The Psychology of Madness*, 126.

42) Fedida, *Mélancolie du destin*, 266; my translation.

43) Pontalis, *Trouver, accueillir, reconnaître l'absent*, 13–4; my translation.

I believe this reading is significantly reinforced when one reads Winnicott together with Blanchot. Even if Blanchot moves away explicitly from Winnicott, it is nevertheless reading one with the other which allows us to better grasp the existential, clinical and theoretical scope of what is at stake in radical situations which we ought to cope with: this view allows us to find a way to give hospitality to a fear of dying which may haunt the patient so vividly that he may end up killing himself; reading Winnicott together with Blanchot and Derrida may help us – does help me giving hospitality to an immemorial and unconscious death in a very specific manner. To quote Blanchot, the point is to host death "without making death present and without making oneself present to it. [One ought] to know that death has taken place even though it has not been experienced, and to recognize it in the forgetfulness that it leaves – in the traces … effacing themselves" (WOD, 66). For Blanchot and for Winnicott, the subjective appropriation and remembrance of the immemorial is neither possible nor desirable: it is on the contrary a lively oblivion that allows us to watch over the anterior death, one's irrepresentable absence.

With Winnitcott, Blanchot leads us here to a conception of life as survival – as an encounter of life with death: without any transcendental "security net," he crosses the mortal limit and reports what he brings back from death, without being stuck in the *aporia* of an impossible testimony of his own death. Blanchot does not lead us to subjectively experience our anterior death, it does not lead us to remember, to represent, to present ourselves again in the face of our own death. He does not say "I am dead." Rather, and it is fundamentally different – and it is perhaps the only way to testify to one's death without sinking into inexistence, Blanchot leads us to confront ourselves with death as that which allows no subjective appropriation, no self-recognition, no remembrance, he leads us to go through death – to be confronted with death as that which goes through ourselves, and he leads us to report that which can be brought back: nothing.

To host this nothingness, to testify to it, "it is not you who will speak; let the disaster speak in you, even if it is by your forgetfulness or silence" (WOD, 66) – this silence, we must believe it on its word: it can and must be understood as an act testifying to survival, not as the encounter of death with death, but as the encounter of death with life.

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