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## *The Task of the Survivor in Ruth Klüger's «weiter leben» (1992) and «Still Alive» (2001)*

### Abstract

Ruth Klüger's German and English memoirs provide a unique opportunity to consider intersections between memory, survival, and self-translation. A Benjaminian interpretation of Klüger's memoirs, *weiter leben: Eine Jugend* (1992) and *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (2001), addresses the question of what meanings accrue to survival as it unfolds over 50 years and in two memoirs and languages. Echoing the ethical interventions articulated by Benjamin in «The Task of the Translator», I identify the ways in which *Still Alive* asserts itself as a translation.

Ruth Klüger's German and English autobiographical accounts of her life as a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust provide a unique opportunity to consider connections between her simultaneous roles as author, witness, and translator of her own survivor experience. In two generational volumes, Klüger transcends the cultural and historical divide between German and American discourse on the Holocaust as she communicates her experience first in German, the language of the perpetrator, and then in English, the adopted language of the victim. A Benjaminian interpretation of Klüger's memoir, *weiter leben: Eine Jugend* (1992), and her English language translation of it, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (2001), poses and begins to answer the question of what meanings accrue to survival as it unfolds over 50 years and in two memoirs and languages. I position myself against Klüger's claim that her English memoir «is neither a translation nor a new book: it's another version, a parallel book, if you will» (*Still Alive* 210) and engage in a Benjaminian reading of both memoirs in order to identify the ways in which *Still Alive* asserts itself as a translation, particularly as it pertains to the concepts of *Überleben* and *Fortleben*. Furthermore, I establish how her English memoir functions in tandem with Walter Benjamin's theory of translation to confer the task of

the survivor on post-Holocaust generations. I begin by considering the titles of both memoirs and how they echo the crucial ethical interventions articulated by Benjamin in «The Task of the Translator», followed by a close analysis of examples culled from the text.

In his seminal essay «The Task of the Translator», Benjamin explores the subject of translation as both that which survives of an original text and that which allows it to live on. Benjamin's theory forges a link between survival and translation that, when read together with Klüger's texts, illuminates parallels between acts of human survival and their textual representations. The crux of Benjamin's argument is a boundary between the two German words *Überleben* and *Fortleben* that outline survival in relationship to life and afterlife:

It is clear that a translation, no matter how good, cannot have any significance for the original. Nevertheless, it stands in the closest connection with the original by virtue of the latter's translatability. Indeed, this connection is all the more intimate because it no longer has any significance for the original itself. It can be called a natural connection, and more precisely a vital connection. Just as expressions of life are connected in the most intimate manner with the living being without having any significance for the latter, a translation proceeds from the original. Not indeed so much from its life as from its «afterlife» or «survival» [*Überleben*]. Nonetheless the translation is later than the original, and in the case of the most significant works, which never find their chosen translators in the era in which they are produced, indicates that they have reached the stage of their continuing life [*Fortleben*]. (Benjamin 57-58; Trans. Randall 153)<sup>1</sup>

Translation, in Benjamin's estimation, hinges upon survival in that it issues from the afterlife of an original text while it simultaneously grants that same text continued life in new linguistic vestiture and with trans-

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<sup>1</sup> Daß eine Übersetzung niemals, so gut sie auch sei, etwas für das Original zu bedeuten vermag, leuchtet ein. Dennoch steht sie mit diesem kraft seiner Übersetzbarkeit im nächsten Zusammenhang. Ja, dieser Zusammenhang ist um so inniger, als er für das Original selbst nichts mehr bedeutet. Er darf ein natürlicher genannt werden und zwar genauer ein Zusammenhang des Lebens. So wie die Äußerungen des Lebens innigst mit dem Lebendigen zusammenhängen, ohne ihm etwas zu bedeuten, geht die Übersetzung aus dem Original hervor. Zwar nicht aus seinem Leben so sehr denn aus seinem «Überleben». Ist doch die Übersetzung später als das Original und bezeichnet sich doch bei den bedeutenden Werken, die da ihre erwählten Übersetzer niemals im Zeitalter ihrer Entstehung finden, das Stadium ihres Fortlebens. (Benjamin 57-58).

formed meaning. Fittingly, Jacques Derrida points out that in German these two distinct terms with different connotations, so critical to Benjamin's argument, are usually collapsed into the French *survivre*, and the English *to survive, to live on* (Brodzki 187). These linguistic equivalents fail to communicate the subtle yet remarkable differences between these two terms in German. In the constellation of life, death, and survival represented by the life of the survivor and reflected in Benjamin's theory of translation, *Überleben* effects *Fortleben* both in human life and literary existence; *Überleben* reaches beyond life to afterlife while *Fortleben* extends life indefinitely into the future. It is evident that in their translation, the original semantic values apparent in German are diluted and thereby lost. German does not conflate the two concepts nor are they mutually exclusive. Rather, these two distinct notions are interrelated in the sense that one gives way to the other in much the same way that *weiter leben* laid the narrative groundwork for *Still Alive*. These terms, multifaceted and discriminate in German, become essential to Benjamin's symbolic investigation into the extended lives of texts in translation. Subsequently, these terms also become critical to my own analysis in charting the intersections between memory of the Holocaust, survivors' memoirs, and self-translation.

Scholars have confronted Klüger's commentary on survival from various angles. While Linda Schulte-Sasse investigates the contributions of *weiter leben* to the genesis of a new American Holocaust paradigm<sup>2</sup>, Caroline Schaumann probes its cultural translation for an American audience<sup>3</sup>. Alternatively, Sandra Alferts takes a more literary approach in analyzing Klüger's relationship to poetry<sup>4</sup>, while Dagmar C. G. Lorenz discusses the significance of memory and criticism in formulating autobiography<sup>5</sup>. Considering questions of translation at large and self-translation in particular, raised by Klüger's memoirs, I contribute to discussions of language and modalities of survival in contemporary Holocaust studies. By exploring who and what survives in experience, memory, and texts, I add to the current research on the importance of Klüger's texts in articulating and shap-

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<sup>2</sup> See article entitled: «Living On» in the American Press: Ruth Klüger's «Still Alive» and Its Challenge to a Cherished Holocaust Paradigm».

<sup>3</sup> See article entitled: «From «weiter leben» (1992) to «Still Alive» (2001): Ruth Klüger's Cultural Translation of Her «German Book» for an American Audience».

<sup>4</sup> See article entitled: «Voices from a Haunting Past: Ghosts, Memory and Poetry in Ruth Klüger's *weiter leben*. Eine Jugend (1992)».

<sup>5</sup> See article entitled: «Memory and Criticism: Ruth Klüger's *weiter leben*».

ing memories of the Holocaust both during and beyond the life of the survivor.

Numerous literary critics, theorists of Holocaust testimony, and those few who returned from Nazi concentration camps suggest that Holocaust survival is irreducible to an existential condition. From this vantage point, Holocaust survivors do not merely live: they live to tell. Over several decades, autobiographical works by survivors as well as their critical studies have spoken of the task of bearing witness. Scholars and historians including Dominick LaCapra, Zoë Vania Waxman, and James E. Young have approached the writing of trauma in relation to the Holocaust from a critical standpoint that addresses the challenges implicit in such an undertaking. Dori Laub, a Holocaust survivor and psychoanalyst, describes this «task» as an imperative that many survivors feel to tell «and thus to come to *know* one's story» (Laub 78; emphasis his). Klüger herself is one such survivor who attests to the reality of a world in which «the dead set us certain *task*» (*Still Alive* 31; my emphasis). She believes that survivors start writing «because [they] want to tell about the great catastrophe» (138), thus further orienting the status of survival with Laub's imperative to tell.

Klüger formally acknowledges this imperative at the age of 61 when she writes her first memoir. *weiter leben* details her childhood experiences in concentration camps, specifically Theresienstadt<sup>6</sup>, and bears witness to her emergence from World War II as a Holocaust survivor in her native German tongue. A particular distinction of Klüger is the production of her own English translation ten years later. While it is not the only translation that exists, it is the only other version of the text for which she is directly responsible<sup>7</sup>. Her memoir for an American audience, aptly titled *Still Alive*, offers a commentary on survival and memory absent from its German companion that multiplies the meanings of survival in the tasks addressed by Klüger and Benjamin. This preoccupation with survival, both in life and translation, is foregrounded in one prominent part of the paratext<sup>8</sup>, that is, in the titles and subtitles of Klüger's memoirs.

The titles of the memoirs immediately confront the audience with concerns of life and death by embedding the semantics of survival at the paratextual level. There are three distinct possibilities for understanding

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<sup>6</sup> Klüger was interred in Theresienstadt, Auschwitz and finally Christianstadt.

<sup>7</sup> *weiter leben* has been translated into: Dutch, English, French, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Spanish and Swedish.

<sup>8</sup> The term «paratext» is borrowed from Gérard Genette's seminal work on narrative theory entitled *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation (Literature, Culture, Theory)*.

*weiter leben* in translation. Since «weiter» (literally «further») is clearly identifiable as an adverb, it is the function of «leben» that merits further investigation. Depending on whether «leben» is understood as an infinitive verb or a gerund, the meaning of the title changes. The most common definition of «leben» is «[to] live», which would result in a crude translation of «weiter leben» as «to live further», whose potential as an imperative is weakened by a lack of punctuation and lower-case, diminutive lettering. Alternatively, «leben» could be understood as a gerund in which case a direct translation would arrive at «living further». It is also possible that Klüger is defying German grammatical conventions and severing the common separable verb «weiterleben», which translates to «[to] live on» as a play on words, disjointed as her life has been since her inauguration into survivorhood. It is difficult to gauge the intended meaning of this sentence fragment since it is conveyed in lower-case letters and therefore precludes a clear grammatical orientation. In contrast, *Eine Jugend* follows strict German grammatical conventions that correspond to one distinct definition: «a youth». Klüger's survival is not restricted to a certain point in time; rather, it is an ongoing condition reflected in the arrested and indefinitely extended time expressed by the indeterminate function of «leben». The vague temporal meaning of *weiter leben* juxtaposed by the certainty of *Eine Jugend* continues to stress the imbalance between the two states of being that have become the pillars of Klüger's life; namely, her life after and before the Holocaust, her survival retroactively informing her memory of her childhood.

*Still Alive*, reinvented ten years after the publication of *weiter leben*, offers another set of interpretations altogether. *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* includes a much more detailed subtitle than its German predecessor that allows the reader to identify the subsequent text as Holocaust survivor literature in ways that the more ambiguous German title does not permit. It is the subtitle alone, *A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, that clearly defines the text as a contribution to the autobiographical genre by referencing an appellation of the historical event and further qualifying it as a personal memory. However, it is the arrangement of the titular pair that seems to suggest agency in a title otherwise devoid of a clear subject; the close proximity between *Still Alive* and the reference to both «girlhood» and «the Holocaust» in the subtitle suggests that the story about to unfold is written by a female author who is still alive despite having been victimized during World War II.

Among the most apparent changes between the two titles is the appearance of *Still Alive* in upper-case letters. If a direct translation of «alive» is

«having life, not dead», it does nothing to address quality of life; it merely differentiates between the living and the dead as Klüger does throughout her memoir, eventually defining survivors of the Holocaust as «by definition ... alive» (*Still Alive* 138). In this sense, *Still Alive* reads like a factual statement in which survivors are characterized by the most basic definition of «having life», which Klüger maintains throughout her memoir is the primary difference between «us and the true victims» (138). Another obvious distinction between those who perished in the Holocaust and those who persisted is the ability to write and thus provide testimony. The task of the survivor is partly an effort to commemorate victims and partly an attempt to articulate the horrors of a particular historical event while the survivor is still alive and able to recall that moment in history, a responsibility that Klüger chooses to fulfill through the act of writing. In this way, writing is classified as an act of life in an equation that Young qualifies as, «“I write, therefore I am”» as a prelude to «“I write, therefore the Holocaust was”» (Young 38). Therefore, the title is imbued with continued traces of the dichotomy between life and death that dictates Klüger’s writing about her life as a survivor and becomes a fixture of her memoirs.

These titles are vital to an understanding of how memoirs in translation circulate at both the semantic and heuristic levels. Klüger’s transformation of the titles from German to English provides us not only with a preview of the story of life and death that is about to follow, but also attends to the renewed life that, in Benjamin’s argument, texts in translation acquire. Her original German title reflects her status as a survivor who is writing about her experience for the first time, invoking Benjamin’s idea of *Überleben* in a variety of close translations. Meanwhile, her English title situates her in the realm of continued life. In *Still Alive*, Klüger revisits her life as a survivor and restructures her narrative within Benjamin’s conceptualization of *Fortleben* in which the author-witness-translator is able to add to her story at both the literal and symbolic levels while she is still alive. As a function of her survivorhood, her self-translated testimony necessarily incorporates the continued passage of time and her experience as a survivor during that time. The new voice that emerges in her translation is her own, ten years older and with the benefit of knowledge she has gained in the afterlife of the publication of her first memoir. As a result, *Still Alive* creates a bridge between the past and the present that projects into the future where it will always be «still alive» and, by extension, still relevant to post-Holocaust generations. Modifications and amendments to the text identify it as a self-translated piece of survivor testimony in the tradition of Benjamin.

The knowledge that Klüger has gained in the years elapsed between her publications and incorporated into *Still Alive* does not always reconcile with the memories that she documented in *weiter leben*. As LaCapra states, survivors who write about their experiences become involved in «processes of acting out, working over, and to some extent working through in analyzing and “giving voice” to the past – processes of coming to terms with traumatic “experiences”, limit events, and their symptomatic effects» (LaCapra 186), which helps to fulfill the desire-cum-need to bear witness, but also creates the potential for further trauma. Interestingly, Klüger’s texts are inspired by a two-fold trauma that further complicates her memory and subsequent literary account of her childhood experience of the Holocaust. As she details in the epilogues of both her German and English memoirs, the impetus to write about her initial trauma was born of a second trauma, a biking accident, sustained upon a trip to Germany in 1991. Meanwhile, the desire to share her life story prevails despite the negative effects it has the potential to induce. As previously discussed, Laub describes this obligation as an imperative, indicating a design or purpose to be found in survival that translates into the feeling among many survivors that they have «not only a moral duty to testify, but also the need somehow to account for their own survival» (Waxman 88). In Klüger’s writing, this compulsion manifests itself in two distinct ways, in both the telling of her survival story and in her retelling of it in a different language ten years later. However, at the same time that Laub points to the imperative to tell and its remedial function, he also acknowledges the impossibility of telling. He argues that:

The degree to which bearing witness was required, entailed such an outstanding measure of awareness and of comprehension of the event – of its dimensions, consequences, and above all, of its radical *otherness* to all known frames of reference – that it was beyond the limits of human ability (and willingness) to grasp, to transmit, or to imagine. (Laub 68; emphasis his)

Subsequently, he reasons that survivor testimony is «receivable only *today*; it is not by chance that it is only now, *belatedly*, that the event begins to be historically grasped and seen» (69; emphasis his). *weiter leben* and *Still Alive* both retroactively attempt to make sense of the trauma that Klüger endured as a child during World War II. The passage of time that transpires between the two publications is illustrated by the ways in which *Still Alive* challenges Klüger’s preconceived memories and beliefs featured in *weiter leben*, oftentimes proving them to be false.

At the same time that Klüger claims to remember everything about her past, she admits that memories have the ability to «seduce us into lies, because they won't be budged by anything outside themselves» (*Still Alive* 34). While she is aware that there are holes and inaccuracies in her testimony, she still relies upon her memory to construct the narrative of her childhood in Nazi Germany. Klüger peppers her memoirs with selections of her poetry, what she refers to as her «logbook» (80), which serves to authenticate her literary testimony and challenge Laub's assertion that the Holocaust may not be documented and experienced simultaneously. In contrast to Laub, she believes that her writing grants her sound access to her past, crediting her poetry as a key component in her act of survival and transmission of past events at the moment of writing her memoir 50 years after the fact. However, in *Still Alive*, Klüger deviates from her German memoir in her portrayal of her most firmly held beliefs. The discrepancies between her memory and collective memory that arise in translation build a bridge to history in which «[s]implistically, history is concerned with events in the past and their meaning *for* the present, while memory involves the impact of the events of the past and their meaning *in* the present – the ways the past becomes a present reality» (Stier 2; emphasis his). In this way, Klüger confirms LaCapra's observations on writing trauma, citing traumatic memories of the Holocaust as active elements in the lives of survivors. Survivor testimony, viewed as «an act of atonement or even exorcism in an attempt to assimilate overwhelming memories» (Waxman 158-9), is composed of these kinds of memories that refuse to remain in the past, memories that haunt survivors like so many ghosts – memories that are still alive. Indeed, the task of the survivor is «ongoing» (in German, «weitgehend») as Klüger reiterates throughout both of her memoirs (*weiter leben* 138, 269; *Still Alive* 32, 39, 165, 205), reaching its pinnacle in *Still Alive*. As a result, Klüger's testimony is vulnerable to change through self-translation.

In both her German and English memoirs, Klüger's memories of her traumatic childhood shape her perception of the post-Holocaust world and her sense of self within it. At issue in translation between *weiter leben* and *Still Alive* is the «gap between knowledge and memory» (*Still Alive* 33) that arises from the relationship between personal memory and historical fact facilitated by worldwide Holocaust archivization efforts<sup>9</sup>. Klüger be-

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<sup>9</sup> Archive in this sense refers to the myriad of museums, memorials, collections of survivor testimonies, documents, etc. that contribute to a wider understanding and remembrance of the Holocaust throughout the world.



believes that memories, «[n]o matter what you propose to them by way of later judgment and better knowledge, no matter how you reproach them or cajole them, like stubborn dogs they just show you their teeth without giving an inch» (34). She seems unable to accept the discrepancy between memory and knowledge that arises in her remembrance of her past, crediting memory as the most influential factor in the life of the survivor despite factual evidence provided over the years by historians, scholars, and numerous others who have contributed to the construction of a worldwide Holocaust archive. As Waxman notes, «[survivor] testimony is mediated by both the concerns of collective memory and the concerns of the individual survivor» (Waxman 158-9); this often positions survivor testimony in opposition to the archive. As a result, startling resolutions may be offered to previously open-ended memories and the beliefs built upon them. Klüger reveals this confrontation in the translation of her texts, specifically in the moment in which she remembers her father's death.

In the earlier chapters of *weiter leben*, Klüger draws an uneven picture of her father as a good doctor who was vacant with his daughter. Her memories of him are limited to punishments and reprimands from a man that her mother knew but «ich kaum, so daß er nur ein unverrückbares Gerät in meinem Gedankenhaushalt geworden ist» (*weiter leben* 32)<sup>10</sup>. Klüger relegates her father to a fixed mental space typified by home, the only context in which she knew him. This disparate conceptualization of her father and a yearning to know him in life translates in her memoir into a need to know the exact dimensions of his death: «[e]s ist schon wichtig, wie und wo einem etwas passiert, nicht nur, was einem passiert. Sogar der Tod. Besonders der, besonders die Tode; weil es ihrer so viele gibt, liegt viel daran, welchen Todes man stirbt» (33)<sup>11</sup>. But Klüger cannot be certain of these details, so she imagines them and often expresses this haunting in poetry and prose as «eine Art Exorzismus» (33)<sup>12</sup>, recalling Waxman's observations on writing the Holocaust. Klüger knows that her father left Austria to seek refuge in Italy at the onset of World War II where Klüger maintains «dort hat er den Fehler begangen, aus einem faschistischen

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<sup>10</sup> I barely [knew him], so he became an immovable object in my mental household. (All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated).

<sup>11</sup> It is important how and where something happens to somebody, not only what happens. Even death. Especially death, especially deaths; because there are so many, it's very significant which death one dies.

<sup>12</sup> ... a kind of exorcism ...

Land in ein demokratisches zu flüchten, nämlich nach Frankreich» (33)<sup>13</sup>. Once in France, he was transported from Drancy, a detainment camp, straight to Auschwitz shortly before the war's end in 1944 where Klüger imagines that he met his death in the gas chambers like countless other Jewish prisoners. Klüger entertains the idea that her father was able to commit suicide en route to Auschwitz, but ultimately comes to the conclusion «daß diese Fabel nur auf dem Mist meiner Wunschvorstellungen gewachsen war» (33)<sup>14</sup>. It is this gross and untimely death that compels much of Klüger's writing and occupies both her imagination and memory with unnerving questions such as «[i]st mein Vater auf Kinder getreten, auf Kinder wie mich, als ihm der Atem ausging» (33)<sup>15</sup>?. These visions and conjectures create a specter of her father that haunts Klüger throughout her life as a survivor, as one who escaped the world of concentration camps and continued to live despite the machinations of the Third Reich.

In *Still Alive*, readers are offered a similar glimpse into Klüger's childhood. In her English memoir, Klüger also remembers her father as «an authority figure in the life of a small girl» (*Still Alive* 33) who was forced to flee from Austria early on, leaving his wife and child to fend for themselves in an increasingly intolerant Vienna. She describes his passage from Italy to France in similar terms as in her German memoir, lamenting the fact that her father made the mistake of «fleeing from a fascist country to a democracy, that is, to France» (39). Klüger confirms that it was the French who «handed my father over to the Germans» (39), recalling his transport from Drancy to Auschwitz in near identical language, even admitting to «fantasizing that he committed suicide on the train» (39) as she does in her German memoir. Klüger's questions about her father's death and her treatment of them in English mirror closely the original German text as well. Much of her writing, specifically her poetry, is occupied by «the question of whether he trampled on those who were weaker» (39) in his last moments. While Klüger's memories live on albeit it in different languages between her memoirs, the observations surrounding them undergo transformations on the pages of *Still Alive*. Accompanying her excavation of her father's life and death in the English memoir is a commentary on memory that has been awakened by the singular corollaries of self-translation. As the living arbiter of her personal memories, Klüger's testi-

<sup>13</sup> ... there he made the mistake of fleeing out of a fascist country into a democratic one, namely France.

<sup>14</sup> ... that this fable was only wishful thinking.

<sup>15</sup> ... did my father step on children, children like me, as he suffocated?

mony is vulnerable to change as she continues to live her life and come into contact with her past.

Unique to *Still Alive* is the addition of a revised sixth section in the first part of the book entitled «Vienna», in which Klüger describes her childhood in Austria's capital city. Section five in both memoirs reads almost identically in translation; Klüger recounts her father's arrest and subsequent flight from Austria while entertaining memories of their strained father-daughter relationship. Both sections end in horror and disbelief at her father's demise in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, which she cites as the seed of her literary motivation. But does Klüger know with certainty how her father died? Section six of *Still Alive* provides English-speaking audiences with previously undisclosed information: Viktor Klüger did not die in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

As critical as life is to Benjamin's theory of translation, death and the circumstances surrounding death are vital to Klüger's acts of remembering and writing. It is a compelling force in her narrative that sheds light on self-translation as an unrelenting and transcendent process. It is only in translation that Klüger accesses the truth about the circumstances surrounding her father's death:

I had written the above account of my father's life and his death and my ongoing reaction, and how I feel that it's an ongoing story. It was published in German, translated into French, and a Frenchwoman read it. As if to prove how ongoing these stories, these deaths, really are, just as I finish translating my lament for him into English, she e-mails me that she has the list of names from my father's transport out of Drancy, transport number seventy-three of a total of seventy-nine. It was nine hundred men, and they didn't go to Auschwitz, but to Lithuania and Estonia, and who knows how they were murdered.  
(39)

It is Ève Line Blum-Cherchevsky who contacted Klüger after reading the French translation of *weiter leben* entitled *Refus de témoigner: une jeunesse*<sup>16</sup>. Blum-Cherchevsky attests to the fact that Viktor Klüger did not die in the gas chambers of Auschwitz as his daughter had come to believe. French-born Blum-Cherchevsky is at the forefront of a multivolume publishing endeavor that seeks to remember the Jewish victims of the various convoys that left France during the war years. Inspired by the loss of her own father, Blum-Cherchevsky has so far succeeded in publishing five volumes

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<sup>16</sup> French: *Refus de témoigner: une jeunesse*. Trans. Jeanne Etoré-Lortholary. Paris: Viviane Hamy, 1997.

reporting on the deportees and their families. The French translation of *weiter leben* enabled Blum-Cherchevsky to include her findings on Klüger's father in her own publication on the only transport from France to the Baltic states in a volume entitled, *Nous sommes 900 Français*<sup>17</sup>. However, this new information does not offer Klüger any peace. Instead, it surfaces to dispossess the details surrounding her father's death that she would like to lay claim to in memory.

Once again, the details surrounding Klüger's father's death are left open-ended. Blum-Cherchevsky cannot provide an alternative to Viktor Klüger's death in the gas chambers. The conflict that this knowledge presents to the memory Klüger has constructed of her father's death makes it hard for his daughter to comprehend because she has come to believe that «[w]here there is no grave, we are condemned to go on mourning ... [b]y a grave I don't necessarily mean a place in a cemetery, but simply clear knowledge about the death of someone you've known» (80). Much of Klüger's writing has revolved around trying to understand her father's death; the advent of this information nullifies her mourning process. Try as she might to process this new information and incorporate it into her life, she cannot:

I should be relieved that he didn't die that ultimate nightmare of a death, in a crowded gas chamber, that it was a different, and perhaps a slightly lesser, nightmare. But now my mental furniture has to be rearranged, and it feels as if I am running through my house in the dark, bumping into things. How *did* he die then? I know so little about who he was, and now I don't even know this final, inalterable fact. (39-40)

The visions of her father's fate that Klüger offers up in *weiter leben* are cobbled from reasonable and compelling assumptions derived from her own memory and as to those facts she has no actual direct knowledge of, reasonably predicated upon common knowledge. For Klüger, memories are more powerful than truth; in fact they are «a prison of sorts» (34), in which she is held hostage by her long-held beliefs. While she does not outrightly reject the objective truth in favor of her memory, she does admit that she is unable to integrate it into her current belief system because her father's open-ended death does not allow her to mourn him. This is why the surprising information is allotted its own space in the English

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<sup>17</sup> For more information on French convoys see: Blum-Cherchevsky, Ève Line. *Nous Sommes 900 Français: À La Mémoire Des Déportés Du Convoi N ° 73 Ayant Quitté Drancy Le 15 Mai 1944*. Besançon (26 Chemin Du Grand-Buisson, 25000): É. L. Blum, 1999.

memoir; it is simply suspended in the text after she recounts his death in the gas chambers and offers no link between her personal memory and her recently acquired knowledge. In this way, the disembodied section six that graces the pages of *Still Alive* mirrors Klüger's unnerving experience of learning this information herself; readers encounter this information as an afterthought that appears to be of little importance to the rest of the memoir.

Klüger's access to these facts exemplifies the ways in which her text corresponds to Benjamin's thematic structure of translation. According to Benjamin, translation is paramount to survival and the transformation of Klüger's memoirs reflects this symbolic relationship. In *Still Alive*, not only is Klüger's memory of her father from her original text revisited and transformed, but Blum-Cherchevsky's information, made available through translation, reveals that he outlived the death Klüger constructed for him in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. In this way, Klüger's text continues to engage Benjamin's concept of *Überleben* through the preservation of her memories from memoir to memoir, language to language. Such a reading also invites alternative interpretations of the title of her English language memoir. The indeterminacy of Klüger's father's death, her inability to ascertain the details surrounding it, invites unlimited speculation into his final moments. Like Klüger's mother, for whom «there was never a day on which she could be sure that ... her husband ... had *not* escaped» (80; emphasis hers), Klüger is able to imagine endless possibilities for her father including his survival. In this regard, perhaps *Still Alive* is meant to reflect Klüger's hope for her family, hope being «a limited quantity of liquid which gradually evaporates» (80) as she approaches the truth about the death of her loved ones. Klüger admits to entertaining similar emotions surrounding the circumstances of her brother's death and how she would «sit in front of the TV decades later, when things got rough in Prague, and quite automatically start to look for Schorschi on the screen. I would ask: "Could he be the plump bald guy in the corner, or perhaps the thin one who is giving the Russian soldier a piece of his mind?"» (80) associating her brother with trauma and unrest. As Klüger mentions elsewhere in her memoir, these are the questions that she «cannot answer and cannot shed» (39) that convert themselves into unrelenting ghosts that demand to be «remembered and revered ... resurrected and buried at the same time» (31), both in her life and in her writing. It is these same ghosts that live on in Klüger's survivor testimony. In turn, the text itself embodies Benjamin's concept of *Fortleben* by conveying these memories and lives through the act of writing, Klüger's preferred method of bearing witness (80).

These ghosts continue to live on in the epilogue to both memoirs in an otherworldly appendage to an otherwise coherent body of text. The epilogue itself is a ghostly genre, an appendix to the memoir that embodies Benjamin's concept of *Überleben* in its location beyond the text. Written in 1991, the same year that *weiter leben* was published, Klüger's epilogue epitomizes Laub's observation that «[t]here are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time» (Laub 78) to exercise the imperative to tell. Though she has just completed her testimony, Klüger has more to say. Indeed, the continuation of her story appears in the epilogue to *weiter leben* and is further expounded upon in *Still Alive*, which also includes its own epilogue. Klüger acknowledges that her testimony originally transpired «weil ich auf den Kopf gefallen war» (*weiter leben* 280)<sup>18</sup>. The occurrence of a second trauma reactivates the ghosts in her life and brings them to the forefront of her consciousness. She repeats her use of the house as a representation of memory in order to describe how her bike accident on the streets of Göttingen, Germany unnerved her, laying her memories bare, and precipitated the telling of her initial traumatic story:

Es war, als hätten Einbrecher alles durcheinandergeworfen, die sorgfältig verpackten alten Papiere aus hinterster Ecke hervorgeholt, sie dann aus Wut, weil sie unbrauchbar und wertlos waren, im Haus verstreut, alle Schubladen aufgerissen, Kleider zerschnitten (wie mit den Sachen für die chemische Reinigung im aufgebrochenen Auto, vor Jahren in Charlottesville), und die Schränke sperrangelweit offen; und uralte Gegenstände, von denen man glaubt, man hätte sie längst in den Müll geworfen, wieder ans Tageslicht gezerrt. (276)<sup>19</sup>

In direct contrast to an earlier analogy wherein Klüger identifies her memories as fixed inside the house of her mind, the impact of Klüger's second trauma is so jarring that it unhinges her past and destroys the consciousness she has constructed for herself as a survivor. Interestingly, Klüger assigns agency not to herself, but to the «Einbrecher» who catalyze the transmission of her testimony by upsetting her memory. Thus, these

<sup>18</sup> ... because I fell on my head.

<sup>19</sup> It was as if burglars had thrown everything around, as if they had grabbed carefully wrapped old papers hidden away and then strewn them all through the house out of anger because they were useless and worthless, had ripped open all the drawers, cut up my clothes (like with the things for the chemical cleaning in the broken-into car a few years ago in Charlottesville), and left the closets gaping wide open; and ancient artifacts that you think you threw away long ago, are dragged back into the daylight.

«Einbrecher» engage Klüger with the task of the survivor. Klüger is no longer able to ignore the past, lying prone in her hospital bed in Germany; instead, she is forced to confront her ghosts head-on and begins «mich mit ihnen auseinanderzusetzen» (279)<sup>20</sup>. Klüger's preoccupation with death and ghosts is tangible as she discusses her recovery from her injuries while symbolically invoking those wounds that refuse to heal. In her penultimate paragraph, she acknowledges the recuperative properties of writing as she asserts «[j]etzt könnten sie mich in Ruhe lassen und mir weiteres Umziehen ersparen» (284)<sup>21</sup>. She hopes to simultaneously free herself of the ghosts that cling to her throughout her life as a survivor while claiming her own existence through the act of writing.

A major distinction of the epilogue in *Still Alive* is Klüger's emphasis on life and living in contrast to the melancholy and loss that penetrate the final pages of *weiter leben*. Klüger documents her bike accident in English in much the same way as she does in German; in the moment in which she remembers her collision with a young cyclist, the authorial voice abruptly switches into the present tense in which the trauma is relived in staccato bursts of narrative framed by erratic punctuation:

Seine Fahrradampel, ich war stehengeblieben, um ihn ausweichen zu lassen, er versucht aber gar nicht, um mich heranzukommen, er kommt gerade auf mich zu, schwenkt nicht, macht keinen Bogen, im letzten Bruchteil einer Sekunde springe ich automatisch nach links, er auch nach links, in dieselbe Richtung, ich meine, er verfolgt mich, will mich niederfahren, helle Verzweiflung, Licht im Dunkel, seine Lampe, Metall, wie Scheinwerfer über Stacheldraht, ich will mich wehren, ihn zurückschieben, beide Arme ausgestreckt, der Anprall, Deutschland, ein Augenblick wie ein Handgemenge, *den* Kampf verlier ich, Metall, nochmals Deutschland, was mach ich denn hier, wozu bin ich zurückgekommen, war ich je fort? (271-272)<sup>22</sup>

Klüger's traumas convene at the moment of retelling invoking La-Capra's view on the inherent dangers of writing trauma; her association

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<sup>20</sup> ... to grapple with them ...

<sup>21</sup> ... now they could leave me in peace and spare me the constant running around.

<sup>22</sup> His headlights, I stood still to let him swerve but he doesn't even try to go around me, he's coming straight at me, doesn't sway, doesn't swerve, in the last fraction of a second I jump automatically to the left, he also goes left, in the same direction, I think he is chasing me, he wants to hurt me, black despair, light in the dark, his lights, metal, like floodlights over barbed wire, I want to push him away with both arms outstretched, the impact, Germany, a moment of hand-to-hand combat, I am losing *this* fight, metal, Germany again, what I am doing here, why did I come back, was I ever really gone?

with German concentration camps collapses upon her most recent visit to Göttingen in the form of open-ended and highly symbolic questions that bind her memory to the language of her childhood experience. These questions surface similarly in her English memoir wherein she reverts to the German language asking, «Deutschland once more, why did I return, or had I never left?» (*Still Alive* 206). However, amidst the clash of metal and flashes of light, Klüger adds to her English memoir that she is fighting for her life (206), a sentiment that she does not include in her German account. Similarly, as Klüger documents her rehabilitation in a German hospital, she laments that the effort it takes to perform menial tasks produces «Tränen in die Augen, aus Eifer, Frust und Anstrengung» (*weiter leben* 277)<sup>23</sup>. Klüger translates this memory with a renewed emphasis on life as she writes «[t]ears come to my eyes from the strain and the frustration and the sheer effort of wanting my life back» (*Still Alive* 208). These moments in which Klüger revisits and invigorates her memories with her own life force call attention to her active struggle to stay alive and the ways in which she has repeatedly survived. While *weiter leben* bears witness to Klüger's survival, *Still Alive* quite literally emphasizes the ways in which she struggles to live on, embracing Benjamin's «stage of continuing life» known as *Fortleben*.

The epilogue to *Still Alive* also deviates from the German epilogue's focus on the past as it orients itself toward the future by introducing alternative modes of survival that transcend her text, namely children. A third and final section of the epilogue appears only in *Still Alive*. It details events in Klüger's life that took place in the intervening years between the publications of her memoirs, including the birth of her granddaughter. It also includes information about the origins of her English language memoir. Similar to her conception of *weiter leben*, the genesis of *Still Alive* is tied closely to her experience with death. Klüger admits that she waited to publish her memoir until after her mother's death: «[l]et it appear in French, in Czech, even in Japanese, but not in English. I owed her that much» (*Still Alive* 210). As the dedication page indicates, Klüger kept her promise and waited until after her mother's death in 2000 to publish *Still Alive*<sup>24</sup>. However, in that time, Klüger also became a grandmother to Isabel. In juxtaposing her mother's death with the birth of her granddaughter, Klüger illustrates the circularity of life and the multiple ways that people

<sup>23</sup> ... tears in the eyes out of exasperation, frustration and exertion.

<sup>24</sup> The dedication page of *Still Alive*\_reads: «In memory of my mother/Alma Hirschel/1903-2000» (unnumbered).



are able to live on both in, and beyond, the text. Her writing seems to suggest that in fighting for her own life, a theme that stands out in the epilogue of her English language memoir, Klüger has also fought for the lives of her children and the generations to come. *Still Alive* is specifically addressed to «my children and my American students» (211) and in this way, Klüger's story becomes an inheritance for her intended audience that embraces Benjamin's concept of *Fortleben* in its unequivocal projection into the future.

By dedicating her English memoir to her mother and citing her granddaughter as its primary recipient, Klüger links her texts and her family together. Similarly, Benjamin's concept of translation also reflects familial relationships though he does not limit considerations of life to biological terms. Rather, as Beatrice Hanssen points out, Benjamin defines life in relation to history. As a result, survivor testimony exemplifies Benjamin's translation theory because it is a model of living history: the act of witnessing is only possible while the survivor is alive and the life of the survivor, that which follows survival, is the primary factor in authenticating testimony. In the same way that «a translation proceeds from the original», children stand «in the closest connection» to their parents in what is literally «a natural connection, and more precisely a vital connection» (Benjamin). However, Benjamin goes one step further in identifying a translation as an extension of the life of an original piece of literature «as from its "afterlife" or "survival" [*Überleben*]». Therefore, Benjamin's theory embraces both the historical and progressive implications in and of a text that abound in survivor testimony. In the case of Klüger, it is her survival, the fact that she has outlived events that conspired to kill her, which enables her to live on both physically in the characteristics of her children that echo her own features and mannerisms, and symbolically, conveyed into the future in a literary vessel.

In the light of the relationship that Klüger constructs between her texts and her family, it is possible to understand *Still Alive* as a triumph. Though Klüger warns us not to misinterpret her text as «some kind of triumph of life» (*Still Alive* 138), Klüger herself uses this exact word to describe her mother's death in the epilogue to her English memoir. Like Klüger, her mother is also a survivor who outlived deportation, arrest, internment in concentration camps, and a later suicide attempt. This is why her mother's natural death at home in her bed feels like an accomplishment to Klüger who writes, «I felt a sense of triumph because this had been a human death, because she had survived and outlived the evil times and had died in her own good time, almost a hundred years after she was born» (211). It

is in the epilogue to *Still Alive* that Klüger begins to adopt this optimistic tone in an otherwise unapologetic memoir. It is also in the epilogue to *Still Alive* that Klüger retrains her focus on her children rather than her ghosts as she does in *weiter leben*, thus offering a new reading of her English title in addition to a new understanding of survival itself. Accordingly, the epilogue invites the reader to interpret the text differently from its position as the «afterlife» of the text. Klüger does have reason to triumph – she not only survived, but she lived on to be survived by both her texts and her family whose story is just beginning to unfold. As a result, *Still Alive* embraces both concepts of *Überleben* and *Fortleben*; Klüger's survival necessitated her writing, and in turn her writing reflects the ever-changing nature of her ongoing story and conveys it into the future, which identifies *Still Alive* as a translation in the tradition of Benjamin. Klüger demonstrates that the task of the survivor never ends; rather, it transcends her own life and death and becomes an inheritance for post-generations who are now acquiring the tools with which to carve their own literary niche.

The children of Holocaust survivors are at the forefront of a surge in literary production that attempts to synthesize simultaneous knowledge of and distance from the Holocaust. Eva Hoffman, who counts herself among this «imagined community» (Hoffman 28), attests to the unique space occupied by the children of Holocaust survivors who have been entrusted with «the guardianship of the Holocaust» (xv) in her book, *After Such Knowledge*. Hoffman is the child of Polish survivors, Boris and Maria Wydra, who went into hiding in the small town of Zalošče in the formerly Polish part of Ukraine at the beginning of World War II. Hoffman was born only a few months after the war's end in Poland in 1945 where she came to believe that «the world as I knew it and the people in it emerged not from the womb, but from war» (3). In her book, Hoffman offers an analysis of the impact of her parents' survival of the Holocaust on her own life and the life of her sister, Alina, her «fellow inheritor of the legacy» (unnumbered), to whom she dedicates the book<sup>25</sup>. Like Klüger, Hoffman attests to the obligation that the experience of the Holocaust confers upon those who survived it first-hand and as a result of that hardship, those who have come to know it as a birthright. Hoffman observes that, though it was before her time, the legacy of the Holocaust constitutes «an overwhelming given and a life *task*» (28; my emphasis) for the children of

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<sup>25</sup> The dedication page to *After Such Knowledge* reads as follows: «To my sister Alina, fellow inheritor of the legacy./AND/Rafael (Felek) Scharf,/who knew how to transmit knowledge» (Hoffman unnumbered).

survivors that she and others of her generation are just beginning to uncover through writing.

Hoffman is one of many writers concerned with the trajectory of post-Holocaust remembrance. She believes that «as a growing body of research, literature, and personal testimony makes clear, the “second generation” does constitute a recognizable entity» (28). While she focuses on the role of children of survivors whose second-hand experience of the Holocaust created «a living connection» (xv) to the events of the past, not unlike the «vital connection» that Benjamin argues exists between an original and its translation, remembrance of the Holocaust is not limited in its literary or theoretical scope. Many scholars, both children of survivors and those without direct lineal connections to the Holocaust, concern themselves with the task of remembrance. Prominent among these theorists is Irene Kacandes whose contributions to the field of contemporary Holocaust studies attest to the importance of cross-generational memory.

Kacandes proposes the term «Holocaust family memoir» to describe literary accounts of the Holocaust «in relation to its effects on multiple generations of one family» (Kacandes 2)<sup>26</sup>. These stories include not only the story of what happened to family members during the Holocaust, but also the story of their acquisition of that story. In this way, her terminology transcends the second generation by embracing multiple generations of kinship, which «often brings with it an especially acute sense of obligation to one’s progenitors» (2). Though Kacandes primarily explores the authenticating strategies of such literary production, the overwhelming message of her work is that diversified manifestations of survivor testimony may be counted upon in the future from a multitude of sources.

Klüger bolsters this concept in the final pages of her English language epilogue. Kacandes’s theory recognizes the task of the survivor as a cross-generational transference. Though Klüger reaches out to her American students in the epilogue, emphasis is placed on the role of the family in the collection and telling of Holocaust narratives. Accordingly, Benjamin’s concept of *Fortleben* also transcends generational shifts that accommodate Klüger’s family dynamic. Interestingly, Klüger skips a generation; she does not openly identify her own two sons as recipients of her story, but rather her children’s children. In this way, Klüger overturns traditional patrilineal

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<sup>26</sup> From Irene Kacandes’s lecture entitled: «Truth and Consequences: Issues in Holocaust Family Memoir» presented as the 22nd Harry K. Kahn Memorial Lecture at the University of Vermont on March 31, 2011; in forthcoming publication: «When facts are scarce»: Authenticating Strategies in Writing by Children of Survivors», Fall 2011.

genealogies in favor of a matrilineal trajectory that will link three generations of women in her family. The texts themselves reflect this generational progression, as the role of family is critical to the afterlife of *weiter leben* and a major motivating force behind the transmission of *Still Alive*. At the young age of four at the time of its publication, Isabel is now 14 and in possession of a book written for her that details the events of her grandmother's life and puts her in the position of learning more and perhaps writing her own literary account of the experience of living with and learning of her grandmother's legacy, invoking Kacandes's concept of the «Holocaust family memoir».

Once again Klüger refers to the circularity of life as she marvels at a photograph of her mother and her granddaughter, «a snapshot of the two of them gleefully rubbing noses» (*Still Alive* 214). She admits that time stands still in the photograph which features «the girl who'll be a woman of the twenty-first century, and the woman who was a girl in the early 1900s» (214) or in other words, the woman who wasn't supposed to live and the girl who almost never was. The image that Klüger describes is both beautiful and powerful; more importantly, it exists as a family heirloom or relic, a companion to *Still Alive* that has the power to facilitate the telling of a different story, namely Isabel's story, in the awakening tradition of the «Holocaust family memoir». Though Klüger does not include actual images in her memoir as many survivors have done, her inclusion of this vivid description – the image we are left with in our heads as we close the book – orients us toward the future as it moves us away from her haunted past into «time frozen in space and space made human» (214) by love and affection. The photograph she describes retroactively informs our understanding of the text, once again suggesting that *Still Alive* may indeed be a story of triumph in which her translation extends indefinitely into the future of Holocaust storytelling and education. Klüger invites her story to be continued from the moment of its inception; the title is invested not only with Klüger's life force, but the life force of her texts and her family. This life force is mirrored in Benjamin's configuration of *Überleben* and *Fortleben* and provides Klüger not only with the opportunity to share her story, but to ensure its longevity by entrusting it to generations to come.

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