

TESTIMONY AS A CO-EXISTENTIAL EXTENSION OF DELIBERATIVE PRACTICES

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Abstract

The article focuses on the relevance of testimony for deliberative practices, which can be observed to have been insufficiently emphasized in previous discussions on deliberative communication. This seems important not only when it comes to considering deliberative practices in relation to historical time and its aftermath, but also directly in terms of their contemporary application. Indeed, testimonies can assume a key communicative role in different life situations by appearing in various

contexts, and in this way allow for the existential and coexistential extension of deliberative practices. First, I address the issue of conceptualizing the phenomenon of testimony and the relationship between the contexts of witnessing and the conditions of truth-telling, drawing in particular on the considerations by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Klaus Held, Bernhard Waldenfels, and Giorgio Agamben's discussion of testimony and truth in *Quando la casa brucia* (2020). I conclude the paper by describing a concrete case of the extension of deliberative practice in relation to the testimony of Marijan Rogić, a former convict in the concentration camp on the island of Goli otok [Barren Island].

Keywords: testimony, deliberative practices, communication, Agamben, Rogić.

Pričevanje kot ko-eksistencialna razširitev deliberativnih praks

Povzetek

82 Članek se osredotoča na relevantnost pričevanja za deliberativne prakse, kjer lahko ugotovimo, da je bila ta téma v prejšnjih razpravah o deliberativni komunikaciji premalo poudarjena. To se zdi pomembno ne samo, ko gre za obravnavo deliberativnih praks v povezavi z zgodovinskim časom in njegovimi posledici, temveč tudi neposredno z vidika njihove sodobne aplikacije. Pričevanja lahko namreč s tem, da se javljajo v različnih kontekstih (osebnih in medosebnih, dokumentarnih, literarnih, pravnih, zgodovinskih, religioznih itd.), prevzamejo ključno komunikativno vlogo v različnih življenjskih situacijah in na ta način omogočajo eksistencialno in koeksistencialno razširitev deliberativnih praks. V članku se najprej zadržim pri problemu konceptualizacije fenomena pričevanja ter pri razmerju med konteksti pričevanja in pogoji izražanja resnice, pri čemer se opiram zlasti na obravnave Hansa-Georga Gadamerja, Klause Helda, Bernharda Waldenfelsa ter na Agambenovo razpravo o pričevanju in resnici v knjigi *Quando la casa brucia* (2020). Prispevek sklenem z deskripcijo konkretnega primera razširitve deliberativne prakse ob pričevanju Marijana Rogića, nekdanjega kaznjence v koncentracijskem taborišču na Golem otoku.

Ključne besede: pričevanje, deliberativne prakse, komunikacija, Agamben, Rogić.

In deliberative practices, *the field of communication* (Habermas 1984, 1987; Rinke 2016; Cattani and Mastroianni 2021; Mercier Ythier 2022; Maia, Hauber, and Choucair 2023) certainly occupies a central place, though it has repeatedly proved to be *an open problem* under the influence of various social factors. Nowadays, it seems that we can even speak of a *crisis* in its definition and understanding, which may lead to the dissolution of the very meaning and relevance of the interpersonal communication that grounds deliberative practices, as well as the broader possibility of social and political impact.

Today, *information-guided and distributed communication* is emerging as a superior form of communication that can subsume all others. At the same time, however, informational communication is subject to manipulation for the purpose of disseminating misinformation, and it serves as a means of controlling not only the public, but also us as individuals.¹ Reducing communication to information, including the potential for manipulation and control, has a definite impact on the deliberative practices, which are based on the free expression of views, opinions, arguments, definitions, and decisions, and cannot be dictated by any higher authority or by instant communication.

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Deliberative practices are in danger of losing their persuasiveness and truthfulness. The dominance of information over other forms of inter-human communication and coexistence fundamentally dissolves the space and time, in which deliberative practices can be realized. It dissolves the world, in which we live and work.² Today, while there is a great deal of reporting and debate in

¹ See Komel 2023.

² See Neri 2024.

various forums about global problems, this tends to skip over concrete living situations, even when it comes to the unbearable conditions experienced by those affected.

This often triggers protests and other forms of resistance from the public directly or indirectly involved, who have little, if any, space to present their situation. Moreover, it seems that, due to the dominance of informational communication, the public space itself increasingly functions only as a zone, which is itself enclosed in the statistically measurable effects of information or misinformation. Furthermore, this displaces and nullifies *the discursive openness* for the free expression and encounter of views and opinions.

84 The question is what deliberative practices can propose to combat the reduction of communicative space and time? How can they extend it without this extension taking place only in the form of the diffusion of information that fills the space of the public and of individuals in such a way that everything is of equal importance and none? Our proposal would be that this communicative extension should be carried out on *an existential or co-existential level*. That is to say, deliberative practices should intensively incorporate those possibilities of inter-human communication that directly relate to the existential and co-existential situations, with which we are dealing with in and are affected by the life-world. As some previous studies on deliberative practices have already noted, one such existential form of interpersonal communication is *witnessing and testimony*:

Stories, narratives, or testimony can often play a powerful role in ordinary political discourse, campaign advertisements, and media coverage of political events. The prominence of testimony seems to rise specifically around issues of marginalization and structural injustice, which might be harder to perceive otherwise. (Chick 2022, 94.)

Every situation of witnessing is about experiencing an event that can be communicated and shared with others. In this way, witnessing an event can open up the historical horizon of a shared world. However, the presence at the event, as well as the recollection of it, for example through diary entries, could have explicit personal-biographical significance. In this case, we are not talking about a personal history, but *a life story*. The Slovenian word “priča”

means *witness*, while the Croatian word “priča” means *story*. The element of “story” and the elemental nature of “narrative” as such already condition the difference between *historic*, *religious*, *legal*, and *literary testimony*. Somehow, *biographical testimony*, which can be memorial-documentary or given in a literary or aestheticized form, is placed between the two. The same applies to pictorial, photographic, filmic, or theatrical forms of providing testimony. Testimonies mediated by media³ can generally be taken as being documentary, but it should be emphasized that here, one of the central forms of testimony is the *interview*, which as such points to the dialogic nature of the witnessing experience and its delivery.

At the same time, all documentary, biographical, historiographical, media, artistic, and intellectual “sources” of one kind or another can subsequently receive the value of testimony and attestation.⁴ This includes the broad topic of *the witness archive*,⁵ or *the archival* in general,⁶ which, following Foucault’s footsteps, for example, Agamben tackled when considering the question of “what remains after Auschwitz.”

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Foucault gives the name “archive” to the positive dimension that corresponds to the plane of enunciation, “the general system of the formation and transformation of statements” (Foucault 1972: 130). [...] In opposition to the *archive*, which designates the system of relations between unsaid and the said, we give the name *testimony* to the system of relations between the inside and the outside of *langue*, between a potentiality and an impossibility of speech [...]. The archive’s constitution presupposed the bracketing of the subject, who was reduced to a simple function or an empty position; it was founded on the subject’s disappearance into the anonymous murmur of statements. [...] Testimony is a potentiality that becomes actual through an impotentiality of speech; it is, moreover, an impossibility that gives itself existence through a possibility of speaking. [...] From this perspective, Auschwitz represents the historical point in which these processes collapse, the devastating experience in which the impossible is forced

3 See Frosh and Pinchevski 2009.

4 See Däumer, Kalisky, and Schlie 2017.

5 See Jong 2018.

6 See Derrida 1996.

into the real. Auschwitz as the existence of the impossible, the most radical negation of contingency; it is, therefore, absolute necessity. *The Muselmann* produced by Auschwitz is the catastrophe of the subject that then follows, the subject's effacement as the place of contingency and its maintenance as existence of the impossible. (Agamben 1999, 143–148.)

Furthermore, it is necessary to take into account *digitized forms of testimony*, which redefine the possibilities of documentation and archiving, the public nature and privacy of information, authorship and authorization. Digital memories are changing our perception of memory and remembrance, which affects both the role and the very validity of transmitted testimonies. With virtual reality, the problem of *authenticity* and *credibility* of testimony is triggered in a new way.

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At the same time, it should be emphasized that the truth and untruth of testimony has central validity not only in theory, but also in the actual *practice* of testimony. As Agamben points out in his recent study, “Testimony and Truth” in *When the House Burns Down*, testimony that turns out to be untrue in some way cannot be said to be testimony at all. Agamben justifies this by stating that testimony does not have the character of *apophansis*, a statement about something:

The truth of testimony has nothing to do with its semantic content; its truth does not depend on what it says. To be sure, testimony can take the form of a proposition but, in contrast to what happens in legal testimony, what it says cannot be submitted to verification—it cannot be true or false. Testimony is not an *apophantic logos* in the Aristotelian sense, a discourse that says something about something. Neither is it a prayer, an invocation or a command. In so far as it is not defined on the basis of what it says, testimony is always true: it simply either is or is not. (Agamben 2023, 16.)

We find something similar in Waldenfels's description of testimoniality in his book *Globalität, Lokalität, Digitalität*:

Testimony generally finds its place at breaking points of experience, which are characterized by an ethical surplus. A witness who gives false

testimony not only makes a mistake, but also commits an injustice by violating claims to truthfulness, doubly so, on the one hand, with regard to claims on the part of the witnessed victim, and on the other hand, with regard to claims on the part of the recipient of the testimony. This is the reason why testimony has been ritually protected since time immemorial. (Waldenfels 2022, 214.)

Following Waldenfels, the question arises as to whether Agamben does not isolate the experience of testimony in terms of its truthfulness from the world horizons in which it appears and could be verified or falsified. Furthermore, witnessing, whether our own or someone else's, can lead us to begin to question the truth and seek answers, which opens worldly horizons that were previously withdrawn.

In this respect, we refer to Gadamer's text *What is Truth?* (1975), where he points out:

If one wants to grasp its truth there is no proposition that can be comprehended solely from the content that it presents. Every proposition is motivated. Every proposition has presuppositions that it does not express. Only they who comprehend these presuppositions can really judge the truth of a proposition. Now I maintain that the ultimate logical form of such motivation of every proposition is the question. It is not the judgment that has logical priority but the question as is historically attested by the Platonic dialogue and the dialectical origin of Greek logic. The primacy of the question over against the proposition implies, however, that the proposition is essentially an answer. There is no proposition that does not represent a type of answer. Therefore, there is no understanding of any proposition that does not take its exclusive criterion from the understanding of the question that it answers. When one articulates this it sounds like a self-evident claim and it is known by everyone from their life experience. When someone puts forth an assertion that one does not understand, one seeks to make clear how he came to it, which question he asked himself, to which his assertion is an answer. And when it is an assertion that is supposed to be true, one must test it itself with the question for which it intends to be answer. It is certainly not always easy to find *the* question to which an assertion is really the answer. It is especially not easy on this account because even the question is not in turn a simple first that we can shift to at will.

For every question is itself an answer. Such is the dialectic in which we are entangled here. Every question is motivated. Even its meaning is never totally encountered in it. When I alluded above to the problem of Alexandrianism, which threatens our scientific culture, inasmuch as the primordality of the question is made more difficult by it, I was alluding to the root of the matter. The decisive factor that primarily makes someone a researcher in science is the ability to see questions. Seeing questions means, however, to be able to break through that which controls our entire thinking and knowing like a closed and impermeable layer of smoothed-over opinions. The researcher is constituted by this ability to break through, and in this way new questions are seen and new answers are made possible. Every proposition has its horizon of meaning in that it originates in a question situation. (Gadamer 1994, 42.)

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It is this *dialogical openness*, which poses questions that both demand and point in the direction of an answer, addressing our “responsiveness”—to use Waldenfels’s concept—, which also encompasses responsibility in truth-telling and in communication in general. It is important to emphasize that also the dialogicality of public argumentation is not only the interpersonal exchange of arguments, but is also preceded by the giving of reasons, the *logon didonai*, which brings into communication the quality of value, that which counts and cannot be quantitatively reduced.

The German philosopher Klaus Held, who has devoted much of his research to the relationship between modern phenomenology and the beginnings of philosophy and democracy in Greece, in his essay *The Ethos of Democracy from a Phenomenological Point of View* states:

What we understand today by the word democracy is not univocal. But one basis of modern democracy, “human rights,” is recognized worldwide, at least verbally. One can, of course, dispute which rights are meant for particular situations, but such a dispute would not be possible if the validity of one human right was not considered self-evident: the right to the free expression of one’s own opinion. This right accords with the basic significance of freedom of speech already operating in history’s first democracy with the Greeks. According to Aristotle, humans are meant to live together in a democratic polis because they possess the capacity to reciprocally give accounts (λόγον διδόναι) of their dealings,

and these accounts are carried out in speaking freely with one another. So one can say that since antiquity, democracy is fundamentally founded on the respect for freedom of opinion.

Political opinions always refer to the way in which matters are to be treated in a shared, political life-space. But because in this life-space decisions need to be made, controversy can arise among opinions. This controversy, however, will only be highlighted as controversy if the speakers do not talk past each other. Therefore, in the controversy concerning possibilities for action, something common or shared is needed so that one may meet another in speaking; one needs a basis for mutual understanding. The only possible basis is that of shared standards counted as unquestionably self-evident, for it is through these standards that it is decided in advance which possibilities for action can at all appear as open to discussion. Even when a fundamentally new possibility for action is championed, this can only be justified in connection with those standards already accepted by all; otherwise, one would at the outset fall upon deaf ears. Each involved party must be allowed to justifiably assume that all others are convinced of the binding force of shared standards; otherwise, controversy cannot occur. (Held 1998, 193.)

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The formation of philosophy in ancient Greece is paralleled by the opening up of the public sphere and what, on the basis of the *logon didonai*, is established as public argumentation, represented above all by the skill of rhetoric. In terms of what is *asserted as truth* in argumentation, this comes into conflict with philosophy, especially with Socrates and Plato. What does it mean to speak the truth?⁷ Is truth in words alone or in things themselves, how does the “logos” mediate between one and the other?

Gadamer’s hermeneutic model of *dialogic interpretation*⁸ can help us to a large extent, insofar it proposes open intermediality and the mediation of

⁷ See also Foucault 2001.

⁸ “What characterizes a dialogue, in contrast with the rigid form of statements that demand to be set down in writing, is precisely this: that in dialogue spoken language—in the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other’s point—performs the communication of meaning that, with respect to the written tradition, is the task of hermeneutics.” (Gadamer 2004, 361.)

question and answer as a *hermeneutic methodological imperative*.⁹ We have to take the label “methodical” with a grain of salt, because, from a hermeneutic point of view, it is essential to leave an open *path* (*hodos* and not *methodos*) for what it addresses as a question. In this respect, we can further draw on Waldenfels’s *hermeneutics of responsiveness*,¹⁰ which he developed within the broader project of *the phenomenology of the alien*.

The alien is a limit phenomenon par excellence. It arrives from elsewhere, even when it appears in our own house and own world. There can be no alien without an alien place. How much weight is given to the alien will thus depend on the kind of order in which our life, our experience, our language, our acts and deeds take shape. When the order becomes transformed, there is also a transformation of the alien which is as multifaceted as the orders which it transcends. The expression “the alien” is no less occasional than the expression “the ego.” The limit zones which expand between and beyond the orders are the breeding grounds for the alien. (Waldenfels 2011, 5.)

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Waldenfels also draws attention to the anchoring of *the existential demand to being-witness* between domesticity and alienness, between one’s own self and the presence of others, between remembering and forgetting:

Forgetting begins now and here, alienness lurks in the midst of the present. This is precisely why we need witnesses and testimonies that allow us to see with other people’s eyes, to hear with other people’s ears [...]. (Waldenfels 2007.)¹¹

“Seeing with other people’s eyes and hearing with other people’s ears” does not only mean opening one’s own eyes and ears for dialogue with a witness and her or his testimony. The *dialogic moment* is not only present in the way

9 See Heiden 2014, 426–444; see also Heiden 2019.

10 See Waldenfels 1994.

11 “Das Vergessen beginnt jetzt und hier, die Fremdheit sucht uns heim inmitten der Gegenwart. Eben deshalb brauchen wir Zeugen und Zeugnisse, die es uns erlauben, mit fremden Augen zu sehen, mit fremden Ohren zu hören [...]” See further Waldenfels 2022, 219–226.

that one's testimony is received and acknowledged by others, but rather in how one who has to witness *responds* to the situation of *being a witness*. In this case, the presupposition of some subjective appropriation of the role of witness is not sufficient, since such appropriation is marked by the alienness introduced into the witness by the situation of witnessing itself. This is again possible due to (co)existential situatedness in the world, and not on the basis of some prior subjective competence of the witness.

In this context, *the hermeneutics of testimoniality*¹² does not focus solely on the epistemological problem of explaining and defining the structure of witnessing and testimony. Rather, it recognizes that testimoniality itself, in the various contexts of its performance and mediation, contributes to *an understanding of the meaning of human existence*, and as such *constitutes a distinctive human experience of the world*.¹³

Therefore, the hermeneutics of testimoniality does not provide any pre-prepared answers to the questions raised by the individual situations of witnessing, as well as the mediation of testimony to and for others, insofar as it is first of all the witness himself or herself, by being a witness, who is confronted with the question of the meaning of his or her own existential situation and dwelling in the world in co-existence with others.¹⁴ The fact that a witness is faced with the existential demand to be a witness can provoke a traumatic experience.¹⁵

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If we understand a witness only as a subject who endures psychological trauma in relation to what has been witnessed and tries at all costs to free himself or herself from it, then we miss the point that being-witness is an existential condition of traumatic experience itself, which can of course be further exacerbated by external pressures. Being-witness puts the witness in front of him- or herself, which means confronting him- or herself as a witness. This confrontation evokes a sense of alienation within oneself and from the world, which problematizes the dialogicality of testimony, without eliminating it.

12 See Erzetič 2018; see also Erzetič 2014, 2023a.

13 See Heiden and Marinescu 2025. See also Erzetič 2023b, 2023c.

14 See Erzetič 2024.

15 See Gilmore 2023.

In conclusion, considering the dialogical context of testimony, I describe an episode, in which I had the opportunity to meet and talk with a former inmate of the Yugoslavian concentration camp on Goli Otok [Barren Island] who experienced both—the confrontation with himself in *the situation of being a witness* and the confrontation with the situation of *what it means to be a witness*, which marked him for the rest of his life.¹⁶

I was faced with the extensive issues of the testimonies of prisoners in the former Yugoslav concentration camp on Goli Otok within the framework of study workshops, conferences, and discussions around the publication of a thematic collection.¹⁷ Officially, the reason for the creation of Goli Otok and its women's section on the island of Sveti Grgur was Tito's dispute with Stalin in 1948 and the threat of an attack by the Socialist bloc countries on Yugoslavia. However, it was not just supporters of Stalinism who were interned in, and it should be emphasized that the methods of its operation have to this date not been fully clarified in detail, nor was the methodology of the intimidating effects of Goli Otok throughout the entire existence of socialist Yugoslavia.

92 None of the convicts on Goli Otok had the opportunity to appear as a witness in court, since no legal framework was ever established that would allow such a thing, but instead legal decisions were made *ad hoc*, on the basis of which general apology was given to the affected persons and exceptionally meager compensation for their suffering. For this reason, there is no accurate data on the number of people deported to Goli Otok. According to the information of the former Yugoslav secret service, about 60,000 people were arrested on Tito's orders from 1948 to 1963, and about 17,000 of them were sent to Goli Otok. We have to bear in mind that many persons who had previously endured the torments of Nazi concentration camps were interned on Goli Otok (it is said that while serving their sentences on Goli Otok, around 500 people died on the island, and according to some other data, as many as 4,000), which led some of the victims to unbearable circumstances and another trauma after surviving Nazi's concentration camp again. The number of direct victims of internment on Goli Otok, as well as the psychological and social condition

16 See Erzetič 2021b, 105–128.

17 See Erzetič 2021a.

of the convicts after their release, cannot be verified with certainty.¹⁸ This was directly contributed to by the strict ban on any public testimony regarding what happened in the camps, under the threat of being returned there (for which the term “two-wheelers” was used). The first testimonies in the mid-1980s were thus given semi-illegally, and they are still labeled as something obscure, which was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that almost everyone who lived in Yugoslavia was afraid of Goli Otok; even in the 1980s, the name “Goli Otok” served as the main intimidating method of the party in power. Accordingly, it is understandable in itself that the rehabilitation of the victims of Goli Otok, both during Yugoslavia and afterwards, took place only on a general declarative level; there has never been a trial, in which, on the basis of the testimonies of the prisoners, those guilty of inhumane acts were identified and convicted.

Due to the upper description of the complex situation in the Yugoslavian witnessing cases about Goli Otok it is worth to draw attention to Fricker’s two varieties of epistemic injustice (testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice) in De Brasi and Warman’s study:

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Since the testimonial strain of epistemic injustice is more relevant to our project, we will focus on that aspect of Fricker’s view. In Fricker’s words, “testimonial injustice occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker’s word” (2007, 1). Broadly speaking, testimonial injustice occurs when one person, the speaker, tries to tell another person, the hearer, that *p*, but the hearer does not accept the speaker’s testimony, and in particular, because they, the hearer, possess prejudicial stereotypes about the speaker’s social identity according to which the speaker is not a credible source of testimony. How does this come about? It is a fact of our epistemic lives that we are dependent on one another. We rely for a great deal of our beliefs, among other things, on the testimony of others. In a perfect world, this would make things straightforward. But this is not a perfect world: some people are incompetent, some are insincere, and some are both. We need to be able to determine who is a good informant, that is, someone who is both competent and sincere. (De Brasi and Warman 2023, 12.)

18 See Erzetič 2021a.

The issues in the cases concerning Goli Otok extended beyond the personal level to the interpersonal level, as they had to confront and deal with untruthful statements by the political authorities, as well as being stigmatized and ostracized by society. Their situation did not change after the Yugoslavian dissolution into democratic republics in the 90's, and the co-existential crisis continued also in democratic systems. This contributed to the fact that Jovo Kapičić, who was appointed as the administrator of the camp on Goli Otok, was able to publish an interview,¹⁹ in which he declared himself the only victim of Goli Otok.²⁰ Considering his life story, which is marked by assuming a very responsible position in the resistance drive during and in law enforcement after the Second World War, one might even believe him, but he himself was not prepared to give any testimony, instead insisting that he was merely following the orders of higher authorities. Although "storytelling has an important normative and institutional role in public deliberation and show that its applied version could overcome epistemic injustices and lead to better public policies" (Fragoso Pitasse 2022, 268), the testimony—which is according to Agamben always truthful or it is not a testimony at all—opens a direct path to a mode of communication that not only creates or intensifies epistemology role, but plays an important chain for justice and fairness for deliberative democracy.

According to De Brasi and Warman article, based on Ficker's theory, many of these indicator properties themselves rely on "stereotypes about social identity" or "whether a speaker is credible."

However, these indicator properties—or rather, our reliance upon them—also leave us vulnerable to several types of error. Sometimes people possess indicator properties but lack competence or sincerity. In other words, some people who are not good informants are nevertheless regarded as if they were. This can lead us to form beliefs on the basis of the testimony of people who are ill-informed or insincere. This is undesirable.

But perhaps the more pernicious variety of error is that which occurs when someone who is both competent and sincere is not

19 NTV Montena 2008.

20 Lovčenske Straže 2010.

recognised as such. In cases of testimonial injustice, a speaker's testimony is not accepted by her hearer because, according to negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes held by the hearer, the speaker is either incompetent or insincere. (De Brasi and Warman, 13.)

In the case of Goli Otok in a demonstrable way, aspects of the personal, historical, political, literary, artistic, documentary, legal, and media aspects of testimony are permeated by the absent testimony itself and the avoidance of testimony relating *to the same event*, to something that happened like *Goli Otok*. The sign "Welcome to Goli Otok," which first greets a visitor of the island today, has a sarcastic impact, since it incidentally reminds one where they have come, and that Goli Otok is not a geographical marker, but the name of a frightening event.²¹

Marijan Rogić endured severe trauma in his life, which was triggered by his internment on Goli Otok as a high school student under the charge of inciting Croatian nationalism—about which he then had to keep silent on the island, otherwise he would have risked even worse torture. In 2004, he self-published a testimony about serving his sentence on Goli Otok, but under an alias, Kreša Mirčetić.²² At first, my assumption was that the reason for this was his still-present fear of "law enforcement," which was visible upon his return to Goli Otok, where he suspected that agents of the former security service were present among the participants of the conference. Only later did it become clear that Rogić's permanent sense of trauma was not only connected to the torture he received as a prisoner on Goli Otok, and the social isolation that followed after his release, but was initially *dictated by his own confrontation with being a witness* to what happened to him on Goli Otok. At a conference, shortly before his death (2020), he described his experience as follows:

A mental crisis gripped us: we became something there that we could not understand ourselves. We moved mechanically, thought mechanically; mindless without content! We expected something

21 "Where testimonial injustice presents an obstacle to equality among formally and epistemically enfranchised citizens, the injustices identified in this paper present obstacles to inclusion in the deliberative process." (De Brasi and Warman 2023, 22.)
 22 Rogić 2004.

constant, or—what?! ... Some time ago, while I was still on Goli Otok, the following thoughts came to me: *“I speak, I think, I talk to myself and I see: Someone, something guides me, protects me everywhere, even in everything, especially in such life-threatening danger. The Catholic in me responds to the Spirit of God... Suddenly, almost at the same time—in my thinking—another thought flew in from somewhere, which seemed to say to me: And you, as if you were standing next to all that, all those things, all the events, letters and you read—you stand, next to yourself, as if none of this concerns you. Is it you, or the other you, or maybe—who knows what!?!”*

Yes, everything was possible on Goli Otok, and above all the impossibility of human reason! *“I didn’t feel anything. Very strange (unusual), such that you can see and feel nothing. It seems impossible to understand and register evil of such magnitude (Größenordnung). Feeling is turned off, if certain limits are exceeded, transgressed.”*

“I continue to reason, I can’t settle down: I stood, therefore, as I said a little while ago, next to myself: it was neither me, my person, nor any other essentiality known to me. Who then, I often wondered in the anthill of Goli Otok. The soul used often to cry—very quietly—, but no tears, no sighs, far less moans. It went on without will, without consciousness, so even composure was not manifested during it. A human being could not and should not show the will to live; not a trace of joy and happiness—neither in me, nor in the one next to me. There is no talk of any defense, any protection. Oppose... —whom, I’ll beg!? Movements, feelings passed me by—mechanically, according to legal provisions, according to prison rules. I—myself—disappeared in the workshops, dormitories of the “rooms” of Goli Otok from number 1 to 6; while the number 7 (seven) was outside the “Wire” and was known as the number of “free men!”, who had reformed, revised their attitude with their own blood. I disappeared on the karst of Goli Otok, and to this day I am gone, so gone!” (Rogić 2021, 27–28.)

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The experience of being-witness has somehow split Marijan Rogić’s self-perception in two, resulting in a latent sense of living in a semi-world with an indefinite hope for a different and other world. What the semi-world means phenomenologically is an important and far-reaching question in itself, which cannot be satisfactorily developed in this context. The semi-world of witness is not simply an abnormal or unreal world; one’s relationship with others, one’s

agency in it, one's valuing, feeling, and thinking may be quite normal, but they are pervaded by a certain detachment that can be experienced as traumatic.²³

The traumatic is related to the return of *the existential demand to being-witness*, and can only be resolved in favorable circumstances by testifying to one's own confrontation with the situation of being a witness *to* and *for* others, which makes possible the awareness that the world, even if only as a semi-world, *is shared with others*. It is important to stress here that testimoniality encompasses not just one, but several forms of mediation, which we have mentioned above, from the personal, documentary, literary, social,²⁴ and historical to the media, legal, and religious, which in itself opens up different experiential horizons of the world.²⁵ Perhaps it is enough for a witness, as has been shown in the case of Marijan Rogić and as is seen today in the case of many victims of war, ideological, social, or interpersonal violence, that at least some horizon of the world has been opened up to him or her *possibility of testifying and conversation with others*.

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23 The relevant role in detraumatization process is certainly played by the possibility of dialogue and communication with the other(s), which must not, however, be reduced simply to combining "the main items of the Discourse Quality Index (DQI), such as 'Level of justification,' 'Content of justification,' and 'Respect,' into a single variable" (Nakazawa *et al.* 2024, 2) as described in terms of the broader discourse of deliberative practices in the article "An Effect of Storytelling on Attitude Changes in Deliberative Mini-Publics."

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