

**CURRENT TRENDS IN  
LANGUAGE AND  
CULTURE STUDIES**



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Selected Proceedings of the 20<sup>th</sup> Southeast Conference on  
Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Film

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*Edited by*

**Yves-Antoine Clemmen, Margit Grieb,  
and Will Lehman**



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*Current Trends in Language and Culture Studies: Selected Proceedings of the  
20th Southeast Conference on Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Film*

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Will Lehman

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# INTRODUCTION

Since 1983 the Southeast Conference on Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Film (SCFLLF) has been a showcase for scholarship in the Humanities with a special emphasis on non-English language area studies. Various universities located in central Florida, i.e. the University of Central Florida, Rollins College, and Stetson University, have hosted the conference over the past couple of decades, but since 2010 Stetson University and the University of South Florida in Tampa are exclusive hosts to the bi-annual SCFLLF meetings.<sup>1</sup>

In 2012 the 20th Southeast Conference on Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Film attracted again close to seventy national and international scholars presenting their research on language, literature, film, culture, and pedagogy. The conference featured 21 sessions and convened on the Stetson University campus in DeLand, Florida on March 2-3, 2012, and it was generously supported by the Stetson University Department of Modern Languages and the Stetson University Department of Continuing Education. We were especially fortunate to have had William O'Connor provide administrative assistance as well as the support of our colleagues who, in addition to attending conference sessions, also organized and moderated various sessions. We would also like to thank the Department of World Languages at USF for financial support for this publication.

The keynote address of the 2012 SCFLLF “Grand Guignol: French Theater of Horror from the Belle Epoque” was delivered by author Agnès Pierron on a uniquely French brand of theater: the Grand Guignol. The Grand Guignol’s existence spans six decades, from 1897 till it closed its doors permanently in 1962. It is also a very geographically restricted genre of theater since it rarely ventured outside of one small venue at the bottom of impasse Chaptal in the both famous and infamous neighborhood of Pigalle, Paris. It had its heyday in the 20s and 30s but never entirely recovered from the effects of the Second World War, as if the horrors presented on stage could not compete any longer with what had happened in

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<sup>1</sup> The 2010 post-conference publication including selected proceedings is entitled *Cultural Perspectives on Film, Literature, and Language* (Brown-Walker Press, 2010) and co-edited by Will Lehman and Margit Grieb.

reality. Nearly vanished into artistic oblivion, the Grand Guignol theatre has recently found new interest with theater companies based in the United States, and Agnès Pierron's work is the main source of information and the most complete available repertoire of that theater in print.

Agnès Pierron was originally trained in acting at the Conservatory of Nancy where she received a *premier prix de comédie*. As a researcher she contributed to several encyclopedias, such as Larousse and Bordas, and to specialized journals, such as *L'avant-scène* or *Le journal de la Comédie Française*. From 1981 till 1985 Dr. Pierron was engaged in acting as well as part of the artistic board of directors of La Criée, the National Theatre of Marseille. She later returned to research working on different collections of the great French lexicographic endeavors of Le Robert, one of the best known French dictionaries. She compiled the *Dictionnaire de citations sur les personnages célèbres* (Dictionary of Quotations on Famous Characters), as well as the *Dictionnaire de la langue du théâtre* (Dictionary of Theatre Terms) which received the *Prix de la critique* (from the Syndicate of Theatre, Dance and Music Criticism) in 2003. She published two other specialty dictionaries, the *Dictionnaire de la langue du cirque* (Dictionary of Circus Terms) (2003) and the *Dictionnaire des mots du sexe* (Dictionary of Sex Vocabulary) (2010) with the *Éditions Balland* where she also directs the collections "Les Dicos d'Agnès."

She is, however, especially well known as the world specialist of the French horror theater Grand Guignol with three seminal works of reference on the subject: *Le Grand Guignol, le théâtre des peurs de la Belle Époque* (collection "Bouquins" chez Robert Laffont, 1995), *Les Nuits Blanches du Grand-Guignol* (Seuil, 2002), and *Maxa, la femme la plus assassinée du monde* (L'entretemps, 2011). Agnès Pierron was the first to rediscover and investigate this theater that had fallen into oblivion, and she has been lecturing on this topic since the late 1990's, thereby contributing to the rediscovery of this uniquely French theatre. We thank Dr. Pierron for her captivating keynote address, as well as the panelists for their thought-provoking contributions, all of which made the 2012 SCFLLF conference a memorable and stimulating event, and a bellwether for future conferences.

In previous editions of selected SCFLLF conference proceedings the editors opted for a language-oriented organization of the publication. This year, a theme-oriented arrangement is better suited to accommodate the selection of contributions. Hence, we have

elected to divide *Current Trends in Language and Culture Studies* into four clusters containing similarly themed essays.

The first and largest section of our collection contains contributions by Stephan K. Schindler, Carine Mardorossian, Christine McCall Probes and Martine Le Glaunec Landis, Silvia Baage, and Sophie Boyer and discusses the various approaches to and challenges involved in representing violence and trauma in literature and film. In his essay “Limits of Representation: Documenting the Holocaust,” Stephan K. Schindler argues that documentary films about the Holocaust, despite the genre’s claim to historical authenticity and objectivity, become entangled in established audio-visual and narrative conventions of the medium film and the institution of the cinema. Citing early and recent documentaries, Schindler demonstrates how filmmakers cannot escape their own ideological context, the medium’s preoccupation with narratives about the individual, as well as the Nazi’s propagandistic shaping of the iconography of the Holocaust.

Schindler’s essay is followed by Carine Mardorossian’s “Violence, contingency, et inégalité sexuelle chez Maryse Condé.” In her essay, Mardorossian focuses on the contingent dimensions of power relations in Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé’s fiction, which, she argues, are emphasized without obscuring their violating and traumatizing effects. In *Who Slashed Céciliane’s Throat?* in particular, Condé’s representation reveals that the supposedly discrete identities in the name of which violence is often perpetuated are no less oppressive when they are imbricated in a hybridizing dynamic. In so doing, her fiction challenges postcolonial studies’ overly celebratory endorsement of hybridizing ethics. Likewise, Silvia Baage also considers postcolonial discourse and the issue of violence in her “Mediterranean and French Caribbean Paroxysms: Marie Ferranti’s Violent Discourse about Corsica.” The author compares and contrasts the function of violence in contemporary postcolonial island discourses of Corsica and the French Caribbean archipelago to situate her analysis of Marie Ferranti’s *La Fuite aux Agriates* (2000). Although this novel can be read as a rewriting of Prosper Mérimée’s *Carmen* from a Corsican perspective, depicting gendered violence and terror from a female viewpoint, Baage’s analysis contextualizes Ferranti’s violent discourse by illustrating that the representation of Corsican island space with its culture, history, and society, is a salient contribution to the body of French-speaking literature in French and Francophone studies.

Christine McCall Probes and Martine Le Glaunec Landis discuss in their joint contribution the representation of violence in literature of 16th-century France. They examine the remembrance of the violence of the French Renaissance, specifically around the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, in Pierre Matthieu's *La Guisade* (1589), an important dramatization of the time. In their essay entitled "The Taste of Violence: Senses, Signs, Biblical and Theological Allusion in the Service of the Dramatization of History: Pierre Matthieu's *Guisade*," the authors discover and analyze rhetorical strategies which heighten and memorialize for the stage the taste of violence manifest in the historical acts and records. Finally, Sophie Boyer's "Le roman familial des Jardin: pour une psychanalyse de l'écriture-miroir d'Alexandre Jardin" returns the discussion to contemporary literary confrontations with acts of violence. Boyer's essay demonstrates how Alexandre Jardin's latest work, *Des gens très bien* (2011), can be interpreted as a twofold project. It consists, firstly, of the rewriting of his previous novel, *Le roman des Jardin* (2005), and, as such, offers an inverted echo of both the novel's thematic and narrative structure. It serves, secondly, as a confession of his family's dark secret, namely the direct responsibility of his grand-father, Jean Jardin, for the Vel' d'Hiv' Roundup that led to the deportation of thousands of French Jews in 1942.

In Section II we present four essays that deal with topics addressing identity, subjectivity, and the national in a variety of literary and dramatic works. In the first contribution, entitled "El teatro vanguardista centroamericano inaugural: performatividad e identidad en *Cuculcán y Chinfonía burguesa*," Alessandra Chiriboga Holzheu introduces and contextualizes two avant-garde plays that construct and perform divergent types of national imagined communities. While both adhere to cultural *mestizaje*, one play models a catholic-based identity while the other portrays Mayan-based cultural distinctiveness. In a similar fashion as the manifesto, these two plays perform divergent and unique models of the avant-garde aesthetic used as a means to publicly address, provoke, and shape modernized national subjectivities and legitimize the writer's social role within these imagined communities. Jessica Burke, in the subsequent essay "Body, Identity, and the Writing Process in the Narrative of Carmen Boullosa," also discusses issues of identity in the Central-American context. She examines the narrative prose of contemporary Mexican author Carmen Boullosa, focusing on the relationship between body, identity, and writing in Boullosa's novels. By exploring the relationship between

characters' bodies, their sense of self, and the text that contains them, Burke argues that Boulosa's fragmented narrative allows for re-configuration of physical and textual bodies, and of identity. It is through dismantling instituted notions of gender, identity, body, and narrative that Boulosa creates a space for reinvention of the self, and of novelistic form.

In "The Literature of Terror: Sadur's Gothic-Fantastic Fictions" Tatyana Novikov offers a contribution concerned with the interconnectedness of identity and the nation in the context of contemporary Russia. She examines Gothic elements in the writings of Nina Sadur, a major figure in Russian prose. Reading her fiction as part of the Gothic tradition allows a vision of a dark universe, where evil is unpredictable and pandemonium underlies the surface of everyday life. Novikov argues that Sadur's Gothic fiction articulates collective anxieties about the integrity of the nation and the dissolution of order, meaning, and identity in the post-Soviet era. Terry Cochran's "The Materiality of Mind in Stefan Zweig's *Chess Story*," by contrast, highlights the relationship between the mind and historical continuity rather than emphasizing the connectedness of subjectivity to the national. In reflecting on Stephan Zweig's *Chess Story*, Terry Cochran examines the underlying thoughts about the intimate link between mind and matter in Zweig's novella as the vehicle for human consciousness.

Section III considers representations of race and gender in literature and film and includes contributions on works by Italian, German, and French authors and directors in the first half of the 20th century. This section begins with Joanne Frallicciardi Lyon's essay entitled "The Trials of Motherhood in Laudomia Bonanni's 'Il fosso,'" in which the author investigates conceptions of motherhood in Fascist and wartime Italy. Lyon's analysis brings to light the influence of patriarchal institutions in shaping motherhood and argues that the seeds of many important Bonannian themes such as gender restrictions, the mother-son bond, and the weak head of household find their origin in this short story. Whereas Lyon focuses on representations involving motherhood, Aneka Meier explores the depiction of young single 'working girls' during the interwar years in Germany reflecting the tensions and ambiguity, as well as the transitional character of the Weimar Republic. Her "All the Single Ladies: 'Working Girls' in Weimar Germany" draws from literature, film, and images in popular 1920s magazines. Meier discusses how traditional

gender roles and expectations collided with the propagation of female independence and the pursuit of women's sexual fulfillment.

Mary Sanders Pollock's "An Unnatural History of Species in the fiction of Vercors and Laurence Gonzales" concludes the third section of this collection with a contribution addressing discourses of race and ethnicity. She argues that Vercors' *Les animaux dénaturés* (1953), a fable in which species serves as a metaphor for race and ethnicity, is newly relevant as a literal examination of species as an issue in itself. According to Pollock, like many more recent works, including Lucy (2010) by Laurence Gonzales, Vercors' novel calls into question the validity of rigid boundaries (race, species, gender) set into place for the purpose of social and political domination.

Whereas the first three sections of *Current Trends in Language and Culture Studies* focus on various themes manifest in literature, film, and culture, the contributions in the collection's final section seek to illuminate important and effective strategies for language learning and teaching as well as approaches for including culture into the humanities curriculum in higher education. In "Instructional Units Informed by Backward Design," Eva Maria Russo acknowledges the durable individuality of teachers' classroom practices and the importance of an un-teachable enthusiastic personality but argues that clear guidelines are nonetheless available for those training graduate student instructors in a "post-method" age. Russo points to sources, such as the proficiency goals provided by ACTFL and the CEFR to the curriculum development template provided by Wiggins and McTighe's *Understanding by Design*, in which instructors find a clear framework to guide their teaching. These sources help focus teachers' selection of highly contextualized materials and guide the creation of plans that facilitate both students' accurate comprehension of subject matter and successfully scaffolded production of the target language. Gabriel Ignacio Barreneche expands the discussion of language pedagogy to include the classroom beyond the traditional campus space in his contribution "Achieving the LEAP Report's Essential Learning Outcomes through Service-learning in Foreign Language Pedagogy." He examines how foreign language programs can use service-learning and effective partnerships with local community agencies not only to increase students' linguistic skills, but also to prepare them for the challenges of a global society and enhance their intercultural and ethical competencies.

We conclude section IV and the volume with a contribution by Heike Scharm entitled "From Analytical to Analogous Thinking: The

Relevance of Transnational Approaches.” She expands the discussions of language pedagogy to the broader field of teaching in the humanities by making an appeal for devising interdisciplinary and multicultural curricula in the humanities. Referring to examples in philosophy, sociology, and literature, she highlights the discrepancy between our changing global reality on one hand, and our traditionally “inward” Western education and thought on the other. Scharm proposes that analogous models of thought shift the focus from interiority and uniqueness to exteriority and correspondence, thus promoting a better understanding of the self and the other, while fostering a mentality of global community builders.

Unfortunately the editors were not able to accommodate all of the conference presentations at the 20th Southeast Conference on Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Film nor the entirety of papers submitted for inclusion in this collection. The editors hope that their selection of papers will invite productive debates among scholars within the various fields showcased and stimulate further interest in the myriad of topics discussed herein. We look forward to another successful SCFFLF in 2014 which will be hosted by the University of South Florida in Tampa.

*Yves Clemmen, Stetson University*

*Margit Grieb, University of South Florida*

*Will Lehman, Western Carolina University*



**I: VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA IN LITERATURE  
AND FILM**



## LIMITS OF REPRESENTATION: DOCUMENTING THE HOLOCAUST

*Stephan K. Schindler*

Since the surprising success of the fictional NBC mini-series *Holocaust* (1978) and subsequently Steven Spielberg's feature film *Schindler's List* (1993) in educating the post-memory public about the traumas of an unprecedented genocide, visual representations of the Holocaust have been scrutinized with regard to their ethical and aesthetic appropriateness.<sup>1</sup> Many critics and historians have voiced their reservations whether popular media and classical Hollywood genres are capable of depicting historical events authentically without evoking melodramatic sentimentality or scopophilic desire usually associated with narrative film. Traditional narrative film, with its powerful construction of fictional worlds, its distraction from the "real world" via fantasy, and its alluring images, seems rather unsuitable to tell the story of genocide. Narrative films' inability to free itself from conventions and form might provoke Theodor W. Adorno's famous dictum "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," (Adorno 30),<sup>2</sup> because an "aesthetic" response to Auschwitz seems to transfigure the real suffering of its victims into an object of aesthetic (dis-)pleasure. The incomprehensible enormity of the Shoah appears incompatible with the Western artistic tradition; it evokes the limits of aesthetic concepts and renders art trivial. Nazi concentration camps constitute such a terrific assault on religious, humanistic, moral, and philosophical values that narratives emerging from or propagating ethical standards become speechless vis-à-vis the factual horror of extreme genocide. The entire aura of negativity that surrounds the historic event—a story that cannot be told because it contains unimaginable horrors—has even culminated in the calling

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<sup>1</sup> A comprehensive summary of this discussion can be found in Ginsberg, pp. 1-59.

<sup>2</sup> German original: „[...] nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch [...].”

for an altogether prohibition of images (*Bilderverbot*).<sup>3</sup> That is why some critics have argued that only documentary films should be permitted to depict the Holocaust, because —so goes the argument—only a genre that seemingly adheres to the discourse of sobriety would be able to guarantee some level of authenticity and would allow the viewer to remain in critical and reflective distance.

In times of historical amnesia and the postmodern collapse of historical consciousness there seems to be a greater demand for Holocaust representations which are disseminated in media that might challenge the authority of traditional historiography. Michael Rothberg argues that there is “a demand for documentation, a demand for reflection on the formal limits of representation, and a demand for the risky public circulation of discourses on the event” (Rothberg 7). However, one of the representational problems of narrating the story of the genocide derives from the fact that, unlike other historic genocides, the Holocaust has been painstakingly documented by the perpetrators themselves. Relying on these visual documentations, as does Alain Resnais’s film essay *Nuit et Brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, 1955) or more recently Yael Hersonski’s *A Film Unfinished* (2010), poses the question whether the “typical” images of the Holocaust, what Inga Clendinnen has termed the “identikit image of ‘the Holocaust’ we carry in our heads” (Clendinnen 165)—depictions of roundups, deportation, concentration camps, slave labor behind barbed wires, killings, burying the dead in mass graves—continue to carry their racist connotations. After all, the visual framing of these processes, aspects, and symbols of the Holocaust has its ideological frame embedded: the narrative anonymity of the victims, degrading camera angles, close-ups of distortion, segregating emphasis on striped uniforms or the Star of David, etc. reveal compositions that utilize cinematographic properties to construct a powerful anti-Semitic or inhuman imagery.<sup>4</sup> Even docu-dramas such as Heinz Schirk’s *Die Wannsee Konferenz* (*The Wannsee Conference*, 1984)—the reenactment of the administrative process of the “final solution”—present the victims only within the perpetrators’ inhuman discourse where Jews are only mentioned as numbers, in cynical racist anecdote.

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<sup>3</sup> For example Claude Lanzmann as discussed by Stuart Liebman in “Introduction” in *Claude Lanzmann’s SHOAH*, 5-24. See the critical response to such an absolute position by LaCapra, 95-138.

<sup>4</sup> For the connection between visual framing and ideological frame see Koch, *Die Einstellung ist die Einstellung*.

notes, or as logistical problems in the process of industrialized killing. Dominick LaCapra has pointed out the hazards of using the perpetrators' views, images, or language which might also reenact the "negative sublime" of their ideology (LaCapra, *History*, 2). Looking at a selected few documentary films of the Holocaust, I would like to address these fundamental questions that arise with Holocaust representations: How does one tell whose story, for what purpose, using what kind of audiovisual composition?

*Memory of the Camps*, one of the first documentaries on the subject, was produced by the British Ministry of Information in 1945, co-directed by Alfred Hitchcock, and reissued by PBS Frontline in 1985. This film about the liberation of the concentration camps Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald is considered a masterpiece or even as Annette Insdorf claims "the most authentic and affecting film on the Holocaust" (Insdorf 199-200). It was made to confront the Germans immediately after the war with the atrocities committed by the Nazis and to convince them to accept Allied justice and ideology. However, the film was never finished and fell victim to occupational political strife between the individual Allied factions. It was not shown to the public until its rediscovery in the 1980s.<sup>5</sup> However, the film, had it been shown earlier, might have experienced the same defying reception as other re-education films produced by the Allies such as the American film *Death Mills*: the German public, in comments after viewing *Death Mills*, either distanced themselves from any responsibility for the atrocities or compared the suffering of camp victims with their own in times of Allied bombings. Famous British director Alfred Hitchcock, who is credited with some aspects of the editorial composition of *Memory of the Camps*, was aware of the difficulty of achieving a specific response in viewers. When contemplating the audiovisual composition, to make the documentary more "real" and believable, he suggested "to avoid all tricky editing," to use long shots "which panned [...] from the guards onto the corpses," and to insert a montage of the victims' possessions and body parts such as hair, wedding rings, spectacles, etc. (Gladstone in Haggith 56). Hitchcock, a fiction filmmaker par excellence, was aware of the tools of the trade and how to use editing strategies to allow the recordings to appear more "true" and convincing.

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<sup>5</sup> Kay Gladstone, "Separate Intentions: The Allied Screening of Concentration Camp Documentaries in Defeated Germany in 1945-46: *Death Mills* and *Memory of the Camps*," in Haggith, 50-64.

*Memory of the Camps*'s opening sequence reveals its careful staging of history and its pedagogical impetus by using Nazi propaganda footage of party meetings and parades and replacing some of the original sound, such as Hitler's voice in speeches, with a voice-over narrating the Nazi rise to power in the fashion of a historical documentary. The film then cuts to a peaceful country still life, replete with trees, farmland, women and children, thus evoking the German notion of "Heimat" (homeland), a concept originating in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which was re-appropriated as a German value by the Nazis. This pastoral sequence is juxtaposed with images depicting the horrors of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The omnipotent narrator provides a transition for these competing series of images by saying that the intruding non-visible smell of the camp contaminates the beauty of the landscape for the invading Allied troops. What follows is a carefully composed liberation story with images depicting the role benevolent victorious Allied forces played, the dreadful bodies and empty faces of tormented survivors, piles of contorted nude corpses, and the nervously guilty or defiant expressions of perpetrators and bystanders.<sup>6</sup> The film tells a story about the infrastructural challenges of liberating and dismantling a camp, disposing of the dead and caring for the survivors, and it concludes with footage from other camps in order to depict the systematic plan and execution of this unimaginable mass murder. At times the voice-over even remarks on the psychological trauma to which the troops were subjected. Similar images of starved and decaying corpses being buried in mass graves by former German guards are repeated several times. The film seems to linger on the agonizing imagery depicting the liberators having to compound the atrocities by having to dispose of the corpses in a dehumanizing way: they are dragged through sand, hosted onto trucks, and thrown or bulldozed into pits.

With these images the film reveals astounding representational problems. The filmic material is used less for bringing to light the victims' plight and fate than for ideological purposes, namely to provide a screen for identification with the victorious Allied forces, that is to enhance the film's purpose as a re-education tool. The voice-over listing the number of inmates in various camps and a series of shots of mass grave markers generalize individual fates and reduce victims to anonymous statistics. This is highly problematic as this

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<sup>6</sup> An account for the film's creation can be found in Toby Haggith, "Filming the Liberation of Bergen-Belsen," 33-49.

narrative strategy reproduces an obsession with numbers of Jewish victims akin to the Nazis, most memorable in the administrative detachment of the German officers and politicians discussing the elimination of Europe's Jewish population at the infamous Wannsee Conference. Conversely, the perpetrators are identified as individuals through close-ups showing distinct faces, mentioning of names, and giving interviews while the camera seemingly exploits the nameless victims' nude bodies. In one sequence, *Memory of the Camps* probes the limits of representation, if not to say oversteps them, when complementing the repeated images of female corpses with those of naked bathing women who have survived Bergen-Belsen. The sequence is problematic on several levels. For one, it alludes to a well-known Nazi mass murder deception strategy, when the victims were told they would take showers when in reality they were being gassed to death (Steven Spielberg will later use a similar scene for suspense purposes in *Schindler's List*). While the narrating voice uses this scene as evidence of the falseness of Nazi propaganda disseminating that Jews were dirty, the voyeuristic gaze of the camera lingers and exploits the nakedness of the female body. This sequence raises the question whether these shots are necessary or appropriate in the documentation of the Holocaust, whether they indeed "restore their [the former prisoners'] sense of dignity and humanity" (Haggith, 45), or whether they just reveal the cameraman's desire. The film thus deals with an ethical dilemma of representational crisis: how can the victimized human body continue to be depicted in the aesthetic framework of an established cultural tradition that ends with the Nazi assault on humanity? With the occurrence and depiction of thousands of corpses the famous statue of Laokoon can no longer serve as the classical symbol of human suffering.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the bathing scenes, the display of the individual healthy female body, cannot have a healing or cathartic effect any longer to serve as a remedy for the viewer to overcome the traumatic experience of witnessing the results of mass murder. Such a return to modern aesthetics would deny the fact that the Holocaust has eradicated exactly those philosophical paradigms that could not prevent the genocide in the first place and continues to have epistemological difficulties to explain it.

The image's power of deception is one reason why Claude Lanzmann's monumental 9½ hour masterpiece *Shoah* (1985) avoids

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<sup>7</sup> See Liliane Weissberg, "In Plain Sight," in: Zelizer, 13-27.

focusing on the perpetrators' perspective or any historical imagery altogether.<sup>8</sup> Instead, his interviews with survivors, former guards, and onlookers reconstruct, in detail, the horrific process of extermination and thus negate the myth of the "unspeakable." Visiting the railway tracks and sites of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Chelmno in the 1980s, the survivors in Lanzmann's film recall what happened to human beings, whereas the perpetrators and bystanders articulate their terrible detachment using the rhetoric of repression and denial. Lanzmann refuses to let any historical imagery interfere with the voices of the survivors and forces the audience to imagine what these voices describe. Following the classical narrative formula of historical novels, these personal stories make the public history of the Holocaust transparent for an audience which for some time has felt quite comfortable with shelving the memory of the Jewish genocide in abstract histories. Instead of freezing the event in the anonymity of the murder of six million Jews, Lanzmann uses auto-biographical accounts of the Holocaust to re-humanize the vast number of victims by facilitating an understanding of individual physical and psychological suffering. Their testimonies express grief over lost ones and attempt to restore singular identities of victims through giving them names and personal voices. Like Lanzmann, some critics assert that the truth of the Holocaust can only be transmitted through the recordings of survivors' testimony (for example in the ongoing testimonial archive projects at the Universities of Michigan, Southern California or South Florida). Nonetheless, survivor stories are also subject to narrative traditions, to selective traumatic amnesia, or to the directive manipulation of interviewers.

A recent Holocaust documentary, Yael Hersonski's production *A Film Unfinished*, released in 2010, is an attempt to deconstruct the Nazi project to document their atrocities for ideological purposes. The Third Reich Ministry of Propaganda produced several so called documentary films as part of their meticulously staged strategy of deception, such as *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt* (The Führer Gives a City to the Jews, from 1944), a film that was supposed to deceive the world public by staging "normalcy" in the concentration camp Theresienstadt (Terezin).<sup>9</sup> In his film, Hersonski shows the filmic

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<sup>8</sup> See Fred Camper, "Shoah's Absence," in: Liebman, 103-111. The film "is haunted by those images we never see" (103).

<sup>9</sup> See Lutz Becker, "Film Documents of Theresienstadt," in: Haggith, 93-101.

material the Nazis produced depicting the Warsaw Ghetto to which he adds a critical commentary. This commentary is multi-layered and multi-faceted because it contains a narrating voice-over explaining the original production of the Nazi film, the selective construction of that film's reality, and the historical facts the film excludes. In addition, *A Film Unfinished* presents the testimonies of those who recorded the footage and those being depicted in the film in two ways: by reading documents written by the ghetto's inmates as well as the filming perpetrators and by having survivors watch scenes and comment on the Nazi material, thereby adding their personal experiences as a corrective insertion to the ideological narrative. The film's composition creates a complexity that pays tribute to the different perspectives and representations of and experiences embedded in the historic event. On one hand, *A Film Unfinished* delivers the most complete visual material of the living conditions in the ghetto and how these conditions were created through dehumanizing terror. On the other hand, the film reveals the construction of the Nazi's anti-Semitic propaganda film which stages "reality" in multiple takes, uses actors, and carefully follows a script. The Nazis present their cinematographic construction of reality to the viewing public as the "real," a juxtaposition of poverty and luxury in the ghetto as an expression of Jewish deception, or focusing on miserable conditions the Nazis themselves had created but now depicted as "natural" living conditions chosen by the Jewish ghetto population.

What makes this documentary somewhat problematic is the position of the camera when it records the survivor watching the footage of his/her own past. On the one hand, observing the survivor's reactions to what remains unseen turns the viewer into a voyeur par excellence, partaking in the survivor's pain of re-experiencing the events. On the other hand, the survivor is placed in a position of historical authority which is enhanced by the low angle of the camera. Following the self-reflexive commentary of the omnipotent narrator and the juxtaposition of two quoted witness accounts—the filmed victim and the filming perpetrator—the survivor has the last word as if he or she were the site of ultimate truth. The burden of such historical authority is unbearable, because it elevates the survivor above his/her fragile humanity, a humanity that always includes error, forgetting, or psychological breakdown vis-à-vis one's own trauma. What was evident already in Lanzmann's *Shoah* reoccurs in Hersonski's *A Film Unfinished*: the surviving witness cannot answer the fundamental questions regarding any logical reasoning underlying the

event. Primo Levi's famous "here there is no why" echoes through all these interviews. The survivor does not allow for oversimplified identification when he or she refuses to give the interviewer the anticipated possibility of being the site for truth. Instead, the survivor might comment on the prosaic normality of being. For example, one witness exclaims, while watching the Nazi filmic material from the Warsaw Ghetto: "I might see my mother." As viewers we do not become witnesses "to the survivor's experience but [to] the making of testimony and its unique understanding of events" (Young 171).

Each of the documentaries discussed here exemplifies the multi-faceted challenges of representing the Holocaust as a historical event as well as an event of individual, personal trauma. These difficulties bring to the foreground the inability of the medium itself to portray complexities without reproducing the ideological framework of image-making and reducing the multitude of voices to a filmic meta-narrative that is subject to agency. While the image has limits when it comes to adequately representing violence and genocide, the compositional structure of these films questions whether we have yet to discover a postmodern redefinition of the genre "documentary" that takes into account the limitations of representational truth.

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