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After the Fact: Encounters in Holocaust Testimony

Werbe, Charlotte France

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AFTER THE FACT:

ENCOUNTERS IN HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

Charlotte F. Werbe

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ABSTRACT

"After the Fact: Encounters in Holocaust Testimony" examines the self-reflexive testimonial projects of Charlotte Delbo, Claude Lanzmann, and Art Spiegelman. This dissertation analyzes the social and mediatic conditions that are brought to bear on the production and reception of Holocaust testimony.

My first chapter argues that Charlotte Delbo transposes the formal innovations of her first work, *Les Belles lettres* (1961), into *Mesure de nos jours* (1971), a volume comprised of Delbo's friends' testimonies from the postwar period. Delbo's unconventional approach for gathering testimony gestures toward the way that testimony can challenge, rather than reinforce, conventional ways of thinking about memory, truth, and experience. My second chapter puts Claude Lanzmann's documentary film *Shoah* (1985) in conversation with the video interviews conducted at archival centers in the United States by examining the techniques these projects use for recording testimony. Lanzmann's visible interventions call attention to the social situatedness of testimony, thereby granting agency to his witnesses and viewers alike. Finally, my third chapter examines Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* (1986, 1991). I contend that Spiegelman emphasizes the various sites of tension that are proper to the comic book medium in order to promote reading practices that can account for the "frame conditions" that mediate testimony.

My corpus prioritizes disruption by spotlighting the ways in which testimony is always mediated. Collectively, these artists redefine notions of truth and fact that have been central to the configuration and consumption of Holocaust testimony over the past seventy years.

FIGURES

1. Charlotte Delbo, *Les Belles lettres,* 56-57 45

2. Edith P. (HVT-107), Fortunoff Video Archive, Yale University Library 86

3. "Treblinka Villagers," *Shoah*, First Era, Part One (24) 91

4. "Czeslaw Borowi," *Shoah*, First Era, Part One (23) 95

5. "Franz Suchomel," *Shoah*, First Era, Part One (55) 99

6."Treblinka Villagers," *Shoah*, First Era, Part One, (24) 106

7. "Henrik Gawkowski," *Shoah*, First Era, Part One (34) 110

8. "Villagers at Chelmno Church," *Shoah*, First Era, Part Two (26) 111

9. Moore and Gibbons, *Watchmen*, 23 126

10. Tardi, *C'était la guerre des tranchées*, 24 126

11. Spiegelman, *Maus I*, 11-12 127

12. Fred, *Simbabadd de Batbad*, 25 129

13. Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 116 133

14. Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 11 138

15. Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 16 139

16. Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 44-45 141

17. Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 45 144

18. Moore and Gibbons, *Watchmen*, 1 149

19. Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 41 150

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Chapter One 26
As for Me: Charlotte Delbo, the Algerian War, and Holocaust Testimony

Chapter Two 69
Behind the Camera: *Shoah* and the Archives

Chapter Three 116
Drawing Distance: Art Spiegelman's *Maus*

Conclusion 156

Bibliography 158

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I want to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, who has always been there for me.

Thank you to my dissertation committee and to all those who have supported me in this journey.

If you understood everything I said, you'd be me.

— Miles Davis

INTRODUCTION

Driven by thirst, I eyed a fine icicle outside the window, within hand's reach. I opened the window and broke off the icicle but at once a large, heavy guard prowling outside brutally snatched it away from me. 'Warum?" I asked in my poor German. 'Hier ist kein warum' (there is no why here), he replied, pushing me inside with a shove.

— Primo Levi[1]

1. Introduction

In the encounter described by Primo Levi, the denial of the very question underscores the radical negation of communication in the concentration and extermination camps during the Holocaust. Since the end of World War II, survivors have attempted to communicate what they experienced inside the "concentrationary universe" to the public.[2] This has led to the dissemination of a great number of testimonies over the past seventy years. In order for these narratives to reach their audiences, survivors have been faced with the challenge of balancing the reality of their past experiences and the present conditions under which these experiences are recalled and narrativized.

[1] Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, trans. Stuart Wolf (London: MacMillan, 1993), 29.

[2] I borrow the term "concentrationary universe" from the title of David Rousset's memoir *L'univers concentrationnaire* (1946).

Testimonial output necessarily engages with the past while shaping itself to fit the needs of the present. Yet, the pressures exerted by myriad factors in the present-day narration of experience have not always received sustained attention. This dissertation examines works that not only recognize that testimony is necessarily mediated, but that call attention to this mediation. Rather than gesturing toward unrepresentability and impossibility, the projects of Charlotte Delbo, Claude Lanzmann, and Art Spiegelman propose a method of communication that questions itself as it negotiates the tensions between the narrated past and the narrating present. If "testimony as an art of survival begins and ends with the act of communication," it is the problem of communicative interaction that is at the heart of this dissertation. [3]

2. Testimony

The notion of testimony has changed greatly over time.[4] Broadly speaking, testimony is a communicative act that aims to fill gaps in knowledge.[5] But it is an

[3] Thomas Trezise, *Witnessing Witnessing: On the Reception of Holocaust Survivor Testimony* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 89.

[4] There is a vast critical literature on the history of witnessing and testimony. See Andrea Frisch, "The Ethics of Testimony: A Genealogical Perspective," *Discourse* 25, no. 1 & 2 (2003): 36-54; Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Michal Givoni, "Witnessing/Testimony," *Mafte'akh* 2 (2011): 147-169; Annette Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin* (Paris: Plon, 1998).

[5] The OED defines testimony as "personal or documentary evidence or attestation in support of a fact or statement; hence, any form of evidence or proof." This definition

ambiguous and epistemologically complex form of communication that performs a number of discursive functions.[6] After the Holocaust,[7] testimony migrated into the public sphere as survivors came forward to "bear witness" to their experiences.[8] Today,

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emphasizes that testimony provides knowledge as a response to epistemic uncertainty. *Oxford English Dictionary,* s.v., "testimony," accessed April 13, 2016, http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.princeton.edu/view/Entry/199748.

[6] Paul Ricœur suggests that testimony has multipe uses: "[…] l'archivation en vue de la consultation par des historiens n'est que l'un d'entre eux, au-delà de la pratique du témoignage dans la vie quotidienne et parallèlement à son usage judiciaire sanctionné par la sentence d'un tribunal." Paul Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2000), 201.

[7] In this dissertation, I use the term Holocaust instead of Shoah. I agree with Walter Laqueur that it is counterproductive to avoid the term Holocaust given its rootedness in the English-speaking world. Walter Laqueur, ed. *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), xii. For more on the emergence of the term in American discourse see Jon Petrie, "The Secular Word Holocaust: Scholarly Myths, History, and 20th Century Meanings," *Journal of Genocide Research* 2, no. 1 (2000): 31-63.

[8] To "bear witness" is a formulation that is informed by judicial and religious traditions and is frequently used to express the moral imperative to testify after the Holocaust. Axel Gelfert, *A Critical Introduction to Testimony* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 17. Just as "bearing witness" has changed over time, the figure of the witness has also shifted as a result of political, economic, and social factors. See Didier Fassin, "The Humanitarian Politics of Testimony: Subjectification through Trauma in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (2008): 552. For a compelling discussion of the ways governmental agencies use the concept of "bearing witness" see also Didier Fassin, "Subjectivity Without Subjects: Reinventing the Figure of the Witness," in *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2012): 200-222.

to testify is to engage with legal, religious, and literary traditions that entail moral, pedagogical, and historical imperatives.

After the liberation of the concentration and extermination camps, Holocaust survivors sought to recount and record their experiences for a number of reasons. The injunction to remember and to bear witness, "zakhor," compelled many eyewitnesses to testify. In Poland, where at least eighty-five percent of the primarily Yiddish-speaking Jewish population had been killed, the *Landsmanshaftn* (immigrant associations) compiled *Yizkor-Bikher* that served as substitute gravestones to commemorate those who had perished.[9] Centers such as the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine in Grenoble and the Wiener Library in London sought to collect the testimonies of survivors in order to remember the dead but also to bring Holocaust perpetrators to justice.[10] Some survivors also found psychological release in the act of writing. Elie Wiesel claimed that he wrote in order to "understand as much as to be understood."[11] Others sought to leave a record of their experiences for future generations.

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[9] *Yizkor-Bikher* are memorial books that were compiled in Poland, the United States, Argentina, and Israel. They were written in Yiddish or Hebrew, or a mix of the two.

[10] Zoë Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 96.

[11] Elie Wiesel, *One Generation After* (New York: Random House, 1970), 213. In his new preface to *Night* (2012), Wiesel wonders why he chose to write his testimony, "Did I write so as *not* to go mad [...] [or] was it to leave behind a legacy of words, of memories [...] or was it simply to preserve a record of the ordeal I endured as an adolescent?" He also describes it as a "moral obligation." Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Hill & Wang, 2012), i-ii. In *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (1996), Wiesel characterizes writing the original version of *Night* in a kind of delirium: "I wrote feverishly, breathlessly,

The impulse to testify was also related to the distinct mechanisms of the Nazi program of annihilation, which sought not only to eradicate specific groups of people but also to erase all traces of that eradication. The Holocaust was a state secret in Germany. Most killing orders were delivered orally, leaving almost no written record. This agenda is apparent in Henrich Himmler's 1943 speech at Posen, where he announced: "I want to also mention a very difficult subject… before you, with complete candor. It should be discussed among us, yet nevertheless, we will never speak about it in public […] I am talking about the evacuation of the Jews, the extermination of the Jewish people."[12] To testify, then, did not only serve to memorialize those who had died, but also to teach present generations about the horrors that took place during World War II.

Survivors may seek to tell their stories for a number of reasons, but the public exerts significant pressure on how, and even *if*, testimony will be produced. Testimony is an act that is "consolidated" at the time of its reception.[13] In other words, testimony, in order to function as such, must be called upon, and it is therefore socially bound,[14] as

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rereading. I wrote to testify, to stop the dead from dying, to justify my own survival." Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (New York: Schocken, 1996), 240.

[12] Heinrich Himmler, "Himmler Speech in Posen (Poland) in October 4, 1943," *Facing History*, http://www.facinghistory.org/holocaust-human-behavior/himmler-speech-posen-1943.

[13] Frisch, "The Ethics of Testimony," 46.

[14] Régine Waintrater writes: "[…] Il y a presque toujours un élément de demande sociale, un horizon d'attente, qui fait que 'le document parle' parce qu'il sert à certains intérêts." Régine Waintrater, *Sortir du génocide: Témoigner pour réapprendre à vivre* (Paris: Payot, 2003), 14.

M. Plaza remarks, "lorsque [le document] ne répond à aucune demande sociale, il peut être totalement muet."[15]

The longstanding claim that the immediate postwar period was "silent" has been reassessed by a number of scholars, including Zoë Waxman, who notes that seventy-five memoirs were published between 1945 and 1949 (fifteen in Yiddish, thirteen in Hebrew, twelve in Polish, seven in French, six in Hungarian, and several in English).[16] If we see more in the way of testimonial production today, it is not necessarily because survivors are more eager to speak, but is rather a direct consequence of shifting market forces. The possibility for testimony to exist in the public sphere is directly, and irrevocably, tied to the demands of the public.

Survivors have frequently expressed anxiety regarding the reception of their accounts. The "unlistened-to story" in *Survival in Auschwitz* (1947) gestures toward Levi's trepidation that the public would refuse to listen to him.[17] In Wiesel's *Night* (1956)

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[15] M. Plaza quoted in Waintrater, *Sortir du génocide*, 24.

[16] Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, 100. See also François Azouvi, *Le Mythe du grand silence: Auschwitz, les Français, la mémoire* (Paris: Fayard, 2012).

[17] The "unlistened-to story" emerges in Levi's dream: "This is my sister here, with some unidentifiable friend and many other people. They are all listening to me… it is an intense pleasure, physical, inexpressible, to be at home… but I cannot help noticing that my listeners do not follow me, in fact they are completely indifferent: they speak confusedly of others thing among themselves, as if I was not there. My sister looks at me, gets up and goes away without a word… I am now quite awake and I remembered that I have recounted it to Alberto and that he confided in me, to my amazement, that it is also his dream and the dream of many others, perhaps of everyone. Why does it happen? Why is the pain of everyday translated so constantly in our dreams, in the ever-repeated scene of the unlistened-to dream?" Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 60.

Moché the Beadle serves as a parable for the encounter between survivor and witness.[18] Likewise, Jorge Semprún wonders about his audience: "[p]ourtant un doute me vient sur la possibilité de raconter. Non pas que l'expérience soit indicible [...] on peut toujours dire en somme [...] Mais peut-on tout entendre, tout imaginer? Le pourra-t-on? En auront-ils la patience, la passion, la compassion, la rigueur nécessaire?"[19] Evidently, survivors were anxious about how the public would attend to their accounts.[20]

Publishing houses also play a vital role in the dissemination of testimony. In the years following the war, most memoirs were rejected. In the preface to his memoir *Days of Terror* (1962), J. Lemel, a Belgian Holocaust survivor, expresses frustration that publishers were turning down his manuscript: "I wonder, if the memoirs of Anne Frank or David Rabinowitz had been written in Yiddish, would they have met the same fate as mine and never seen the light of day?"[21] Charlotte Delbo's memoir *Aucun de nous ne*

[18] Moché the Beadle says to the young Wiesel: "I wanted to return to Sighet to describe to you my death so that you might ready yourselves while there is still time. Life? I no longer care to live. I am alone. But I wanted to come back to warn you. Only no one is listening to me..." Wiesel, *Night*, 17.

[19] Jorge Semprún, *L'Écriture ou la vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 23.

[20] On the subject, Simone Veil writes "on entend souvent dire que les déportés ont voulu oublier et on préféré se taire. C'est vrai sans doute pour quelque-uns, mais inexact pour la plupart d'entre eux." Simone Veil, quoted in Annette Wieviorka, *Déportation et genocide: entre la mémoire et l'oubli* (Paris: Plon, 1992), 170.

[21] J. Lemel, *Days of Terror* (Paris: self-published, 1962), 9. Translation my own.

reviendra was rejected several times before it was accepted for publication in 1965. Levi's now-canonical *Survival in Auschwitz* was also refused.[22]

The complex publication history of Wiesel's *La Nuit* (1958) also sheds light on the responsibility of the public and the publishing market in the production of a testimonial text. *La Nuit* is a translated, edited, and condensed version of the original Yiddish-language memoir *Un di velt hot geshvign…* (*And the World Remained Silent…*) (1954).[23] With help from François Mauriac, the text underwent substantial modification in translation due to the particular demands of a secular French-speaking audience.[24] For example, themes of religion and revenge in the original Yiddish text were either

[22] Levi explains: "The manuscript was turned down by a number of important publishers; it was accepted in 1947 by a small publisher who printed only 2,500 copies and then folded. So, this first book of mine fell into oblivion for many years: perhaps also because in all of Europe those were difficult times of mourning and reconstruction and the public did not want to return in memory to the painful years after the war had just ended." Levi quoted in Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, 111.

[23] The original text that Wiesel wrote was 862 pages. It was pared down to 245 pages and published as volume 117 of *Dos Poylishe Yidntum* series in Buenos Aires in 1956. With François Mauriac's help, the volume was translated to French and condensed to 178 pages.

[24] Peter Davies suggests that translation offers a unique vantage point for accessing the construction of a testimonial text: "Translations of Holocaust writing are a textual performance that exemplifies translation-specific methods that respond to current discourses about the Holocaust." Peter Davies, "Translation and the Uses of Holocaust Testimony: Elie Wiesel's *La Nuit* in German Translation," *German Life and Letters* 64, no. 4 (2011): 556.

substantially modified or entirely erased from the translation.[25] These changes indicate that both Wiesel and Mauriac were aware of the entanglements of reader reception.

The publication and consumption of Holocaust testimony has been, and continues to be, deeply intertwined in the political ideology of the time and place in which it is produced.[26] France's secular and universalist tradition categorically shaped the memoirs of the 1940s and 1950s. In order to appeal to their public, the most commercially-successful memoirs focused on universal themes of human resilience and community, neglecting the specificities of the camp experience or the particularities of the Holocaust. For example, two works that gained immediate notoriety — David Rousset's *L'univers concentrationnaire* (1946) and Robert Antelme's *L'espèce humaine* (1947) — were penned by non-Jewish resistance members. Their titles alone reveal that testimony in the immediate postwar years in France did not respond to imperatives of memory or ethnic identity but rather to ontological, political, or patriotic principles that served to valorize France as a nation.[27]

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[25] For example, *Un di velt* begins with a serious indictment of religion, while *La Nuit* begins with the story of Moché the Beadle and the issue of reception. See Naomi Seidman, "Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage," *Jewish Social Studies* 3, no. 1 (1996): 1-19.

[26] Of course, there are publishing houses that intentionally push back against nationalist agendas, such as Les Éditions de Minuit, but these are the exception not the rule.

[27] Wieviorka, *Déportation et genocide*, 317-328. France was deeply fractured in the wake of World War II. Charles de Gaulle propagated the "myth of resistance" at this time in order to create a coherent narrative that would not inculpate France in the Holocaust.

The demand for testimony increased significantly in the 1960s. Fassin and Rechtman speak of a "major shift in attitude."[28] Numerous watershed events have been posited as fundamentally altering Holocaust discourse. According to Annette Wieviorka, the highly publicized Eichmann Trial (1961) was responsible for this shift,[29] while Samuel Moyn argues it was the Treblinka Affair (1966),[30] and Joan B. Scott and Pierre Nora suggest it was the Six-Day War (1967).[31] Suffice it to say that these events worked in concert to change how testimony would be received in the public sphere. As Wieviorka asserts, testimony reflects the contemporary discourse of its time.[32] Yet,

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[28] Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry Into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 58.

[29] Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin*, 81-82. Wieviorka claims that the Eichmann Trial inaugurated the "era of the witness." While the pedagogical orientation of testimony may have shifted as a result of the trial, it was nonetheless a significant theme in the years preceding the trial. See Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, 104.

[30] Samuel Moyn's *The Treblinka Affair* examines the publication of Jean-François Steiner's polemical text *Treblinka: The Revolt of an Extermination Camp* (1966). Moyn argues that the debates surrounding the text provoked a shift in Holocaust discourse in France. Samuel Moyn, *The Treblinka Affair: A Holocaust Controversy* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2005).

[31] Joan B. Wolf, *Harnessing the Holocaust: The Politics of Memory in France* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

[32] Wieviorka writes, "le témoignage, surtout quand il se trouve intégré à un mouvement de masse, exprime, autant que l'expérience individuelle, le ou les discours que la société tient, au moment où le témoin conte son histoire, sur les événements que le témoin a traversés." Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin*, 13. In a recent interview, she challenges readers: "Je vous mets au défi de trouver [l'expression 'j'ai été traumatisé'] dans les témoignages des années 1940-1950, mais qui sont systématiques dans les années 1990." She attributes this phenomenon

despite the range of sociopolitical conditions that influence the production of testimonial memoirs,[33] these literary endeavors are rarely examined through a sociohistorical lens.[34]

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to the uniformity of discursive practices: "Tout le monde raconte la même chose tout simplement parce qu'il y a une uniformisation des discours: le discours politique est uniformisé, le discours du témoin l'est aussi." Wieviorka, quoted in "Une historienne dans la cité — entretien avec Annette Wieviorka," *Nonfiction.fr*, Nov. 24, 2011, https://www.nonfiction.fr /article-5221-une-historienne-dans-la-cite-entretien-avec-annette-wieviorka.htm.

[33] In Russia, testimony was curtailed as a result of the Cold War and the Iron Curtain. The fear of retaliation in Poland often prevented the publication of testimony. In Poland, for example, Chaim Hirszman — one of only two survivors of the death camp at Belzec — testified in Lublin to what he had experienced and was murdered on his way home, before he could return the next day to provide further testimony. Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1986), 817.

[34] The lack of scholarship on the sociohistorical context of testimonial production is tied to scholarly trends in the field of literary criticism that favor decontextualizing the production of literature. John Burke argues that "the exclusion of the author functioned quite simply as an exclusion, a methodological gambit within a system which did not pose the questions of origins and determinants of the text." Burke, quoted in David Boyd, "Literary Celebrity in Early Twentieth-Century Japan" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2018), 181. As Boyd adds, the problem of authorship has simply been displaced: "The reflexive dismissal of authorship has actually allowed the dominant myths of authorship to silently survive or assume new forms. Consequently, the godlike author has been replaced by a godlike text, effectively replicating the problem rather than solving it." Ibid., 181.

In addition to these various social, political, and historical contexts, testimony also faces the challenge of securing the trust of its public. Testimony is a communicative act that is sought when "the facts upon which justice must pronounce its verdict are not clear […] and when both the truth and its supporting elements of evidence are called into question."[35] It is a genre driven by notions of truth and trust.[36] As a result, memoirists often *strive* to give the impression that their narratives are timeless in order to promote a sense of authenticity.

The necessity to produce credible and coherent accounts puts survivor-scribes in a difficult position. The double bind, as James Young explains, rests in the writer's desire to relate authentic testimony, just as this account requires recourse to literary strategies.[37] The craft of storytelling, so welcome in other genres, risks undermining the

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[35] Rosanne Kennedy, "Memory, History and the Law: Testimony and Collective Memory in Holocaust and Stolen Generations Trials," in *Memory and History: Understanding Memory as Source and Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 50. Testimony is called upon when there is a lack of clarity; as Ricœur remarks, testimony "met directement en balance la confiance et le soupçon." Ricœur, *La Mémoire,* 202.

[36] Aaron Beim and Gary Alan Fine write that "[…] in all sorts of testimony, the ultimate concern is whether it should be believed." Aaron Beim and Gary Alan Fine, "Truth in Testimony: The Institutional Embeddedness of Holocaust Survivor Narratives," *European Journal of Sociology* 48, no. 1 (2007): 56. For Waintrater, testimony is founded on mutual trust: "Le contrat qui est scellé entre le témoin et celui qui recueille son témoignage peut se résumer à ceci: 'pendant une courte période, le témoin va être accompagné dans son voyage de mémoire, et son interlocuteur fera tout ce qui est en son pouvoir pour le suivre et le protéger. A la fin de ce voyage, les deux personnes se sépareront.'" Waintrater, *Sortir du génocide*, 185.

[37] Young writes: "The possibility that, once committed to paper, a witness' testimony could be perceived as a fabrication of reality and not the trace of it he had intended, would seem

very truth that testimony aims to impart. In other words, Holocaust memoirists must try to be as a truthful as possible while attempting to produce accounts that appear spontaneous and artless.[38]

As a result, writers have turned to alternate methods to create conditions of trust and belief. Various conventions have been established to ensure the stability of these accounts. Barbara Foley has remarked that Holocaust memoirs are strikingly uniform in structure.[39] Elie Wiesel also alludes to this when he asks: "[h]ave you read, re-read, attentively read the survivors' testimonies? They seem to have been written by one man,

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to mock a witness's very *raison d'être*. And to compound the dilemma, the more insistently a survivor-scribe attempts to establish the 'lost link' between his text and his experiences in the text, the more he inadvertently emphasizes his role as maker of the text, which ironically — and more perversely still — further undermines the sense of unmediated fact the writer had attempted to establish." James Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 25.

[38] Ibid., 17. Similarly, Waintrater writes: "Ou le témoin témoigne 'brut de décoffrage,' au plus près de l'expérience, et il se voit accusé d'être trop impliqué, donc trop subjectif. De là à la suspicion, il n'y a qu'un pas, vite franchi. Ou il élabore son témoignage travaillant à le rendre plus clair, et c'est alors cet ordonnancement même qui l'accuse, rendant son récit trop distancié, voire fabriqué. Là encore, la suspicion n'est pas loin, pour les raisons inverses de celles évoquées précédemment." Waintrater, *Sortir du génocide*, 26.

[39] According to Foley: "A four-part development becomes familiar to the reader of Holocaust memoirs. First, the author describes life before deportation; then, the shock, disbelief, and despair of losing all one's relatives and being cast into the pit of the camp; then, the gradual process of adaptation and survival; finally, the departure from the camp and the return to a life that can only parody 'normality.'" Barbara Foley, "Fact, Fiction, Fascism: Testimony and Mimesis in Holocaust Narratives," *Comparative Literature* 34 (1982): 338-339.

always the same, repeating a thousand times what you, the reader, even if you are his contemporary, will never understand."[40]

While the traditional schema for writing testimony remains popular, a number of first-generation survivors have reflected on the construction of their texts and introduced these reflections into their memoirs. In *L'écriture ou la vie* (1995), Jorge Semprún considers the relationship between lived experience and writing. According to him, artifice is not only a necessary part of reconstructing an experience, but is, in fact, beneficial: "[s]eul l'artifice d'un récit maîtrisé parviendra à transmettre partiellement la vérité du témoignage."[41] In his memoir, Semprún does not focus on stripping the narrative down to the bare "facts," but rather chooses to layer his testimony, constantly circulating back to the same memories, despite their increasing incompatibility. In so doing, he shows readers that "truth" is created after the fact.

In the act of testifying, memoirists face a number of challenges. Yet, it is rare for these pressures to be explicitly articulated. It is our responsibility, as engaged readers, to understand the vagaries of testimony.

3. Critical Approaches to Testimony

The back matter of the Hill & Wang edition of *Night* features two reviews: "Wiesel has taken his own anguish and imaginatively metamorphosed it into art" and "*Night* is a "human document […], almost unbearably painful, and certainly beyond

[40] Wiesel, quoted in Foley, "Fact, Fiction, Fascism," 338.

[41] Semprún, *L'écriture ou la vie*, 26.

criticism."[42] While testimony as art and as document are not incompatible, the question of how to read and interpret Holocaust testimony has been a great source of contention in the field of Holocaust Studies for the past four decades.

Today, Holocaust testimony has become a subject of study, but for a long time, scholars hesitated to place these narratives up to the lens of literary criticism. Young suggests that this reluctance stemmed from concerns that literary analysis would risk displacing the Holocaust as an historical event, reducing it (and any literature related to it) to a mere "system of signs."[43] However, the 1970s saw substantial shifts in the interest in memory and testimony in public discourse. Friedländer argues that this widespread phenomenon helped catalyze the academy's attention to the subject.[44]

During the 1970s and 1980s, a number of literary critics began developing theoretical tools for examining Holocaust testimony. The work produced during this period provided new vantage points for accessing and analyzing these narratives. However, scholarship on the subject was deeply influenced by the tenets of deconstruction, a tremendously popular method of critical analysis at that time. Holocaust testimony came to be interpreted under the sign of aporia, impossibility,

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[42] Wiesel, *Night*, book cover.

[43] Young writes: "[…] if Holocaust narrative is nothing but a system of signs merely referring to other signs, then where are the events themselves? To concentrate on the poetics of a witness's testimony, for example, over the substance of the testimony seems to risk displacing the events under discussion altogether." Young, *Writing and Rewriting*, 3.

[44] Saul Friedländer writes: "it was the memory construction of popular culture and mass media that enforced the growing attention of professional historians on the history of the Holocaust since the 1970s." Friedländer, quoted in Aleida Assmann, "History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony," *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (2006): 273.

and unspeakability.[45] For Lyotard, Felman, and Agamben, testimony was defined as an impossible yet necessary act.[46]

Trauma theory grew to be the privileged framework for examining and interpreting testimony in the field of literary studies. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992) and Cathy Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) are considered landmark theoretical works on testimony. While Felman and Laub rely heavily on the psychoanalytic paradigms proposed by Freud to formulate their theoretical apparatus, Caruth also integrates the work of neurobiologist Besser Van der Kolk to support her

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[45] Agamben writes: "The aporia of Auschwitz is, indeed, the very aporia of historical knowledge: a non-coincidence between fact and truth, between verification and comprehension." Agamben, quoted in Thomas Trezise, *Witnessing Witnessing*, 124. For a sustained critique of Agamben's theoretical position see Trezise, "Theory and Testimony," in *Witnessing Witnessing*, 122-158. For a discussion of the prevalence of the term "unspeakable" in Holocaust scholarship, see Thomas Trezise, "Unspeakable," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 1 (2001): 39-66.

[46] See Giorgio Agamben, *The Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 1999); Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992); and François Lyotard, *The Differend*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), esp. 56-58.

contention that trauma is marked by absence and inaccessibility.[47] Paradox and absence are the notions undergirding trauma theory.[48]

While trauma theory helped put testimony on the map of literary studies, so to speak, it also failed, in many ways, to properly attend to both the witness and the process of witnessing. The universal tenets of psychoanalysis — fundamental to trauma theory — made it difficult to account for the diversity of survivor accounts and to recuperate the individual voice. As a result, testimony was frequently stripped of its social, historical, and mediatic contexts. This problem remained unrecognized for a long time given that memoirists themselves tend to decontextualize their accounts from the specific conditions under which they are writing in order to appear

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[47] Laub writes that "massive trauma precludes its registration; the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are temporarily knocked out, malfunction. The victim's narrative… does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence […]." Laub and Felman, *Testimony*, 57. See also Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). For a critique of Caruth's theory see Trezise, "Trauma and Theory" in *Witnessing Witnessing*, 40-62 and Ruth Leys, "The Pathos of the Literal" in *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 284-297.

[48] According to Derrida, there is an inherent paradox unique to testimony: the very conditions upon which it relies are negated in the very act of testifying: "To testify is always *one the one hand* to do it *at present* […]. If that to which I testify is divisible, if the moment in which I testify is divisible, if my attestation is divisible, at that moment it is no longer reliable, it no longer has the value of truth, reliability, or veracity that it claims absolutely. Consequently, for testimony there *must* be the instant. And yet, *on the other hand*, this condition of possibility is destroyed by the testimony itself." Derrida, quoted in Frisch, "The Ethics of Testimony," 39.

authentic. In other words, trauma theory and Holocaust testimony create a closed feedback loop.[49]

Dominick LaCapra, Ruth Leys, Thomas Trezise, and other scholars have extensively reassessed and critiqued trauma theory.[50] Broadly speaking, they argue that trauma theory reproduces the very breach that it suggests is at the root of the traumatic encounter.[51] In other words, the purported alienation of the self that occurs during a traumatic event is continually reinforced (which Leys dubs the "mimetic impulse"). Rather than reintegrating witnesses back into community, the potential for productive communication is severed and they are isolated once more.

LaCapra, Leys, and Trezise turn their attention to the reception of testimony. These critics express concern regarding the interlocutory relationship that informs the production and reception of testimony. LaCapra urges readers to approach these narratives through the mode of "empathic unsettlement," a form of witnessing that

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[49] For Alan Mintz, trauma theory is an "exceptionalist" approach, as it favors a mode of inquiry that "is rooted in a conviction of the Holocaust as a radical rupture in human history that goes well beyond the notion of uniqueness." Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2001), 75.

[50] See Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Leys, *Trauma*; Trezise, *Witnessing Witnessing.*

[51] LaCapra observes "The language of literary theory — at least Caruth's variant of this language — itself seems to repeat, whether consciously or unconsciously, the disconcertingly opaque movement of post-traumatic repetition in a seeming attempt to elucidate that movement." LaCapra, *Writing History*, 184.

takes into account the proximity and distance of readers to testimonial literature.[52] Leys excoriates trauma theory, arguing instead that the encounter with accounts of the Holocaust should be characterized by "an intelligent, humane, and resourceful pragmatism."[53] Trezise asserts that "witnesses of witnesses" should "maintain a balance of empathy and reserve, tolerate a tension between identification and estrangement, recognize and respect the irreducible otherness of survivors" so as to respectfully and effectively reintegrate survivors back into the community.[54]

Recently, a number of scholars have turned to the political embeddedness of testimonial production, focusing primarily on the decades immediately following the war. Michael Rothberg has been at the forefront of these investigations, claiming that Holocaust memory has been shaped by intersecting violent histories. Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009) examines the transnational and transcultural formation of memory and directly challenges the notion of competitive memory that has shaped the field for so long.[55]

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[52] LaCapra, *Writing History*, 41. LaCapra writes extensively of the many extremes that characterize trauma theory: "There is, at times, a tendency to […] eliminate or obscure the role of problematic intermediary or transitional processes […] and to restrict possibilities to two extremes between which one may oscillate or be suspended […]." Ibid., 17.

[53] Leys, *Trauma*, 307.

[54] Trezise, *Witnessing Witnessing*, 224.

[55] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009). Multidirectional memory also has much to do with how testimony is received: "The borders of memory and identity are jagged; what looks at first like my own property often turns out to be a borrowing or

Likewise, in *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (2015), Debarati Sanyal uses the notion of complicity to show how, in the French public imagination, the Holocaust has been connected to other regimes of violence.[56] These approaches integrate forgotten or neglected histories in order to challenge dominant modes for thinking about the Holocaust.[57]

In addition to thinking about localized historical events that have shaped Holocaust remembrance and memorialization, there has also been an emergence of scholarship that focuses on the role media play in the production and reception of testimony. While new media have shaped public consumption of testimony, they have not been subject to extensive analysis. Noah Shenker's *Reframing Holocaust Testimony* (2015) and Jeffrey Shandler's *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Age: Survivors' Stories and New Media Practices* (2017) focus on the impact of new media on

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adaptation from a history that initially might seem foreign or distant." Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 5.

[56] Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015). See also Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); Michael Rothberg, Debarati Sanyal, and Max Silverman, eds., "Nœuds de mémoire," *Yale French Studies* 18 (2010).

[57] While Alan Mintz classifies trauma theory as belonging to the "exceptionalist" approach, the work of Rothberg and Sanyal can be aligned with what he dubs the "constructivist" approach, a mode of inquiry that stresses "the cultural lens through which the Holocaust is perceived," where "historical events, even the Holocaust, possess no inscribed meanings; meaning is constructed by communities of interpretation — differently by different communities — out of their own motives and needs." Mintz, *Popular Culture*, 39-40.

the testimonial encounter.[58] With the rise in digital technologies, these critics are recognizing the necessity to look beyond conventional literary memoirs to other ways that Holocaust testimony reaches the public.[59] These approaches bring together close and distant reading, triangulating sociological, historical, and aesthetic approaches for interpreting testimony.

[58] Noah Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015); Jeffrey Shandler, *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Age: Survivors' Stories and New Media Practices* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).

[59] See Thomas Trezise, "Between History and Psychoanalysis: A Case Study in the Reception of Holocaust Survivor Testimony," *History & Memory* 20, no. 1 (2008): 7-47; Amit Pinchevski, "The Audiovisual Unconscious: Media and Trauma in the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies," *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 1 (2012): 142-166; Caroline Wake, "Regarding the Recording: The Viewer of Video Testimony, the Complexity of Copresence and the Possibility of Tertiary Witnessing," *History & Memory* 25, no. 1 (2013): 111-144; Gary Weissman, "Shoah Illustrated," in *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004): 140-206; Assmann, "History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony"; Henry Greenspan and Sidney Bolkosky, "When is an Interview an Interview? Notes from Listening to Holocaust Survivors," *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 431-449.

4. Corpus

In the beginning is relation.

— Martin Buber[60]

This dissertation examines the self-conscious and experimental testimonial projects of Charlotte Delbo, Claude Lanzmann, and Art Spiegelman. In their respective works, these artists circulate a number of voices and incorporate their own commentary. The polyphonic character of these texts points to the social embeddedness of testimony and draws attention to the asymmetrical nature of the encounters that are brought to bear on the creation of knowledge after the fact.

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Chapter One, "As for Me: Charlotte Delbo, the Algerian War, and Holocaust Testimony," examines how comparison is harnessed in the literary engagement of Charlotte Delbo, a resistance member and concentration camp survivor. While most scholars have overlooked Delbo's first published text, *Les Belles lettres* (1961), this chapter explores its innovations and suggests that they are transposed into her later text, *Mesure de nos jours* (1971). I argue that Delbo uses the framework of comparison to structure *Les Belles lettres*, a clear reflection of the ways in which the Holocaust was activated in public discourse during the postwar period in France. However, by inserting her own voice, Delbo self-reflexively gestures to the ways that comparison

[60] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 18.

comes to structure the knowledge and memory of both the Holocaust and the Algerian War.

The transposition of the formal innovations of *Les Belles lettres* into *Mesure de nos jours* fundamentally disrupts the conventions of testimony. Much like *Les Belles lettres*, multiple perspectives circulate in *Mesure de nos jours*, as different testimonies are integrated and intercut with Delbo's own testimonial vignettes. Going further than *Les Belles lettres*, however, the testimonies in *Mesure de nos jours* explicitly refer to one another, gesturing toward each other through difference as each survivor finds a way to articulate their individuality within the collective group. In other words, the formal composition of *Mesure de nos jours*, predicated on juxtaposition and comparison, produces new knowledge that is founded on difference. Delbo not only reactivates the social context through which survivors come to think and talk about their own experiences, but also points to the ways that information comes to be circulated and how it is intimately tied to the structure of narrative.

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Chapter Two, "Behind the Camera: *Shoah* and the Archives," analyzes audiovisual testimonial recording projects by examining in parallel the video testimonies recorded at a number of archival centers and Claude Lanzmann's documentary film *Shoah* (1985). In reaction to the postwar tendency to privilege a unified historical account, both Lanzmann and the archival centers focus on recording a wide range of eyewitness testimony, yet the two projects adopt divergent filming methodologies. While the archival centers suppress revealing the conditions that mediate testimony, Lanzmann instead emphasizes them. Analyzing the interviews

conducted at the center reveals that they aim to engage viewers by engineering an immediate and emotional connection with the witness. Alternatively, Lanzmann insists on revealing the fabric of testimony, thus encouraging viewers to interpret these narratives from a critical perspective. I argue that Lanzmann gives viewers the tools to understand how the past is retrieved by calling attention to the testimonial encounter.

While the archival centers have made a strong contribution to the memory of the Holocaust, their streamlined approach, which obscures how present demands mediate testimony, reduces the complexities of narrative construction. By presenting testimony as embedded in its social context, Lanzmann does not attempt to conceal the tensions that are inalienable. Instead, Lanzmann gives viewers the tools to understand how the past is retrieved.

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Chapter Three, "Drawing Distance: Art Spiegelman's *Maus*," argues that Spiegelman foregrounds the tensions that are inherent in the comics medium in order to promote a critical rather than emotive reading of the text. If comics are already an "art of tensions," Spiegelman emphasizes the tensions between the panel, the sequence, and the page. Spiegelman's techniques require readers to pause, stop, and often reread a particular panel, sequence, or page. As a result, witnessing is driven by discomfort and disruption. I examine three key scenes that stage intimate dialogues and emphasize the formal features of the medium. By highlighting the artifice of representation, these scenes produce reading practices that oscillate between

proximity and distance; where the frame becomes as crucial as what is contained within it.

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This dissertation does not engage with testimony through the optics of fact and fiction. The corpus that I have selected is not primarily concerned with documentary truth, but rather, the conditions that fashion perceptions of truth. These innovative projects disrupt the conventional schema that can be used to assess the "validity" of testimony by reconstructing testimony through an active engagement with the conditions that mediate it. By repositioning notions of truth and credibility, Delbo, Lanzmann, and Spiegelman intervene in a genre that has been predicated, first and foremost, on creating conditions of trust. In so doing, they take significant risks, especially given the continued pervasiveness of Holocaust negationism. The fact is, Holocaust negationism will always be with us, and more importantly, has nothing to do with the truth. As these projects show, catering to those who wish to undermine testimony need not be the priority of memoirists.

CHAPTER I

AS FOR ME: CHARLOTTE DELBO, THE ALGERIAN WAR, AND HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

La torture en Algérie

Des hommes ont fait de ma langue le langage des tortionnaires

Des villages brûlés au napalm en Indochine

Des Algériens pourchassés par la police de Paris, un jour d'octobre 1961,

des Algériens dont on a repêché les corps dans la Seine.

Que souvent j'ai pensé à toi, Hannelore.

— Charlotte Delbo[61]

If all these heartfelt acts of mourning belong to a genre, then the poignancy seems conventional rather than authentic.

— Jane Gallop[62]

1. Introduction

Since the liberation of the concentration and extermination camps, the way the Holocaust has been addressed has varied considerably. Although it is common

[61] Charlotte Delbo, *La Mémoire et les jours* (Paris: Berg International, 1985), 118.

[62] Jane Gallop, *The Death of the Author: Reading and Writing in Time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 87.

practice today to consider the Holocaust a unique event that cannot, ethically or practically speaking, be compared to other events, in the immediate postwar era, the Holocaust served as a pedagogical or political tool for interpreting other violent phenomena.[63]

This chapter examines how comparison is harnessed in the literary engagement of Charlotte Delbo, a resistance member and concentration camp survivor. Although Delbo wrote her first text, *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, shortly after the liberation of the camps, it was published some twenty years later. While her first published work, *Les Belles lettres* (1961), dealt with the Algerian War, Delbo also authored numerous other texts related to her experiences during the Holocaust, including *Spectres, mes compagnons* (1977) and *La mémoire et les jours* (1985). *Une connaissance inutile* (1970) and *Mesure de nos jours* (1971) together with *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, came to form the trilogy, *Auschwitz et après*. Given that *Mesure de nos jours* focuses on the postwar era, scholars who turn to Delbo's work tend to focus on

[63] A vast critical literature treats the fraught question of the specificity of the Holocaust. See Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (Seattle, WA: The University of Washington Press, 1982); Emil Fackenheim, "Concerning Authentic and Inauthentic Responses to the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 1, no. 1 (1986): 101-120; Alan Rosenbaum, ed., *Is the Holocaust Unique? Perspectives on Comparative Genocide* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Beatrice Heuser, "The *Historikerstreit*: Uniqueness and Comparability of the Holocaust," *German History* 6, no. 1 (1988): 69-78; Steven T. Katz, "The 'Unique' Intentionality of the Holocaust," *Modern Judaism* 1, no. 2 (1981): 161-183.

the first two volumes of the trilogy, which predominantly concentrate on the camp experience.[64]

In the following, I examine the innovative structure of *Mesure de nos jours* (1971) — a text composed of numerous testimonial vignettes (including Delbo's) that are placed side-by-side and cross-reference one another — and suggest that this formal experimentation can be traced back to her first published work, *Les Belles lettres* (1961). Not only does comparison occur within the body of *Les Belles lettres*, but, as we shall see, its formal composition reflects the interdependence of the Holocaust and the Algerian War in the public imagination of the early sixties. The transposition of this literary technique — wherein multiple perspectives interact and are supplemented by Delbo's point of view — into *Mesure de nos jours*, radically upends the conventions of the Holocaust testimonial memoir, demanding that readers think critically about how testimony is produced and consumed.

In both *Les Belles lettres* and *Mesure de nos jours*, Delbo acts as an invested editor who takes extant works — letters and testimonies respectively — and fundamentally alters the message by promoting a second-order reflexivity. By adding

[64] In recent years, there has been a surge of interest in Delbo's works, resulting, in part, from the 2013 conference celebrating the centennial of her birth. See David Caron and Sharon Marquart, eds., *Les revenantes: Charlotte Delbo* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2011); Violaine Gelly and Paul Gradvohl, *Charlotte Delbo* (Paris: Fayard, 2013); Christiane Page, ed., *Charlotte Delbo: Œuvre et engagements* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2014); Ghislaine Dunant, *Charlotte Delbo: la vie retrouvée* (Paris: Grasset, 2016). See also http://www.charlottedelbo.org, a website run by the association "Les Amis de Charlotte Delbo."

her own voice to the range of perspectives in these texts, Delbo calls attention to the *process* through which facts come to be constituted as such. These numerous perspectives reconstitute the social context that is necessarily brought to bear on the production of narrative.

2. Comparison in the Immediate Postwar Years

Les Nazis c'était nous. Hélas.

— Jules Roy[65]

Over the past seventy years, the Holocaust has come to serve as a paradigmatic event through which many seek to understand other atrocities.[66] This tendency was particularly pronounced in the decades following the war and had resounding effects on how the Holocaust was integrated into public consciousness. In his introduction to *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961), Raul Hilberg decried the lack of any

[65] William B. Cohen, "The Algerian War, the French State and Official Memory," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 28, no. 2 (2002): 222.

[66] Ross Chambers argues that the Holocaust has served as a paradigm of extreme violence and horror, writing that "the Nazis' vast genocide has been for more than fifty years *the* case, at once exemplary and uniquely horrifying, around which all thinking about twentieth-century atrocity has revolved." Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions: AIDS Writing, Testimonial, and the Rhetoric of Haunting* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 4.

serious investigation into the Holocaust, writing that "the destruction of the European Jews has not yet been absorbed as an historical event."[67]

Until the 1970s, the Holocaust tended to be defined as an absolute evil against which other events could be compared, particularly in Western Europe and the United States. In response to colonial brutality, Aimé Césaire used Hitler as a universal symbol: "J'ai beaucoup parlé de Hitler. C'est qu'il le mérite: *il permet de voir gros* et de saisir que la société capitaliste, à son stade actuel, est incapable de fonder un droit des gens, comme elle s'avère impuissante à fonder une morale individuelle."[68] In 1968, Jean-Paul Sartre evoked World War II in order to suggest that American actions in Vietnam were tantamount to genocide.[69] Peter Novick controversially claimed that, at the height of the Cold War in the United States, images of Nazi victims were formulated in political rather than ethnic terms in order to equate the Nazis with the

[67] Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, (New York: New Viewpoints, 1973), v.

[68] Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 2000), 5. Italics my own.

[69] Jean-Paul Sartre, *On Genocide and a Summary of the Evidence and the Judgments of the International War Crimes Tribunal* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1968).

Soviets.[70] In all of these cases, and many more, the Holocaust was activated as a rhetorical device in order to support claims about contemporary large-scale events.[71]

Following World War II, the subject of decolonization dominated French discourse. In an already fractured country, the Algerian War (1954-1962) led to even deeper fissures.[72] Early on in the conflict, memories of World War II, in particular of the occupation, were activated by leftist political parties in an effort to support Algerian independence. In order to practice solidarity with Algerians, metropolitan French people frequently evoked Hitler's brutal regime. In 1951, French politician Claude Bourdet published an article in *L'Observateur*, "Y a-t-il une Gestapo en

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[70] Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999). Novick's work was controversial, stirring up negative reviews from Berel Lang and other scholars, who questioned his arguments from an ethical standpoint. See Novick's response to Berel Lang: Peter Novick, "Response to Lederhendler and Lang," *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no. 3 (2001): 169-179.

[71] There are many other examples of comparisons made between the Holocaust and other large-scale violent events, including Hiroshima, the Indochina Wars, the Biafran Plight, and the Rwandan Genocide. See Ran Zwigenberg, *Hiroshima: The Origins of Global Memory Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Kristen Fermaglich, *American Dream and Nazi Nightmares: Early Holocaust Consciousness and Liberal America, 1957-1965* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2006); and Joan B. Wolf, *Harnessing the Holocaust*.

[72] While the start of the Algerian War is officially recorded as November 1st, 1954, the beginning of the conflict can be traced to the Sétif Massacre of May 8, 1945. On this day, thousands of Algerians participated in a march organized by the French authorities to mark the victory of the Allied Forces over the Nazis. The march turned violent when French police fired on the protestors. This event is now considered to be a turning point in Franco-Algerian relations.

Algérie?" Bourdet's editorial put in parallel the torture tactics utilized by the French in the Algerian War and those employed by the Nazis in World War II.[73]

Comparisons to World War II only amplified as the Algerian War continued. In October 1961, the French police brutally murdered hundreds of Algerians in the streets of Paris during a peaceful march aimed to protest the curfew recently imposed on Algerians by the French government.[74] This violence was immediately described in terms of Nazi brutality.[75] An Algerian man reported back to his FLN superiors that he had witnessed a terrible sight at *Le Palais des Sports*, the same arena where thousands of Jews were taken in the roundup of Vel d'Hiv in 1952: "There we made a macabre discovery. The [*Algerian*] brothers were lying on the ground, their heads split open and limbs dislocated. All these horrors were comparable to those endured by the Jews in the Nazi concentration camps."[76] The newspaper *France Observateur* also evoked World War II when it ran an image in the next day's paper of Algerians lying on the

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[73] Claude Bourdet, "Y a-t-il une Gestapo en Algérie?" *France-Observateur*, Dec. 6, 1951.

[74] The exact death toll remains unknown. The day after the massacre, the police declared three dead and sixty-seven wounded. In 1988, the French government officially took responsibility for forty deaths. The death toll likely numbered around 200 to 300 people. For more on questions of state responsibility and amnesia, see Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène et l'oubli: la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005).

[75] Henri Rousso points out that in France, since World War II, it continues to be common practice to stigmatize political enemies by alluding to their likeness to either Nazis or to French collaborators. Henri Rousso, "Comparative Afterlives: Vichy France and the Algerian War," lecture, The University of Minnesota, November 15, 2005, 1.

[76] Jim House, "Memory and the Creation of Solidarity During the Decolonization of Algeria," *Yale French Studies* 118/119 (2010): 30.

ground at the *Palais*, with a caption reading "Les Algériens au *Palais des Sports*. Cela ne vous rappelle rien?"[77] In his article for *Les Temps modernes*, Claude Lanzmann went further: "Entre les Algériens entassés au Palais des Sports en attendant d'être 'refoulés' et les juifs parqués à Drancy avant la déportation, nous nous refusons à faire une différence."[78] Such comparisons also traveled across the Atlantic, where North American newspapers denounced the actions of the French police. The liberal magazine *The New Republic* condemned "the cold-blooded brutality of the [French] police" as "worse than the comparable treatment of Jews in Paris under Nazi rule."[79]

While the French antiracist association, Movement Against Racism, Anti-Semitism, and for Peace (MRAP) frequently drew parallels between the Holocaust and the Algerian War, these comparisons grew more extreme as the Algerian War progressed. In order to draw attention to the urgency of the Algerian plight, the MRAP argued that "all racism had to be considered as inseparable" in a move that Jim House

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[77] Michael Rothberg, "17 October 1961: A Site of Holocaust Memory?" in Carola Hähnel-Mesnard, Marie Liénard-Yeterian, and Cristina Marinas, eds., *Culture et mémoire: représentations contemporaines de la mémoire dans les espaces mémoriels, les arts du visuel, la littérature et le théâtre* (Paris: Éditions de l'École Polytechnique, 2008), 38.

[78] "Appel," *Les temps modernes* 186 (November 1961): 624.

[79] *The New Republic*, 27 Nov 1961, 8. Some comparisons were particularly easy to make. For example, Maurice Papon served as head of the French police in the Vichy regime and during the Algerian War (he played an instrumental role in the October Massacre). For more, see Jim House and Neil MacMaster, *Paris 1961: Algerians, State Terror, and Memory* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006).

dubs "radical comparativism."[80] The MRAP sought to align both wars in order to emphasize the dangers of French militarism, and designed posters boasting such as headlines as:

> This spectacular deployment of repressive forces, these arbitrary arrests, this awful racism are all directly inspired by the means used by the Nazi occupiers and its agents. The cries of 'dirty wog' that were heard during the police operations are like those of 'dirty Jew' that the Vichy police came out with when they were handing over the thousands of innocent people into Deportation and the gas chambers.[81]

Rhetoric such as this helped mobilize youth in supporting the anticolonial cause.

Many artists and intellectuals in France vociferously protested French military actions in their support for Algerian independence.[82] In 1960, 121 intellectuals signed the *Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie (Manifeste des 121)*, an open letter published in *Vérité-Liberté*. The letter called on French authorities to end compulsory military service and to renounce the use of torture. To stress the

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[80] Jim House, "Memory and the Creation of Solidarity During the Decolonization of Algeria," 20.

[81] MRAP Archives, Paris, quoted in ibid., 21.

[82] Drake and Kelly note that intellectuals were divided: the leftists opposed any kind of armed conflict while some intellectuals simply did not approve of this particular war. See David Drake and Debra Kelly, "Intellectuals and War," *Journal of War & Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009): 5-16.

gravity of the situation, the document explicitly compared French and German military methods: "faut-il rappeler que, quinze ans après la destruction de l'ordre hitlérien, le militarisme français, par suite des exigences d'une telle guerre, est parvenu à restaurer la torture et à en faire à nouveau comme une institution en Europe?"[83]

While connections between the Holocaust and other violent phenomena were freely made in the immediate postwar period, since then, there has been much discussion regarding the ethics of comparison. Alain Resnais' renowned and controversial film *Nuit et Brouillard* (1956) offers a striking example of the potential pitfalls of comparison. The film — whose title is borrowed from the German directive *Nacht und Nebel* targeting political activists and resistance fighters — treats the memory of the Holocaust by showing images of the grounds of Auschwitz and Majdanek while describing the lives of prisoners in the camps. For the most part, images of the past are presented in black and white while the present is shown in color. Although past and present are juxtaposed throughout the film, Resnais uses various techniques to dismiss the possibility of any simplistic temporal distinctions.[84]

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[83] "Déclaration sur le droit à l'insoumission dans la guerre d'Algérie. Manifeste dit des '121,'" *Lignes* 1, no. 33 (1998): 85.

[84] Bersani and Dutoit have argued that the sepia colored images in the film function to purposefully blur the distinction between past and present. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 183. Andrew Hebard also points out that the camera and color are used to confound boundaries of past and present. Andrew Hebard, "Disruptive Histories: Toward a Radical Politics of Remembrance in Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog*," *New German Critique* 71 (1997): 87-113.

The structure of the film reflects its underlying aim: not only to show the public the horrors of the Holocaust, but also, and perhaps more urgently, to make a political statement about the Algerian War. In fact, many decades later, in an interview with Charles Krantz, Resnais stated: "the whole point of *Night and Fog* was Algeria."[85] In *Nuit et Brouillard*, Resnais implicitly alluded to the Algerian War by including a photograph of French officers guarding a detention center. During a time when the "myth of resistance" was being propagated by Charles de Gaulle, the French *képi* shown in this scene stands in direct contradiction to claims that the French were not involved in the occupation and deportation of tens of thousands of Jews from France.[86] For Resnais, this image was essential: "C'était quand même important de montrer que la France avait organisé des points de départ pour les camps."[87] Censors

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[85] Alain Resnais, "Interview with Charles Krantz," New York City, November 2, 1984, quoted in Charles Krantz, "Teaching *Night and Fog*: History and Historiography," *Film & History* 15, no. 1 (1985): 7.

[86] After World War II, Charles de Gaulle immediately started propagating the idea that all the French resisted the Nazis. In his speech on August 25th, 1944, he famously exclaimed: "Paris, Paris outragé, Paris brisé, Paris martyrisé, mais Paris libéré! Libéré par lui-même, libéré par son people avec le concours des armées de la France, avec l'appui et le concours de la France toute entière: c'est-à-dire, la France qui se bat. C'est-à-dire la seule France, de la vraie France, de la France éternelle." Charles de Gaulle, "25 août 1944" (speech, l'Hôtel de Ville, Paris, August 25, 1944), Charles de Gaulle, Paroles Publiques, https://fresques.ina.fr/de-gaulle/fiche-media /Gaulle00005/la-liberation-de-paris.html.

[87] Richard Raskin, *Nuit et Brouillard by Alain Resnais: On the Making, Reception, and Functions of a Major Documentary Film: Including a New Interview with Alain Resnais and the Original Shooting Script* (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 1987), 56, quoted in Emma Wilson, *Alain Resnais (French Film Directors)* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2006), 25.

put pressure on Resnais to remove the image, threatening that if he chose to keep it, the last ten minutes of the film would be cut. In the end, Resnais agreed and painted a beam over the French soldier's *képi*.[88] While today the role the French played in the deportation has been officially recognized, at the time this image was shocking.[89]

Nuit et Brouillard has been criticized for universalizing the Holocaust. The film's commentary makes frequent comparisons between World War II and contemporary France, concluding with the provocative suggestion that the horrors of the Holocaust do not belong only to the past:

> Il y a nous qui regardons sincèrement ces ruines comme si le vieux monstre concentrationnaire était mort sous les décombres, qui feignons de reprendre espoir devant cette image qui s'éloigne, comme si on guérissait de la peste concentrationnaire, nous qui feignons de croire que tout cela est d'un seul temps et d'un seul pays, et qui ne pensons pas à regarder autour de nous et qui n'entendons pas qu'on crie sans fin.[90]

This way of engaging with the Holocaust has been critiqued at length by those who argue that Resnais suppresses the specificities of the Nazi genocide. Lanzmann has

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[88] *Nuit et Brouillard* was screened out of competition at Cannes.

[89] In 1995, Jacques Chirac, the former president of France, officially recognized the role the French played in the deportation of Jews during World War II.

[90] "Nuit et Brouillard," *Le Ciné-club de Caen*, https://www.cineclubdecaen.com/realisat/resnais/nuitetbrouillard.

affirmed the importance of the film while also criticizing the filmmaker for producing a "beau film idéaliste" in which "le mot 'Juif' y est prononcé une fois."[91] Robert Michael maintains that "*Night and Fog* […] silently buries six million Jews in universal genocide […] and the Jews vanish with hardly a trace"[92] which "unintentionally mirrors Himmler's imperative that 'in public we will never speak […] of the evacuation of the Jews, the annihilation of the Jewish people."[93] In other words, the film uses the past in order to craft a political message about the present, and as a result, the differences between these two violent events are obscured. In her illuminating analysis of *Nuit et Brouillard*, Debarati Sanyal suggests that allegory, the poetic register the film uses, reduces the specificity of the Holocaust and forecloses the possibility of difference.[94]

Although the comparisons found in *Nuit et Brouillard* and the manifesto could help rally the public, the attempt to produce political change by using the Holocaust as a paradigm of evil has had fundamental and long-lasting effects on the memory of these two wars. While most scholars locate the Eichmann Trial as the catalyst for the major shift in Holocaust discourse that occurred in the 1960s,[95] Michael Rothberg

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[91] Claude Lanzmann, *Le Lièvre de Patagonie*, 531.

[92] Robert Michael, "A Second Look: *Night and Fog*," *Cinéaste* 13, no. 4 (1984): 36-37, quoted in Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman, "Introduction: Concentrationary Cinema," in *Concentrationary Cinema: Aesthetics as Political Resistance in Alain Resnais' Night and Fog,* Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman, eds. (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2011): 1-54.

[93] Richard Raskin, quoted in Emma Wilson, *Alain Resnais*, 25.

[94] Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 101.

[95] Tom Segev stated "[t]he Eichmann trial marked the beginning of a dramatic shift in the way Israelis related to the Holocaust." Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 329-330. For more on the global impact of the

provocatively claims that this change was the direct result of its juxtaposition to the Algerian War.[96] Comparison was not only a framework that could produce political change, but also came to create certain forms of knowledge. In the following section, I examine how Charlotte Delbo adopts comparison into the formal features of her volume *Les Belles lettres*. I argue that Delbo uses particular strategies to foreground comparison as a process, which in turn emphasizes how information is (re)circulated, and through this circulation, how new knowledge is created.

Eichmann Trial on the production of Holocaust testimony, see Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin*. Scholars have also posited other watershed moments but all of these relate directly to the Holocaust rather than contextualizing how the Holocaust was being brought into public discourse through other parallel events. For more, see Moyn, *A Holocaust Controversy*.

[96] See Michael Rothberg, "Beyond Eichmann: Rethinking the Emergence of Holocaust Memory," *History and Theory* 46 (2007): 74-81.

3. *Les Belles lettres*

Je n'aime pas la littérature gratuite ou formelle. Je n'écris pas pour écrire. Je me sers de la littérature comme d'une arme, car la menace m'apparaît trop grande [...].

— Charlotte Delbo[97]

Delbo's slim volume *Les Belles lettres* also adopts the conceptual framework of comparison as a strategy for protesting French actions in the Algerian War.[98] Like the manifesto, many of the letters in *Les Belles lettres* draw specific comparison between the Holocaust and the Algerian War. And, similarly to *Nuit et Brouillard*, comparison structures Delbo's text. However, in contrast to the film, Delbo's self-invested voice as author and editor emerges through her commentary, which is interspersed sporadically throughout the volume. By adding her own perspective, Delbo stages comparison as process.

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[97] Charlotte Delbo, quoted in "Entretien avec François Bott: Je me sers de la littérature comme d'une arme," *Le Monde*, 20 June 1975. Reprinted in Caron and Marquart, *Les Revenantes*, 25.

[98] I am indebted to Michael Rothberg whose groundbreaking analysis of *Les Belles lettres* has been foundational for my research on Charlotte Delbo. Rothberg has reframed much of the existing scholarship on Delbo's literary works, remarking: "[t]he formal innovation and provocative content of *Les Belles lettres*, which has been almost completely ignored in the recent wave of Delbo criticism [...] suggests the need to reread the emergence of Delbo's powerful oeuvre in light of an as-yet-unremarked political and historical context." Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 200.

Les Belles lettres is composed of 86 letters discussing the Algerian War. The letters are organized chronologically and written by a variety of social actors, including jurists, politicians, clergy members, soldiers, and journalists. Delbo's own commentary appears in bold face between some of the letters. While a few of the letters are private correspondence, the majority had previously circulated in the main French press (*Le Monde, France-Observateur, l'Express*) and other, politically-engaged newspapers (*Les Temps Modernes, Vérité-Liberté*, *Afrique-Action*) between 1959 and 1961. *Les Belles lettres* tackles issues related to the Algerian War that came to a fever pitch in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

What are the responsibilities of individuals vis-à-vis their nation? Does patriotism preclude the right to personal freedom? *Les Belles lettres* served as a direct response to the tense debate that ensued after the publication of jurist Maurice Duverger's editorial in *Le Monde* in 1960,[99] in which Duverger drew a distinction between the right to disobey conscription and orders to torture:

> Mais un Français n'a ni le devoir, ni le droit d'organiser des réseaux d'aide au FLN ou de favoriser la désertion de nos soldats: ce sont là des actes de trahison qu'aucun de nos gouvernements ne peut tolérer, que nul groupe de citoyens ne peut approuver [...] un soldat qui recevrait l'ordre de torturer aurait le devoir de désobéir, car la torture est un mal

[99] See Anna Norris, "Beyond the Shoah: Charlotte Delbo Confronts the Algerian War," *Women in French Studies* 6 (2016). To my knowledge, Anna Norris' article is the first to engage with the specific polemic to which *Les Belles lettres* responded.

absolu quels qu'en soient les buts. Mais il n'existe aucun devoir ni aucun droit de désertion.[100]

French public opinion was divided on the issue of compulsory military service and the use of torture by the French military, and Duverger's brief editorial triggered a range of responses. A good number of these are gathered in Delbo's volume.[101]

In *Les Belles lettres*, comparison determines the thematic content as well as the formal features of the text. In order to reflect on the contentious issues of the era, many of the letters draw comparisons between the Algerian War and the Nazi regime. Jean Le Meur, a Catholic soldier who later went to jail for two years for refusing to serve in the French army during the Algerian War, writes: "[j]e ferais sans déplaisir la guerre contre les Nazis, mais avec [les Algériens], non."[102] In another letter, Jean Martin, a Malagasy-French author and academic, suggests that World War II can provide important lessons : "[q]uant à savoir si Francis Jeanson est un 'traitre', l'expérience des années quarante devrait, me semble-t-il, vous inciter à un peu plus de modération dans l'expression de vos jugements sur ce qui est conforme ou non aux véritables intérêts de notre pays."[103] Deploring the war and the abuse endured by the Algerians at the hands of French soldiers, Jeanson himself writes, "[f]aut-il que nous

[100] Norris, "Beyond the Shoah," 115.

[101] In response to the editorial, Jérôme Lindon, Jacques Nantet, and Francis Jeanson published columns in the same journal asking: "Is desertion a duty or a crime?" Ibid., 116.

[102] Charlotte Delbo, *Les Belles lettres* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1961), 14.

[103] Ibid., 18.

nous consolions en retenant le fait qu'il n'y a, dans ces camps, ni chambres à gaz ni fours crématoires?"[104] References to World War II abound in the correspondence gathered in *Les Belles lettres*.

Delbo also bookends the volume by referring to World War II in her commentary. At the very beginning she writes,

> [m]ais alors qu'auparavant — quand on songe aux années qui ont précédées la guerre de 1939 — l'indignation explosait en manifestations et en actions collectives, se transformait en actes par l'intermédiaire des syndicats et des partis politiques, elle n'a plus aujourd'hui le moyen de s'exprimer.[105]

The grammatical suspension of "the war of 1939," left between em dashes, gestures toward the ways in which World War II becomes textually intertwined in this volume. At the end of the text, Delbo evokes the stark parallel between the sites of torture in both wars : "[c]ombien sont montés à l'échafaud, dans la cour de la Santé, dans la cour de Montluc, combien de Français dans les années 40, combien d'Algériens depuis 1954… Combien."[106] Delbo's poignant references to World War II, most visible at the start and end of the text, suggest that, for her, the two wars had much in common.

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[104] Delbo, *Les Belles lettres*, 27.

[105] Ibid., 9.

[106] Ibid., 151. The Montluc prison in Lyon is where World War II resistance leader Jean Moulin, among other resistance members, was interrogated and tortured, before dying on

Delbo's own rhetorical strategies indicate that she felt comparison could be an appropriate way of mobilizing public opinion. According to her, *Les Belles lettres* served as a "call to action." She saw literature as an effective method for producing political change. In an interview with François Bott in 1975, she stated, "[j]e n'aime pas la littérature gratuite ou formelle. Je n'écris pas pour écrire. Je me sers de la littérature comme d'une arme, car la menace m'apparaît trop grande […]."[107] It is through formal innovation that *Les Belles lettres* is weaponized.

Just as the Holocaust and the Algerian War are compared in the letters and Delbo's commentary, the layout of the text also promotes comparison at the formal level. The letters are positioned side by side, producing a dialogic structure. Each discrete account contextualizes the other. This is reminiscent of the structure of *Nuit et Brouillard*, where past and present are juxtaposed to one another. However, rather than placing events in parallel (the Holocaust and Algeria), as in Resnais' film, the accumulation of letters in *Les Belles lettres* produces a *plurality* of voices. This plurality does not simply allow for one perspective to be "mapped" onto another.[108] In other

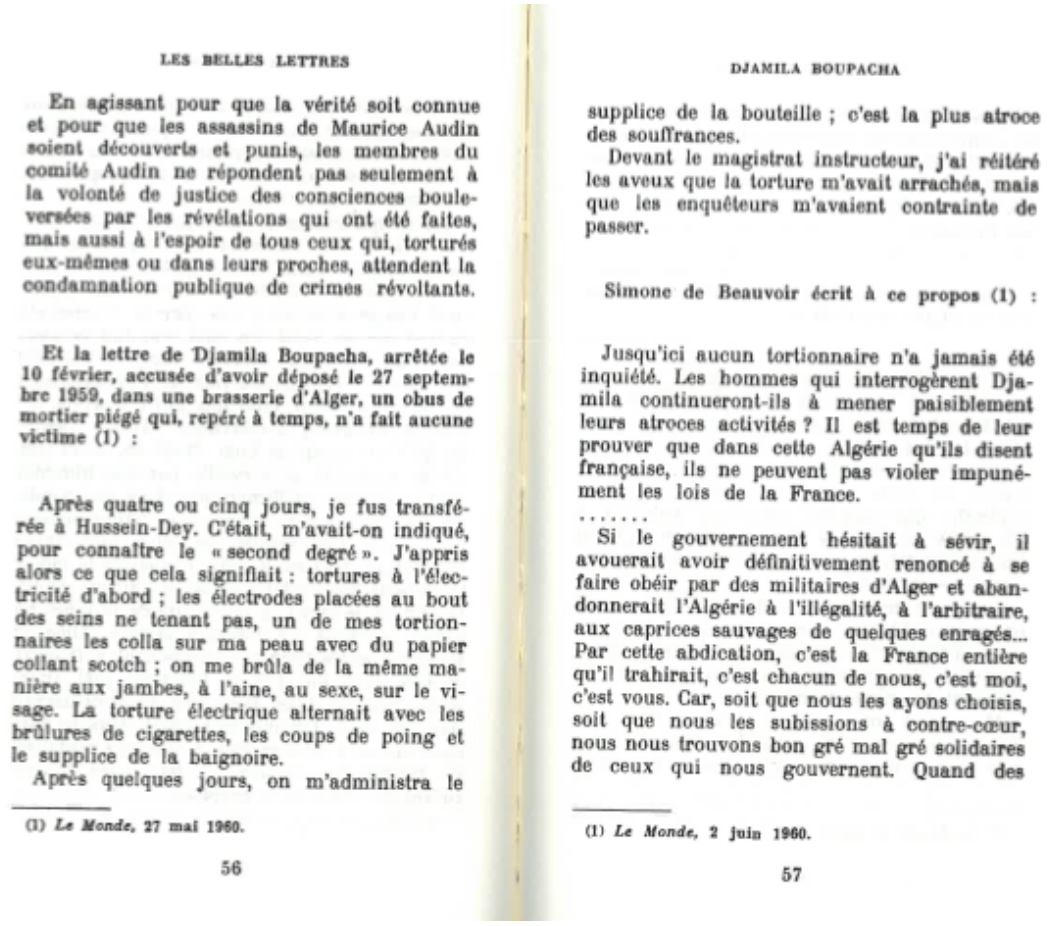
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the way to Metz, from injuries sustained in a suicide attempt. During the Algerian War, the prison opened its doors again and in 1955, it was decreed that all death penalties in Lyon would be carried out there. One dozen FLN freedom fighters were executed at the prison after being refused pardon by Charles de Gaulle.

[107] Charlotte Delbo, quoted in "Entretien avec François Bott," 15.

[108] Mark Webber uses the term "mapping" when he describes the function of metaphor as a "process that occurs in and through the connecting of two elements that are not assumed to be linked conceptually. In this process, aspects of the 'vehicle' domain are mapped onto corresponding aspects of the 'tenor' domain." Mark J. Webber, "Metaphorizing the Holocaust: The Ethics of Comparison," *Images* 8, no. 15-16 (2011): 8.

words, the letters do not work in direct relationship with one another but instead work together with a great number of perspectives. In this way, meaning is continually amplified. Delbo overturns the necessarily hierarchical two term-relationship — standard forms of comparison — by collecting a vast number of perspectives that come to resist a vertical power structure. The voice is democratized. The example I have selected below illustrates the relationships that emerge through the formal construction of the text.



LES BELLES LETTRES

En agissant pour que la vérité soit connue et pour que les assassins de Maurice Audin soient découverts et punis, les membres du comité Audin ne répondent pas seulement à la volonté de justice des consciences bouleversées par les révélations qui ont été faites, mais aussi à l'espoir de tous ceux qui, torturés eux-mêmes ou dans leurs proches, attendent la condamnation publique de crimes révoltants.

Et la lettre de Djamila Boupacha, arrêtée le 10 février, accusée d'avoir déposé le 27 septembre 1959, dans une brasserie d'Alger, un obus de mortier piégé qui, repéré à temps, n'a fait aucune victime (1) :

Après quatre ou cinq jours, je fus transférée à Hussein-Dey. C'était, m'avait-on indiqué, pour connaître le « second degré ». J'appris alors ce que cela signifiait : tortures à l'électricité d'abord ; les électrodes placées au bout des seins ne tenant pas, un de mes tortionnaires les colla sur ma peau avec du papier collant scotch ; on me brûla de la même manière aux jambes, à l'aine, au sexe, sur le visage. La torture électrique alternait avec les brûlures de cigarettes, les coups de poing et le supplice de la baignoire.

Après quelques jours, on m'administra le

(1) *Le Monde*, 27 mai 1960.

56

DJAMILA BOUPACHA

supplice de la bouteille ; c'est la plus atroce des souffrances.

Devant le magistrat instructeur, j'ai réitéré les aveux que la torture m'avait arrachés, mais que les enquêteurs m'avaient contrainte de passer.

Simone de Beauvoir écrit à ce propos (1) :

Jusqu'ici aucun tortionnaire n'a jamais été inquiété. Les hommes qui interrogèrent Djamila continueront-ils à mener paisiblement leurs atroces activités ? Il est temps de leur prouver que dans cette Algérie qu'ils disent française, ils ne peuvent pas violer impunément les lois de la France.

.....

Si le gouvernement hésitait à sévir, il avouerait avoir définitivement renoncé à se faire obéir par des militaires d'Alger et abandonnerait l'Algérie à l'illégalité, à l'arbitraire, aux caprices sauvages de quelques enragés... Par cette abdication, c'est la France entière qu'il trahirait, c'est chacun de nous, c'est moi, c'est vous. Car, soit que nous les ayons choisis, soit que nous les subissions à contre-cœur, nous nous trouvons bon gré mal gré solidaires de ceux qui nous gouvernent. Quand des

(1) *Le Monde*, 2 juin 1960.

57

Figure 1. Charlotte Delbo, *Les Belles lettres,* 56-57.

In this example, it is important to observe the sequence of letters and Delbo's commentary. Prior to the letter that appears at the top of page 56, Delbo asks the question "[f]aut-il encore des témoignages?"[109] in reference to the question of torture. What follows, then, is French-Algerian journalist Henry Alleg's letter, which ends on page 56. In this letter he affirms that Maurice Audin, a member of the Algerian Communist Party and one of the "disappeared" in the Battle of Algiers, was tortured by the French Army. Following Alleg's correspondence, Delbo introduces another letter, penned by Djamila Bouchapa, a member of the FLN who was arrested, tortured, and raped by the French army. Delbo's commentary makes it explicit that she is the editor bringing these letters together. Following Boupacha's letter, Delbo comments that Simone de Beauvoir also wrote on the same topic ("Simone de Beauvoir écrit à ce propos"[110]). De Beauvoir's letter, on page 57, makes a conspicuous reference to Boupacha, further binding these documents. As these two pages show, multiple perspectives are placed side-by-side and with occasional intrusions by Delbo.

Delbo's voice emerges as authoritative throughout *Les Belles lettres*. Not only does she collect and compile the letters, but she also *adds* her own commentary. Her textual interventions are in bold face, and therefore stylistically demarcate the different writers included in the volume. The letters do not necessarily blend to form a unified whole but are defined as separate. Her commentary acts as a boundary to ensure that the letters do not blend into one another. Similarly, her interventions also point to her position as a self-invested editor and author. In this way, Delbo asserts

[109] Delbo, *Les Belles lettres*, 53.

[110] Ibid., 57.

that she is the visible hand shaping the narrative.[111] The presence of her voice determines the structure of the text, making visible the sutures of the narrative.

Rendering the composition of the text transparent functions as a kind of literary performance. Derrida argues that literariness situates itself under the sign of the self-reflexive and its ability to "re-mark" on itself. He writes, "[c]e qui m'intéresse, c'est que, toujours possible pour un texte, pour tout corpus de traces, cette remarque est absolument nécessaire et constitutive dans ce qu'on appelle l'art, la poésie ou la

[111] It is crucial to note that Delbo's commentary throughout *Les Belles lettres* deliberately challenges the genre to which the text can most easily be assigned — the anthology. Delbo explained in a private correspondence that she marketed the text as an anthology in order to, "1/ faire repasser les lettres importantes; 2/ exprimer l'opinion d'un mouvement qui s'amplifie de gens qui ont à dire, à dire contre Bourdet et Servan-Schreiber, contre Thorez. Bourdet et Servan-Schreiber ne bougent que lorsqu'on les pousse, Thorez est statufié depuis trop longtemps ; ne bougera qu'au déboulonnage. (Opinion à ne pas exprimer, j'en conviens, mais je tiens que le PC ne se révèlera pas de la guerre d'Algérie, comme l'Internationale socialiste est devenu l'ancien parti radical.)" BNF, Fonds Delbo, 4-COL-208-99, Succession Delbo. Although the volume does bear some characteristics of anthology, Delbo was aware that it also defied conventional conceptions of this genre, and that the text bore hallmarks of several other genres including the epistolary, the memoir, and the manifesto. As a result, the volume is not easily reducible to one of them. If genre offers the critic a way of situating a work so that it may be compared to other similar texts, by defying convention, Delbo refuses the possibility of situating the text within a continuum. Throughout her literary career, she demonstrates a keen interest in disrupting genre conventions. She frequently refuses a linear and chronological approach to her works, challenging the traditions of memoir. In *Le Convoi du 24 janvier* (1965), she experiments with historical and memorial texts by integrating brief descriptions of the lives of the women who traveled with her on the convoy to Auschwitz.

littérature."[112] In other words, literature must reflect upon — or at the very least acknowledge — its own performance. Delbo's metatextual commentary or "re-marking" throughout the volume stages the letters self-consciously, revealing the architecture of the text.[113]

Delbo once stated, "[l]a vérité est la liberté. La liberté au sens le plus riche du terme: le droit de disposer de sa vie: et la vérité c'est-à-dire la transparence des rapports entre les gens. Le pouvoir ne supporte pas cette transparence. Il nous force à nous travestir, à nous masquer."[114] If Delbo aimed to inject post-World War II France with a "truth cure,"[115] *Les Belles lettres* demonstrates that, for her, the "truth" could only be in rendering transparent the way in which knowledge is created through the (re)circulation of "facts." Knowledge of the Holocaust emerged through the act of comparison, an act that Delbo does not *evaluate*, but self-consciously harnesses as a literary structure.

Nicole Thatcher suggests that "Delbo s'exprime non à travers un discours politique, philosophique, moral ou religieux, mais à travers des choix délibérés du contenu et de la forme de ces œuvres."[116] *Les Belles lettres* is clearly concerned with human rights and democracy, but rather than merely discussing these themes, Delbo engages with them on a structural level.

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[112] Jacques Derrida, *Parages* (Paris : Editions Galilée, 2003), 263.

[113] "Remarquer" is translated as "re-mark" in the English editions of the text.

[114] Delbo, quoted in "Entretien avec François Bott,"15.

[115] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 203.

[116] Nicole Thatcher, "La Mémoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale en France et la voix contestataire de Charlotte Delbo," *French Forum* 26, no. 2 (2001): 109.

In *Les Belles lettres*, the truth that these letters aim to impart is as much tied to the truth of narrative construction that Delbo points back to. While Delbo is fully aware that she can never exit the frame of narrative, she does the next best thing, and leaves her imprint on it. However, the transposition of this "comparative" structure into Delbo's testimonial volume *Mesure de nos jours* fundamentally transforms the genre of testimony and its reception.

4. Testimony, Cross-reference, and *Mesure de nos jours*

> *The* Thou *confronts me. But I step into direct relation with it. Hence the relation means being chosen and choosing, suffering and action in one [...].*
>
> — Martin Buber[117]

Les Belles lettres and *Mesure de nos jours*, the third volume of Delbo's trilogy *Auschwitz et après*, share a remarkably similar formal structure. *Mesure de nos jours* brings together numerous brief testimonial vignettes describing Delbo's friends' postwar experiences.[118] The majority of the testimonies address the experience of living in postwar France. Delbo also intersperses her own testimonial vignettes throughout the volume. While the design of *Les Belles lettres* calls attention to the process

[117] Buber, *I and Thou*, 76. Original emphasis.

[118] It remains unclear if the letters were written by the survivors or if Delbo ghost-wrote them. Most critics believe Delbo interviewed her friends and then wrote their stories down.

through which knowledge is created, transmitted, and interpreted, the transposition of this formal structure in *Mesure de nos jours* redefines the way testimony can treat notions of authenticity and credibility.

Above all, testimony aims to impart knowledge by seeking to "render the event visible [and manifest] in the orb of the civilized world."[119] In the process of telling their stories, Holocaust eyewitnesses have had to deal with the practical issue of getting their work published so that the public could access their narrative. The publication and distribution of testimonial literature, as with all other literatures, has been driven by market forces.

Most Holocaust memoirists were aware of the publishing market and public expectations. Anne Frank's father edited his daughter's diary, not only to safeguard private information, but also to ensure that it would be successfully published.[120] Similarly, Elie Wiesel, with the help of François Mauriac, substantially rewrote *Night* in its translation from the Yiddish to French in order to speak more directly to the demands of a French speaking public at the time.[121] Broadly speaking, survivors were

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[119] Marc Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*, trans. Gil Anidjar (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 95.

[120] See Jeffrey Shandler, "From Diary to Book: Text, Object, Structure," in *Anne Frank Unbound: Media, Imagination, Memory*, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jeffrey Shandler, eds. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012): 25-58.

[121] Analyzing how Holocaust memoirs have been translated sheds light on the ways in which testimony responds to audience expectations and localized political demands. Scant attention has been paid to testimony in translation, with the exception of some notable works, including Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the*

cognizant of the publisher's and public's demands, and these demands came to play an important role in how these narratives were written and presented.[122]

Many Holocaust memoirists expressed bitter disappointment that their accounts were rejected by publishers. In the preface to his self-published memoir *Teg fun shrek* (*Days of Terror*), Holocaust survivor and journalist J. Lemel conveys frustration that he has been unable to find a publisher: "I wonder, if the memoirs of Anne Frank or Dovid Rabinowitz had been written in Yiddish, would they have met the same fate as mine and never seen the light of day?"[123] Delbo also faced difficulties publishing *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, an account of her experiences in the Holocaust. In a letter to a friend, she explains,

> J'ai écrit un livre sur Auschwitz — il est terrible et c'est la seule chose que j'aie jamais faite à laquelle je tienne vraiment. Malheureusement, les éditeurs n'en veulent pas, tout en lui reconnaissant des qualités. 'Ce n'est

Politics of Translation (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014) and Davies, "Translation and the Uses of a Holocaust Testimony."

[122] Foley has pointed out the fact that survivor-scribes were aware of the standards by which their memoirs would be judged. She writes that "[…] Holocaust writers have been only too aware of the necessary difference between reality and imagination and they have employed a variety of rhetorical devices to enforce the factuality of fictiviness of what I shall call 'contracts' — the patterns of literary expectations — that they establish with their readers." Foley, "Fact, Fiction, Fascism," 332.

[123] J. Lemel, *Teg fun shrek*, 10.

> pas le moment. Le public est saturé, etc.' Ci-joint les notes de lecture des éditions du Seuil qui m'ont été communiquées.[124]

Following this rejection, Delbo put the volume "away in a drawer" to "make sure it would stand the test of time, since it had to travel far into the future."[125]

Aucun de nous ne reviendra is marked by an innovative structure, which may explain why Delbo had difficulty finding a publisher. This volume is composed of brief vignettes written in prose and poetry form. While the form is unusual, Delbo remains faithful to genre conventions by positioning herself as the sole narrator. However, she changes tack in the final volume of the trilogy, *Mesure de nos jours*. Like *Les Belles lettres*, this text is made up of her friends' testimonial vignettes interspersed with Delbo's own reflections. The polyphony of perspectives radically upends the conventions of the testimonial memoir that had been established up until that point.[126]

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[124] *Lettre de Charlotte Delbo à Boubou du 23 Juin 1961*, BNF, Fonds Delbo, 4-COL-208-294, Succession Delbo. Ghislaine Dunant explains that this was probably Odette Boubou who was imprisoned with Charlotte Delbo at Romainville, subsequently escaped the convoy's departure, and was eventually deported to Ravensbrück in April 1943 where she found Charlotte again. Dunant, *Charlotte Delbo: La vie retrouvée*, 209.

[125] Rosette C. Lamont, "The Triple Courage of Charlotte Delbo," *Massachusetts Review: a quarterly of literature, the arts, and public affairs* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2000/2001): 495.

[126] Beate Müller writes, "[o]f course, any testimony — whether self-authored by the survivor witness or not — shows traces of a wide range of influences on the author, such as traditions pertaining to the testimonial genre, expectations seen to be held by the intended audience or familiarity of the author with similar accounts." Beate Müller, "Trauma, Historiography and Polyphony: Adult Voices in the CJHC's Early Postwar Child Holocaust Testimonies," *History & Memory* 24, no. 2 (2012): 159.

In his article on Delbo's trilogy, Thomas Trezise suggests that Delbo knowingly "violates the conventions of testimony," but does so by first establishing them.[127] In so doing, Trezise argues, Delbo actively points back to the importance of the text's form, articulating that "between the frame and the work there is a signifying relation that demands interpretation."[128] By destabilizing the conventions of genre, as she does in *Mesure de nos jours*, Delbo modifies how testimony will be produced and received. Genre is comfortable, as Derrida suggests: "[a]insi, dès que du genre s'annonce, il faut respecter une norme, il ne faut pas franchir une limite limitrophe, il ne faut pas risquer l'impureté, l'anomalie ou la monstruosité."[129] Delbo's disruption dislocates the power that genre can exert on a text and its audience. Referring to *Les Belles lettres*, Rothberg has remarked on Delbo's strategy for combining genres, arguing that it

> […] not only expresses a questioning of community but also derives from the 'multidirectionality' of memory — in this case, the manner in which postwar France is buffeted simultaneously by the nonidentical, yet overlapping and equally conflictual legacies of the Nazi occupation and the unraveling project of colonialism.[130]

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[127] Thomas Trezise, "The Question of Community in Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz and After*," *MLN* 117, no. 4 (2002): 873.

[128] Ibid., 873.

[129] Jacques Derrida, "La Loi du Genre," in *Parages* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), 253.

[130] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 208.

Broadly speaking, Delbo's rearticulation of genre functions in response not only to the difficulty of recounting the extreme experiences of the Holocaust, but also to the complex ways that Holocaust memory was being negotiated in France in the years immediately following World War II.

In the following, I examine how testimonies interact across *Mesure de nos jours*. I focus specifically on the shift from relatively harmonious testimonies to the increase in conflict that occurs as the volume progresses. Cross-referencing allows comparison through difference to emerge as the central way that survivors establish their singularity within the group to which they belong.

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In the immediate postwar period, Holocaust memoirists frequently began their accounts with brief descriptions of the difficulties they faced reintegrating in society after the liberation of the camps. In his preface to *L'espèce humaine*, Robert Antelme describes this as a kind of "delirium:" "[…] durant les premiers jours qui ont suivi notre retour, nous avons été, tous je pense, en proie à un véritable délire."[131] For Antelme, the "delirium" stemmed from the stark contrast between life in the camp and the world beyond it. Ka-Tsetnik 135633 and David Rousset allude to this disparity, dubbing the camps "Planet Auschwitz" and the "Concentrationary Universe," respectively.[132] Likewise, at the start of *Mesure de nos jours*, Delbo describes the feelings of

[131] Robert Antelme, *L'espèce humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 1.

[132] Yehiel De-Nur, under the penname Ka-Tstenik 135633, wrote many texts on his experiences in the camps, but he is, perhaps, most well-known for collapsing during his testimony at the Eichmann Trial in 1961.

disorientation and isolation she felt upon arrival in Paris. A profound sense of loss characterizes her narrative, as she recounts navigating the crowds upon arrival in Paris:

> A l'arrivée, je ne reconnaissais plus [mes camarades]. Dans la foule des gens qui nous attendaient, elles glissaient, disparaissaient, reprenaient apparence un instant, si impalpables, si irréelles, si fuyantes, que je doutais mon existence propre [...] [mes camarades] se perdaient, se retrouvaient, me retrouvaient, disaient des mots que je ne saisissais pas, s'évanouissaient encore et se fondaient enfin dans la foule des gens qui nous attendaient, englouties pour toujours dans cette foule [...] je flottais au milieu de cette foule qui glissait tout autour de moi.[133]

The following testimonial vignette, Gilberte's, mirrors Delbo's description of arrival in Paris. Despite (or because of) the throngs of strangers, Gilberte also feels alone and disconnected.

> Moi, c'est tout de suite que j'ai été perdue, dès le retour à Paris [...] l'impression qui me reste est celle d'une foule, une foule où j'étais perdue. Je me souviens très bien qu'au début vous étiez ou devant ou derrière moi, que je me retournais pour savoir si vous étiez bien

[133] Charlotte Delbo, *Mesure de nos jours* (Paris: Minuit, 1971), 9-10.

> toujours là […] Comment s'est-il fait qu'au terme du défilé devant les tables et les gens qui s'affairaient autour des tables, je me sois retrouvée seule, seule dans une foule où aucun visage ne m'était parlant?[134]

Both women feel estranged from their camp community. The presence of crowds ultimately alienates them, highlighting their own fragility as the bonds that had bound the women to one another break.

Delbo and Gilberte choose to isolate themselves, in a bedroom and a hotel room, respectively. Delbo finds it difficult to reconnect with other people, and describes that with much effort, "je crois me souvenir que j'étais couchée, que des gens venaient me voir…. J'entendais leurs voix de très loin […]."[135] Gilberte also finds herself exhausted and alone, "[j]e me suis réveillée dans la pénombre d'une chambre. Il y avait un lit, un grand lit de milieu où je m'étais allongé tout habillée. J'étais lasse, lasse."[136] She sits on her bed, aimless, "[j]e me suis passé de l'eau sur la figure avec mes mains et je me suis assise sur le lit. J'ai attendu sans attendre rien. J'étais là, inerte, ne me demandant pas si je devrais faire quelque chose."[137] Delbo's and Gilberte's vignettes form a near-seamless unit at the start of the volume, as they describe their sense of loss and loneliness upon arrival in Paris. While the shift from one account to the next

[134] Delbo, *Mesure de nos jours*, 21-22.

[135] Ibid., 13.

[136] Ibid., 22-23.

[137] Ibid., 25.

could destabilize readers, there is no significant disruption given that the two accounts are relatively complementary.

The coherence of Delbo's and Gilberte's accounts gives way to contrast as the volume continues. Rather than providing a unified story, the testimonies diverge and difference emerges in a variety of ways. At times, difference appears within a single vignette. At other times, one testimony refers to another in order to express disagreement. This is one of the most unusual features of *Mesure de nos jours*. In the following, I examine the several notable examples of cross-referencing (testimonies commenting on other testimonies).

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The first explicit cross-reference appears at the start of Louise's account. Louise writes, '[j]e ne sais pas pourquoi Mado s'est mise en tête que si son mari avait aussi été déporté ce serait plus facile. Regarde moi, avec mon mari."[138] She begins her brief narrative by situating it in relation to Mado's testimony, which in turn structures the rest of her account. Just as the vignette is structured through a relationship of *difference* vis-à-vis another testimony, it also engages with the complexities of marital communication. Louise remarks that, in her experience, a shared past can, surprisingly perhaps, be damaging. She explains that her husband frequently compares their experiences in the camps, suggesting that his were more extreme. Louise states: "[…] nous avions les mêmes références, le même code, nous parlions le même langage… eh bien, sais-tu ce qui est arrivé? Après vingt ans de mariage, il n'y a

[138] Delbo, *Mesure de nos jours*, 176.

plus qu'un déporté dans le ménage. Le déporté, c'est lui."[139] The marital relationship between Louise and her husband is described through the lens of Mado's own observations about marriage. While Louise and her husband might have benefited from their shared experiences, this similarity only gives way to a kind of competition. In order to define himself as different, her husband insists that his suffering was more extreme.[140] Just as Louise's husband seeks to establish difference, Louise's account is also predicated on establishing a distinction between her experience and Mado's. In this vignette, comparison emerges across several strata. Difference is not only ascribed to her relationship with her husband, but the very structure of the account is based on differentiation.

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Later in the volume, Marceline begins her account by evoking a claim Gaby previously made, "[e]lle a de la chance Gaby, de pouvoir s'écouter. Moi, je ne pourrais pas."[141] Much of Gaby's account centers on her experience at home and the many comforts that were available to her, including reuniting with her fiancé who had also been deported. Gaby's account also refers to another survivor, Poupette, who she believes is lucky to be in a warmer country. By beginning her vignette with a reference to Gaby, Marceline immediately evokes the many differences that exist between

[139] Delbo, *Mesure de nos jours*, 175.

[140] The zero-sum logic that defines Louise and her husband's relationship can be likened to some of the problems that emerge when the Holocaust is compared to other events.

[141] Delbo, *Mesure de nos jours*, 178.

Gaby's experience in postwar France and her own. Marceline writes that she waited years to marry, as opposed to other deportees who immediately found a partner:

> Il y a ceux qui se sont jetés dans l'action militante, ceux qui se sont mariés et qui se sont dépêchés d'avoir des enfants — comme s'ils voulaient rattraper le temps perdu. Moi, j'ai attendu quatre ans pour me marier. Et je ne voulais pas d'enfants.[142]

Marceline did not end up marrying a deportee like so many others. Yet, like Louise, the failure to communicate afflicts her marriage. She recounts a conversation with her husband:

> La déportation a été une épreuve terrible, il le sait, mais il tient que la nature humaine est douée d'une extraordinaire plasticité grâce à laquelle l'individu s'adapte et se réadapte à tout… 'la preuve qu'il en est ainsi, dit-il, c'est que tu es revenue. (Je pourrais lui démontrer le contraire en comptant ceux qui ne sont pas revenus. Laissons. Je ne discute pas ce point avec lui), de sorte qu'il vous reste des mauvais souvenirs, bien sûr. Ces souvenirs terribles, il ne faut pas en être prisonnier, en être obsédé. Il ne faut pas vous laisser écraser par eux. Là, c'est affaire de décision. Ce qui est fini est fini."[143]

[142] Delbo, *Mesure de nos jours*, 181.

[143] Ibid., 182-183.

By reducing her experience to "awful memories," her husband denies the extremity of Marceline's experience. And, by avoiding any further discussion, Marceline in turn denies the possibility of dialogue.

Louise and Marceline's stories are constructed on the basis of comparison. From an initial point of contrast with another testimony, Louise and Marceline go on to describe, from different vantage points, the ways that communication has failed in their marriages. These testimonies call into question the widespread assumptions about the Holocaust and its aftermath. Each story is unique.

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If community appears in Holocaust memoirs, it is usually in the context of the camp experience.[144] Although some critics have contested the notion that community was an integral feature of the camps, it was central to Delbo's experience.[145] Trezise

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[144] Many survivors, including Jorge Semprún, Elie Wiesel, and Primo Levi speak of the bonds that were forged or broken in the camps.

[145] Research focusing on women's experiences during the Holocaust significantly increased in the 1980s and 1990s in part due to the founding or expansion of Women's Studies departments and programs. Much of this scholarship, which was in part based on cultural feminism, focused on the role of community in the camps, drawing the conclusion that while men competed, women bonded. Some of this scholarship failed to adequately consider the myriad demands, including social pressure, with which women's testimonies were confronted. For more see Lawrence Langer, "Gendered Sufferings? Women in Holocaust Testimonies" in *Women and the Holocaust*, eds. Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998): 351-363; Janet Jacobs, "Women, Genocide, and Memory: The Ethics of Feminist Ethnography in Holocaust Research," *Gender and Society* 18, no. 2 (2004): 223-238; Joan Ringelheim, "Women and the Holocaust:

makes the claim that Delbo's volume *Aucun de nous ne reviendra* revolves around the complex notion of community.[146]

If the first two volumes engage with the notion of community through the pronoun "us," it is the pronoun "moi" that is at the heart of the final volume, *Mesure de nos jours*. How do we negotiate among different experiences and perspectives? How do we respect experiences as unique while integrating them into the history of a large-scale event? In reference to the trilogy, one critic argues that it "[brings] to mind a vast chorus composed of many voices blending into one" that are "unified by the author-memorialist."[147] While it may be tempting to suggest that these voices form a unified whole, the numerous voices in this text testify to difference rather than coherence.

Throughout *Mesure de nos jours*, "moi" emerges as a pivotal term, an emphatically comparative pronoun that Rosette Lamont, in her translation of *Auschwitz et après*, translates as "as for myself." "Moi" gestures toward a complex relationship between the self in relation to a community. The pronoun "moi" emphasizes difference and exhibits the desire to establish singularity. The relationship engendered by the "moi" is slippery, but the term itself is clear: I, me, myself, as *separate* from "you." "Moi" is not only emphatically comparative — it is contrastive, gesturing toward the complex relationship wherein an "I" is differentiated from a "you" of some kind but only through a structure that presupposes similarity. While

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A Reconsideration of Research," *Signs* 10, no. 4 (1985): 741-761; and Carol Rittner and John Roth, eds., *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust* (New York: Paragon House, 1998).

[146] See Trezise, "The Question of Community."

[147] Lamont, "The Triple Courage of Charlotte Delbo," 488.

"moi" marks difference, it can only occur within some kind of communal framework, and therefore, implicitly acknowledges that multiple perspectives are possible.

One of the questions in the text that emerges is, who exactly is the *other*? In her testimony, when Gilberte says "moi," who is the other to whom she is speaking? Charlotte Delbo? Her friends from the camp? The other survivors as a community? This pronoun problematizes the boundary between internal and external communities and how they are defined.

The separation of the self from the other does not only occur within the testimonies, when the "moi" is used to establish difference, but also articulated through the formal composition of the text, in particular through the titles of the testimonies; those belonging to Delbo are titled by theme (or left untitled), while those belonging to the others are titled with the proper name of the person to whom the story belongs. Delbo also chooses to clearly define each testimony as separate when she intersperses her own vignettes in the volume. These vignettes disrupt the flow of reading and foreground her position as author and editor. Her intervention calls attention to the fact that the testimonies do not enter into spontaneous relationship with one another but rather that the possibility of communication through the juxtaposition of narratives is orchestrated by Delbo. Communication is at the core of *Mesure de nos jours*, providing a direct response to the purported "incommunicability" of Holocaust experiences. Relationships of all kinds structure the text. Poupette's husband left her, claiming that she was too unstable as a result of the

camps.[148] Denise took care of Jacques, and this left her no time to think of herself.[149] Gaby envies Poupette who has found a warm climate to make her home.[150] Ida begins by remarking that she knew no one that was on the train.[151] Cross-referencing sutures the testimonies together, exposing the seams between perspectives — where "I" begins.

The possibility of communication also takes place through a change in the interlocutory relationship. Typically, testimony directs itself outward to an interlocutor who *does not know*, and it is through this *need to fill a gap* that it typically comes to exist in the first place. The testimonial memoir is conditioned by the implicit demands of the readers that are external to the text and experience. In *Mesure de nos jours*, the testimonies appear to be directed to one another. In this way, the testimonies form an internal dialogue to which readers bear witness. The narratives come to be imbedded within a social context, which Delbo not only establishes but renders transparent. Delbo makes visible the community, internal and external, that bears on the shape of testimony.

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[148] Poupette: "Si tu savais comment mon mari a été odieux, jusqu'à vouloir m'enlever les petites en disant que j'étais trop malade pour m'en occuper, que j'étais anormale, que j'étais folle." Delbo, *Mesure de nos jours*, 135.

[149] Denise: "J'ai eu tant de peine à ramener Jacques sur la rive / Je me suis donné tant de peine pour ramener Jacques et pour qu'il vive / que je n'ai pas eu le temps de penser à moi." Ibid., 167.

[150] Gaby: "Comme j'envie Poupette! Qu'elle a eu raison de partir dans un pays chaud! […] Il y a quelque temps que je n'ai pas eu de ses nouvelles. Que devient-elle, tu le sais?"Ibid., 170.

[151] Ida: "Dans le wagon, je ne connaissais personne." Ibid., 100.

The formal innovations of *Mesure de nos jours* produce a new set of literary expectations between the eyewitness and the reader. The concepts of authenticity and credibility are redefined through the lens of connection and context. Although many of the relationships described in *Mesure de nos jours* are marked by a failure to communicate, the formal design of the text, nonetheless, allows for the testimonies to be brought into relationship with one another. It is through their proximity that comparison emerges, and it is through comparison that a community comes to be reconstituted.

5. Conclusion

> *[Mes camarades] étaient assises près de moi dans l'avion et à mesure que le temps s'accélérait, elles devenaient diaphanes [...], perdaient couleur et forme. Tous les liens, toutes les lianes qui nous reliaient les unes aux autres se détendaient déjà. Seules leurs voix demeuraient et encore s'éloignaient-elles à mesure que Paris se rapprochait. Je les regardais se transformer sous mes yeux, devenir transparentes, devenir floues, devenir spectres [...] À l'arrivée, je ne les reconnaissais plus.*
>
> — Charlotte Delbo[152]

Comparison, whether we like it or not, structures much of our thinking about the Holocaust. As Yehuda Bauer remarks, even if the Holocaust is considered a unique

[152] Delbo, *Mesure de nos jours*, 9.

event, this contention requires a "previous comparison to establish its special standing."[153] Comparison is unavoidable. New knowledge can only be processed and integrated by activating preexisting cognitive structures. What we find to be similar or different in comparison is the result of a procedure rather than inherent to the objects at hand.

Regardless of how critics evaluate comparison, it was an important feature of Holocaust discourse in decades immediately following World War II. Localized events came to frame how the Holocaust was discussed. Scholars have only recently begun to contextualize the social and political pressures that determined the shape of Holocaust memory during this time.[154] The field is rapidly changing, with numerous scholars looking at localized memory politics to broader transnational frameworks in order to analyze how *entangled histories* have impacted the treatment of Holocaust memory.

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[153] Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2002), 39.

[154] Richard Golsan's claim that bringing together violent histories can enable "a distortion and conflation of two distinct historical moments" captures the anxieties that many scholars feel about comparative tactics. Richard Golsan, *Vichy's Afterlife: History and Counterhistory in Postwar France* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 177. On the subject of the sociohistorical significance of testimony, Wieviorka remarks in an interview: "[a]près la guerre, vous avez deux cent témoignages, qui disent à peu près tous la même chose, et qui sont tous construits pareils. Quarante ans après, vous reprenez les témoignages du même événement, et vous avez une autre construction du témoignage. Quand vous écoutez les témoins parler à la télévision ou des collections de témoignages, la plupart d'entre eux racontent la même chose. C'est-à-dire, qu'en témoignant, sans pour autant mentir bien sûr, ils font le récit qu'on leur demande." Wieviorka, *Nonfiction.fr*.

In her recent study, *Memory and Complicity*, Sanyal recalls a formulation made by a character from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Paul D says to Sethe that he "wants to put his story next to hers." For Sanyal,

> This image of proximity rather than identification, adjacence rather than convergence, strikes me as a powerful image for the ongoing work of Holocaust memory, and more generally for multidirectional memory, cosmopolitan memory, mémoire partagée, and other models of plural memory in the age of globalization.[155]

Here, Sanyal stresses the benefits of considering the proximity of different events in order to understand how Holocaust memory has been constructed. She contests that identification is a productive way of interpreting information.

Throughout *Mesure de nos jours*, the idea of "sharing an experience" emerges as, quite possibly, the most problematic way of engaging with another person's story. In an uncomfortable passage, Delbo describes visiting her friend Marie-Louise. Both Marie-Louise and her husband, Pierre, imply that Pierre is capable of *knowing* as much as the survivors who actually experienced the camps. Leading Delbo around her study, Marie-Louise points out all the books she owns on World War II and claims, "Oh! Tu sais, Pierre pourrait écrire lui-même. Il a lu tous les livres qui sont ici. Et comme je lui ai tout raconté."[156] Pierre even suggests that he "already knows" Delbo because of the

[155] Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 256-57.

[156] Delbo, *Mesure de nos jours*, 84.

extent to which Marie-Louise has talked about her.[157] According to Marie-Louise, her own memories have become Pierre's: "Mes souvenirs sont devenus les siens. À tel point que souvent j'ai l'impression qu'il était avec moi là-bas. Il se rappelle tout, mieux que moi, même."[158] As the three continue to chat, Delbo asks Marie-Louise about other survivors they knew, and Pierre interrupts several times to imply that he personally knows the people about whom Delbo is talking. While Pierre attempts to be sympathetic and caring, he effectively silences Marie-Louise. This vignette speaks to Delbo's concerns with overidentification.

In this chapter, I have explored how Delbo adopts the framework of comparison in her first published work *Les Belles lettres*, and self-reflexively provides her own commentary, in order to emphasize the way information is mediated through our preexisting knowledge which is, in turn, in continual flux. In other words, contemporary knowledge about the Algerian War was mediated through the memory of the Holocaust, each acting upon the other to produce new forms of knowledge.

The concept of comparativity, most frequently evoked to refer to transnational world literatures, applies remarkably well to Delbo's unique literary strategy.[159] While

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[157] Delbo, *Mesure de nos jours*, 88.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Ming Xie defines comparativity against comparison as follows: "Comparison in the usual sense is generally interested in the practical results of its operation — that is, similarities or differences — often conceived from an implicitly self-centered or superior viewpoint, whereas comparativity, or the act of comparing or thinking how (not) to compare, is more concerned with how similarities or differences come about in the first place." Ming Xie, *Conditions of Comparison: Reflections on Comparative Intercultural Inquiry* (New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2011), 676.

comparison can be reductive as it typically requires some kind of decontextualization, comparativity instead aims to identify what is lost or gained in the process of comparison. I have argued that Delbo transposes this conceptual structure into her testimonial volume *Mesure de nos jours*. However, rather than comparing event to event as *Les Belles lettres* does, it is experience that is put in conversation in *Mesure de nos jours*. By juxtaposing their stories, Delbo allows her friends to put forward their own individual identities. While the self is constituted through its relationship to the other, comparing the two need not be reductive, but rather can serve to give autonomy back to the individual whose identity is not solely defined by his or her community.

In asking "*Et toi, comment as-tu fait?*" — the original title of *Mesure de nos jours* — Delbo does not ask the question "what," but rather, "how." Her question is not descriptive, it is relational. It is a question of *how* we remember and *how* we interpret, and the way that these two entwine and produce new knowledge. In this way, it is a necessity for testimony to challenge itself. For Delbo, testimony is not only useful insofar as it provides access to past events, but also because it can teach us to better understand *how* it is that we try to return.

CHAPTER II

BEHIND THE CAMERA: *SHOAH* AND THE ARCHIVES

En reléguant [les images] d'emblée dans la sphère du document — chose plus facile et plus courante — on les coupe de leur phénoménologie, de leur spécificité, de leur substance même.

— Georges Didi-Huberman[160]

1. Introduction

In *Images malgré tout*, Didi-Huberman writes that the archive is never simply the "'reflection" of an event, nor is it pure "evidence," but it is instead "[…] toujours à élaborer par recoupements incessants, par *montage* avec d'autres archives."[161] With *montage* in mind, this chapter brings together major audiovisual projects devoted to recording Holocaust testimony that were initiated in the 1980s and 1990s, namely Claude Lanzmann's documentary film *Shoah* (1985) and the video testimonies recorded at the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies (1981) and at the University of Southern California's Shoah Foundation (The Institute for Visual History and Education) (1994). The comparison of these projects' respective philosophies for recording interviews sheds light on how they conceptualize the uses (and abuses) of Holocaust testimony.

[160] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2003), 49.
[161] Ibid., 127.

In reaction to the postwar tendency to privilege a unified historical account, both Lanzmann and the archival centers focus on recording a wide range of eyewitness testimony. However, the two projects adopt divergent filming methodologies. While the archival centers suppress the conditions that mediate testimony, Lanzmann opts to emphasize them. Analyzing the interviews conducted at the center reveals that they aim to engage viewers by engineering an immediate and emotional connection with the witness(es). Alternatively, Lanzmann insists on revealing the fabric of testimony, thus encouraging viewers to interpret these narratives from a critical perspective.

Far from a neutral endeavor, recording testimony involves choices that have important consequences on how viewers come to understand the past. While the archival centers have made a crucial contribution to the memory of the Holocaust by recording an extraordinary number of testimonies, their streamlined approach also reduces the complexities of narrative construction, especially by obscuring how the demands of the present mediate the production and consumption of testimony. Instead, by presenting testimony as embedded in its social context, Lanzmann does not attempt to conceal the tensions that are an inalienable part of testimony. Thus, he reveals how the testimonies are produced and recorded, in turn giving viewers the tools to understand how the past is retrieved.

2. The Turn to the Individual

It was indeed a happy idea to go to the camps with a wire recorder and the only strange thing is that nobody else thought of doing that.

— Max Weinreich[162]

Toward the end of World War II, and in the immediate postwar period, numerous centers were established with the explicit mission of documenting eyewitness experience of the Holocaust. In 1943, Rabbi Isaac Schneerson opened the *Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine* (CDJC) in France in the hopes of collecting testimony that could be used to write a history of Jewish persecution during the Holocaust. *The Central Jewish Historical Commission* (CZKH), founded in 1944 in Poland, focused on interviewing child survivors.[163] Many other projects were also initiated with the purpose of gathering as many accounts of the war as possible. The number of testimonies recorded during this period is astonishing — approximately 18,000 testimonies and 8,000 questionnaires were collected. At a minimum, contributors numbered in the tens of thousands.[164]

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[162] Max Weinreich, quoted in Alan Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices: The 1946 Interviews of David Boder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

[163] In 1947, the name was changed to the Jewish Historical Institute (also known as the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute). The acronym CZKH is most commonly used and stands for the institute's Polish name, *Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna*.

[164] Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record!: Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 225.

The majority of these projects developed strict protocols and prepared elaborate questionnaires in an effort to standardize their interview practice.[165] Questionnaires were often complemented by Polish or Yiddish-language guidelines for nonprofessional interviewers.[166] Centers frequently tasked interviewers with reconstructing "the entire testimony in the order in which it was conducted," which meant rewriting the material so that it would be chronologically and thematically organized while retaining "the style of the narrator."[167] Given that the primary goal of recording these testimonies was to establish evidence, producing a clear and comprehensive narrative record was essential.[168]

Although eyewitness narratives tended to serve a documentary purpose during this period, one project in particular looked beyond the purely evidentiary function of testimony. In 1946, David Boder, a psychology professor at the Illinois Institute for Technology, traveled across Western Europe to displaced person's camps, orphanages, and shelters, conducting interviews with survivors. Later, some of his findings were published in a volume titled *I Did Not Interview the Dead* (1949). While the CDJC and CZKH provided pre-established questionnaires and explicit instructions for their

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[165] The CZKH's questionnaires were comprised of 209 questions and sub-questions that would cover much of the interviewee's life. See Jockusch, *Collect and Record*, chapter 3.

[166] Ibid., 96.

[167] Gita Silkes, "Algemayner araynfir tsum fregeboygen far kinder," *Metodologische onvizungen tsum oysforshen dem Khurbn fun Poylishe yidntum* (Lódź: Central Council for Jews in Poland, 1945), quoted in Boaz Cohen "The Children's Voice: Postwar Collection of Testimonies from Child Survivors of the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 77.

[168] For more, see Beate Müller, "Trauma, Historiography and Polyphony."

interviewers, Boder adopted a flexible method for engaging with witnesses. Rather than prioritizing the historical record *qua* facts, Boder focused on recording the psychological effects of the camp experience, and demonstrated a keen interest in capturing how trauma had affected the linguistic behavior of his witnesses. By using a wire recorder for most of his interviews, Boder in effect produced the first oral history project including survivors.[169] The aims of these various projects are reflected in the techniques and protocols that were established in order to record testimony.

By the early 1950s, the practice of interviewing witnesses virtually disappeared. At a time when countries were focusing on rebuilding their national identities, individual testimonies posed a risk to a coherent and unified vision of the past. As a result, large-scale historical projects were favored. Scholarly trends began to veer toward a "perpetrator-focused, regime-centered [...] 'top-down' approach."[170] For example, historian Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961) eschewed survivor testimony entirely. Hilberg's decision to rely exclusively on German documents characterizes the general tendency of this period.

Although interview projects fell by the wayside for several decades, the 1980s and 1990s saw the return of the testimonial interview as a means for transmitting individual narratives and remembering the Holocaust. Across the globe, archival projects devoted to recording Holocaust testimonies began to be initiated. Thanks in

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[169] Beate Müller, "Translating Trauma: David Boder's 1946 Interviews with Holocaust Survivors," *Translation and Literature* 23, no. 2 (May 2014): 258.

[170] Raul Hilberg, "The Development of Holocaust Research: A Personal Overview," *Yad Vashem Studies* 35, no. 2 (2007): 29.

part to developments in sound and video technology, this period saw an acceleration of recorded audiovisual narratives. The archival centers aimed to respond to growing concerns that Holocaust narratives were being trivialized. If the history books had marginalized individual experiences in favor of an overarching narrative, these centers hoped to recuperate personal stories so as to bring to light experiences that had previously been concealed or forgotten. In his introduction to *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (1997), Saul Friedländer observes that individual testimonies have the potential to "tear through seamless interpretation and pierce the (mostly involuntary) smugness of scholarly detachment and 'objectivity.'"[171] If the Holocaust had been "flattened" by "traditional historiography," as Friedländer suggests, the end of the twentieth century saw a widespread effort to foreground individual experiences.

A range of social and political factors propelled the "turn to memory" that characterizes the last two decades of the twentieth century. In 1980, the adoption of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in official psychiatric nosology signaled its emergence as a significant area of research and inquiry. A cultural shift in the diagnosis and treatment of trauma took place.[172] While it had been treated with suspicion, by the end of the twentieth century, traumatic stress was freed of its stigma and considered a real medical condition.[173]

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[171] Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, Volume I: The Years of Persecution 1933-1939* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 25-27.

[172] See Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[173] See Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). Other diseases

Likewise, literary output was marked by a newfound interest in individual memory.[174] This period saw the drastic proliferation of first-person narratives, as Annette Wieviorka remarks: "[il y a avait un] extraordinaire engouement pour les 'récits de vie' — pêcheur Breton, institutrice à la retraite — à portée ethnologique, [voulant] qu'on donne la parole aux exclus, aux sans-grade, aux sans-voix."[175] In the United States alone, over one hundred monographs on autobiographical writing were published in the 1980s, attesting to the widespread interest in studying first-person narratives.[176]

The rise in the production and reception of Holocaust testimony shaped and was shaped by an increased interest in memory studies. Numerous academic texts treating Holocaust memory were published, including Saul Friedländer's *A Conflict of*

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related to time and memory also benefited from increased medical attention. Alzheimer's Disease was recognized as the most common form of dementia in the 1970s, and in the 1980s and 1990s — thanks in part to the founding of organizations across the globe devoted to Alzheimer's research — great strides were made in understanding the clinical pathology, genetics, and biology of the disease.

[174] Leigh Gilmore points out that the number of new English language volumes categorized as "autobiography or memoir" tripled from the 1940s to the 1990s. Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1. Roger Luckhurst attributes this boom to several factors including the emergence of *testimonio*, transcriptions of "oral testimony from murderous campaigns against racial minorities [which] re-energized the politics of memoir in the 1980s." Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 132.

[175] Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin*, 128.

[176] Alfred Hornung, "Autobiography," in *International Postmodernism: Theory and Literary Practice*, ed. Hans Bertens and Douwe W. Fokkema (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1997), 221.

Memories? The New German Debates About the Final Solution (1988); James Young's *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (1993); Lawrence Langer's *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (1993); Deborah Lipstadt's *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (1993); and Geoffrey Hartman's *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory* (1994). Saul Friedländer and Dan Diner founded the academic journal *History & Memory* in 1989. These works spoke to anxieties that Holocaust memory was being lost — either forgotten or repressed. Whereas survivor narratives had been relatively marginal to the study of the Holocaust, they began to occupy center stage,[177] as part of a social imperative dubbed "devoir de mémoire," which described society's ethical duty to remember and transmit the past.[178] No longer relegated to the fields experimental psychology and clinical psychoanalysis, interest in memory now took a firm foothold in public and academic discourse.[179]

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[177] Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin*, 135-136.

[178] The expression "devoir de mémoire" was first coined in the 1970s and became widespread in the 1990s when France's role in the Holocaust was reexamined.

[179] See Kerwin Lee Klein, "On the Emergence of Memory." Klein notes that the publication of Yosef Yerushalmi's *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (1982) and Pierre Nora's "Between Memory and History" (1989) provoked major shifts in the conception of memory. Regarding the relationship between history and memory, Alon Confino suggests, "the notion of 'memory' has taken [history's] place now as a leading term, recently perhaps *the* leading term, in cultural history." Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997): 1386, original emphasis, quoted in Assmann, "History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony," 262-263.

The rise in survivor narratives was also a reaction to concerns that Holocaust experiences were being co-opted and reduced, and therefore, failing to account for the full complexity of wartime experiences. The miniseries *Holocaust*, released in 1978, served as a major catalyst for the initiation of numerous projects devoted to collecting individual testimonies. This popular but controversial series told the story of the persecution of a fictional Jewish-German family. Winner of eight Emmy Awards and two Golden Globes, and boasting such actors as Meryl Streep and James Woods, Holocaust was a hit in the United States and Germany, drawing an audience of 107 and 20 million respectively. Despite its success, *Holocaust* was disparaged for its "Hollywood" style.[180] Above all, critics faulted the miniseries for using the story of only one family as a "point of entry into the Holocaust's master narrative as a contrivance."[181]

Many Holocaust survivors lambasted the miniseries, arguing that it preyed on the emotions of viewers. Elie Wiesel asserted that it trivialized the Holocaust by turning it into a soap opera.[182] Charlotte Delbo expressed anxiety before screening the miniseries, "je redoutais une émotion incontrôlable, un rappel de ce qui, d'après les articles que j'avais lus, serait certainement insoutenable," but reflected later, "non cela

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[180] The miniseries stirred public consciousness — resulting in Pope John Paul II's visit to Auschwitz as well as the President's commission on the Holocaust, which was established to plan an appropriate Holocaust memorial in the United States.

[181] Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 170.

[182] Ronald J. Berger, *Fathoming the Holocaust: A Social Problems Approach* (New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002), 142.

ne me touchait pas [et] ne croyez pas que je suis endurcie parce que je suis une revenante d'Auschwitz."[183] These excoriations testify to growing concerns that the Holocaust was being misrepresented.

Claude Lanzmann accused the miniseries of committing a "moral crime."[184] According to Lanzmann, *Holocaust* attempted to render coherent an event that exceeded "human comprehension." The innovations of his documentary film *Shoah* speak directly to the purported failings of the miniseries. For example, archival material and reenacted scenes are completely absent from *Shoah*, and instead, the film is composed of contemporary interview footage featuring survivors, bystanders, and perpetrators. In fact, over the course of six years, Lanzmann interviewed witnesses across the globe, recording more than 350 hours of footage. After five years of editing, he faced the difficult decision of naming the film. According to Lanzmann, the title *Shoah* — conspicuously not Holocaust — was selected precisely because it was a foreign word to most French viewers (and also did not carry a sacrificial connotation). In his memoir, Lanzmann recounts that when Georges Cravenne, French film producer and publicity agent, suggested the title be changed, Lanzmann responded that the foreign counterpart of *Holocaust* was chosen *because* no one would understand.[185]

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[183] Wieviorka, *L'ère du témoin*, 131.

[184] Claude Lanzmann, "From the Holocaust to 'Holocaust,'" in Stuart Liebman, ed., *Claude Lanzmann's Shoah: Key Essays* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 30.

[185] Claude Lanzmann, *Le lièvre de Patagonie* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 728. For a more detailed explanation of Lanzmann's proposition that the Holocaust should not be understood, see Claude Lanzmann, Cathy Caruth, and David Rodowick, "The Obscenity of

Just as Lanzmann was working on his monumental documentary film, a small grassroots project under the name of the Holocaust Survivor's Film Project was established. Spearheading new trends in the collection of testimony, the project was moved to Yale University in 1981 and became a center under the new name the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies. To date, the Fortunoff Archive has collected over 4,400 witness accounts (over 10,000 hours).[186] Since its opening, numerous other centers have been founded. In Canada, The Freeman Family Foundation Holocaust Education Centre has focused on collecting survivor testimonies from the Winnipeg area and the Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Holocaust Education Center has recorded hundreds of Holocaust survivors from the region of Toronto. The Visual History Archive located at the University of Southern California's Shoah Foundation (VHA) was founded by Steven Spielberg in 1994 and is today the largest archival center, housing over 55,000 video testimonies.[187] The VHA is also developing innovative projects in partnership with the Institute for Creative Technologies, such as "New Dimensions in Testimony," which encodes data from a single survivor's testimony to develop a program that serves as a pedagogical tool for

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Understanding: An Evening with Claude Lanzmann," *American Imago* 48, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 473-495.

[186] See "About" on their website: https://web.library.yale.edu/testimonies.

[187] The majority of these testimonies were collected in the 1990s when the Shoah Foundation set a goal of recording 50,000 testimonies. For more information see https://sfi.usc.edu/vha /collecting.

young learners.[188] Other initiatives continue to crop up;[189] In 2011, the Group for the Study of the History of the Jews of Greece carried out a one-year video recording with the joint efforts of the USC Shoah Foundation and scholars from across the globe.[190]

While the videos produced at the archives have, for the most part, been overlooked by scholars, *Shoah* has been subject to extensive critique.[191] This attention, however, remains limited given that critics tend to situate the film within paradigms of documentary cinema and/or trauma theory, overlooking the film's sociohistorical significance.[192] In the following, I place the film in conversation with the videos

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[188] "New Dimensions in Testimony" is already proving to be a contentious project. The looming questions revolve around the ethics of creating an "artificially intelligent" Holocaust survivor. For more information see: http://ict.usc.edu/prototypes/new-dimensions-in-testimony.

[189] In addition to an acceleration of collected testimonies, Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, saw the average number of Pages of Testimony collected in the Hall of Names grow to 1,500 pages per month during the 1980s and double to 3,000 per month in the 1990s. http://gjst.ha.uth.gr/en/theteam.php.

[190] For more information on the project, see http://gjst.ha.uth.gr/en/theteam.php.

[191] There are notable exceptions. See Thomas Trezise, "Between History and Psychoanalysis: A Case Study in the Reception of Holocaust Survivor Testimony," *History & Memory* 20, no. 1 (2008): 7-47. Trezise is one of the few to recognize that there is a lack of discussion on the topic: "For all the talk of 'frames' in Laub's essay, it is thus quite remarkable how little attention is actually paid to the framing of video testimony as a genre." Trezise, "Between History and Psychoanalysis," 32.

[192] Although Gabriela Stoicea analyzes the role of translation in *Shoah* through psychoanalytic paradigms, she notes that the critical scholarship on the film has tended to "repeatedly [take] up and [analyze] visible indications of reciprocity between Lanzmann's film and psychoanalysis, in terms of both content and procedure [...] the main emphasis seems to have fallen on trauma as a crucial psychoanalytic category for understanding

recorded at the Fortunoff and USC Shoah Foundation archives in order to analyze these recorded audiovisual narratives through the lens of the Holocaust testimonial tradition and the kinds of discursive shifts that were occurring at the time. I focus on the "frame conditions,"[193] or technical choices and/or protocols that Lanzmann and the centers adopted for filming testimony.

3. Multiple Witnesses

The VHA and the Fortunoff Archive both stress the primacy of recording eyewitness testimony. Yet, the missions of these two centers are fundamentally different. The VHA emphasizes the potential pedagogical function of documenting testimony, and as a result, has made a concerted effort to digitize their holdings in order to make testimony publicly accessible.[194] In their promotional trailer, "An Invitation to Make History," their pedagogical goal is clear: "[t]he testimonies will be made available to museums and other nonprofit organizations exclusively for

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Lanzmann's cinematic and philosophical endeavor." Gabriela Stoicea, "The Difficulties of Verbalizing Translation and the Economy of Loss in Claude Lanzmann's 'Shoah,'" *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 39, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 43.

[193] Geoffrey Hartman refers to the "frame conditions" when he writes: "while the video testimonies have an unusually direct emotional impact, they are mediated by frame conditions." Geoffrey Hartman, "The Humanities of Testimony: An Introduction," *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (2006): 250.

[194] In addition, the VHA's website adds that their mission is "to overcome prejudice, intolerance, and hatred — and the suffering they cause — through the educational use of the Institute's Visual History Archive." (https://sfi.usc.edu/about). Shenker, 113.

historical and educational purposes."[195] The VHA's vast digital collection is featured on a user-friendly platform offering tools for academic and non-academic alike. Recognizing the need to create pedagogical tools that could be used in concert with the videos, the archive has also developed specialized programs such as IWitness and ITeach, for students and teachers alike.[196]

In contrast to the VHA, The Fortunoff Archive's interviews hinge on therapeutic rather than pedagogical objectives, and in keeping with this orientation, they have not prioritized the digitization of their holdings.[197] Regarding the relative inaccessibility of the video testimonies recorded at the Fortunoff Archive, co-founder and literary critic Hartman controversially remarked, "[w]e never touch the original tapes. The original tapes are always there in pristine form. And you can see them in full. Nor do we let them out even overnight. You have to come to the archive to see the entire tape. I think a person should make that effort."[198] It is not surprising that the psychoanalytic encounter plays such a key role in the Fortunoff Archive's ideology given that one of its co-founders, Dori Laub, was a practicing psychoanalyst at the time of the archive's inception. In fact, trauma theory, which came to be the most popular paradigm for analyzing Holocaust testimony, was the result of the merging of

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[195] Shenker, 117.

[196] For more on the IWitness and ITeach programs, see http://iwitness.usc.edu/SFI/ and https://sfi.usc.edu/education/iteach.

[197] See Amit Pinchevski, "The Audiovisual Unconscious." The Fortunoff Archive has recently pivoted toward increasing access to digital testimonies.

[198] Jennifer R. Ballengee, "Witnessing Video Testimony: An Interview with Geoffrey Hartman," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 1 (2003): 223-24.

video testimony, Holocaust literature, and psychoanalytic thought in Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992) — a theoretical text largely based on the testimonies recorded at the Fortunoff Archive in the 1980s. For Laub, psychoanalysis and testimony are intertwined: "the process that is set in motion by psychoanalytic practice and by the testimony [are] essentially the same, both in the narrator and in myself as listener (analyst or interviewer)."[199] Over the past few decades, the archive has slowly dissociated itself from psychoanalytic theory, focusing instead on making their holdings publicly accessible and creating postdoctoral opportunities in order to encourage the use of their facilities.[200]

The respective aims of the VHA and the Fortunoff Archive are not only reflected in how they choose to distribute the videos, but also by the strategies they employ for recording interviews. The VHA's protocol demonstrates an effort to standardize testimonial production for pedagogical purposes. For example, their interview guidelines specifically state that testimony must adhere to a tripartite structure (before, during, and after the war) and interviewers are required to meet their interviewees prior to the recording to ensure that all three periods of time are

[199] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 70.

[200] The Fortunoff Video Archive and the Digital Humanities Lab at Yale University recently advertised a postdoctoral position in the Fortunoff-DHLab. Additionally, the Geoffrey H. Hartman Fellowship Program was founded in 2017 and offers a one-year postdoctoral opportunity.

included in the interview.[201] Instead, the interviews conducted at the Fortunoff Archive are marked by a "flexible and open-ended format," in an effort to "[allow] witnesses to wander down the circuitous path of their memories."[202] The Fortunoff Archive has repeatedly emphasized the agency of the witness, claiming that their interview methodology "stresses the leadership role of the witness in structuring or telling his or her own story. Questions primarily ascertain time and place, or elicit additional information about topics already mentioned, with an emphasis on open-ended questions that give initiative to the witness."[203] This continues to be one of the guiding principles of the archive. Recently, Stephen A. Naron, the director of the archive, stated that the interviews are conducted in a way that enables survivors "to tell their story the way they want to tell their story" and adds that the archive avoids "[asking] a lot of questions, so the narrative can be convoluted, jumping back and forth in time and space."[204]

Despite their different priorities, the methods for visually framing testimonies at these two centers are nearly identical. In keeping with the overarching goal to

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[201] According to Shenker, these documents are unavailable to the public and quite difficult to locate. Shenker, 119.

[202] This statement was originally made in a correspondence between Langer and Michael Berenbaum (April 4, 1991). Ibid., 24.

[203] Geoffrey Hartman, "Tele-Suffering and Testimony in the Dot Com Era," *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* 19, no. 3 (Winter 2000): 9.

[204] Ed Stannard, "Yale Archive Preserves Holocaust Histories Through Survivor Testimonies," *New Haven Register*, May 14, 2018, https://www.nhregister.com/news/article/Yale-archive-preserves-Holocaust-histories-12911181.php.

preserve and recover the individual voice, both the VHA and Fortunoff Archive strive to keep a single witness the focal point of the interview. Typically, the survivor is filmed in a medium close-up shot in the center of the frame. Colloquially dubbed "the talking head," this shot positions the subject as "[speaking] directly to the audience"[205] or "talking directly in close-up to the camera."[206] While the talking head has become standard documentary practice, it is a distinct visual choice that was initially pioneered by John Grierson in the 1930s and 1940s and later made popular by documentaries such as Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line* (1988). Without fail, every archive center has adopted the talking head shot as the main method for filming eyewitness testimony. Given that this kind of a shot is now a conventional technique for filming interview footage, few critics have substantively engaged with the ways in which it affects the reception of testimony.

[205] *MacMillan Dictionary*, s.v. "Talking Head," accessed August 5, 2016, http://www.macmillandictionary.com/us/dictionary/american/talking-head.

[206] *Oxford English Dictionary*, "Talking Head," accessed August 5, 2016, http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.princeton.edu/view/Entry/197263.



Figure 2. Edith P., Holocaust Testimony (HVT-107), Fortunoff Video Archive, Yale University Library

Critics agree: video testimonies can be profoundly affecting. Dominick LaCapra comments that "the sound of voices, the often agonized looks on the faces have a powerful, at times an overwhelming effect, and the impression may remain with the viewer long after the event."[207] For Hartman, intimacy is one of the central effects of video testimony, where "[…] there is nothing between us and the survivor; nor, when an interview really gets going, between the survivor and his/her recollections. The effect, therefore, can be extraordinarily intimate — it is hard not to cry."[208] In these centers, establishing a relationship between viewer and witness is considered an advantage since it ensures that the witness remains front and center. The talking head,

[207] LaCapra, *Writing History*, 92.

[208] Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 140.

according to Hartman, helps accomplish this, whereas a "more sophisticated technique would merely distract viewers."[209]

While the talking head aims to foster a sense of immediacy for the viewer, purportedly *for the sake of the witness*, this filming style obscures the context — in this case the entire physical body — that realizes the speech act. As Allan Sekula remarks, such portraiture operates "as a double system [...] of representation capable of functioning both *honorifically* and *repressively*."[210] In other words, the medium close-up foregrounds the speakers while also defining them through their fragmentation. Similarly, Roger Hallas explains in his discussion of queer politics and AIDS activism that the "talking head" is "deeply implicated in the disciplinary function of dominant media representations" that "regulate the visible identification of specific bodies and identities, their authority to speak, and the possible forms of address they may perform."[211] In regard to Holocaust testimony, this system of representation allows for the individual to be prioritized, but at the expense of the "frame conditions" that structure the information and how it comes to later be interpreted. While seemingly innocuous, decontextualizing the body, and subsequently the speech act, does a fundamental disservice to witness and viewer alike.

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[209] Geoffrey Hartman, "Tele-Suffering," 9.

[210] Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 6. Original emphasis.

[211] Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 37.

Ruth Franklin criticizes what she perceives as the dominance of the talking head shot in the interviews conducted throughout *Shoah*: "[Lanzmann's] decision to shun archival footage presented him with a problem: talking-head shots, which constitute the majority of the survivor testimony, are visually dull. Lanzmann's crucial choice was to juxtapose the testimony with film made on location at the present-day sites of the death camps."[212] Beyond Franklin's commentary, there has been little discussion of the particular shots Lanzmann uses.[213] Yet, a closer look at these interviews reveals that Lanzmann does not, in fact, turn all of his witnesses into "talking heads."

One of *Shoah*'s major innovations is Lanzmann's decision to interview several witnesses at a time. Eight of the 25 interviews in the first part of *Shoah* feature two or more witnesses onscreen.[214] By including numerous voices, Lanzmann overturns the interlocutory relationship that typically dictates the interview encounter. Rather than relying purely on the exchange occurring between onscreen subject and offscreen interviewer (Lanzmann, in this case), the primary dialogue often occurs between the two (or more) witnesses onscreen. As a result, the witnesses turn away from the camera and toward one another. Moreover, the frame must shift in order to accommodate the witnesses, and as a result, the medium close-up shot is replaced with the long shot, a shot that shows the entire human figure (or close to it).

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[212] Ruth Franklin, "*Shoah*, by Claude Lanzmann," *Salmagundi* 170-171 (Spring 2011): 27.

[213] One significant exception is Felman's analysis of the interview with survivor Simon Srebnik. See Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 204-283.

[214] *Shoah*, dir. Claude Lanzmann (New Yorker Films, 1985), DVD.

Lanzmann's interview with two unnamed Polish peasants offers a striking example of his unusual technique. In this scene, the Poles are interviewed outside and the pacing is frenetic. After being asked a few questions by Lanzmann, the two men turn toward each other in a lively discussion. Lanzmann interrupts to ask the men what they are discussing and the two turn back to the camera as the interpreter translates their disagreement. In this disjointed interaction, to which viewers only have partial access since the interpreter does not translate the entire disagreement, the two witnesses contradict one another. While they worked in the fields during the war, they remember certain facts differently. One man claims he could see how "the Jews were being asphyxiated" while the other says that this was impossible; they could not stop and look, otherwise the Ukrainian guards would shoot them.

> *— Et il y avait un champ situé à cent mètres du camp. Et il travaillait aussi pendant l'occupation.*
>
> *— Il travaillait dans son champ ?*
>
> *— Oui. Alors il a vu comment on asphyxiait les Juifs, il a entendu comment ils criaient, il a vu tout cela. Il y avait une petite élévation de terrain et de là, il pouvait voir pas mal de choses.*
>
> *— Qu'est-ce qu'il dit, lui ?*
>
> *— On ne pouvait pas s'arrêter et regarder. C'était interdit, parce que les Ukrainiens leur tiraient dessus.*[215]

[215] Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah* (Paris: Fayard, 1985), 36.

In this scene, the men's responses are not only shaped by Lanzmann's interjections and questions, but also by their discussion. As Felman asserts, *Shoah* is an attempt to explore "the *differences* between heterogeneous points of view, between testimonial stances that can neither be assimilated into, nor subsumed by, one another."[216] These differences might never have surfaced had Lanzmann chosen to interview the men separately.

In regard to the reception of testimony, the presence of these two men in dialogue onscreen also leads them to alter their physical orientation. As they turn toward one another, the audience is only able to see their faces in profile. In fiction film, the profile view is frequently used to lend mystery to characters or to imply that the audience should not fully trust them. In Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), Madeleine — a mysterious character — first appears in profile view. In a recent South Korean film, *Mother* (2009), the protagonists are consistently shot in profile and in the end commit (and are revealed to have committed) heinous acts of murder.[217] Whether fiction or documentary film, the profile shot produces distance, decreasing the potential for a sense of immediacy between audience and character.

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[216] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 207.

[217] *Every Frame a Painting*, "Mother (2009) – The Telephoto Profile Shot," YouTube video, 4:28, April 16, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUOdQxQkVt8.



Figure 3. "Treblinka Villagers," *Shoah*, First Era, Part One (24).

In short, when Lanzmann interviews several witnesses at a time, the interactions that arise between them are brought to bear on how testimony is produced and received. Whereas the archival centers privilege the medium close-up shot, the presence of multiple witnesses in Lanzmann's film requires medium or long shots in order to incorporate more people into the frame, and as a result, the context that is brought to bear on testimony becomes visible to viewers.

4. Witnessing the Witness

Not to film life as it is, but life as it is provoked.

— Jean Rouch[218]

In order to emphasize the social environments that play a role in the production and reception of testimony, Lanzmann not only includes multiple witnesses within a single shot but also inserts himself onscreen, playing an active and visible role in many of his interviews. Such an approach can be traced back to *cinéma vérité*, a documentary style developed by filmmaker and anthropologist Jean Rouch and sociologist Edgar Morin in the 1960s.[219] Inspired by the pioneer documentary filmmaker Dziga Vertov's *kino-pravda*, *cinéma vérité* aims to provide a "true" glimpse into social relations. Therefore, *cinéma vérité* is primarily concerned with the study of the social interactions caught on camera, and perhaps even more importantly, how the camera yields particular relationships and reactions. According to Rouch and Morin, the only truth that could be produced in documentary film was one that

[218] Jean Rouch, quoted in Mick Eaton, *The Camera and the Man: Anthropology-Reality-Cinema: The Films of Jean Rouch* (London: British Film Institute, 1979), 151.

[219] In the 1920s, Vertov promoted the idea of "kino-pravda" ("film-truth") in his newsreels *Kino-Pravda*. This series sought to represent reality by avoiding reenactments and actors.

included the filmmaker.[220] In other words, the "truth" of documentary had to include the "truth" of its making.[221]

For his film, Lanzmann boldly borrows from *cinéma vérité* tradition and breaks with the conventions of Holocaust documentary cinema. While earlier Holocaust documentary films were innovative, each in its own way — *Death Mills* (1945) for its shocking material; *Nuit et Brouillard* (1956) for its commentary on contemporary France; *Le Chagrin et la pitié* (1971) for its testimonial bricolage — none implicated their filmmakers in the fabric of the film as *Shoah* does. Lanzmann's presence disrupts the illusion of a harmonious narrative and denies the possibility of a seamless testimonial encounter.

Lanzmann's onscreen presence has been subject to a range of commentary. For Ruth Franklin, the presence of the filmmaker refutes any objective representation of the Holocaust and instead only transmits "Lanzmann's Shoah."[222] Yet, as Lanzmann has insisted, the film is not about the Holocaust, but rather, about the process of narrative (re)construction. According to Lanzmann, producing a film about the Holocaust is impossible because it "erects a fire around itself, a borderline that cannot be crossed because there is a certain ultimate degree of horror that cannot be

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[220] Brian Winston, "Documentary: I Think We Are in Trouble," *Sight and Sound* 1 (1978/79): 4.

[221] Although *cinéma vérité* and *direct cinema* are usually conflated, they are distinct from one another by virtue of *cinéma vérité*'s self-reflexivity.

[222] Franklin, "*Shoah*," 34.

transmitted."[223] Instead of using archival footage, Lanzmann includes himself in the film, foregrounding how his presence affects the transmission of information; at the time of the recording, and later on, when viewers watch the film. Indeed, the testimonies that are recorded in *Shoah* are "clearly and explicitly filtered through Lanzmann's own viewpoint and agenda."[224]

In a number of scenes, Lanzmann progressively becomes the focal point of the interview. First, Lanzmann physically displaces his interviewees from the center of the camera shot. In his interview with the Polish peasant, Czeslaw Borowi, Lanzmann progressively moves toward the center and comes to be framed by Borowi (on his right) and the interpreter (on his left). This is startling, considering that the purported focus of the film is eyewitness testimony. The shot's composition suggests that Lanzmann is as significant as — if not perhaps even *more significant* than — the witnesses he interviews.

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[223] Lanzmann has repeatedly stated that it is impossible to represent the Holocaust. In an interview with Marc Chevrie and Hervé le Roux, he comments, "[…] I started precisely with the impossibility of recounting history. I placed this impossibility at the very beginning of my work." Claude Lanzman, quoted in Marc Chevrie and Hervé le Roux, "Site and Speech: An Interview with Claude Lanzmann," trans. Stuart Liebman, in Stuart Liebman, *Shoah: Key Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 39.

[224] Kathryn Robson, "*Shoah*" in *The Cinema of France*, ed. Phil Lowrie (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 167.



Figure 4. "Czeslaw Borowi," *Shoah*, First Era, Part One (23).

Secondly, the way that Lanzmann interacts with his witnesses is unusual. By playing a range of roles onscreen, he emphasizes the conditions under which testimony comes to be generated. Most critics have labeled Lanzmann's onscreen behavior as "aggressive," paying particular attention to how he interacts with interviewees Franz Suchomel, Czeslaw Borowi, and Abraham Bomba.[225] Readings of these interviews have, for the most part, failed to analyze the theatricality of these encounters. Ignoring Lanzmann's exaggerated posturing in the interviews, which is further emphasized by the *range* of roles he plays onscreen throughout the film, critics have almost unanimously condemned his interview methodology. Marcel Ophuls

[225] This chapter does not analyze Lanzmann's interviews with Abraham Bomba. For literature on the subject see Sue Vice, *Shoah* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011) and Dominick LaCapra "Lanzmann's *Shoah*: 'Here There is no Why,'" *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1997).

remarks that Lanzmann takes on the position of judge and jury in the film rather than passive observer.[226] Tzvetan Todorov criticizes Lanzmann's methods for interviewing the Poles: "My main complaint is not the translations themselves but the technique that Lanzmann uses in interviewing Polish peasants. He does not use this technique with anyone else. It seems designed to put as much distance as possible between the witnesses and the audience."[227] Todorov does not seem to take into account that this remark can only be made thanks to the visibility of the interview framework that Lanzmann establishes through his overt presence. Put differently, Lanzmann's self-conscious presence onscreen allows viewers to be aware of the particular — and often problematic — conditions under which testimony is produced.[228] Moreover, it should be noted that while Lanzmann may at times provoke the Polish bystanders he interviews, he prods survivors as well, sometimes to such an extent that they respond with frustration or irritation.[229]

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[226] Francine du Plessix, "Film; Bearing Witness," *The New York Times Magazine*, August 30 1987, http://www.nytimes.com/1987/08/30/magazine/film-bearing-witness.html.

[227] Tzvetan Todorov, *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in Concentration Camps* (New York, NY: Holt Paperbacks, 1997), 271-278.

[228] James Young notes that the interpreters frequently come to the rescue during the interviews with Poles, reframing Lanzmann's antagonistic or sarcastic questions so that the interviewees are not defensive. James Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, 160-161. Giacomo Lichtner writes that "there is more than a small element of violence in Lanzmann's insistent, forceful, provocative prodding." Giacomo Lichtner, *Film and the Shoah in France and Italy* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008), 167.

[229] For example, Lanzmann was accused of treating Abraham Bomba sadistically. For more on the interview with Bomba see Ruth Klüger Angress, "Lanzmann's *Shoah* and its audience," in *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Austria: An Anthology*, ed. Dagmar C. G.

Critiques of the film also tend overlook when and why Lanzmann behaves the way he does onscreen. It is clear that there is a degree of difference in his treatment of victims, bystanders, and perpetrators, but even within these groups, Lanzmann does not treat all eyewitnesses alike. His behavior is conditioned by the psychology of the person he interviews, rather than constructed solely by the interviewee's role in the Holocaust.[230] He is deferential and polite with one perpetrator, and hostile and confrontational with another. For example, Lanzmann aggressively approaches and questions a cook in a restaurant, presumably a perpetrator, until the man flees the scene. On the other hand, when he interviews former junior SS sergeant Franz Suchomel, he acts deferential and respectful.

The unfolding of the interviews in *Shoah* hinges on how Lanzmann opts to approach his witnesses. Erin McGlothlin notes that while critics tend to psychologize Suchomel, it is instead more valuable to analyze how Suchomel's responses are

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Lorenz (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999): 214-231, and Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, "The Witness in the archive: Holocaust Studies/Memory Studies," *Memory Studies* 2, no. 2 (2009): 151-170.

[230] Lanzmann has made ample comments that indicate his disdain for Polish people. For example, at a screening at Oxford University, Lanzmann told his listeners that the French would never have tolerated concentration camps in their countryside. See Neal Ascherson, "The *Shoah* Controversy," *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 16, no. 1 (1986): 53-61. The remarks Lanzmann has made about his film have had a formidable impact on its scholarship, and as a result, it is quite difficult to disentangle Lanzmann's personal opinions about the Poles as expressed in public and his actual treatment of the Poles in the film.

directly informed by the didactic relationship Lanzmann establishes with him.[231] Indeed, Lanzmann recalls arriving unannounced at the sergeant's doorstep and asking him for advice: "*Nous* ne savons pas […] comment élever *nos* enfants." As Lanzmann explains it, this psychological move allowed for Suchomel to occupy

> la place et la posture du pédagogue, je me mettais face à lui en position d'élève et je lui faisais valoir l'importance du rôle historique qui serait le sien s'il acceptait de me décrire les divers moments du processus de la mise à mort de masse à Treblinka.[232]

Lanzmann was aware that getting into Suchomel's good graces would require appealing to his sense of authority. By including himself on screen, Lanzmann refuses to obscure the oddities of his relationship with Suchomel, and as a result, grants critics greater perspective on Suchomel's testimony.[233] Without Lanzmann's presence onscreen, the nuances of Suchomel's behavior would be understood very differently.

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[231] She remarks that a number of critics have described Suchomel as "enthusiastic," one going so far as to claim that Suchomel clearly "enjoys the memory of those days." Erin McGlothlin, "Listening to the Perpetrators in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*," *Colloquia Germanica* 43, no. 3 (2010): 240.

[232] Lanzmann, *Le lièvre de Patagonie*, 640. Original emphasis.

[233] It should be noted that given the constraints of the interview with Suchomel, Lanzmann did not have as many options as he typically did when filming other witnesses. Suchomel was under the impression that he was having a private conversation with Lanzmann.

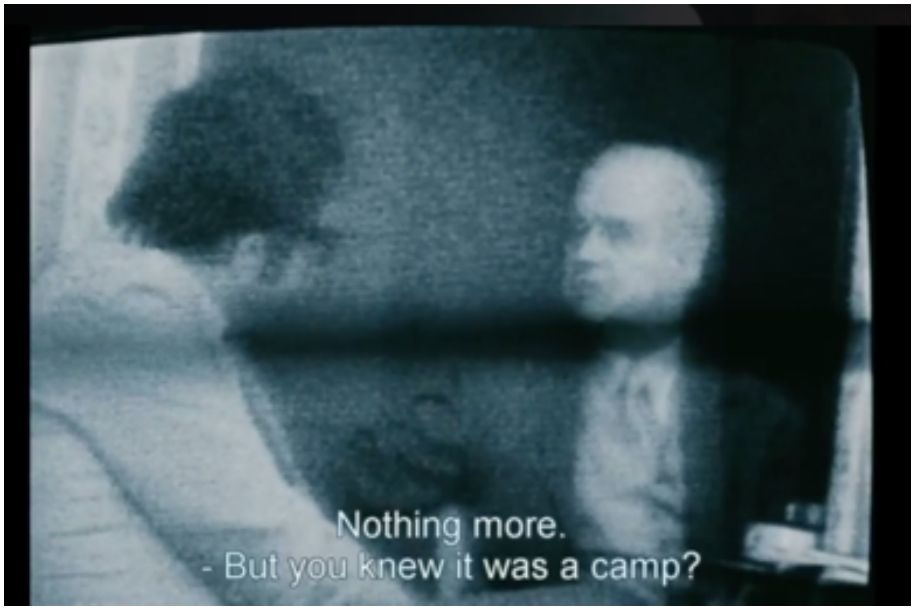


Figure 5. "Franz Suchomel," *Shoah*, First Era, Part One (55).

At the archival centers, interviewers are rarely present onscreen. At the VHA, if the interviewers are shown at all, it is typically at the start of the interview and only briefly, in order to verify the interview setting.[234] The interviewer's questions are not cut, as this would "challenge the historical validity of the testimony," but interviewers are asked to "keep their comments to a minimum," while maintaining a connection with the interviewee through "eye contact, hand gestures, and body positioning, thus achieving a silent yet present role in the process."[235] Interviewers are also told to refrain from emotional or physical gestures of comfort if survivors "get too emotional."[236]

[234] Hartman, "Tele-Suffering," 9.

[235] Shenker, 124.

[236] Ibid., 124.

In contrast to the VHA, the Fortunoff Archive methodology leaves interviewers offscreen in order to keep the "the survivor at the center, visually as well as verbally."[237] Interviewers are instructed to remain unobtrusive: "heard and not seen, and trained to ask only enough questions to make the witnesses comfortable, to keep them remembering, and sometimes to clarify a statement."[238] Such an approach ensures that the interviewer does not serve as a distraction for both the witnesses and the viewers. For instance, in a prototypical interview conducted at the Fortunoff Archive, the interviewer's questions are cut from Edith P.'s testimony.[239] As opposed to the disorder integral to Lanzmann's interviews, Edith P.'s testimony is easy to follow. Editing out these questions yields a narrative that is coherent and uninterrupted. Thus, viewers are not granted access to the factors that frame Edith P.'s responses.

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[237] Shenker, 9.

[238] Ibid., 9.

[239] Edith P. narrates, "[m]y father was a high official, very religious man. We were six children, four boys, my sister was the oldest, I was the youngest." Her testimony cuts, and she proceeds, "we did not hear much, by this time the Hungarian press, most likely, was censored. We listened to the British, the BBC, and we knew that there were concentration camps, but in some miraculous way, we thought that we are never going to go there. It's impossible. We had refugees from Poland, Polish Jews, who told us 'Do something. Go. Go to America, go to Israel. Go to Palestine. Do something. Escape because that's what's going to happen to you.' And we thought that's impossible, I mean my father was born here, his father was born here, and my great grandfather was born here. It's impossible. But we didn't know enough. Had we known enough, I think we would have done more. [CUT] Of course, when the Germans came in, we had to wear the yellow sign, you know […]." Edith P. (HVT-107), *Fortunoff Video Archive*, Yale University, published Aug. 27, 2009.

In the archival centers, the role the interviewers play alternates between critical and liminal to the production of testimony. Hartman stresses that the interviewer's duty is to "listen and to restore dialogue [...]," yet how exactly do interviewers go about "restoring dialogue"?[240] What kind of "dialogue" should be "restored" in the first place?

The critiques of Lanzmann's interview methodology — and the dearth of scholarship concerning the archives' methodology [241] — gesture toward a profound anxiety regarding the treatment and autonomy of witnesses. However, in a crucial way, testimony is constrained by the inherent expectations of its audience. Witness testimony is always bound to, and constrained by, the conditions under which it is articulated. Testimony is always already a response, and as such, it is already conditioned by its external context before it is even produced. In fact, one of the many advantages of the testimonial interview is that the questions can be made available to viewers. Including the questions can help to recontextualize testimony and to make visible the constraints that are operating on the narrative.

By exaggerating his own position as interlocutor, Lanzmann underscores the constraints to which testimony is continually subjected. As Jill Robbins summarizes,

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[240] Hartman, *The Longest Shadow*, 12.

[241] By scholarship, I am not referring to the writings of some of the co-founders of the Fortunoff Archive but the work conducted by people external to the archives. In the past couple of years, there has been a rise in scholarship devoted to analyzing the archives. Noah Shenker's *Reframing Holocaust Testimony* is one the most sustained and rigorous analyses on the subject.

"the ethical becomes *visible* through the violation of the ethical."[242] Throughout the film, it becomes exceedingly evident that testimony cannot be *constituted independently from the interlocutory encounter*, and to elide this encounter is to conceal the conditions that frame testimony. By revealing the pressures that characterize testimonial production, Lanzmann's presence creates a necessary "sense of partialness, of situated presence and local knowledge that derives from the actual encounter of filmmaker and other."[243]

Lanzmann's "biases" as revealed through his onscreen presence disengage viewers from identifying with the interviewees and allow them to consider, instead, their own practices of reception. Lanzmann, like his viewers, is a social actor who was not directly involved in the events the testimonies recount. In this way, he can serve as a mirror to viewers so that they may witness a secondary witness. Trezise calls attention to this doubling in his formula "witnessing witnessing," which speaks to the imperative of bearing witness to oneself.[244]

"Witnessing witnessing" is a complex and demanding task. Lanzmann's "reflective witnessing," however, does help viewers to understand their process of

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[242] Jill Robbins, "The Writing of the Holocaust: Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*," *Prooftexts* 7, no. 3 (1987): 254. Original emphasis.

[243] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 44.

[244] Trezise formulates that *Witnessing Witnessing* "approaches the testimony of Holocaust survivors, therefore, by focusing on attention on those who receive it." Trezise, *Witnessing Witnessing*, 2.

reception.[245] He embeds himself in his film, and as a result, viewers must attend to multiple voices, while also remaining aware of how Lanzmann, as interviewer and filmmaker, comes to shape the testimonies. For Lanzmann, it is crucial to reveal how "testimonial truth" is mediated. In *Shoah*, there is no such thing as life as it is; rather, the film shows us life as it is made.

5. Framing Witnessing

La morale est affaire de travellings.

— Luc Moullet[246]

At a 1959 roundtable on Alain Resnais' film *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959), Jean-Luc Godard memorably inverted Luc Moullet's formulation "la morale est affaire de travellings" and stated "le travelling est affaire de morale."[247] While this remark can be broadly conceived as a reconceptualization of the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, in this context, Godard was specifically referring to concentrationary cinema. The question of the camera's responsibility in the representation of extreme experiences had, at this time, received significant attention thanks to Jacque Rivette's

[245] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 112.

[246] This statement was first made in reference to the cinema of Samuel Muller. Luc Moullet, "Sur les brisées de Marlowe," *Cahiers du cinéma* 93 (1959): 11.

[247] Jean-Luc Godard, quoted in Jean Domarchi et al., "Hiroshima, notre amour," *Cahiers du cinéma* 97 (1959), 5.

commentary on a scene from Gillo Pontecorvo's *Kapo* (1960).[248] Both Rivette and Godard take issue with the scene for its aestheticization of death, which ultimately *tells* viewers what to see and how to view it rather than allowing them to critically determine the meaning of the scene.

In contrast to discussions about *Kapo,* the tracking shot from the opening scene of Alain Resnais' *Nuit et Brouillard* has been universally acclaimed. At first, this shot shows a beautiful and lush landscape, but as the camera tracks right, barbed wire enters the frame, disrupting the initial image. In Resnais' notes for this scene, he writes, "*Nuit et Brouillard*. Couleur. Un paysage neutre, calme, banal. La caméra recule […] En panoramiquant, la caméra découvre dans le lointain l'entrée du camp […]. Une suite de panoramiques très lents partant chaque fois d'un élément 'extérieur' et se terminant sur un élément 'intérieur' […]."[249] The horrifying context is belatedly revealed. As opposed to the tracking shot in *Kapo*, which closes in on a young woman

[248] In this widely criticized tracking shot, a woman is pictured committing suicide by throwing herself into an electric barbed wire fence. Rivette took issue with the way the camera moved: "[v]oyez […] dans *Kapo*, le plan où Riva se suicide en se jetant sur les barbelés électrifiés; l'homme qui décide, à ce moment, de faire un travelling-avant pour recadrer le cadavre en contre-plongée, en prenant soin d'inscrire exactement la main levée dans un angle de son cadrage final, cet homme n'a droit qu'au plus profond mépris." Jacques Rivette, "De l'Abjection," *Cahiers du cinéma* 120 (1961): 54.

[249] Resnais, quoted in Christian Delage and Vincent Guigueno, eds., *Le film et l'historien* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 17.

dying in a concentration camp, and in its careful positioning, *tells viewers what to feel*, Resnais uses the camera to shatter the image and to destabilize viewers.[250]

In reference to the disarming camera work in *Nuit et Brouillard*, Leo Bersani comments that Resnais "constantly [sets] up obstacles to undisturbed vision."[251] The camera work in *Shoah* is similarly arresting. Throughout the film, panoramas and zooms not only emphasize the sociality of testimonial production but serve to disrupt the viewing experience. These movements belatedly reveal the social interactions that constitute narrative, and viewers must negotiate the tensions that arise between the visible and invisible.

Lanzmann's interview with the two Polish men demonstrates how the panorama can surprise viewers. After he has asked them a few questions, a voice is suddenly heard offscreen. The camera quickly pans right and reveals another man. The unanticipated and belated intrusion of the third man reorients the viewer's perception of the scene. Such camerawork demands that viewers remain critical of the narratives to which they are bearing witness. Indeed, at any moment, some pertinent information may be just beyond reach.

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[250] Rivette formulates that the difference between Pontecorvo and Resnais' work is that Resnais' film is not necessarily aimed at representing the Holocaust, but rather, embeds the tensions of representation into the fabric of the film, writing, "[…] ces questions de justifications morale ou esthétique, Resnais non seulement se les pose, mais il les inclut dans le mouvement même du film […] le sujet même des film de Resnais, c'est l'effort qu'il doit faire pour résoudre cette contradiction." Jacques Rivette, quoted in "Hiroshima, notre amour," Rivette, "De l'Abjection," 12.

[251] Bersani and Dutoit, *Arts of Impoverishment*, 183.



Figure 6. "Treblinka Villagers," *Shoah*, First Era, Part One, (24).

While the panorama shot provides a more comprehensive glimpse into the surroundings, it also gestures toward the *hors-champ* that was initially unavailable given the constraints of the frame. In other words, the panorama stresses the impotence of the viewer when confronted with an image — *the image is never complete*. Art critics have for a long time now suggested that the panorama intensifies the dialectic between freedom and constraint. Following in the tradition of painting and photography, the panorama can provoke feelings of disorientation, or as Bernard Comment describes it, "an exquisite switching from feelings of dominance to those of dissolution, of loss."[252] If the panorama is capable of transporting rather than confining the viewer, it can only do so by calling attention to the limits of what can be revealed at any single moment.[253]

Much like the panorama, the zoom shot bears a unique capacity for calling attention to the parameters of the visible. Before becoming a widespread filmic

[252] Bernard Comment, *The Panorama* (London: Reaktion Book Ltd, 1999), 138.

[253] Daniel Downes, *Interactive Realism: The Poetics of Cyberspace* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 58.

technique, the zoom was widely criticized as a self-conscious "pseudo-camera movement"[254] that produced spatial distortion. In a zoom shot, the camera does not physically move, but instead, the focal length of the lens is altered and gives viewers the illusion of moving closer or farther away from the action. Rather than promoting harmony between the part and the whole, the zoom is a disruptive movement that overtly gestures toward the presence of an outsider, in this case the camera, that manipulates the viewers' vision.[255] Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor warn that zooming should be used with care as it "alters the image size (the relative size of an object on the screen) rather than perspective itself [...]" and as a consequence,

> zooming into someone can never convey the same sensation as moving closer to the person [...] If you stay still and zoom into someone, your subject will simply end up occupying a larger image size [...] and the move feels unnatural and your spectators will sense (and share) your distance from the action.[256]

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[254] John Belton, "The Bionic Eye: Zoom Esthetics," *Cinéaste* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1980-81): 21.

[255] Paul Willemen states that the zoom is an "intrusive, emphatically overt sign of the narrator's performance." Paul Willemen, "The Zoom in Popular Cinema: A Question of Performance," *Rouge Press*, 2003, http://www.rouge.com.au/1/zoom.html.

[256] Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor, *Cross-Cultural Filmmaking: A Handbook for Making Documentary and Ethnographic Films and Videos* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 114-115.

For these reasons and some others, the zoom has been criticized for emphasizing the medium. In reference to Rossellini's use of zoom in the film *The Age of Medici* (1973), film critic Fred Camper writes that this technique reveals

> [...] that every part of the shot, and indeed every shot, is only a part of a much larger whole. No image can acquire a fixed value or overpowerful meaning, because every image may soon be transformed into another related image via the smooth, continuous zoom... [the lens's] multiple perspectives, its ability to change from close-up to long shot and back again, express the continual interdependence between individual and environment, between part and whole....[257]

The zoom shot plays an important role in contextualizing and recontextualizing the interviews in *Shoah*. In a scene featuring the Polish locomotive operator, Henrik Gawkowski, the camera zooms outward and then inward again. While zooming outward could destabilize the viewer, zooming inward immediately after only amplifies the overt presence of the camera.[258] In this encounter, Lanzmann asks Mr. Gawkowski if most of the Jews arrived at the camps in ("pullman") wagons or

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[257] Fred Camper, quoted in Belton, "The Bionic Eye," 21.

[258] Barbash and Taylor are emphatic regarding the double zoom, writing, "[i]f you zoom, it's best to only zoom in or only zoom out within a single shot. If you zoom in and out within the same shot, you distract from the scene itself, reminding spectators that everything they see is mediated by the camera." Barbash and Taylor, *Cross-Cultural Filmmaking*, 115.

in passenger cars. Mr. Gawkowski sits front and center, facing the camera in a medium close-up shot. As Mr. Gawkowski responds to one of Lanzmann's questions, a voice comes from offscreen. The camera rapidly zooms out to reveal a woman, Mrs. Gawkowska. Lanzmann asks the interpreter, "Ce n'est pas vrai? Qu'est-ce qu'elle dit, Madame Gawkowska?" The interpreter responds: "Madame Gawkowska dit que peut-être son mari n'a pas tout vu" and continues, "[i]l dit qu'il a vu [...]."[259] While the interview seems initially to be focused on establishing some facts about how Jews arrived in the camps, it ends up instead revolving around a disagreement between husband and wife.

Mrs. Gawkowska surprises viewers given that viewers are initially unaware of her presence. When she questions her husband's testimony, she plays an active role in the development and structure of her husband's narrative. Her doubts provoke him, and as a result, he disagrees more forcefully with Lanzmann. Mr. Gawkowski proceeds to tell a story that would substantiate his testimony.[260] Evidently, Mrs. Gawkowska's intervention has a concrete impact on her husband's testimony, and the zoom shot here functions as a surprise element that further disrupts any illusion of harmonious narrative. The self-conscious quality of the zoom in this scene asserts the narrative voice of the camera, reminding the audience that Mr. Gawkowski's testimony is always framed by factors that are beyond the image presented.

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[259] Lanzmann, *Shoah*, 47.

[260] It is striking that the translation of Mr. Gawkowski's story is left incomplete. While the story as a whole could have potentially portrayed him in a positive light, the absence of a complete translation leads viewers to be suspicious of his testimony.



Figure 7. "Henrik Gawkowski," *Shoah*, First Era, Part One (34).

Later, the zoom reemerges, but this time the direction of the zoom produces incongruity between what is seen and heard. Lanzmann's interview features Simon Srebnik surrounded by a number of Poles in front of a Catholic church in Chelmno. In Felman's well-known reading of the scene, she analyzes the confusion of witnessing that takes place. While the Poles remember Srebnik well, their testimony becomes confused when Lanzmann evokes the role of the church in the massacre of the Jews. Felman suggests that the Poles here are *false witnesses* in that they develop of a fantasy of *what happened* rather than remaining true to "historical fact."[261]

While Felman assesses the language of this scene, there is also an additional layer of meaning that is produced and that supports her claim. While the scene begins with a long shot that shows the bodies of Srebnik and the Poles around him, as the scene progresses, the camera slowly begins to zoom in, ending with medium close-up shot of Srebnik's face. At first, the surroundings are shown (the Poles, the church)

[261] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 128-129. Original Emphasis.

until viewers are left with only a discrete element of the initial shot. In Felman's analysis she argues that the Poles offer a "simplified negotiation of the inside and outside [and how they] merely [project] their inside on the outside."[262] The disjunction of this "projection" is supported by the zoom, which emphasizes the jarring juxtaposition between the Polish people's memories of the young wartime Srebnik and the older Srebnik to whom viewers bear witness. The Srebnik the Poles describe — young, skinny, and "ready for his coffin" — is not consistent with the image of Srebnik presented to the viewers. The camera movement here foregrounds the tensions of the information that is located inside and outside of the frame.



Figure 8. "Villagers at Chelmno Church," *Shoah*, First Era, Part Two (26).

In contrast to the active role of the camera in these scenes from *Shoah*, the VHA and Fortunoff Archives opt instead to keep the camera as discreet as possible when filming eyewitness interviews. In these centers, rather than *interrupting* the

[262] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 261.

experience of viewing testimony, the camera aimed to "satisfy more naturally the viewer's eye."[263] The zoom shot was initially used at the Fortunoff Archive, but it was quickly determined that these movements were excessive and only distracted viewers. Consequently, the founders resolved to keep the camera fixed with very little movement. Similarly, the VHA also avoids camera movements, save for an initial verification shot of the interviewers at the start of the interview. Their filming guidelines specifically state that camera movement implies mediation and is therefore to be avoided. Videographers are instructed to find a comfortable medium close-up shot of the witness and to avoid any extreme close-ups. The guidelines are clear, "[o]nce the close shot has been established, do not zoom in or out. Such camera moves would add editorial comment to the testimony, thereby compromising its historical validity."[264] Shenker suggests that these instructions fail to consider that the very framing in the first place is an "editorial commentary."[265] It is striking that both the Fortunoff and VHA archives perceive the camera as a feature that would distract viewers or inauthenticate testimony, rather than as a tool that could be productively harnessed in the production and reception of testimony.

As Godard suggests, the way in which these interviews are framed by the camera plays an important role in the construction of meaning and, ultimately, is deeply tied to the ethics of how testimony is transmitted and received. Therefore, the disruptive and disorientating camera work in *Shoah* serves to call attention to the

[263] Hartman, "Tele-Suffering," 9.

[264] VHA guidelines, quoted in Shenker, 130.

[265] Ibid., 130.

necessary framing of testimony. The panorama and zoom shots reveal the precarious balance between what is seen and unseen and represent the complex negotiation inherent in the act of testifying and bearing witness.

6. Conclusion

> *The most odious and intolerable thing, even in the most innocent bourgeois, is that of not knowing how to recognize life experiences other than his own: and of bringing all other life experiences back to a substantial analogy with his own.*
>
> — Pier Paolo Pasolini[266]

In this chapter, I have considered key strategies that the archival centers use for representing and transmitting testimony and put these in conversation with Lanzmann's innovative approach to recording testimony. First, I analyzed the impact that interviewing more than one witness has on how testimony is produced and transmitted. The introduction of multiple witnesses requires Lanzmann to go beyond the conventional talking head approach used in the archival centers and in documentary films. Second, I turned to the onscreen presence of Lanzmann and his interactions with witnesses. I argued that his disruptive and (frequently) aggressive interviewing methods reveal the artifice of the testimonial interview encounter and produce a self-conscious form of witnessing. Finally, I examined how witnesses are

[266] Pier Pasolini, quoted in Fredric Jameson, *Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), 178.

revealed in a single scene. I suggested that camera techniques such as the zoom and panorama are distracting, ultimately reminding viewers that they are watching a film constructed by Lanzmann. Drawing as much attention to the process of interviewing as the interview itself emphasizes the choices that are made when recording testimony. Awareness of these representational choices is key for understanding that testimony is always the product of the interviewer's situatedness.

The centers' decision to collect and record such a vast array of testimony was in part driven by the perceived inadequacies of the miniseries *Holocaust*. The centers recorded in such large numbers in order to transmit the full complexity of experience to future generations. I argue that analyzing the centers' interview footage reveals their philosophy regarding the reception of survivor testimony. In order to ensure their comprehensibility, the centers used a variety of "authenticity effects" — established protocol and selected filming techniques — to keep the survivor at the center of attention. Consequently, viewers are encouraged take up a position *vis-à-vis* eyewitness testimony that is informed by emotions.

This approach may initially appear to benefit eyewitnesses, since it keeps them at the center of attention —viewers are not distracted by other people onscreen, camera work, other objects, etc. However, as this chapter has aimed to show, the centers' recording techniques inadvertently reproduce the very problems present in previous representations of Holocaust experience. The relationship between interviewer and interviewee is not symmetrical. Those working at the archive (editors, marketing departments) and interviewers are in a position of authority given that they have control over the questions that will be asked and how the testimony will be

edited and marketed. When these features are concealed, survivors risk becoming a mouthpiece for the institutions since the audience cannot properly gauge the boundary between the eyewitness, the interviewer, the interview, and the institution. In attempting to solve the problem of Holocaust representation and testimony, the centers produce many of the same problems they perceive present in the miniseries *Holocaust* and other representations of the Holocaust.

While *Shoah* also served, in part, as a response to the failings of the miniseries, Lanzmann opts for a different approach to filming and representing Holocaust testimony. Like the centers, Lanzmann privileges the individual voice, rather than archival footage. However, he calls attention to the social landscape that is brought to bear on the production and consumption of testimony. Similarly to the *cinéma vérité* style, the conflicting testimony and the on-camera appearance of Lanzmann lead to "an emphasis on the act of gathering information or building knowledge, the process of social and historical interpretation."[267] For Lanzmann, the only way to be "authentic" is to reveal the conditions that produce testimony.

[267] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality,* 49.

CHAPTER III

DRAWING DISTANCE: ART SPIEGELMAN'S *MAUS*

… And if I make a mistake, I want you to have my mistake.

— Art Spiegelman[268]

1. Introduction

When Art Spiegelman's graphic novel[269] *Maus* was released in 1986, it received near universal acclaim and quickly climbed the bestseller lists.[270] In 1992, after the publication of the second volume, it became the first graphic novel to win the coveted

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[268] Michael Silverblatt, *Art Spiegelman: Conversations*, ed. Joseph Wittek (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 131.

[269] The term "graphic novel" has been polemical. It was coined by Will Eisner in 1978 in order to legitimize his work *A Contract with God*. The difference between "comics" and "graphic novel" is that the former refers to the medium and the latter to the genre. Given that I am particularly interested in the formal structure of the medium, I use the term "comics" throughout most of this chapter.

[270] After *Maus* was placed on the fiction side of *The New York Times*' bestseller list, Spiegelman wrote a letter to the editors requesting that it be moved to the nonfiction side: "If your list were divided into literature and nonliterature, I could gracefully accept the compliment as intended, but to the extent that "fiction" indicates that a work isn't factual, I feel a bit queasy. As an author, I believe I might have lopped several years off the 13 I devoted to my two-volume project if I could only have taken a novelist's license while searching for a novelistic structure." Art Spiegelman, "A Problem of Taxonomy," *New York Times' Books,* December 29, 1991, http://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/29 /books/l-a-problem-of-taxonomy-37092.html.

Pulitzer Prize. *Maus* marked a turning point in Holocaust discourse for its innovative representation of testimony, and also redefined perceptions of the comics medium as one equipped to deal with "serious" matters. While most critics praised *Maus*, the comics artist Harvey Pekar lambasted the work. Pekar was well-known in comics circles for his collaboration with Robert Crumb and his long-running autobiographical series *American Splendor*.[271] According to Pekar, "the major defect in *Maus*, one that is far more disturbing than the use of 'animal metaphors,' is Spiegelman's biased, one-sided portrayals of his father, himself, and their relationship."[272] Pekar's criticism is accurate in the sense that Spiegelman and the host of characters in *Maus* are all explicitly filtered through Spiegelman's artistic vision. *Maus* is composed of three narrative strands: the first story is Spiegelman's father's Holocaust experience; the second is the moment of the testimonial interview; and the third is Spiegelman's reflections on the representation of this testimony.[273] If Spiegelman gives Pekar

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[271] Pekar was frequently referred to as the "poet Laureate of Cleveland." *American Splendor* covered the daily life of Pekar in Cleveland and was later turned into an Oscar-nominated film.

[272] Pekar adds later on: "Another scene which bothers me is one in which Art discovers that his father, in a fit of depression, has destroyed (Spiegelman's mother's) diaries, written during the Holocaust, which Art wanted to use to get material for *Maus*. Art screams at Vladek for this, calling him 'murderer'… Does Vladek deserve to be called a murderer because he destroyed Art's source material?… Understand that all along my point is not that Spiegelman has been unethical toward his father, but that he gives me plenty of reason to doubt the accuracy of his portrayal of him." Harvey Pekar, "Maus and Other Topics," *The Comics Journal* 113 (December 1986): 56.

[273] Erin McGlothlin, "No Time Like the Present: Narrative and Time in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*," *Narrative* 11, no. 2 (2003): 180. Like Hamida Bosmajian and McGlothlin, I use

"plenty of reason to doubt the accuracy"[274] of the characters depicted in *Maus*, this is thanks to the two metanarratives that are incorporated in the text. Rather than a failing, Spiegelman's attempt to represent Holocaust testimony graphically *and* actively show the various forces that shape its production can instead be considered innovative.[275]

Spiegelman inserts himself into the narrative as a character, spotlighting that he is the *visible hand* shaping the testimony and text. In an interview, Spiegelman comments:

> This is my father's tale. I've tried to change as little as possible. But it's almost impossible not to [change it] because as soon as you apply any kind of structure to material, you're in trouble [...] Shaping means [that] things that came out (in an interview) as shotgun facts about events that happened in 1939, facts about things that happened in 1945, they all have to be organized. As a

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"Spiegelman" to designate the artist and the character in the metanarrative (when he reflects on representational practices) and I use "Art" to designate his representation as the son of Vladek in the interview scenes.

[274] Pekar, "Maus and Other Topics," 56.

[275] Unlike other critics who criticized Spiegelman for using the comics medium to depict such a serious topic, Pekar, as a famed graphic artist, was not necessarily opposed to the use of the medium. It could be said that it is the glibness of Spiegelman as son in *Maus* that fundamentally disturbed Pekar.

> result, this tends to make my father seem more organized than he was.[276]

For Spiegelman, to be "honest" he must insert himself within the pages of *Maus* to show how Vladek's story comes to be shaped by his active participation in the process of narrative construction. In other words, the only way to be "authentic" is to highlight the *inauthenticity* of representation. Andreas Huyssen remarks, "Spiegelman accepts that the past is visually inaccessible through realistic representation: whatever strategy he might choose, it is bound to be 'inauthentic.'"[277] While Pekar considers the shape representation takes in *Maus* to be "dishonest," Spiegelman's strategy is to emphasize such mediation *precisely* in order to be more "honest."

While memoirs are traditionally monophonic, *Maus* unfolds through Spiegelman's conversations with his father,[278] thereby positioning Spiegelman as the primary addressee of testimony. This is unusual since interviewers are typically kept out of the frame of narrative and are only "useful" insofar as they ask the questions that elicit the story. Given that Spiegelman includes himself in the narrative, he draws attention to the interlocutory relationship that produces and shapes testimony. As a result, the readers' position to the testimony and the text changes dramatically. No

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[276] Joshua Brown, "Of Mice and Memory," *Oral History Review* 16, no. 1 (1988): 94.

[277] Andreas Huyssen, "Of Mice and Mimesis: Reading Spiegelman with Adorno," *New German Critique* 81 (2000): 76.

[278] Spiegelman stated: "The root source of the whole thing was my father's conversations with me." Brown, 93.

longer the "direct addressee" of testimony, readers bear witness to Vladek telling his story to *someone else*.

While a significant amount of attention has been paid to the treatment of temporality and the use of the anthropomorphic characters in *Maus*,[279] critics have by and large failed to consider the array of dialogues and the ways in which they are staged for readers. The positioning of voices side-by-side invites readers to consider Spiegelman as not only a witness to his father's story but also an active participant in the testimonial encounter, in fact, a highly emotional participant. Readers do not encounter one story, but two distinct stories. In order to tackle the tensions that arise through the juxtaposition and merging of these stories, readers must activate a critical rather than emotional approach to the text. Such an approach reduces the readers' tendency to identify with characters in *Maus*, an inclination that Spiegelman has dismissed:

> As soon as you tell the story of a survivor and how they survived, you're not telling a story of what happened. Somehow, it becomes a how-to

[279] Numerous postwar comics had made use of anthropomorphism before *Maus*, including Horst Rosenthal's *Mickey au Camp de Gurs* (1942) and Edmond-François Calvo's *La Bête est morte!* (1944). Anthropomorphization is considered one of the most innovative features of *Maus*, and there exists a wealth of articles on the subject; however, the history behind the use of animals in comics suggests that, at least in this regard, *Maus* situates itself within a firmly established tradition, namely the "funny animals" genre. In fact, the first "issue" of *Maus* was published in *Funny Aminals* (*sic*.), edited by Robert Crumb in 1974, when Spiegelman was asked to create animal characters.

> manual. *Because there's a natural desire and tendency on the reader's part to identify with a character* in a book someplace, you identify with the one who survived.[280]

This chapter argues that Spiegelman foregrounds the tensions that are inherent in the comics medium in order to promote a critical rather than emotive reading of the text. If comics is already an "art of tensions,"[281] Spiegelman emphasizes the tensions between the panel, the sequence, and the page. As a result, witnessing is driven by discomfort and disruption. Simply put, Spiegelman's techniques require readers to pause, stop, and often reread a particular panel, sequence, or page. Thus, Spiegelman prevents his public from reading too fast— demanding that his readers not only *feel*, but also, most importantly, *think*. In the following, I examine three key scenes in which intimate dialogues are staged and the formal features of the medium are emphasized. By emphasizing the artifice of representation, these scenes produce reading practices that oscillate between proximity and distance, where the frame becomes as crucial as what is contained within it.

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[280] Brown, 96. Emphasis my own.

[281] Charles Hatfield formulates this expression in *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (2005). He writes that the tensions of the medium are in fact its great strength, writing, "comic art is composed of several kinds of tension, in which various ways of reading — various interpretative options and potentialities — must be played against each other. If this is so, then comics readers must call upon different reading strategies, or interpretative schema, than they would use in their reading of conventional written text." Hatfield, 36.

2. Panels and Pages

In comics, you make the best come alive by reading it, by experiencing it beat by beat, as you would playing music. So that's one way to aesthetically experience comics. Another way is to pull back and consider the composition all at once, as you would the façade of a building. You can look at the structure that could turn around in your mind and see all of its parts at once.

— Chris Ware[282]

In comics, the page layout (*la planche*) calls to mind basic architectural metaphors. As Angela Szczepaniak remarks, the page "reinforces the connectedness of panels, rather than their isolation as discrete units."[283] In reference to the link between comics and architecture, and its influence on the construction of *Maus*, Spiegelman states:

> So, at some point I was looking through a dictionary, and I sought 'comics,' comics means a narrative series of pictures; 'narrative,' narrative means a story; 'story,' story comes from the medieval Latin

[282] Chris Ware, quoted in Daniel K. Raeburn, *Chris Ware* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 25.

[283] Angela Szczepaniak, "Brick by Brick: Chris Ware's Architecture of the Page," in *The Rise and Reason of Comics and Graphic Literature*, ed. Joyce Goggin and Dan Hassler (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2010), 87.

> 'historia,' which is the medieval picture windows. Therefore, the word 'story' as narrative is the same as the word 'story' as in stories of a building. And McCay was the architect of comics. I mean, he was somebody who dealt with this amazing fantasy architecture in *Little Nemo*, and his pages have a kind of architectonic rigor that I found necessary to understand to compose the pages of *Maus*.[284]

In other words, meaning is not only produced at the microunit of the panel, but also at the site of the page. A careful reading of the composition of the pages in *Maus* provides important clues as to the strategies Spiegelman uses to generate a reading that is aware of both the parts and the whole of a single page.

The page is the basic unit that all comics artists must tackle as they figure out how to "break down"—divide and distribute—the narrative action. At the most basic level, the page layout organizes the order of things, engaging readers to follow sequences in a particular fashion. In his landmark theoretical text, *Comics & Sequential Art*, Will Eisner remarks that pages play a fundamental role in the composition and interpretation of narrative and that they "are the constant in comic book narration. Pages have to be dealt with immediately after the story is solidified."[285]

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[284] Silverblatt, 130. For example, Chris Wares' recent graphic novel, *Building Stories* (2012), plays with the doubled meaning of the word "stories," which can signify both tales and the levels of a building.

[285] Will Eisner, *Theory of Comics & Sequential Art* (Tamarac, FL: Poorhouse Press, 1985), 63.

While this is true, pages can also determine the story. To date, the most comprehensive and sustained discussion of the page is Benoît Peeter's typology of page layouts wherein he delineates some facets that are missing from Eisner's definition. Peeters distinguishes among four types of page layouts: the *conventional*, in which the panels are formatted uniformly; the *decorative*, where the visual design of the page overrides the narrative; the *rhetorical*, where the panels' organization on the page works in conjunction with the narrative; and the *productive*, where the panel layout actually motivates the narrative.[286] Thierry Groensteen makes significant use of this typology in his works, while also refining Peeter's concept of the rhetorical and decorative layouts.[287]

A page layout can be invisible in the sense that it remains constant throughout the narrative and is therefore almost imperceptible as a unit of meaning. Alternatively, it can be subject to formal experimentation and used to illustrate or challenge the narrative. For example, the page layout in Dave Gibbon and Alan Moore's revolutionary graphic novel *Watchmen* (1987) is remarkably uniform. Regarding this choice, Gibbons commented:

> If you mess around with the page layout, you make people aware of the design of the page. You make people aware that there is an artist at

[286] Benoît Peeters, *Case, planche, récit: Comment lire une bande dessinée* (Paris: Casterman, 1991), 36.

[287] Thierry Groensteen, *Système de la bande dessinée* (Paris: Presses universtaires de France, 1999), 108-112.

> work. If you make the page layout almost invisible or predictable, then you take the eye and the viewer within the picture and you make them far less aware that what they're looking at is an artifact. And that's the effect I wanted with *Watchmen*.[288]

Jacques Tardi's *C'était la guerre des tranchées* (2010) also benefits from a regular layout. Rarely deviating from its three-tiered structure, the tercets in this graphic novel produce a fluid, almost musical, reading. A change in the page layout in Tardi's work typically illustrates a significant event in the story and as such, aims to break "the spell" of reading. [289] While the page layout can remain insignificant, it can also be harnessed to call attention to both the intradiegetic content of the story as well as the extradiegetic process of reception.

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[288] "Illustrating *Watchmen*," *Watchmencomicmovie.com*, last modified October 23, 2008, http://www.watchmen comicmovie.com/102308-dave-gibbons-watchmen-comic-illustrator.php.

[289] Groensteen, *Système*, 74. Groensteen also quotes Jacques Samson on the subject of the page layout: "La rigueur, la systématicité et le caractère inusité de cette construction des planches mettent en évidence une double contrainte formelle appliquée à la représentation: l'*invariance du cadre* et le *non-morcellement des strips* (…). L'usage, habituel en BD, du cadre variable tend soit à comprimer, soit à dilater le rythme de la lecture, alors que la contrainte de l'invariance du cadre a un effet inverse; elle pondère la progression de la lecture en imposant une métrique rigoureuse et imperturbable — ici, le tercet — dont la répétition produit une sorte d'envoûtement…." Ibid., 74.



Figure 9. Moore and Gibbons, *Watchmen* 23.



Figure 10. Tardi, *C'était la guerre des tranchées* 24.

In contrast to works that deprioritize the page layout as a unit of meaning, the page layout in *Maus* is repeatedly foregrounded, thereby disrupting the reading process. The first significant disturbance occurs at the start of the first chapter of *Maus I*. The chapter begins with a six-panel page construction, one of the most common layouts in North American comics. The following page, however, deviates from an organized grid, featuring eight panels of varying size and shape. The shift from the first to second page is jarring. Eisner remarks that the first page of a comic (much like other art forms) functions as "a launching pad for narrative, and for most stories it establishes a frame of reference [...] it sets a 'climate.'"[290] In the case of *Maus*, this "frame of reference" is immediately shattered, gesturing toward a narrative that

[290] Eisner, *Theory of Comics & Sequential Art*, 62.

will be inconsistent and unpredictable. According to Groensteen, a break in the standardized format of the page layout changes principles of uniformity and as such can be disconcerting to the reader.[291]



Figure 11. Spiegelman, *Maus I* 11-12.

The change in page layout at the start of *Maus* calls attention to the construction of the second page. In this scene, Art is eager to begin interviewing his father, Vladek. Vladek climbs on the exercycle, expressing uncertainty that anyone would be interested in his story. On this page, the layout deconstructs Vladek's body across several panels: his head is in panel 4; his torso and arms in panel 5; and his leg and foot in panel 7. The eighth panel, accentuated by its circular shape, serves as the

[291] Groensteen, *Système*, 57-61.

exercycle wheel. As opposed to the first page where the meaning of the page is contained within the frames and the sequence, the superimposition of Vladek on this second page across multiple frames demands a reading that takes the page into account. The reader is forced out of the steady panel-to-panel rhythm of the first page and into the disarranged, slightly incomplete, and visually demanding reading of the second page.

In the fragmentation of Vladek's body, the page as a "hyperframe" is emphasized. This is common practice in Japanese comics (*manga*) where Jacqueline Berndt suggests that the "catwalk," or the tabular image, "provides the reader with an enjoyable uncertainty as to whether the single panel or the whole page is to be treated as the main visual frame."[292] However, the "catwalk" typically functions as a whole image unbroken by panels. Peeters gives an example of the tableau and its relationship to the panel and the page in the work of French artist Fred, in which an image of a large dog is divided into frames through which a sequence occurs. Peeters describes the effect as follows:

> Si l'on observe par exemple la page 25 de l'album *Simbabbad de Batbad*, on voit d'emblée qu'elle présente un jeu sur le tableau et le récit. Au premier coup d'œil, la planche semble s'offrir comme un espace homogène et simultané (recomposant l'image d'un gigantesque chien).

[292] Jacqueline Berndt, "Considering Manga Discourse: Location, Ambiguity, History" in *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*," ed. Mark W. MacWilliams (New York and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2008), 302.

> A y mieux regarder, il s'avère que la page obéit bel et bien à un modèle d'ordre séquentiel (reconstituant les déplacements de Philémon).[293]

Here, Peeters notes that two readings coexist, a close, sequential reading of the panels, and a more distant, holistic approach to the page.



Figure 12. Fred, *Simbabadd de Batbad* 25.

The tension that is generated between the panel and the page corresponds to a key theme in *Maus* scholarship: temporality. If it is true that the "architecture of the comics page" can be used to "challenge our habits of understanding the narrative line

[293] Peeters, *Case*, 48.

as pervasively linear and sequenced in time,"[294] then the interplay between the panels and the page on this second page of *Maus* demands a double reading which can incorporate linear time and atemporal space. While reading the frames in sequence produces a staccato rhythm, the floating frame featuring Vladek functions as a timeless moment, further emphasized by the image of the exercycle that is both motionless and mobile.

Scholars and critics are conflicted on the treatment of time in *Maus*. For James Young, past and present frequently collide and "occasionally even collapse into each other."[295] Dominick LaCapra agrees when he writes that the past intrudes into the present.[296] Like Young, Raffaella Baccolini and Federico Zanettin conceptualize the treatment of time as a "collapse": "the mixture of words and images is particularly conducive to the *collapsing* of past and present, [...] in *Maus*, the *collapsing* of past and present is rendered in various ways that involve the mixture of words and images, at times mostly language, and elsewhere predominantly images [...]."[297] According to these critics, *Maus* illustrates a collision of past and present where the two have reciprocal influences on one another.

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[294] Thomas Brederhoft, "Comics Architecture, Multidimensionality, and Time: Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 4 (2006): 885.

[295] Young, "The Holocaust as Vicarious Past," 682.

[296] Dominick Lacapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 155.

[297] Raffaella Baccolini and Federico Zanettin, "The Language of Trauma: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and its Translations," in *Comics in Translation*, ed. Federico Zanettin (New York: Routledge, 2015), 109-110.

On the other hand, critics who have paid close attention to the formal features of *Maus* argue that past and present are consistently placed in proximity, but never subsumed by one another. In her formulation of "postmemory," literary critic Marianne Hirsch asserts that the presence of three photographs in *Maus* disrupts the reading and signals a clear division between past and present.[298] Likewise, in her analysis of the insert *Prisoner on Hell Planet* — a brief strip located near the center of *Maus II* — Hilary Chute suggests that the past visibly erupts into the present, where the insert "enters into the story, it would seem, from the outside, registering confrontationally — and materially — the presence of the past."[299] For Chute, Hirsch, and others, the formal features of the medium highlight the dislocations, rather than confluence, of past and present.

On the subject of time, Spiegelman is clear: "[Comics are] about time being made manifest spatially, in that you've got all these different chunks of time – each box being a different moment in time – and you see them all at once. As a result, you're always [...] being made aware of different times inhabiting the same space."[300] Each component of the medium — panels, sequences, pages — indicate a different

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[298] James Young succinctly sums up Hirsch's argument that "*Maus* disrupts its own narrative and visual temporal flow by incorporating three actual photographs of the Spiegelman family, severing what she terms the 'testimonial chain' that links past and present." James Young, "The Holocaust as Vicarious Past: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and the Afterimages of History," *Critical Inquiry* 24 no. 3 (1998): 26.

[299] Hillary Chute, "The Shadow of a Past Time: History and Graphic Representation in *Maus*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 52 no. 2 (2006): 206-207.

[300] Ibid., 201-202.

temporal moment. Reading time in *Maus* therefore means considering temporal relationships that occur through the juxtaposition of the frame and the page among the other features of comics.

According to McGlothlin, the complex relationship between past and present functions as the central narrative axis in *Maus*:

> [The] comic images [...] rather than clearly marking off the past from present, contribute to a problem in which the present and past are intimately interconnected and difficult to separate from one another, for the past is revealed to be constitutive of the present, and the present makes demands on the ways in which the past is represented.[301]

Throughout this page, the verbal interactions between son and father show that Spiegelman is eliciting, shaping, and framing his father's testimony. Yet, in the fifth panel, Spiegelman is framed by Vladek's arms, one of which visibly bears the prisoner's camp tattoo, thus pictorially demonstrating how his father's past exerts pressure on him.[302] Past and present shape each other; father and son frame one another.

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[301] McGlothlin, "No Time Like the Present," 178.

[302] Michael Levine's article drew my attention to the image of Spiegelman framed by his father's arms: "Vladek voices this objection, his arms and the handlebars of the exercycle are depicted in such a way that they contain Art, while the picture once held aloft by the son is shown sitting in its former place on the table." Michael Levine, "Necessary Stains: Spiegelman's *Maus* and the Bleeding of History," *American Imago* 59, no. 3 (2002): 324.

The emphasis on the hyperframe through the superimposition of Vladek on the page occurs again toward the end of *Maus II*, effectively bookending the start and end of his testimony. Toward the end of the second to last chapter, "Saved," he is shown taking up two-thirds of the page. he faces his readers but looks downward as he responds to Art's questions. The page is composed of six panels in a 2 x 3 structure with a final panel in strip form running across the bottom of the page. Vladek takes up frames 3, 5, 6, and 7. He holds a photograph and several others have fallen on the ground and are scattered about. A drawn-photograph functions as an eighth panel superimposed over panels 6 and 7.



Figure 13. Spiegelman, *Maus II* 116.

On this page, Vladek is pictured in panels, or fragments, that compose a near-perfect unit. He is crossed through with "gutters," a term referring to the space between panel units. The gutter has been theorized to comprise the fundamental difference between comics and other media, such as film. According to Scott McCloud, gutters require readers to perform "closure," which is what permits a "continuous, unified reality."[303] In other words, the gutter is where readers, through their imagination, make sense of the panel transitions and the page as a whole. The gutter, according to Chute, "divides and proliferates time" serving as "interstices that are components of meaning for the reader to fill in [...]."[304] The gutter is the essential unit through which meaning can be made.

The gutters here represent the seams of Spiegelman's narrative reconstruction of his father, which the reader subsequently comes to "fill in." His reassembly of Vladek's body gestures toward the hand he plays in the narrative representation of his father and, by proxy, his father's story. Spiegelman's emphasis on the sutures of the narrative allows readers to become aware of the ways that Vladek's body is being made wholly recognizable out of the patchwork of panels. In this recomposition of Vladek, the artifice of the image is highlighted. As Vladek tells Art at the end of *Maus*, "all such things of the war, I tried to put out from my mind once and for all... *until you*

[303] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (Amherst, MA: Kitchen Sink Press, 1993), 67.

[304] Hillary Chute, "Comics & Media," *Critical Inquiry* 40, no. 3 (Spring 2014): 3, 4.

rebuild me all this from your questions."[305] Vladek's story is rebuilt, panel by panel, until it constitutes a whole and recognizable structure.

At stake in reading these unusual pages is the rapport between the single frame and the page, as well as the page in dialogue with other pages in the volume. To focus solely on the panel is to neglect its relationship to the page, and to examine the page alone is to miss the discrete elements through which it is constituted. By emphasizing this tension, Spiegelman gestures towards an alternative way of approaching testimony. Rather than pure historical contextualization (the broader frame) or pure close reading, an integration of both approaches is vital for understanding how testimony speaks to both past and present.

3. Words and Images

> *I'm* literally *giving a form to my father's words and narrative, and that form for me has to do with panel size, panel rhythms, and visual structures of the page.*
>
> — Art Spiegelman[306]

While the relationship of the panel and the page is key, meaning is also produced in the meeting of the verbal and pictorial at the site of the panel. Spiegelman exploits the design of the page to elicit a doubled reading which requires movement between proximity (the panel) and distance (the page), but also takes

[305] Spiegelman, *Maus II* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), 98. Emphasis my own.

[306] Gary Groth, *Comics Journal*, 1995. Original emphasis.

advantage of the two codes of signification, the verbal and pictorial, to generate a disruptive reading.

In a single panel, words and images can interact in several ways. Sometimes, images can illustrate the text, while at other times, words complete the meaning of a sequence. Words and images can also replicate one another. In more experimental comics, the verbal and pictorial can operate on separate tracks, where they each bear independent messages that work together to "convey an idea that neither could convey alone."[307] McCloud likens this relationship to a dance: "[w]ords and pictures are like partners in a dance and each one takes turns leading."[308] Yet, he also suggests that the meeting of the verbal and pictorial forms a third language.[309] Robin Varnum observes that there lies an inherent contradiction in these two descriptions. Do words and images create a language of their own, or can they be articulated independently from one another?[310] This has been a divisive issue, but today, most theorists and artists agree that the image is the primary signifier in comics.[311] In *Maus*, it would be difficult to claim that either the verbal or pictorial dominate; the two confront one another and form a third language that is closer to approximating reality than words

[307] Robin Varnum and Christina T. Gibbons, *The Language of Comics: Word and Image* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), xiv.

[308] McCloud, 156.

[309] Ibid., 161.

[310] Varnum and Gibbons, xiv.

[311] Proponents of the image as the primary signifier in comics include Thierry Groensteen, David Kunzle, and Hillary Chute.

or images alone.[312] Spiegelman himself suggested that verbal and pictorial work together to create "commix" which "approximate[s] a 'mental language' that is closer to actual human thought than either words or pictures alone."[313]

The frequent dislocation of verbal and visual signs throughout *Maus* implies that Spiegelman considers the tension between these two codes of signification a productive force that can be harnessed. For example, at the start of *Maus II*, the first standard panel shows Art and his wife Françoise.[314] The reader sees Françoise first since she is drawn on the left side of the panel. She asks Art, "what are you doing?" and he responds, "trying to figure out how to draw you…."[315] While the verbal enunciations suggest that Art cannot figure out how to draw his wife, the visual narrative intimates otherwise, given that the reader clearly *sees* Françoise pictured as a mouse.

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[312] Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 41.

[313] Young, "The Holocaust as Vicarious Past," 672.

[314] Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 11.

[315] Ibid., 11.



Figure 14. Spiegelman, *Maus II* 11.

A few pages later, Françoise and Art are pictured driving back from Vermont. Again, the verbal and visual confront one another in a unique way. Art is describing the tribulation of representing his father's experiences, and Francoise simply directs him to "keep it honest." In the next frame, he responds, "see what I mean… in real life you'd NEVER have let me talk this long without interrupting."[316] Given that Art's exclamation immediately follows Françoise's directive to be honest, this final frame calls attention to the artifice of representation. This suggests that, for Spiegelman, the only way to be "honest" is to emphasize the artificial character of any narrative. In this instance, and the one preceding, the verbal and visual signs problematize the "reality effect" of the text, where the verbal puts into question what is being seen. The reader is thus required to consider how both sets of signs interact within the frame. Hillary Chute describes this as a "double vision" where the comics narratives are structurally

[316] Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 14-16.

hybrid featuring "double (but nonsynthesized) narratives [which send out] double-coded narratives or semantics."[317] As these two scenes demonstrate, the codes can remain distinct while also challenging each other.



Figure 15. Spiegelman, *Maus II* 16.

To judge the primacy of the verbal or pictorial in comics, it is instructive to remove each set of signs to consider the meaning that is constructed in the absence of either sign. If the two sets of signs simply illustrate one another, then the meaning of the sequence will remain the same. In the example I have examined, the verbal and pictorial challenge one another, and this is the case throughout most of *Maus*.

[317] Chute writes that the pictorial "comprise[s] a separate narrative thread that moves forward in time in a different way than prose text, which also moves the reader forward in time. The medium of comics is cross-discursive because it is composed of verbal and visual narratives that do not simply blend together, creating a unified whole, but rather remain distinct." Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven, "Introduction: Graphic Narrative" *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 52, no. 4 (2006): 769.

However, a crucial sequence in the chapter "Time Flies," presents an extreme case of the disruptive oscillation between the verbal and the pictorial and what each can provoke in the process of reading comics.

In this sequence, Art visits his therapist, Pavel, and the two discuss Art's artistic predicament and Pavel's experiences as a Holocaust survivor. Art expresses anxiety that he is being inauthentic or inaccurate in representing his father's life. In this lengthy sequence, the verbal rather than the pictorial functions as the privileged site of meaning. Readers are inclined to focus on the discussion between the two men rather than the visual composition of the scene since the pictorial elements making up each panel are nearly identical. The speech balloons that extend past the panel borders — a technique that illustrates excess — also emphasize the exhaustive quality of the dialogue between Spiegelman and Pavel. Given the therapeutic context, with its long history of "talk therapy," it is logical that the voice is privileged. This sequence is marked, however, by one conspicuously silent panel, emphasized by the excess dialogue preceding it. In fact, this is the sole panel in *Maus* that has no verbal element.[318]

[318] To my knowledge, Young is the only critic to have pointed out that this is the only wordless panel in *Maus*. Young, "The Holocaust as Vicarious Past," 687.

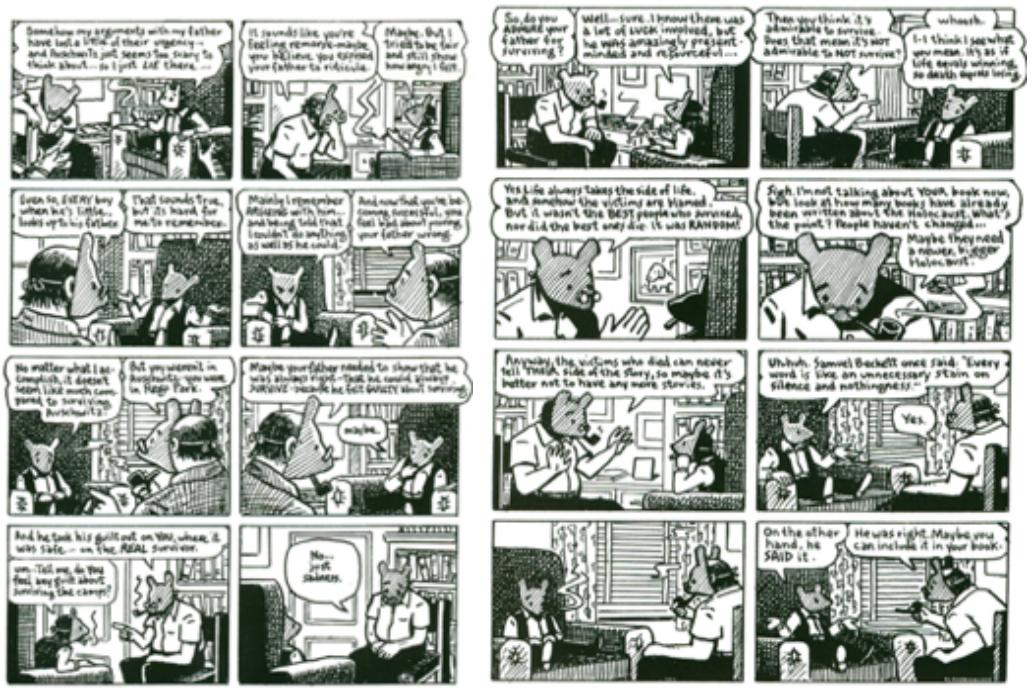


Figure 16. Spiegelman, *Maus II* 44-45.

In the sixth panel, Art quotes Beckett: "Uh-huh. Samuel Beckett once said: 'Every word is like an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness.'"[319] Both Levine and Young have read this silence as an attempt to represent the double bind of the "said" and "unsaid."[320] For Levine, this moment allows silence to "survive." Yet, neither critic considers how the formal absence of one code affects the reader's interpretation of the panel, sequence, and page.

Focusing on the temporality of the page, the absence of verbal enunciation momentarily pauses the narrative. As Groensteen points out, by repeating nearly identical frames — or "the serial" — "le dessinateur insiste sur un moment de l'action,

[319] Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 45.

[320] Levine, 324.

il en allonge la durée sur le mode, non plus du 'et puis…,' mais bien du 'et encore… et encore….'"[321] After the "serial" sequence, the silent panel emerges as timeless. Ann Miller suggests the same when she writes that "the temporality of silent panels is more indeterminate, particularly if they represent décor only, or characters who are immobile. A silent panel in the midst of panels containing dialogue can mark a significant pause in the action."[322] The absence of any verbal element in the frame creates a moment of reprieve where the brain can process the pure visual image.[323] Silence punctuates the panels around it and forces a shift in the rhythm of reading. In comics, time is conveyed through the sequence, the shape of the panel, but also through sound. McCloud suggests that beyond "closure," the illusion of time is created by words, which "introduce time by representing that which can only exist in time — sound."[324] The absence of any caption or verbal text leads the image to float free and suspends the linear time of the previous panels.

The "silent penultimate panel" (SPP) is a common trope in comics, particularly in newspaper strips. The SPP functions as a comedic pause for effect which further

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[321] Thierry Groensteen, *Bande dessinée et narration* (Paris: Presses universitaire de France, 2011), 160.

[322] Ann Miller, *Reading Bande Dessinée: Critical Approaches to French-Language Comic Strip* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 101.

[323] Groensteen points out that on arriving at a silent panel, there are several possibilities. Some readers might consider the panel less important and skim over it quickly. Others might intuit the panel to be more significant and spend more time on it. But regardless, the rhythm of reading shifts. Groensteen, *Système*, 157-158.

[324] McCloud, 95.

sets up the punch line that is located in the final panel.[325] Eisner argues that this kind of pause in speech adds more weight to the following panel: "the deliberate pause (timing) by the insertion of a wordless panel adds weight and power to the punch line."[326] Given the limited space offered to comic strips in newspapers (where this technique originated), the wordless panel allows for time to be stretched, instead of physically stretching the panel itself to imply lengthened time or a pause.[327] The silent panel in *Maus* adds a timeless dimension to the panel and grants readers "breathing space,"[328] while simultaneously setting up the "punchline" that is delivered in the final panel, when Art says, "On the other hand he SAID it."

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[325] Neil Cohn, *The Visual Language of Comics: Introduction to the Structure and Cognition of Sequential Images* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 61.

[326] Eisner, *Theory of Comics & Sequential* Art, 124.

[327] The shape and length of the panel has distinct effects on how time is "read." McCloud, 96-100.

[328] "Plus intéressant que la multiplication des bande dessinées entièrement dépourvues de texte m'apparaît le fait que la bande dessinée 'parlante' semble avoir découvert les vertus de l'instant silencieux, de la parole suspendue, de la pause. Ça parlait beaucoup dans les bandes dessinées d'autrefois, l'image y était sans cesse recouverte par les mots, tenue en laisse par le verbe. Les dessinateurs contemporains ne craignent plus de 'couper le son' quand il le faut, pour laisser respirer le dessin, s'exprimer une 'pensée-image' et naître des émotions visuelles. La bande dessinée a appris à faire silence." Groensteen, *Bande dessinée et narration*, 4.

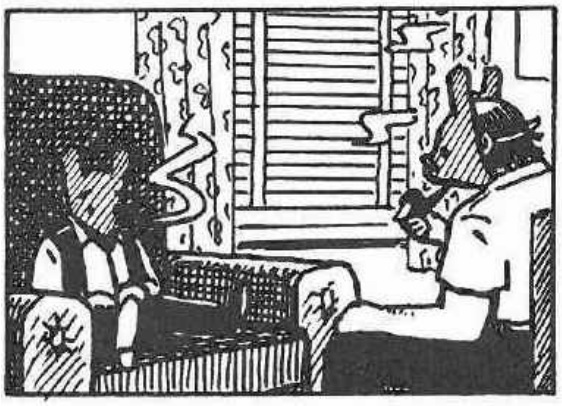


Figure 17. Spiegelman, *Maus II* 45.

The inversion of the said and unsaid that occurs in the final panel is reinforced, in part, by the smoke wafting upwards in this silent panel. Since there are no words to indicate time, the smoke in this particular panel not only adds to the sense of stillness (smoke is *silent*), but also denotes movement in space and time.[329] It is significant that the smoke here moves upwards, in direct contrast to the downward movement the reader's eye naturally makes when reading comics (or nearly anything, for that matter).[330] This destabilizing technique occurs several times in *Maus*. In one particularly fascinating sequence, an image of a train is shown moving from right to left, as opposed to left to right, setting up the change in perspective that will occur in

[329] The wafting smoke may remind readers of Eisner's rain frames; the panels Harvey Kurtzman whimsically dubbed "Eisenshpritz."[329] In these panels, rain is used in order to connote tremendous emotion. In contrast to smoke, however, rain has a sound bite.

[330] Richard Stomgren and Martin Norden note that readers have been conditioned to move their eyes left to right, therefore, in film, when actors move from right to left, it sets up "tensions and disharmony." Richard L. Stomgren and Martin F. Norden, *Movies: A Language in Light* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 49.

the following panels.[331] Similarly, the smoke in this interaction between Art and Pavel foreshadows the verbal inversion that occurs in the final panel.

The silence of this panel, and the manner in which it is overturned, speaks directly to suggestions that the Holocaust is "unspeakable." The notion of "unspeakability" has been pervasive in the field of Holocaust Studies.[332] Proponents of this idea ultimately suggest that there is no way to accurately convey the extreme experiences of the Holocaust. In this particular scene from *Maus*, Spiegelman undermines the notion of the unspeakable that has dominated Holocaust discourse. By highlighting the tensions between the verbal and visual, he suggests that it is not the relationship between speech and silence that is at stake, but rather, the relationship between speech and the image, and the way the two must consistently challenge each other.

[331] Spiegelman, *Maus I*, 34.

[332] For a discussion of the notion of "unspeakability," see Thomas Trezise "Unspeakable," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 39-66.

4. Perspective and Sequence

L'image de bande dessinée, dont le sens demeure souvent ouvert quand elle se présente isolée (et sans ancrage verbal), trouve sa vérité dans la séquence.

— Thierry Groensteen[333]

Beyond the tension between panel/page and verbal/pictorial, there is a third site of narrative pressure: the sequence. Most comics scholars and theorists consider the sequence the most central and unique unit in comics. Eisner called comics "the sequential art" where the arrangement of pictures or images "narrate[s] a story or dramatize an idea."[334] Similarly, McCloud highlights the juxtaposition of panels as a "deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer."[335] Groensteen coined the term *iconic solidarity* to refer to "les images qui, participant d'une suite, présentent la double caractéristique d'être séparées (cette précision pour écarter les images uniques enfermant en leur sein une profusion de motifs ou d'anecdotes) et d'être plastiquement et sémantiquement surdéterminées par le fait même de leur coexistence *in praesentia*."[336] Groensteen's definition emphasizes the serial characters of comics where similarity and difference

[333] Groensteen, *Système*, 134.

[334] Eisner, *Theory of Comics & Sequential Art*, 3.

[335] McCloud, 9.

[336] Groensteen, *Système*, 21.

are continually activated to produce meaning. For these three theorists, the sequence is what distinguishes comics as an art form.

The sequence produces meaning through the ordering of panels that rely on various kinds of transitions. McCloud defines six different kinds of transitions (moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect, non-sequitur) that create a sequence and in turn endow the images with "a single overriding identity, [forcing] the viewer to consider them as a whole."[337] Of course, the way transitions are perceived depends on which panel elements are prioritized. Broadly speaking, the sense of sequence occurs when the reader scans the panels to see what has *changed* from one to the next, in order to deduce the meaning of the transition. Groensteen names this the "principle of *différance*," where "[la] signification [de la bande dessinée] n'est construite en totalité qu'au terme de sa lecture."[338] Making meaning out of the sequence is thus predicated on mental reconstructions of what may be absent *or* present from one panel to the next.

One sequence in *Maus* is particularly instructive for considering the effects of transitions from one frame to the next: the first page of the chapter "Auschwitz: Time Flies." While this sequence (which also happens to be the length of a page) has received a significant amount of critical attention, the shift in perspective that occurs

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[337] McCloud, 70-73.

[338] Groensteen, *Système*, 131. He also recalls Pierre Masson's formulation that comics are a "stuttering art" that is founded on "une dialectique de la répétition et de la différence, chaque image s'enchaînant à la précédente par une reprise partielle de son contenu." Ibid., 135.

in the panel-to-panel transitions has been virtually ignored. In fact, this is the only sequence in *Maus* to utilize the "zoom shot," or what Groensteen dubs, "optical progressivity."[339]

Zooming out operates as a narrative strategy that in the very act of revealing information points to the limits of the frame that contains it.[340] For example, the opening sequence of *Watchmen* emphasizes the viewer's limited perspective by using the zoom shot. Beginning with a close up, the panels slowly zoom out and upward, to progressively reveal the broader context of the initial frame. Such an approach problematizes any sense of authority the reader may have over the image. *Watchmen* puts into question traditional models of authority and the page layout reflects this theme.

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[339] Groensteen writes: "Il existe encore un troisième type d'effet qui renforce, lui aussi, la perception de la successivité des cadres réguliers comme cadence […]: c'est la *progressivité*. Il faut d'ailleurs distinguer entre deux sortes de progressivité: d'un côté, la décomposition cinématique de l'action representée, de l'autre, l'équivalent du travelling optique, c'est-à-dire du zoom avant ou arrière, qui nous rapproche ou nous éloigne par degrés d'un motif donné." Groensteen, *Bande dessinée et narration*, 162.

[340] Horstkotte remarks that zooming only appears to be objective while constantly withholding or disguising crucial information from its readers. Silke Horstkotte, "Zooming In and Out: Panels, Frames, Sequences, and the Building of Graphic Storyworlds" in Daniel Stein and Jan-Noël Thon, eds., *From Comics Strips to Graphic Novels* (Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2013), 28.



Figure 18. Moore and Gibbons, *Watchmen* 1.

In the first panel of "Auschwitz: Time Flies," Art is pictured in a close-up, wearing a mouse mask while two flies buzz around him. He appears again in the second panel, but this time his hand is visible and he appears to be writing or drawing. Now, three flies buzz around him. In the third panel, Art is pictured in a medium shot at his desk. The fourth panel is nearly identical to the third, except Art is no longer pictured in a profile shot and instead is facing the audience, thus obscuring the mouse mask. In the final panel, which takes up half the page, the full image is revealed: Art is sitting at his desk (now the entire desk is visible) which is propped on a pile of

corpses. The reader now understands that the flies that were buzzing around Art in the previous panels were due to these dead bodies. In this sequence, the reader is gradually introduced to an enlarged perspective of the previous panel. This gradual zooming out is jarring in the transition to the final panel. The zoom in this sequence is otherwise fluid and produces a near seamless rhythm.



Figure 19. Spiegelman, *Maus II* 41.

In order to treat the complex question of temporality in this sequence, most critics have focused on the verbal aspects of the page, in part due to the confusing nature of Art's reflections. The dates and times listed seem to lack coherence; from Vladek and Art's work ("Vladek started working as a tinman in Auschwitz in the spring of 1944… I started working on this page at the very end of February 1987"); to birth and death ("In May 1987 Françoise and I are expecting a baby… Between May 16, 1944 and May 24, 1944 over 100,000 Hungarian Jews were gassed in Auschwitz…"); and finally, to depression ("In May 1968 my mother killed herself. (She left no note.) Lately I've been feeling depressed."). While the dates may seem arbitrary, McGlothlin notes that past and present seem to obey the logic of months and seasons, which function to remind the reader that "the story that she has been reading is not 'really' a fictive animal fable but a narrated experience that comes from the same order of 'reality' as the present time of Art's drawing table."[341] For McGlothlin, then, the sequence is coherent. Art's ruminations consolidate the visual aspects of the page, where past and present seem to blend together in the final panel. Given that maintaining coherence

[341] McGlothlin, 189. Critics do focus on temporality but separate the verbal enunciations (which deal primarily with time) and the visual enunciations (which show, in the final frame, a virtual collapse of past and present images). In terms of verbal enunciation, several strikingly different temporal episodes are described: "Vladek died of congestive heart failure on August 18, 1982… Francoise and I stayed with him in the Catskills back in August 1979," and further, "Vladek started working as a tinman in Auschwitz in the spring of 1944… I started working on this page at the very end of February 1987." Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 41.

does not appear to be Spiegelman's priority, it is worthwhile to consider the kinds of disjunctions that occur in the visual aspects of the page.

In this sequence, time does not fly forward, but stagnates. The number of panels on a page gives the impression of time.[342] For example, numerous panels suggest that time is compressed and moving forward at a rapid rate. In the large panel, or splash page, time is slowed. In the enlarged panel of this sequence, multiple temporal planes exist at once. With more space, more of the past can be shown. The tempo of the sequence slows here, and the reader can pause and absorb the diverse elements of the panel. While the four panels (and their respective gutters that suggest an "and then" movement) at the start of the sequence indicate temporal movement, the enlargement of the final panel, with its complex graphic depiction, suggests that time is *not really moving*. The zoom shot does not only produce shifts in terms of perspective, but upends the regular tempo of the sequence.

Zooming out and revealing this final frame is disruptive for the reader. In her analysis of key scenes in *Maus*, Lisa A. Costello determines that the variations in perspective keep "readers off balance, even uncomfortable."[343] Such movement calls attention to the limits of the frame and the information that was missing in the first place. In a final gesture to these limits, an invisible voice calls out: "Alright Mr.

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[342] Eisner writes that to convey time, "[o]nce established and set in sequence, the box or panel becomes the criterion by which to judge the illusion of time." Eisner, *Theory of Comics & Sequential Art*, 28.

[343] Lisa A. Costello, "History and Memory in a Dialogic of 'Performative Memorialization' in Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*," *The Journal of Midwest Modern Language Association* 39, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 31.

Spiegelman, we're ready to shoot!" Although a sense of intimacy is produced in the first panels of this sequence, in which Art is pictured as a "talking head," this exclamation in the final panel foregrounds the fact that readers are bearing witness to a staged scene. The zoom reveals that this sequence is taking place on a film set. Any kind of "seamless collision" of past and present in this scene is overturned. [344]

5. Conclusion

Mais la bande dessinée n'est pas seulement un art du fragment, de l'éparpillement, de la distribution; elle est aussi un art de la conjonction, de la répétition, de l'enchaînement.

— Thierry Groensteen[345]

In her discussion on ethnography and ethics, J.L. Jacobs formulates the term "double vision" to refer to the complex role of the ethnographer who is "both a witness to the crimes against humanity and an ethnographic observer in search of qualitative data."[346] Listening to testimony, as Jacobs suggests, is a complex task. The ethnographer

[344] Young suggests that "Spiegelman is both fascinated and repelled by the way he can actually assimilate these stories so seamlessly into the rest of his life." Young, "The Holocaust as Vicarious Past," 693.

[345] Groensteen, *Système*, 26.

[346] J.L. Jacobs, "Women, Genocide, and Memory: The Ethics of Feminist Ethnography in Holocaust Research," *Gender and Society* 18, no. 2 (2004): 227.

plays two roles, participant and observer, which produces a "double vision" that is a necessary feature of ethnographic work.[347]

Testimony is engrossing; it is upsetting, shocking, surprising. Yet, my reading of *Maus* suggests that by activating the formal features of the medium, Spiegelman seeks to disengage readers from reception that is informed by affect alone. By emphasizing both his role as son, and therefore his emotional investment in the story, *and* his role as artist constructing the story, Spiegelman disrupts traditional approaches to testimony, demanding that readers account for dissonance and interruption. The testimonial encounter, it seems, ought not be smooth.

At one point, Spiegelman remarked: "[t]elling a story as if I was the invisible hand that allowed Vladek to make a comic about Auschwitz would have been so fraudulent. […] Better to give the problematics of reconstructing that experience."[348] Indeed, it is impossible for Spiegelman to remain "objective," so he draws his subjectivity into the fabric of the text. *Maus* is not just a story, it is a story about telling stories. *Maus* is a testimony of the Holocaust, but is also, crucially, a testimony of testimony. Vladek is both literally assembled in the panels on the page by Spiegelman, and also figuratively reconstructed in the process of testimonial production. By focusing on the tensions between panel and page, verbal and pictorial, and perspective and

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[347] When Rosemary Hathaway argues that *Maus* is a postmodern ethnography, she suggests that the work does not fit squarely into the historiographic or testimonial model, and that it is through its self-reflexive meditations on textual production that is relates most closely to the genre of ethnography. Rosemary Hathaway, "Reading Art Spiegelman's *Maus* as Postmodern Ethnography," *Journal of Folklore Research* 48, no. 3 (2011).

[348] Art Spiegelman and Hillary Chute, *MetaMaus* (New York: Pantheon, 2011), 208.

sequence, I have shown that Spiegelman demands a reading which considers the text from close-up and from a distance. This distance implies that Vladek does not have to take on the characteristics that his readers wish upon him, but rather, is visibly designed by Spiegelman, and as a result, recuperates some degree of autonomy.

Throughout *Maus*, Spiegelman stages the testimonial encounter. In so doing, readers become aware of the frames that circumscribe testimony. *Maus*, like testimony, is created through a process of addition and subtraction. In order to bear witness to these dual movements, "double vision" gives the reader the necessary distance to account for and be aware of where representation succeeds, and where it fails.

CONCLUSION

Testimony is a sophisticated act. Although the crucial perspective Holocaust testimony grants historians and literary critics has been recognized, the tendency remains to privilege it as a tool that can provide information about the psychological state of survivors or that can be used as a key source for facts. While testimonial accounts undoubtedly provide a wealth of information about the Holocaust, this dissertation has focused on another fundamental aspect of testimony that has been frequently overlooked. I have argued that testimony is deeply grounded in its historical, social, and mediatic contexts. Testimony is an artifact that does not only provide access to the past, but can attune critical readers to the ways that fact and truth come into being.

For a long time, testimony was treated with suspicion. Since World War II, it has become pervasive; entering the public sphere as a respected, and even desired, method of communication. Testimony is frequently called on to disrupt the status quo and promote social and institutional change. The #MeToo movement, which pushes a social form of activism through the sheer volume of concise testimonies, has elevated global consciousness about sexual abuse and harassment. The nonprofit organization *The Moth* aims to face the challenges of globalization and immigration by advocating for diversity through the collection of true stories told live. Other arenas in which testimony is pivotal include reality television and social media, where it challenges the boundaries of the private and public and the ways that selfhood and community are imagined. Podcasts have even turned to testimony as a new way of telling stories. For

example, the enormously successful podcast *Serial* (2014-2015) reconstructs a murder investigation solely by collecting informal and formal testimonies.

The mass deployment of testimony in the public sphere has offered original and exciting ways of engaging with the world around us. Yet, this surge in testimonial production has also destabilized previously "stable" visions of identity, community, and history. The surfeit of testimonies today, which necessarily stand in contradiction to one another, can leave us wondering how so many diverging perspectives can exist, and more importantly, what to make of these different accounts. Testimony offers a platform for the everyperson, but the question of how to critically engage with this platform persists. The "post-fact" world in which we live today is profoundly intertwined with testimony, where the facts and truths that emerge from testimony can be dismissed as quickly as they are formulated.

This dissertation has aimed to shed light on the mechanics of testimony by examining works that reveal, rather than conceal, the seams and sutures of this communicative act. As critical readers and engaged citizens, it is our responsibility to tease out the entanglements that always already belong to the testimonial encounter, whether it is the encounter between the self and the other, the past and the present, or the immediate and the mediated.

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