

Jennifer Cazenave

An Archive of the Catastrophe: Recovering the Unused Footage of "Shoah"

1) PROPOSAL

I. Abstract and Proposal for the ACLS Fellowship

In 1973 Claude Lanzmann embarked on the making of his cinematographic opus, *Shoah* (1985), a title taken from the Hebrew word for "catastrophe," which also denotes the destruction of the European Jews. Over the course of twelve years, he gathered 220 hours of interviews and ultimately edited this material into a nine-and-a-half hour film that excluded archival images entirely. Following the release of *Shoah*, the unused footage was scattered between Lanzmann's basement in Paris and the LTC Film Laboratory in the suburb of Saint-Cloud. In 1996, upon recommendation of the historian and *Shoah* protagonist Raul Hilberg, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) purchased this archive and undertook the monumental project of restoring and digitizing it. While Hilberg (1995) never identified the contents of the excluded material in his letter of support to the USHMM, he justified this extraordinary acquisition by emphasizing the canonical status of *Shoah* as an unprecedented work of Holocaust representation.

Titled *An Archive of the Catastrophe: Recovering the Unused Footage of "Shoah,"* my proposed book undertakes the first comprehensive examination of the excluded material archived at the USHMM. This study deconstructs and reframes the paradigmatic status of Lanzmann's film that has shaped theoretical reflections on the limits of representation and informed decades of trauma studies (Felman and Laub 1991; Caruth 1995; LaCapra 1997; Rothberg 2000; Trezise 2013). In turn, my research demonstrates that the outtakes subsist as critical and significant texts in unearthing new meanings and mobilizations of *Shoah* and, more broadly, Holocaust testimony. Drawing on the unused footage, previously unexamined letters and institutional files, and interviews that I conducted with several of Lanzmann's prominent collaborators, my book (a) reconstructs the arc of the film's making, (b) maps obscured historiographical and representational legacies, including the filmed testimonies of the foundational 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, (c) recovers the largely excluded voices of the women survivors interviewed for the film, and

(d) unfolds alternative scenes of survival and remembrance that resist the momentary reliving of the past, or testimonial reenactment, exemplified and universalized by *Shoah*. My study, which is situated at the intersection of visual culture, literary theory, history, and archive and memory studies, will not only recast the legacy of Lanzmann's monumental film, but also reconfigure conventional modes of representing trauma in cinema. Accordingly, I seek funding from the American Council of Learned Societies to complete this important book manuscript.

II. Project Significance and Overview

Penned a quarter of a century after the release of the film, French critic Jean-Michel Frodon's assertion that "[t]here is a before and an after *Shoah*, both for History and individual and collective perception of the extermination event itself, and for the history of the art of cinema" (Frodon 2010, 10) encapsulates the enduring legacy of Lanzmann's opus as an epoch-making filmic and historiographical document on the Holocaust. Frodon here reiterates the critical posture of the finished film that has informed the scholarship around Lanzmann's monumental documentary since 1985. Two decades after their acquisition by the USHMM, the *Shoah* outtakes thus remain strikingly absent from the numerous monographs and articles on the film that continue to perpetuate its canonical status as both an archetype for the writing of the disaster in cinema and a discourse on the limits of representation (Hirsch 2003; Saxton 2007; Marty 2016).

My unprecedented study of the 220 hours of interviews amassed by Lanzmann will reposition the global legacy of *Shoah*, as well as redefine the fields of trauma theory and Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Extending well beyond a reconstruction of the film's making between 1973 and 1985, my research presents a major challenge to the common conceptualization of *Shoah* as a *sui generis* cinematic work. I illuminate the influence—notably on Lanzmann's selection of witnesses for the film—of the Eichmann trial in 1961, a critical marker in both humanities and social sciences scholarship (Douglas 2001; Wieviorka 2006; Rothberg 2009), which I here recast through the lens of the *Shoah* outtakes. In turn, I map the friction produced through the encounter between the finished film and the excluded material to reveal processes of remembrance that have yet to be integrated into theoretical discourses on

testimony and trauma. I thus confront the continued prevalence of testimonial reenactment established by *Shoah* as a dominant index of measure in determining the authenticity and depth of traumatic experience, investigating in particular how the excluded interviews unfold not the resurgence of but a resistance to this process of excavating the past. In retrieving alternative eyewitness accounts captured by the camera but ultimately left on the cutting room floor, my book not only offers a voice to these testimonies from the margins, but also addresses crucial questions raised by Lanzmann's film, including the absence of a gendered experience of the Holocaust (Hirsch and Spitzer 1993).

One narrative of the many examples of friction I recover through my analysis of the outtakes, and which also reflects the exclusion of gendered representations and perspectives in *Shoah*, is the unedited interview of Ada Lichtman, who worked as a seamstress inside the extermination camp of Sobibór. In front of Lanzmann's camera, she narrates her experience while mending dolls scattered over a coffee table. This *mise-en-scène* bears a striking similitude to Abraham Bomba's emblematic and oft-cited testimony included in *Shoah*. Filmed giving a haircut inside a barber shop in Tel Aviv and prompted by the filmmaker's questioning and insistence, he finally breaks down as he recounts cutting the hair of women from his hometown inside the gas chamber at Treblinka. In the unedited interview of Lichtman, Lanzmann attempts to provoke deep memory by prompting her to sing several times. While the cameraman anticipates this possible resurfacing of the traumatic past in effecting a close-up of her face when she stumbles over the words, Lichtman continuously reframes her testimonial performance, including through facial expressions of incredulity that punctuate the melody she sings. As she ultimately interrupts her own singing to comment on the lyrics, she concludes (speaking over Lanzmann at that very moment) "I realize when one *has to*, one cannot remember." Encapsulating Lichtman's hesitation in front of the camera and Lanzmann's failure to mold her process of bearing witness, this response calls our attention to the ever-unstated but always present choices that constitute the film as it stands, but are themselves both unseen and unvoiced.

My book project follows the tradition of genetic criticism exemplified by the scholarship of film historian Sylvie Lindeperg (2014). In reconstructing the making of Alain Resnais' renowned

documentary, *Night and Fog* (1955), her research frames broader questions about Holocaust historiography, traumatic memory, and filmic legacies. My study, which draws on extensive archival research, is structured as follows:

Introduction: The “Shoah” Archive first presents the acquisition of the outtakes by the USHMM in 1996 and the progression over two decades of an institutional project that shifted from mere preservation to the creation of a digital archive. It then establishes the wide theoretical, representational, and historiographical implications of reframing *Shoah* through the lens of this unused footage.

Chapter 1: *The Formation of a Paradigm* retraces the making of *Shoah* from 1973 to 1985, analyzing the evolution of Lanzmann’s method and vision, as well as offering a detailed account of its major phases—including the inaugural historical investigation, the first filmed interviews, and the five-and-a-half-year editing process—and of the profound contributions of the filmmaker’s collaborators.

Chapter 2: *Recasting 1961* redefines the legacy of the Eichmann trial by fleshing out its overlooked influence on the making of *Shoah*, notably attested in Lanzmann’s extensive probing of the controversial condemnation of Jewish leaders by Hannah Arendt (2006) in numerous interviews that he ultimately excluded from the finished film.

Chapter 3: *Feminine Traces* expands and enhances gendered readings of *Shoah* not only in analyzing the overlooked role and significance of the interpreters (all women), whose voices weave through both the finished film and the excluded material, but also in exposing the largely unedited testimonies of the ten women survivors interviewed by Lanzmann.

Chapter 4: *Trauma Reframed* investigates the remaining testimonial narratives left on the cutting room floor, including outtakes that have yet to be preserved and digitized, in order to challenge and reposition theoretical paradigms of testimony and trauma sustained by the finished film since its release in 1985.

Conclusion: The Afterlife of “Shoah” assesses the importance of further redefining the modes and materials for the writing of the disaster in our current global turn across the humanities and social sciences. It foregrounds in particular how universalisms produced by and through *Shoah*, including testimonial reenactment, are themselves shaped and inflected by their own migrations into other cultural

contexts of mass violence such as the representation of the Cambodian genocide in the cinema of Rithy Panh.

My book significantly expands my 2011 doctoral dissertation on the *Shoah* outtakes, a project completed when only half of the unused interviews had been digitized. Consequently, this previous work focused largely on the testimonies of women, while intimating the importance of reframing trauma theory through the archive of *Shoah*. As a recipient of the Charles H. Revson Foundation Fellowship at the USHMM, my archival research led to an interview with Claude Lanzmann and ultimately to the establishment of a sustained collaboration with the archivists, whom I assisted in prioritizing the preservation of the outstanding interviews. This research and relationship combined with the academic work on the unused footage of *Shoah* speak to my expertise and experience and to the feasibility of completing my book manuscript during the funding period. This semester, I will submit my book proposal to several university presses. I have met with the Humanities Director of the University of Minnesota Press, and she expressed enthusiastic interest in my project. Other presses situated at the intersection of film, media, literature, history, and cultural studies that I am considering are Stanford University, Duke University, and Columbia University. Beyond the submission of the book proposal, I will also have polished versions of both the introduction and chapter 3 by the end of the current semester. I will dedicate the next semester to completing chapter 1. While I have viewed and analyzed all but the remaining thirty hours of filmed testimonies, whose digitization will be completed by May 2017, I will need to return to the USHMM to finish consulting the original transcripts of the interviews annotated by Lanzmann during the editing phase, which will provide crucial insights into the process of composing *Shoah* and assist with the completion of the remaining chapters. The support of ACLS will enable me to complete my research at the USHMM over the summer and finish writing the book's remaining two chapters and conclusion during the 2017-2018 academic year.

2) SUPPORTING NON-TEXT MATERIALS



Figure 1: The unused footage of *Shoah* at the LTC Film Laboratory in Saint-Cloud in 1996.

Figure 2: A close-up of the *Shoah* film cans today archived at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.
(The Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection—USHMM/Yad Vashem)



Figure 3: Film and sound reels from the interview Claude Lanzmann conducted with the historian Raul Hilberg.
(The Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection—USHMM/Yad Vashem)



Figures 4 and 5: Claude Lanzmann interviews the survivor Ada Lichtman as she mends dolls in front of the camera. (The Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection—USHMM/Yad Vashem)

Q: Was haben sie gesungen?
 A: verschiedene Lieder.
 Q: Erinnern sie?
 A: bitte? Ich erinnere. Man hat gesungen: kein Vater, kein Mamen, kein Schwester, kein Brueder, alles alles ist schon weg...und wir werden auch nicht mehr sein. Alles ist nicht auf der Welt...Und so...und singt man....
 Q: Koennen sie singen? probieren Sie.
 A: Ich habe Angst...ich habe Angst, dass alle weg... weglaufen von hier...
 Q: Nein, probieren Sie.
 A: Also, man hat gesungen: Kein Vater, kein Mamen, kein Schwester, kein Brueder. Eben bin ich auf der Welt....Sehen sie, ich bin schon nicht...
 Q: Noch einmal.
 A: ...Allein bin ich auf der Welt...Oben schon ich sing nicht mehr...Nur das Lied...Ich will doch mehr nicht sein, noch in.... Oder man pflegte singen: Nur dort will ich gehen...in Welt will man gehen...und verschiedene andere...Ich hab schon gengerkt...im Moement wenn man muss, kann man sich nicht so erinnern.
 Q: Bitte.

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Q: What did you sing?
 A: Different songs.
 Q: Do you remember?
 A: Pardon? I remember. One sang: No father, no husband, no sister, no brother, all all have gone....and we will not be there any more. All are not in the world.. ...And so...and one sang...
 Q: Could you sing? Try.
 A: I am afraid...I am afraid everyone will run away...
 Q: No, try it.
 A: All right, one sang: No father, no husband, no sister, no brother. Alone I am in the world...ou see, I am not...
 Q: Again.
 A: Alone I am in the world. Up there I won't sing any more...Only the song...I don't want to be any more... Or one used to sing : I want to go only there...want to go into the world...And different ether songs...I realize, when one has to, one cannot remember.
 Q: Please.

FROM THE HOLDINGS OF THE U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORI

Figures 6 and 7: Claude Lanzmann prompting Ada Lichtman to sing several times in German during the interview. (Original and Translation of the Ada Lichtman Interview Transcript. The Claude Lanzmann Shoah Collection—USHMM/Yad Vashem)

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4) PUBLICATIONS

Accepted for Publication

“Earth as Archive: Reframing Memory and Mourning in Rithy Panh’s *The Missing Picture*” (article accepted to *Cinema Journal*).

Work in Progress

Archiving Catastrophe: The Unused Footage of “Shoah” (book manuscript).

“Composing with Impossibles: The Jewish Council, the ‘Kastner Train,’ and the Making of *Shoah*” (chapter under review for *The Invention of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann’s “Shoah” in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Erin McGlothlin, Brad Prager, and Markus Zisselsberger).

Book Chapters

2017 “*Dos Poylishe Yidntum: Testimony and Commemoration in the Aftermath of the Catastrophe*” (with Judith Lindenberg) in *Yiddish in the Twentieth Century in its European Context*, eds. Marion Aprot and Jan Schwarz (Düsseldorf: Düsseldorf University Press), in press. Print.

2016 “Critique et image. La naissance de *Positif* (1952-1959)” in *Discours critique et médium (XXe-XXIe siècles)*, ed. Ivanne Riolland (Paris: CNRS Éditions), pp 51-66. Print.

2014 “Retour sur *Kapo: histoire d’une abjection*” in *Critique et Violence*, ed. Éric Marty (Paris: Les Éditions Hermann), pp. 51-66. Print.

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Reviews

2012 “Histoire d’un cinéma qui nous regarde,” a review of Sylvie Rollet’s *Une éthique du regard: le cinéma face à la Catastrophe, d’Alain Resnais à Rithy Pahn* (Les Éditions Hermann), nonfiction.fr, March 22. Web.

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