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## **The challenge of film considered as historical research: Claude Lanzmann's approach to the Shoah - constructing history in dialectical time-images**

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the challenge of  
film considered as

**historical  
research**

*Claude Lanzmann's Approach  
to the Shoah: Constructing History  
in Dialectical Time-Images*

OLAF BERG

You cannot see it, but what you cannot see, you have to show in images.

Claude Lanzmann<sup>1</sup>

It is time to end [the] defensive posture and to adopt a different way of looking at  
historical films, to suggest that such works have already been doing history.

Robert Rosenstone<sup>2</sup>

Considering film as *historical research* entails thinking of it not just as a historical *source* or a kind of popularised *presentation* of history, but as a tool of production by which unique historical insights can be gained. Though film is widely regarded as a legitimate source material of historical scholarship, it is seldom employed as such. Siegfried Kracauer's investigation of the popular rise of Nazism in German society<sup>3</sup> and Marc Ferro's study of Russian revolutionary history are among the pioneering works in this field.<sup>4</sup> The presentation of history in film is at the very least discussed among historians as a serious option to aid the dissemination of historical insights into the classroom and the larger public realm. Increasing numbers of historical journals have started providing space for film reviews. Renowned historians like Robert Rosenstone and Natalie Zemon Davis have also participated in the production of historical films and published their reflections on the experience of this involvement.<sup>5</sup> But, to think of film as a medium of historical research still seems to be a very odd idea for the overwhelming majority of historians.

Robert Rosenstone's claim, cited above, which urges historians to end defensive postures and to take historical films as works that 'have already been doing history'<sup>6</sup> may seem less

provocative in the context of cultural studies than in history departments. Rosenstone suggests that we should 'derive theory from practice by analyzing the development of how the past has been and is written'<sup>7</sup> in the historical film. The challenging character of this approach may explain why Rosenstone in part seems to shy away from his own claim. Although he defends filmmakers like Oliver Stone as historians of a new kind, when referring to several movies about the *Shoah* Rosenstone states, 'like *all* historical films, this group is not capable of explaining long-running national, European, or world geopolitical developments' (my emphasis). He limits motion pictures to the experience of an 'important experiential quality ... by giving us the illusion that, for a little while, we witness, or even live, the problems, angers, fears, joys, and pains of other lives set in other times'.<sup>8</sup> In this essay I wish to take up Rosenstone's suggestion that we might consider some filmmakers as historians and push it a little further by exploring Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* as a model for the filmic inquiry into history.

#### — THE PROBLEMATIC OF THE SHOAH-REPRESENTATION

The *Shoah* is, in many regards, a very special subject matter for historians. The possibility or impossibility of the adequate representation of the *Shoah*, whether in text or in film, is a complex and multidimensional discussion. One aspect of this discussion is the implied normalisation of the unspeakable horrors and the vast magnitude of the event produced by showing it in dramatised form. Any intention to stage a re-enactment of the last moment in the gas chambers of Auschwitz would be a disgusting belittlement of the *Shoah*. And any dramatisation of the fate that befell a single person would run the risk of betraying the destiny of the vast majority of the victims. There is no depiction—whether documentary or fictional—in which you can watch the *Shoah* unfold as a simple event.

'The problem of representing the Holocaust can also be seen as the core problem of history', suggests Rosenstone. In our representations, we inevitably alter the past and impose our meanings upon events and moments in such a manner that those who lived through them might have great difficulty in recognising them. Therefore, Rosenstone concludes, '[i]n this the Holocaust is like any other historical problem'.<sup>9</sup> Although I agree that we generally cannot represent the past 'as it really was', there is still something special in the problem of representing the *Shoah*. Let me outline three interlinked reasons for this.

First, there is no adequate concept to represent the *Shoah*. Any concept intended to approximate or identify with the *Shoah* is always already defeated by Auschwitz because life itself has become guilty and any conceptual identity with the *Shoah* shameful. Theodor W. Adorno points to this specific problem when he raises the question of 'the drastic guilt of he who was spared' because 'his mere survival calls for the coldness, the basic principle of bourgeois

subjectivity, without which there could have been no Auschwitz'.<sup>10</sup> In an age determined by the guilt of mere survival, he suggests, an altogether new conception of truth is needed that is independent of *adaequatio* or the conceptual appropriation of reality. Thus thought, according to Adorno, when it refuses to respond to the non-conceptual, lapses into complicity: 'If thought is not measured by the extremity that eludes the concept, it is from the outset in the nature of the musical accompaniment with which the SS liked to drown out the screams of its victims'.<sup>11</sup> Every serious investigation of the *Shoah* would have to deal with this gap between the undeniable fact of Auschwitz and the impossibility of capturing it with a transcendental concept adequate for the facts. Therefore the *Shoah* becomes a distorting non-place that is beyond any positive representation. And it is a special challenge to treat the *Shoah* in film because films rely on images, and images need to show something that is positively perceptible.

Second, the *Shoah* is fractious to any linear account of history. Conventional history takes it to be its central task to find, select and arrange facts in order to create an intelligible narrative that explains why a particular prior cause leads to a specific result. This kind of history, understood as the representation of past facts within a narrative framework, implicitly grants intelligibility to the represented. However, any attempt to make the *Shoah* fully intelligible is suspect, as it seeks to confer legitimacy on the gruesome event by granting it a coherent meaning. Again, it is indeed a difficult task to grasp the relation between traceable facts that connect past events to the *Shoah* without conceding to it an intelligible meaning. However, as I will demonstrate by analysing Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*, the complexity of motion pictures may turn out to be an advantage in this context.

Third, unlike other historical events, there is no visual object emblematic of the *Shoah* because the absence of visibility is thematic to the event itself. At the centre of the *Shoah* is not only the annihilation of all Jews but also the liquidation of all evidence of that crime.<sup>12</sup> Every testimony of the extinction is the exception to the rule, the witness being only the one who escaped his or her fate. Therefore, the absence of testimony from those who did not escape and the invisibility of the crime is necessarily an integral aspect of any representation of the *Shoah*. How can the invisible be shown by audio-visual means? Any film dealing with the *Shoah* must find at least an implicit answer to this question.

#### ANALYSING LANZMANN'S SHOAH AS A MODEL OF FILMIC HISTORY

An oft-repeated objection to film as an apposite medium for the transmission of history is its capacity to produce emotions. However, historians like Rosenstone insist on acknowledging the contribution to historical insight and understanding that films can provide through their experiential qualities. I wish to expand on this observation and demonstrate that emotional quality is a vital feature of the specific cognitive mode that Lanzmann's film

promotes. Thus, the allegedly emotional filmic treatment of history is not arbitrary to the history it constructs. Moreover, if well employed, it is not a failing but a strength of film.

This specific relation between emotion and cognition is precisely why I would like to analyse *Shoah* as a *model* of filmic investigation of history, and not merely as an *example*. As Adorno claimed in his *Negative Dialectics*, while an example is arbitrary to the content it explains, a model irradiates a general issue by its own specificity: 'A model covers the specific, and more than the specific, without letting it evaporate in its more general super-concept.'<sup>13</sup> I do not regard *Shoah* as an illustration of historical cognition, but as a contribution to a debate on history. I survey this film in terms of its strategies of presentation and, hence, the construction of history. My aim is to derive categories for academic historical research from the particular answers that the film gives to the specific question of representing the *Shoah* in film.

The way I treat Lanzmann's film draws on some assumptions that are not exactly commonsense among historians. Let me discuss just two of them briefly.

First, I assume that the form and medium of articulation of historical insights matter in terms of a record of past events but are also constitutive of the historical insight itself. For this assumption I rely on the concept of metahistory, as it has been developed by Hayden White. His analysis of the nineteenth-century European historical discourses reveals that the underlying influences of the prevalent writing styles and the choice of narrative tropes were indeed consequential in its construction. If this is true for written texts, it should be true for films as well. To address the specific problem of the representation of history in film, White coined the word 'historiophoty' to distinguish it from written historiography.<sup>14</sup>

Second, I presume that history is not about some truth hidden in historic facts, but about a *relation* we establish with the past events based on present-day material and immaterial artefacts. Therefore it is 'more appropriate to talk about the referentiality than the reference', as Hans-Jürgen Goertz states in his investigation of the theory of historical referentiality.<sup>15</sup> 'The idea of the truth being rediscovered in the evidence is a nineteenth-century modernist conception and it has no place in contemporary writing about the past', concludes Alun Munslow in his examination of history in a postmodern age.<sup>16</sup> This does not entail the utter loss of any criteria for the construction of history. Regarding the *Shoah*, Robert Eaglestone has consistently pointed out that the notion of history as a literary genre can be helpful, even to defend the historiography of the Shoah against David Irving's 'scientific' Holocaust denial intentions.<sup>17</sup>

Drawing on these assumptions it is feasible to ask the question: how does the consideration of film as historical research work? I suggest that a possible answer to that question is Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*. However, before I add more substance to my argument, it is necessary to provide the reader with a brief overview of the plot.

— PLOT SUMMARY OF SHOAH

Claude Lanzmann's nine-and-a-half hour film *Shoah* (1986) relates the story of the systematic annihilation of the European Jews by the German Nazis. Lanzmann started working on the film in 1974, and it took him twelve years to complete the final version. The movie was originally divided into two parts for theatre exhibition and later shown in a four-part version on television and distributed on DVD. As a radical departure from convention, Lanzmann refuses to use historic footage as illustration. In long travelling shots of trains, railways and highways, he shows the present-day images of the routes that millions of victims of the *Shoah* were once forced to take to the extermination camps. In extended pans the camera feels its way across the landscapes where European Jews were once murdered in their millions. Lanzmann talks with survivors, perpetrators and bystanders and, in the process, produces a kind of filmic oral history.

The film is structured around a chronological account of the German extermination program. It begins in Chelmno with Simon Srebnik who survived the annihilation camp of Chelmno. Lanzmann convinced Srebnik to return to this place and to tell the story of Chelmno, where the extermination machinery was still in its initial phases and where the Nazis killed their victims while driving them in trucks which rerouted their exhaust into their interiors. Srebnik's eyewitness account is followed by many more testimonies, among them one by Abraham Bomba, who survived the camp at Treblinka while working as a barber for the Germans, as well as that of Filip Müller, a survivor of the *Sonderkommando* at Auschwitz who had to operate the crematorium at the camp. Jan Karski, a liaison officer for the exiled Polish government, describes, apparently still under shock, what he saw when he visited the Warsaw Ghetto undercover with the aim of writing a report that would convince the allied forces to intervene in favour of the Jews.

These testimonies of the *Shoah* are set in contrast to conversations with bystanders who had lived next to the extermination camps, people who worked on the railroads and thus participated in the crime, as well as with the interviews Lanzmann intended to get from German perpetrators. Most of the Nazi perpetrators refused to be interviewed or would only be filmed with hidden cameras. In the film, Lanzmann does not confront them directly with his opinions but insists they recount their version of what had happened and what their commitment to the *Shoah* was. By doing so he appears to place trust in the critical capability of viewers to build their own opinion.

— THE INSCRIPTION OF HISTORY IN FILM

To grasp the multiplicity of forms in which history appears in film, it is important to remember the above-mentioned definition of history as a relation to the past and to understand that

film is more than merely a material series of images, for these images need to be projected, viewed and recognised as a film. In other words, film is a dynamic structure that mediates the social relation between those who are filming, that which is being filmed and those who are viewing the film. Like history, film exists only as a theoretically and socially constituted entity. Hence, I believe the historic relation can be inscribed into the filmic relation.

How is history inscribed in Lanzmann's film? To answer this question, let me take a fifteen-minute sequence that occurs shortly after the beginning of the second film. We are inside a barbershop; the camera looks into the mirrors at the wall that reflect the room. Some hairdressers are seen attending to their clients. A text insert tells us that the barber at the centre of the image on the screen is Abraham Bomba and that we are in Holon, Israel. Although no word has been spoken up until this point, already a lot of history has been made available through the images: The clothing of the workers and clients, the decoration in the room, as well as the grain and colour of the images induce a nostalgic impression of the 1970s. These images are themselves artefacts of a long receded past, and as one looks at the images in 2007 it is clear that Bomba may not be alive today.

I call such inscription of history that occurs due to the lag between registration and perception of a sound and/or image the *archive-mode*. Like any material we find in archives, the relation with the past established by the archive-mode depends on the permanence in time of the film-material and is transformed by the changing modes of perception and comprehension of the film itself. The archive-mode points to the relation between the event of filming and the event of viewing. This does not, however, mean that time is locked in the archive. On the contrary, what we see today is different from what was seen at the time the image was filmed. The observation above regarding the grain of the image and the outdated and quaint seventies' decoration and fashion in the barber shop point towards this quality and may not have been seen as such at the time the scene was filmed.

As mentioned earlier, Lanzmann rejects this very mode of historical inscription to construct a history of the *Shoah* in film. Instead, he appears to operate in the present. He directs his voice off camera to Bomba and asks him to explain how he came to be selected to work as a barber in Treblinka. The film captures Bomba's testimony of what had happened but it is more than just Bomba's words which inform us; we see his face as well, his movements, his voice, sometimes trembling, sometimes firm. Here, it is not the material film that persists in time, but the person registered by the camera. People as well as landscapes or buildings bear marks of time that can be captured in film. These marks become readable at the moment of projection. I call this ability to capture the relation of the filmed object to the past the *trace-mode*. Bomba's relation to his own past is expressed through his gestures and his voice, the audible sounds and the eloquent silences are captured like traces. The theme of this mode is the afterlife of the past or the present marked by its past.

The special importance of the trace-mode to Lanzmann's history of the *Shoah* becomes palpable in this sequence. Because he was a professional barber, the Nazis had chosen Bomba to cut the hair of the victims just before their execution in the gas chambers. When asked about his feelings the first time he saw women entering the gas chamber, Bomba avoids the question by talking about the details of the procedure. On Lanzmann's insistence, he starts describing a situation when the wife and sister of one of his fellow barbers happened to enter the gas chamber, and then he suddenly stops—there are no words to describe the feelings, the emotional state of the barbers and those women. The camera witnesses the painful return of Bomba to his past, the lack of an adequate language for the *Shoah*. Bomba wishes to end the conversation but Lanzmann insists on continuing. After almost four long minutes of silence, Bomba starts again and states briefly that his colleague could not manage to do more than simply try to stay a second longer with his beloved. The long moment of silence that precedes the answer appears to have been much closer to the event than any description of it in words. It is thus the silence of the trace-mode that makes it possible to 'show' without reproduction, to present without representation.

The whole sequence seems at first glance not unlike a documentary filmed at Bomba's everyday place of work. But, in fact, the entire setting is staged. At the time of the interview Bomba had retired, and prior to that he had run a barber shop in New York.<sup>18</sup> The classical division of documentary and fiction does not work anymore. When Lanzmann makes Bomba repeat his movements while cutting the hair of the victims in Treblinka, he produces at first glance an image that emulates the past event. The decision to film Bomba's testimony in a barbershop establishes a historical relation due to the constellation it produces. The inscription of history derives from a vital piece of information about the past prior to the event of filming. This strategy is most often employed in historical fiction films which re-enact certain events. I call the production of sounds and/or images that seek to imitate a viewpoint situated in the past the *emulation-mode*.

However, Lanzmann rejects the re-enactment of the *Shoah* as well as the archive-mode and, in fact, the scene involving Bomba is only an abstract emulation of a single gesture. It is not at all the filmmaker's intent to reproduce the hair-cutting situation in Treblinka. The light flooded barbershop in Holun, with mirrors on the walls and the clients sitting in padded chairs, is certainly not a replica of the chamber with bare walls and wooden benches, crowded with naked women seconds before their murder.<sup>19</sup> Lanzmann creates sounds and images that are rather abstract and evocative of the past event, instead of reproductions of the event itself. The historical relation itself becomes topical and audible as well as visible. I call this production of sound and/or image the *connotation-mode*. It is, to my mind, the most self-reflexive mode of inscription.



Before I proceed further with inquiring into the filmic strategies of constructing history, it is important to sound a note of caution about a possible misunderstanding. The inscription of history into film is altogether different from the construction of history in film. The four modes of inscription show how the historical relations are immanent to the moving images, while the construction of history is the way in which a new relation to the past is established by a specific composition of images.

With this differentiation in mind, I would like to shed some light on how Lanzmann constructs a history of the *Shoah* through his images. In his film he clearly privileges the trace-mode, though he also uses the connotation-mode while staging interviews. How does Lanzmann construct his history from these particular images?

The semiotic approach,<sup>20</sup> which entails the analysis of film as a syntactic system of signs, to be read and interpreted as text, reaches its limits rather quickly and appears to fall short of grasping the historical relation at stake in the filmic images. The trace-image relates to the past not as a signifier arbitrary to the signified, as it would be typical for a sign. A look at the repeatedly employed images of landscapes in *Shoah* illustrates this vividly: images of the former places of extinction, now overrun with grass and trees; landscape shots that are confronted with the bodily presence of survivors within the frames or intercuts with close-ups of their faces which are 'readable' as landscapes as well. The turf of Treblinka, the scarred face of Abraham Bomba, these do not function as signs for the *Shoah*. The trace is not a sign which is arbitrary to the artefact; it is in fact the embodiment of an inner relation to the past. Moreover, the trace is not itself the subject matter. Even though the speechlessness of Bomba is governed by the events of the *Shoah*, the *Shoah* is not the silence itself, nor is Bomba's life an intelligible continuation of the *Shoah*.

The trace-mode of images stimulates the imagination. But the images created—at least in my mind—are neither a representation nor a replication of the *Shoah*. The film refuses to generate any image that fulfils Leopold von Ranke's famous claim 'to show what really happened', or less ambitiously, to show how it might have happened. I do not have a clear image of the gas chambers of Treblinka crowded with victims in front of my eyes, but perhaps an idea of the impossibility of imagining adequately what has happened in the past. There exists forever a gap between Bomba's experience and what he can describe through words. In the film, this gap—the relation between Bomba and the *Shoah*—becomes visible. And such a relation with the past is indeed what history is. Lanzmann constructs history out of images, where not only the past but history itself is inscribed as a trace; not a positive sound and/or image of representation but one constructed 'negatively' through the absence of such sound and/or image.

Lanzmann supports the effect of the trace-mode of the image in two ways: by not showing the archival footage, and by using the connotation-mode, as in the barber's shop, which is so consciously unlike a remodelled gas chamber. The connotation-mode is similar to the trace-mode, in that it is not arbitrary to the artefact. By showing the individual, banal and innocuous activity of cutting someone's hair, it intensifies the contrast to the monstrous, inexpressible situation in Treblinka. The connotation-image is deduced from the gap, which becomes visible in the trace-image. It is derived from the relation; it is not the relation itself. And this 'impossible' irreversible relation, which can never be rendered as stable and intelligible, becomes visible in combination with the trace-image.

Lanzmann states that Bomba *embodies* his own history by standing in the barber's shop rather than sitting in an armchair and telling his story.<sup>21</sup> I would like to conceptualise this notion of embodiment further. Such embodiment is neither a symbol nor a repetition. It generates a tension in which the past and the present overlap, but without becoming identical or one. It is precisely this tension that makes the incommensurable gap between the past and the present visible. Embodiment is the central element of the historical construction in Lanzmann's film. Embodiment is at the same time a temporal and a spatial form: temporal, as it links the present of the filming with the past that is invoked; spatial, as the very process of invoking the past occurs only because of its corporeal presence in a specific place. As in ritual, the body in trance can become a medium to connect with ancestors; in Lanzmann's film the body becomes a medium of history, a medium within the medium of film. *Shoah* does not open up a gaze into the past but into our relation with the past, into the gap, which is not reconciled. In this way Lanzmann can rightly say: 'You cannot see it, but what you cannot see you have to show in images.'<sup>22</sup>

#### — EMBODIMENT IN DIALECTICAL TIME-IMAGES

My analysis has shown that on the level of the specific content of *Shoah* the historical relation which is constituted by the film cannot be explicated through a semiological approach. By employing my categorisation of four modes of inscription of history into film, it is possible to describe the function of images in Lanzmann's filmic investigation into history more accurately and to determine embodiment as a basic concept within his survey of the *Shoah*. To what extent can this result be generalised for the concept of film considered as historical research? Is the concept of embodiment specific to the communication of history in film? To answer this question, it is useful to explore Gilles Deleuze's philosophical approach to film and to link it up with the concept of the dialectical image that Walter Benjamin outlines in his philosophy of history.<sup>23</sup>

A central concern of Deleuze during the period in which he wrote his books on cinema<sup>24</sup> was the relation between 'the visible and the sayable', as Mirjam Schaub points out in the

subtitle of her monograph on Deleuze.<sup>25</sup> The visible and the sayable, Schaub argues with Deleuze, do function in different systems guided by different rules. In contrast to the sayable, the visible does not require successive actualisation. On a formal level, Deleuze argues that Christian Metz's semiology of film is circular in its reasoning: a filmic syntax equates images with propositions, but this is achieved by subjugating images to a syntagmatic paradigm.<sup>26</sup> Instead, Deleuze proposes that while the linguistic sign as concretion of the sayable refers to an external entity, the image as the concretion of the visible includes all meaning in itself, but it never reveals its meaning at once, because its meaning is always complicated, always in a state of emergency.

Benjamin's philosophy of history relies on this quality of the image which includes complex meanings and reveals only particular meanings at a specific time. 'The true image of the past flits by ... For it is an irretrievable image of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image.'<sup>27</sup> Benjamin considered such an image a 'dialectical image'. He aims his critique against the additive procedure of Historicism to fill the homogeneous and empty time with a mass of data.<sup>28</sup> The dialectical image, in contrast, brings the movement to a standstill and, therefore, 'is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation'.<sup>29</sup> It is thus a concept of a luminous historical relation that opens the possibility of changing the present by revealing new meanings from the remains of the past.

Benjamin's concept of history is of special interest in the context of the problem of representation raised by the *Shoah*. Traditional history relates to the past through a mode of representation that implies a fixation with the represented past events and an idea of the present as inevitably and irrevocably shaped by these events. The dialectical image, in contrast, establishes a relation to the past events as a constellation that rejects such fixation, enabling the gap between the irretrievable past events and the present manifestation of its remaining forces to be addressed. Benjamin's above cited notion of history as an irretrievable flitting-by image and his emphasis on the importance that the present 'recognize itself as intended in that image',<sup>30</sup> refers to a process usually identified as emotional: in a specific constellation of the present, the image emerges, attracts us and evokes a feeling. The first step in our recognition of ourselves as 'intended' in the image that flits by is *not* a rational decoding, but an instantaneous intuition. This emotion is not the illusion of living through past experiences to which Rosenstone refers, but a crucial aspect of filmic cognition as well as Benjamin's concept of history.

Although Benjamin was also concerned with cinema, he developed his concept of the dialectical image in the context of his theory of linguistic images in literature, and never applied it systematically to film. To conceptualise a dialectical image in film it is helpful to return to Deleuze. He distinguishes between two main forms of representation of time in

film: the movement-image and the time-image. The movement-image is marked by rational cuts that establish a sensory-motor bond, that is, a linear relation between time and space, between action and reaction. In this context, time is represented indirectly as a measure of movement. This is also true of Eisenstein's concept of dialectical montage. But even in the movement-image 'the whole is no more an addition than time is a succession of presents'.<sup>31</sup> Hence, there is an intrinsic resistance in film to a linear account of history.

While the movement-image is best represented by the great Hollywood productions, the time-image emerged after World War II in the devastated landscapes of Europe—in Italian Neo-Realism, the French Nouvelle Vague, the New German Cinema—and in the Third World Cinema.<sup>32</sup> The time-image breaks with the idea of a sensory-motor link and lets different times coexist. In a way, the image is doubled; it becomes an irreducible unit of an actual image and its own virtual image. Actual and virtual images are different but indistinguishable.

Bomba's embodiment of his own history can be recognised as such a time-image. Moreover, in a significant part of the sequence the camera captures Bomba in the mirror, and his mirror image tells his story from Treblinka. As Deleuze explains, the doubled image of the mirror illustrates the time-image: 'The mirror-image is virtual in relation to the actual character that the mirror catches, but it is actual in the mirror, which now leaves the character with only a virtuality and pushes him back out-of-field.'<sup>33</sup> The coexistence of different times in the time-image match with the constellation of what has been with the now-time in Benjamin's conception of the dialectical image.

The use of time-images allows Lanzmann to avoid transforming the history of the *Shoah* into something rational that has terminated in the past. He shows us history not as progress, but as a *constellation of danger* by juxtaposing the times of the gas chamber in Treblinka and the barbershop in Israel into an image of different but indistinguishable times. It enables the viewer to sense the gap between the two times and to build through that feeling a cognitive relation to the past.

#### — A MODEL FOR FILMIC INVESTIGATION OF HISTORY

*Shoah* demonstrates the potential of film for historical research. In response to the specific problems of representation that the *Shoah* raises, Lanzmann developed a filmic structure built on embodiment that emerges from trace- and connotation-images. The characteristic of the visual, which contains an ever-complicated knowledge that never reveals all its meaning at the same time, has proven to be useful in constructing a discourse about the *Shoah* without reference to an external transcendental concept that would have always been defeated by Auschwitz. The film creates a historical time-space relation which is, on the one hand, capable of presenting time itself as independent from an indirect measurement through movement in space and, on the other hand, is reconnected to space through its bodily presence

in the image. This enables an actualisation of the historical relation inscribed in the image without constructing a linear narrative. It is what Benjamin called a dialectical image, or what Deleuze called a time-image. 'The cinema [is] becoming, no longer an undertaking of recognition [reconnaissance], but of knowledge [connaissance].'<sup>34</sup> Lanzmann's answer to the problem of representation established a model that sheds light on what a post-Auschwitz historical relation to the past could be, and what significant part films could play in this regard. Perhaps this historic relation established in film is the emergence of what Adorno had called for: a new kind of truth that is not bound to the corrupted concept of *adequatio*.

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2. Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, Longman, Pearson, Harlow, 2006, p. 37.
3. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler. A Psychological History of the German Film*, Princeton University Press, London, New York, 1947.
4. Marc Ferro, *Analyse de film, analyse de sociétés. Une source nouvelle pour l'histoire*, Classiques Hachette, Paris, 1975, Marc Ferro, *Cinéma et histoire*, Denoël, Gonthier, Paris, 1977, translation Naomi Green, Marc Ferro, *Cinema and History*, Wayne State Univ. Press, Detroit, 1988.
5. Rosenstone participated in the production of *Reds* and *The Good Fight*. See also Robert A. Rosenstone, 'History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film' in *American Historical Review*, 93, 1988, Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1995; Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*. Davis participated in the production of *The Return of Martin Guerre* and wrote a book about it later: Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1983. See also Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2000.
6. Rosenstone, *History on Film*, p. 37.
7. Rosenstone, *History on Film*, p. 36.
8. Rosenstone, *History on Film*, p. 153. For the reference on Oliver Stone see the chapter 'Film maker/Historian', pp. 111–33.
9. Rosenstone, *History on Film*, p. 135.
10. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton, Seabury Press, New York, 1973,

- pp. 362–3. For the concept of shame, refer also to Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal, Summit Books, New York, 1988.
11. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 365.
  12. For this insight, refer to Carles Torner, *Shoah: Cavar con la mirada*, Editorial Gedisa, Barcelona, 2005.
  13. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 29. Also cf. p. xx.
  14. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973. Also, Hayden White, 'Historiography and Historiophoty' in *American Historical Review*, 93, 1988.
  15. Hans-Jürgen Goertz, *Unsichere Geschichte: Zur Theorie historischer Referentialität*, Philipp Reclam jun., Stuttgart, 2001, p. 118. Translation mine.
  16. Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, London and New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 178.
  17. Robert Eaglestone, *Postmodernism and Holocaust Denial*, Postmodern Encounters, Icon Books/Totem Books, Duxford, Cambridge, 2001.
  18. Lanzmann reveals this in an interview with Heike Hurst. Claude Lanzmann and Heike Hurst, 'Eine befreiende Wirkung: Gespräch mit Claude Lanzmann', in *Shoah*, ed. Claude Lanzmann, Claassen, Düsseldorf, 1986.
  19. For descriptions of this sequence, refer also to Torner, pp. 39–53 and Stefan Gandler, 'Warum schaut der Engel der Geschichte zurück?' in *Zeitschrift für kritische Theorie*, 9, 2003, pp. 57–8.
  20. See for example Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor, New York, Oxford University Press, 1974.
  21. Lanzmann and Hurst, 'Eine befreiende Wirkung', p. 275.
  22. Lanzmann, "Parler pour les morts", p. 15, translation mine.
  23. I am aware that they emanate from diverse philosophical traditions. But, as Ian Buchanan suggests, there is at stake an underlying dialectic in Deleuze's philosophy, and his transcendental empiricist ethic can be regarded as an answer to the problem the *Shoah* constitutes for philosophy. Ian Buchanan, *Deleuzism: A Metacommentary*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2000, pp. 26–7, 56–7, 73–89.
  24. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Barbara Habberjam and Hugh Tomlinson, London, Athlone, 1986, Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989.
  25. Mirjam Schaub, *Gilles Deleuze im Kino: Das Sichtbare und das Sagbare*, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München, 2003.
  26. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*. See pp. 25–6.
  27. Walter Benjamin, Thesis V of 'On the Concept of History', in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, Belknap Press, Cambridge, Mass. & London, 2003, pp. 390–1.
  28. Cf. Thesis XVII of 'On the Concept of History' in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, p. 396.
  29. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Belknap Press, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2002, pp. 462–3 (N2a,3 and N3,1).
  30. Benjamin, Thesis V of 'On the Concept of History', pp. 390–1.
  31. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 35.
  32. Deleuze even employs this distinction for the titles of his books on cinema. For the distinction between movement-image and time-image, see especially the last chapter of *Cinema 1* and the first two chapters of *Cinema 2*.
  33. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 70.
  34. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 18.