

H-France Review Vol. 22 (April 2022), No. 70

Jennifer Cazenave, *An Archive of the Catastrophe: The Unused Footage of Claude Lanzmann's "Shoah."* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019. xxxviii + 313 pp. Chronology, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$95.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781438474779; \$35.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9781438474762.

Review by Audrey Evrard, Fordham University.

Jennifer Cazenave's *An Archive of the Catastrophe* is a fascinating, meticulously researched, critical examination of the *Shoah* outtakes preserved as part of the *Shoah* archive by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem. Published in 2019, this crucial intervention into the fields of Holocaust and cinema studies contributes to a scholarly resurgence of interest in Lanzmann's influence on cinematic and historical reconstructions and representations of Holocaust memory. This groundbreaking study was recognized by the Society for Cinema and Media Studies in 2020, receiving Honorable Mention in the Best First Book Award competition. That same year, Cazenave joined other scholars of Lanzmann's cinema and Holocaust studies in Erin McGothlin, Brad Prager, and Markus Zisselsberger's coedited volume *The Construction of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann's "Shoah" and its Outtakes*.^[1] So did Sue Price, who recently published another book-length exploration of the archived outtakes, *Claude Lanzmann's "Shoah" Outtakes: Holocaust Rescue and Resistance*.^[2]

Most urgently, *An Archive of the Catastrophe* shines a light on Claude Lanzmann's "monumental archive," tending "to these words...recorded and relegated to the margins; to the reception and, at times, nonreception of alternative accounts of the catastrophe, as well as to the momentary suspension of authorial intent; to the shaping of testimony by witnesses unseen and unheard; to processes of remembrance yet to be integrated into theoretical discourses on testimony and trauma" (pp. xxxi-xxxii). While its focus rests primarily on the outtakes preserved in the archive, the book references a broad range of materials and documents, including footage of the Eichmann trial; annotated transcripts of scenes, letters, and Lanzmann's later films and writings; and various contemporaneous accounts produced by other filmmakers or historians. Cazenave's excavation of the *Shoah* archive is masterful, maintaining a knowledgeable yet subtle dialogue with existing scholarship on trauma, memory, and cinema studies. Her capacity to engage Lanzmann's work deeply while always keeping the reader focused on the subjects encountered in the archive is a major strength of this book. In so doing, the book carefully releases into the frame voices, trauma, and memories that irrepressibly recalibrate, without canceling out, *Shoah*'s intervention into the politics and ethics of Holocaust memory.

Cazenave's mining of this obsessive archive brings her readers to grasp the extent to which "the finished film [*Shoah*] and the unused material *coexist*, not only producing new meanings and mobilizations of *Shoah* but also rendering visible 'divergences, impossibilities, discords, dissonances'" that defined Lanzmann's project (p. 50). In Cazenave's reading, the "hauntology of [this] archive" reveals Lanzmann's "resistance to [the] process of excavating the past," rather than his facilitation of "the resurgence" of this process by cinematic means (p. xxxii). Outtakes featuring women reveal their striking absence from *Shoah*, deliberately unsettling Lanzmann's institution of a "linear, progressive, universalizing approach to encountering horror" (p. 230) that only "the male eyewitnesses closest to the machinery of destruction" (p. 50) could embody. It is, therefore, in Cazenave's uncovering of the "heterogeneous modalities" of representation of trauma that are present at the very heart of Lanzmann's archive that *An Archive of the Catastrophe* most successfully redefines Lanzmann's legacy.

Early in chapter one, "The Formation of Paradigm," Cazenave reminds the reader that "the defining representational innovation of *Shoah* (what Lanzmann terms in *Diary* the 'coincidence' or 'absolute identity' of ethics and aesthetics) lies, precisely, in a subtle interplay of the image and its absence" (p. 5). This first chapter addresses Lanzmann's increasingly deliberate focus on staging the testimonies of "exemplary witnesses," emphasizing the gendered bias at work in this project (p. 44). For Cazenave, the title *Shoah*, which "constitutes for the filmmaker an acoustic image," perfectly "translates" the impossible inquiry that structures his finished film (p. 53). By the end of this first chapter, she argues that such obsessive binding of the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas cannot be separated from Lanzmann's intervention in postwar politics of Holocaust memory and their transmission. She writes: "Phonetically, ... *Shoah* also calls to mind the French word *choix*, or choice, a word...[that] calls attention to the inevitable selection underlying the editing phase between 1979 and 1985," that "occupies a central place in narratives of the destruction of European Jewry," and that "traverses the testimonies ultimately left on the cutting room floor" (p. 53). Shifting attention and focus from the product of Lanzmann's filmmaking, the finished film, to his editing work, Cazenave's study opens a space where these testimonies can surface, and where more heterogeneous demands can be made.

Chapters two, three, and four then proceed to restore the difference and excess that Lanzmann sought to contain by way of an "ethics of editing" that eventually erased them from *Shoah*. These chapters reintroduce "exemplary witnesses," highlighting varying ways in which they opposed resistance to Lanzmann's authorial directions as they shared their memories in front of his camera. Cazenave's painstaking analyses of archived outtakes are distinctly committed in these chapters to regendering Holocaust traumatic memory.

Chapter two, "Recasting 1961: Shoah and the Eichmann Trial," returns to this seminal moment for both Israel's postwar politics of memory and for Lanzmann's reformulation of his project. Archival material and outtakes—featuring two witnesses at the trial, Rivka Yoselewska and Ada Lichtman—"evidence the friction produced through the encounter between the finished film and the unused (or...unrecorded) interviews: namely, the surfacing of alternative testimonial scenes that resist the trope of reenactment universalized by *Shoah*" (p. 63). This second chapter starts by referencing David Perlov's 1979 documentary *Memories of the Eichmann Trial*, pointing to defining strategies of representation used by Perlov that anticipated Lanzmann's aesthetic preferences in *Shoah*. Perlov's "recovering, in 1979, [of] the audio recording of the Eichmann trial...singularly stages the acoustic confrontation with the trauma of the Holocaust underlying public memory" (p. 60). While recalling the radio mediation of "the emergence of the witness as

a [disembodied] social figure in Israel,” and of their testimonies as “universally accessible,” his *mise en scène* most importantly reintroduced “the missing face of the witness,” “articulat[ing] an ethics of testimony that seemingly anticipates *Shoah*” (pp. 60-61). Whereas Perlov presented “the face as the site of an unspeakable trauma,” Lanzmann’s close-ups expected it to bear witness to the emotional “reviv[ing]” and “reliv[ing]” of past trauma, in other words, the resurging of “deep memory” (p. 74). In this chapter, analyses of outtakes with Yoselewska and Lichtman underscore these women’s refusal to comply with “the voice of the ‘master,’ [which] is also the voice of the docu-auteur who exhibits complete control over the survivor’s testimonial performance while imprinting onto the scene his stern directorial dictum” (p. 73). Cazenave reports that the former steadfastly refused to meet Lanzmann for an interview and describes how the latter cunningly imposes her will as a self-aware subject who dictates the terms of her act of remembrance (p. 81). What Lanzmann failed to understand, Cazenave explains, is that, while “refus[ing] the silencing reenactment and revictimization [he] demanded of the film’s protagonists, ... Lichtman was in fact ‘playing’ the role she had once played at the death camp [when] she had been made to participate in the German strategy of deception” (p. 82). This second chapter concludes with Lanzmann’s decision to rehabilitate Jewish leaders whose role during the Holocaust had come under scrutiny during the Eichmann trial, most famously in Hannah Arendt’s writings. However, exclusively referencing the chairman of the Warsaw Ghetto, Cziernakow, who preferred to kill himself rather than cooperate with the Germans, Lanzmann avoided engaging the dichotomy established in postwar politics of memory between the heroism displayed in uprisings and revolts and the passive culpability of the leaders of the Jewish council. This time, his ethics of editing steered away from those voices and experiences that raised the question of the moral responsibility of certain Jewish leaders and their passivity while others were actively resisting and fighting.

Chapter three, “Off-Frame: Trauma and the Feminine,” delves further into those women’s voices and personal traumas silenced or displaced to the margins or periphery of the testimonial accounts presented in *Shoah*. In this chapter, Cazenave gives visibility to outtakes that, had Lanzmann decided to integrate them into the finished film, would have made him “a pioneer” at a time when feminist scholars were starting “to reverse the assumption ‘that men’s experiences were normative and that women were either an addendum or that their specific experiences can shed no broader light onto the Holocaust’” (pp. 127-28). She points out that the first Conference on Women and the Holocaust took place in New York City in 1983, two years before *Shoah* premiered in Paris. To counteract Lanzmann’s eventual “erasure of gendered perspectives and details,” Cazenave spends time on several outtakes featuring Paula Biren, an Auschwitz survivor; Gertrud Schneider, a survivor from Riga and a historian who, in 1979, had just completed a book manuscript entitled *Journey into Terror: Story of the Riga Ghetto*; and Ruth Elias, who was the last surviving witness to the medical experiments conducted at Auschwitz by Mengele, the camp physician. Despite all being “exemplary witnesses” to various parts of “the extermination process,” these three women’s accounts were either excluded from *Shoah* or altered in such ways that the gendered specificities of their testimonies ended up being removed (p. 11). Biren lived in the Lodz Ghetto in the early 1940s, “the longest lasting, best organized, and most cut off from the world” led by Mordechai Rumkoswki, known as “King Chaim” (p. 125). In 1942, Rumkowski complied with the “resettlement” of 20,000 “unproductive Jews, principally children and the elderly” (p. 124). Lanzmann’s decision to rehabilitate “men likened to collaborators” into the broader community of Holocaust survivors meant he sacrificed accounts such as Biren’s that implicitly pointed out the complicity of Jewish leaders such as Rumkowski. Ruth Elias’s testimony evidences, more specifically, the gendered isolation and difference defining survival

strategies in the extermination camps. Pregnant when she arrived at Auschwitz, she recalls the moment she faced the “choiceless choice” to kill her own child to save herself (p. 149), a trauma that *Shoah* did not account for, privileging instead the tragedy of Czerniakow, a male leader who “refuse[d] to ‘kill the children with [his] own hands’” and ended his own life (p. 150).

The fourth and final chapter, “The Question of Rescue and Refugees,” shifts the geographical focus maintained largely on Jewish survivors’ memories of their lives in eastern European ghettos and camps to the recollections and actions of those based in Western Europe and the United States. Lanzmann’s work on *Shoah* in the 1970s and early 1980s coincided with emerging debates and research about rescue and refugee policies. About thirty hours of the archival outtakes address this question, signaling, once again, the director’s ongoing dialogue with contemporary historiographical debates. Regardless, Lanzmann renounced touching upon this issue in *Shoah*, though it was central to his contention with Steven Spielberg’s approach in *Schindler’s List* in 1994. Cazenave posits that Lanzmann’s critique of the American filmmaker reaffirmed “the very dilemma with which he himself had been confronted at the LTC film laboratory” in the early 1980s, namely “how to compose from [this] monumental archive of interviews a film about death *and* survival—about the East *and* the West?” (p. 180). Regardless, the few hours dedicated to rescue missions and Western recollections reveal the difficulties, at the time, of conveying the magnitude and the horror of the “process of extermination” underway in Europe (p. 213). While pushed to the margins of *Shoah*, these outtakes and “the world’s resounding silence” that they communicate “haunt” Lanzmann’s “accentuat[ion] [of] the sheer isolation *and* abandonment of the Jews of Europe upon confining the Holocaust to the East and to the Final Solution” (p. 225).

Across four extremely detailed chapters, the book meticulously constructs juxtapositions and echoes that highlight the ethical underpinnings of Lanzmann’s documentation of the catastrophe. *An Archive of the Catastrophe* convincingly demonstrates the docu-auteur’s inability to assimilate within his moral inquiry “gendered version[s] of survival” and any “narrative of trauma centered on the impossible” and defined by excess (p. 150). Reconsidered from this perspective, *Shoah* reveals Lanzmann’s failure to “compos[e] with impossibles” and fully deliver a “film that [was] the Shoah,” rather than “a film *about* the Shoah,” as he intended (p. 180). However, the recovery of these outtakes, left out but not eliminated, bear witness to the many “exemplary witnesses” that he raced to record before they died, even if he didn’t allow them to be heard in 1985. For this reason, Jennifer Cazenave’s critical reassessment of Claude Lanzmann’s legacy is at once rigorous, incisive, and generous. Beyond its immediate contribution to the fields of Holocaust and film studies, this book stands as a powerful defense of film archives, many of which are currently facing an uncertain future. In restoring these testimonies, and bringing them to readers’ attention, this book ensures that this archive will continue to live on and trouble new generations.

NOTES

[1] Erin McGothlin, Brad Prager, and Markus Zisselsberger, eds., *The Construction of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann’s “Shoah” and its Outtakes* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2020).

[2] Sue Price, *Claude Lanzmann’s “Shoah” Outtakes: Holocaust Rescue and Resistance* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).

Audrey Evrard
Fordham University
aevrard@fordham.edu

Copyright © 2022 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of *H-France Review* nor republication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on *H-France Review* are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172