

# Ernst Fraenkel Vorträge

zur amerikanischen  
Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Geschichte und Kultur

Herausgegeben von Susanne Rohr und Sabine Sielke

## 8

Peter Novick

**Is the Holocaust an American Memory?**

Susan Rubin Suleiman

**History, Memory, and Moral Judgment in  
Documentary Film: On Marcel Ophüls' *Hotel  
Terminus: The Life and Times of Klaus Barbie***

John F. Kennedy-Institut für Nordamerikastudien  
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## Preface

The two essays collected here were first presented in a lecture series of the Colloquium organized by the Departments of Literature and Culture at the John F. Kennedy Institut in the winter term 2000–2001. Entitled “Exchanges on Intricate Issues: Interrelations Between Jewish-American and Jewish-German Literary and Cultural Practices,” these lectures meant to provide a platform within the context of American studies in Germany for a discussion that has become more and more resonant in both German and American culture: the debate around the various ways of representing and remembering the Holocaust. This debate which centers increasingly on how to adequately represent and remember has both shaped and reduced our understanding of Jewish culture.

Our exchanges aimed at interrogating literary and cultural practices ranging from fiction to the visual arts and museum culture, practices which are intricate first and foremost because they touch upon collective and individual traumatic experiences. They are intricate moreover because they have evolved historically within different cultural contexts and their specific notions of representation, history, and memory, yet at the same time constitute a conflictual Jewish, American, and German contact zone. It is this zone that our lectures and discussions wanted to explore and—at least partially—map in its complex contours.

The essays by Susan Rubin Suleiman and Peter Novick persuasively lay out and interrogate this zone as they unfold the

intricacies of memory and representation from their own particular perspectives and research interests: the field of documentary film and the historical analysis of the Holocaust's symbolic force in American life.

It is our hope to have added with the lecture series and these essays not only to the processes of mutual understanding, but to the understanding of Jewish culture.

Winfried Fluck, Susanne Rohr, Sabine Sielke

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# Peter Novick

## Is the Holocaust An American Memory?

There's a problem with trying to give you a straightforward and convincing answer to the question in my title—"Is the Holocaust an American Memory?" The problem is that the notion of "memory"—and here, of course, I am talking about what is called "collective memory"—is very fuzzy and ill-defined. Because of all the ambiguity that surrounds the term, let me start with a couple of preliminary observations about the very idea of "collective memory" in general and about "Holocaust memory" in particular.

We use the term "collective memory" so frequently and so unselfconsciously that we often lose sight of the fact that it is a metaphor—an organic metaphor—which analogizes between the memory of an individual and of a community. The metaphor works best when we are speaking of an organic (traditional, stable, homogeneous) community, in which consciousness, like social reality, changes slowly. When Maurice Halbwachs first put forward the idea of "collective memory" in the 1920s, the great French medievalist Marc Bloch, who was generally suspicious of organic metaphors for society, nevertheless thought it might usefully be applied to such things as a peasant grandparent, grandchild on knee, passing on rural traditions. A very "organic" image. How appropriate the metaphor is for the very inorganic societies of the twenty-first century (fragmented rather than

homogeneous, rapidly changing rather than stable, the principal modes of communication electronic rather than face-to-face) seems to me questionable. Metaphors have a capacity to illuminate, but can as easily obscure. The term "collective memory" is so embedded in contemporary discourse that it is unavoidable, but I urge you to remain aware that it is a loose metaphor, like "the American mind" or "the German soul," and that confusion results when one slips into literalizing the metaphor. "My love is like a red, red rose" is all very well in its place, but not when it leads to you watering your beloved, or packing manure around her feet.

As concerns memory of the Holocaust there is a different kind of problem. Discourse about "Holocaust memory" is nowadays so international that it has become increasingly common to speak of the (global, singular) "memory" of the Holocaust, as if national memories were subdivisions of a single, universal "master memory." Here it is important to distinguish between, on the one hand, historical scholarship about the Holocaust which is increasingly singular and universal, and, on the other hand, collective memories of the Holocaust, which are—necessarily and properly—plural and local. (The contrast I am presenting here is admittedly somewhat overdrawn: a counterposition of ideal types.)

In the 1950s, when I began to study history, professional historical consciousness was very "particularist": there were northern and southern versions of the American Civil War, Protestant and Catholic versions of the Reformation, German and French versions of World War I. This has changed greatly over the past half century, during which there has been a far-reaching "cosmopolitanization" of historical consciousness. Professional historical writing has become truly international—part of a single scholarly discourse.



Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in historical writing on the Holocaust. Historians of the Holocaust whether they are German, Israeli, American, French, or of other nationalities, regularly confer together, write for the same academic journals, and cooperatively address shared interpretive questions. Their work is evaluated (incorporated, criticized, modified) by scholars around the world according to criteria which are not determined by national boundaries. There are, of course, differences among scholars: methodological, ideological, philosophical. But nowadays these differences are most visible within rather than across national borders. There is no such thing as an "American school," "German school," or "Israeli school" when it comes to historical interpretation of the Holocaust, any more than there are national differences in the dismay and horror with which scholars (and others) in every country regard that great crime. All of this seems to me an in-every-way desirable development.

"Collective memories" of the Holocaust are an entirely different matter. Though collective memories deal with the past, they are not just a matter of a collectivity accumulating and passing on information about that past. Collective memories have to do, rather, with a collectivity defining (and redefining) its relationship to the past. In part that relationship is "given." In the case of the Holocaust, some collectivities have historical ties to the murderers, some to the victims, some to one sort or another of (near or remote) "bystanders." That obvious fact alone makes it absurd to talk of different collectivities sharing the same memory of the crime; of there being a single collective memory of the Holocaust.

In addition to these kinds of "given" historical relationships to various pasts, there is another equally important dimension of collective memories—in many ways a more important dimension. Memories are chosen, though often chosen within various kinds of constraints, and often with less than full awareness

that one is making a choice. Collective memories are selected (marginalized or centered, shaped in one or another fashion) based on choices about what purposes those memories might serve for the collectivity in the present; the direction in which addressing or avoiding them might point for the future. Depending on the challenges they face, different collectivities will focus on different memories; as the challenges change, so will the focus.

As I said at the outset, the notion of "collective memory" is unclear and ambiguous. By what criteria, then, can one judge whether the Holocaust is or isn't an American collective memory? One approach, which I'm going to try out here, is to look at the principal ways in which what undeniably are significant collective memories develop. Then let us consider whether those circumstances—or anything resembling them—obtain in the case of the American encounter with the Holocaust.

At the most immediate and literal level, collective memories arise when members of a collectivity share a common experience. In the first instance, this is the direct experience of a generation who together lived through a depression, a war, a revolution; the shared memory forms a bond among those who have shared the experience. As the memory of a lived experience this is a strictly generational phenomenon. The extent to which members of later generations come to vicariously share that memory—make it "theirs"—is going to depend on a number of things, of which I will mention two of the most important. In the first instance, it depends on the presence in the society, over subsequent decades, of a lot of people who directly shared the experience; whose living presence is a pervasive (if sometimes subliminal) reminder of the event; whose personal memories enter into the culture stream and influence later generations. And, both in the immediate aftermath of the event and later, much is

going to depend on how close other members of that society who didn't directly share the experience are to those who did share it. The most obvious form of closeness is familial—children and grandchildren of those with the direct experience—but it can also be a relationship with neighbors, teachers, or simply with members of the same religious or language community.

I need not belabor the point that in the case of the USA, none of these forms of visceral closeness to those who experienced the Holocaust directly has existed. Not just in Germany, but throughout continental Europe, much of the population in the postwar decades had had one or another kind of direct or indirect contact with the Holocaust: mostly as witnesses, but as perpetrators and survivors as well. In postwar America, the total of those recent immigrants who fell into any of these categories was some small fraction of one percent of the population. Also important is the sheer physical distance between the United States and what was—in the larger, not the particular Berlin sense—the “topography of terror.” And to physical distance you have to add the psychic distance with which most Americans view events abroad. For Americans as a whole, the sense of the Holocaust as our history—our memory—lacks the human foundation that it has in Europe; or that it has, albeit in a somewhat different way, in Israel.

Let me illustrate what I've been talking about. Summon up, if you will, the famous photograph of German soldiers pointing their weapons at a terrified Jewish child, hands raised, in the Warsaw Ghetto. By no means all young Germans, when they see that photograph, reflexively imagine that but for “late birth” they might have been one of those soldiers. But a great many do. By no means all American Jews, seeing the photograph, reflexively imagine that but for parents or grandparents' immigration, they might have been that boy. But a great many (including myself) do. For the overwhelming majority of Amer-

icans there simply aren't the kind of linkages which have made the Holocaust a significant memory for Germans and for Jews.

Another way in which an event becomes a significant collective memory is when it is what might be called "foundational" for a collectivity; marks an important kind of historical discontinuity. Collective memories of this kind can be very long-lived—the Battle of Kosovo for Serbs, the expulsion of 1492 for Sephardic Jews. The reason that these memories endured for centuries is that the conditions they symbolized also endured: foreign oppression; foreign exile. Except for European Jews, the Holocaust itself did not mark that kind of watershed. But the language of memory is one of symbols. To a very considerable extent the Holocaust has, in recent decades, become the central symbol of Nazism, and of the War with all its brutalities. And those events were "foundational" for Europe in the past half century. The events of the War and occupation were cataclysmic for Europe, bringing unprecedented military and civilian casualties, along with vast material devastation. For almost every nation in Europe the War and the German occupation brought radical changes of regime, along with far-reaching changes in their respective political cultures. Insofar as the Holocaust has become emblematic of the revolutionary changes wrought by the War, it has become—for all Europeans—an important symbol of radical discontinuity. Like la Bastille for revolutionaries in France (and for their heirs) it has become the symbol of the ancien régime; has become a sort of "negative creation myth."

The Second World War was so earthshaking and so devastating for Europeans that it may be difficult for them to appreciate how little impact it had on the United States. The War occasioned no domestic disruption, no physical destruction, and—by the grisly standard of the twentieth century—relatively few military casualties (and none among civilians). Indeed, for most older Americans, looking back at the War in retrospect,

what they remember most is the prosperity it brought after the decade of depression. If, for Europeans, World War II was experienced as a catastrophe, for Americans it was—as expressed in the title of a best-selling volume of memoirs—*The Good War*. (I should remind you at this point that for most Americans, the war against Japan was much more important than the War in Europe. Probably the most memorable image of the War for Americans is not death and devastation in Europe, but our soldiers raising the American flag in victory at Iwo Jima. If there are alternative candidates they would also be from the Pacific Theater: American battleships sinking at Pearl Harbor; the mushroom cloud over Hiroshima.) Finally, if in Europe the War saw the murder of most of its Jews, who thereafter became what is called “an absence which is a presence,” in the United States the War saw simply a further stage in the integration of Jews into American society as they joined with other Americans in mobilization. In the aftermath of the War (and of the Holocaust), American Jews were an increasingly integrated, visible, and self-confident presence in American society.

The final set of circumstances in which an event becomes a significant collective memory—the most important kind of memory—is when it comes to be adopted as a point of reference for collective identity: when it is more or less deliberately put forward as a way of defining—usually positively, occasionally negatively—who or what a collectivity is. Not surprisingly, self-aggrandizing memories are the most popular, recalling heroic deeds or a “golden age” in the collectivity’s past for purposes of inspiration or reassurance. Very often tragic events are recalled to underline a victim identity. Thus for centuries, recalling the eighteenth-century partitions, Poland identified itself as “the Christ among nations,” crucified and recrucified by foreign oppressors. Memories can be calls to an identity which demands continued mobilization: the annual pilgrimage of French workers

to the Mur des Fédérés, site of the slaughter of Communards in 1871, was a reminder of the eternal enmity between proletariat and bourgeoisie. In Israel, for some years (though less nowadays) there was a caricatured memory of a timid and craven "exilic" Jew, intended to celebrate—by showing its opposite—the identity of the new proud and militant Israeli. As Israeli memory sought to "negate the Diaspora" in the interests of establishing a new "counter-identity," so the memory of the Holocaust in Germany (to a lesser extent in other parts of Europe) has been in the service of defining a collective identity against what is remembered. The relative weight of that memory as compared with other memories must be constantly re-negotiated with the passage of time. But it is hard to imagine present-day Germans building the sort of identity almost all Germans seek without the Holocaust having become a significant German collective memory; without the fact of having conducted a sustained encounter with that memory being an important element in a new German identity.

What of the USA? I'm not sure that nowadays there is any memory-based identity among my fellow-Americans. We are, notoriously, the most "now" and amnesiac of peoples. And we're an incredibly diverse people. One would be hard pressed to find any "leading culture" to which new Americans might assimilate, let alone "leading memories" they are likely to vicariously share. The only historical "memory"—and I put that in big quotation marks—which seems to have had any marked influence on American consciousness is one with which Germans are very familiar through their reading of the works of Karl May: a highly mythified version of the American frontier. This "memory" is slightly fading now, but millions remain within its thrall—which goes a long way toward explaining the prevalence of gun ownership in the United States.

Whatever other memories may play a role in fashioning contemporary American identity, the notion that memory of the Holocaust plays a role in this process seems to me absurd on the face of it. But that has not inhibited attempts to use the Holocaust as a negative marker of American identity. "When America is at its best," a leading official of the Washington Holocaust Museum told an interviewer, "the Holocaust is impossible in the United States." Only recently have I discovered, to my astonishment, that in the Attorney General's Conference Room in the Department of Justice building in Washington there are murals which face each other, described by Attorney General Janet Reno as follows:

One is Justice Granted—an optimistic, hopeful sign of people coming into a new world with hope, with prosperity, with justice. On the other end of the room is Justice Denied, and there is a barren slope with people being led off into bondage by brown-shirted troops, violins being taken, papers being torn.

Whatever the failings of our criminal justice system, we are being told, we don't have brown-shirted troops taking violins. As a nomination for a negative marker of American identity this is so pathetically complacent and self-aggrandizing that I don't know whether to laugh or cry.

I have been arguing that judging by what collective memory in general, and memory of the Holocaust in particular, means in other contexts, the Holocaust isn't, in any worthwhile sense, an "American memory." But there is one major problem with that argument, which will not have escaped your attention. That is the impressive variety of institutions and practices in the USA which seem to prove that the Holocaust is an American memory.

Though matters of school curricula in the USA are customarily left to educators, in a large and growing number of American

states the teaching of the Holocaust in primary and secondary schools has been legislatively mandated. There are hundreds of courses on the Holocaust in colleges and universities. Ceremonies commemorating the Holocaust are held annually within the Capitol Rotunda in Washington; parallel ceremonies are conducted annually in many state capitals and municipalities. Then there are the museums—preeminently the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington (the most elaborate in the world), whose expenses, originally to be raised by private contributions, have been largely taken over by the American federal government. There are also major Holocaust museums in Los Angeles and New York; smaller museums in many other cities, with more on the drawing board. There are countless memorial monuments in American public space. (In Boston the New England Holocaust Memorial is located on the tourist itinerary called the “Freedom Trail,” along with Paul Revere’s House and the Bunker Hill Monument.) American mass media representations of the Holocaust have found a wide audience in America (and sometimes in Germany as well, as in the case of the movie version of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in the fifties, and the TV series “Holocaust” in the seventies). In the USA, public figures from former President Clinton on down told Americans that seeing *Schindler’s List* was their civic duty. Doesn’t all this empirical data overwhelm my a prioristic argument, based on somewhat arbitrary criteria, that the Holocaust isn’t an American collective memory?

All of the forms of Holocaust remembrance which I’ve just listed are surely “evidence” ...but evidence of what? I said earlier that the organic metaphor of collective memory can lead one astray. This is an instance in which it does: it suggests that there is an “organism” called “American society” which “remembers,” with the items I’ve listed reflecting that collective act of remembering.



In fact, if you examine these forms of remembrance—the curricula, the museums, the ceremonies, the media presentations—they are in every instance the result of initiatives by American Jews. This is true, I should add, of just about any other form of Holocaust remembrance in the United States you can name. The two percent of the American population which is Jewish is, in most respects, indistinguishable from the ninety-eight percent of the American population which isn't Jewish. But that two percent is very distinguishable when it comes to its relationship to the Holocaust. To draw conclusions about the extent to which the Holocaust is an "American memory" by surveying the projects, the activities, and the institutions initiated by that two percent of the population—a two percent which is, for these purposes, the most unrepresentative sample imaginable—is breathtaking in its naivete.

I cannot here review all the factors that led American Jews, after marginalizing the Holocaust in their consciousness for the first quarter century after the crime, to move it toward the center of their consciousness from the mid-1970s onward—to make it an American Jewish memory. That process was in part—but only in part—the result of decisions made by Jewish organizations, who, in the wake of Israel's narrowly-averted defeat in the 1973 Yom Kippur War searched desperately for ways to mobilize support for the Jewish State. (I might say here that while I think invoking the Holocaust probably did succeed in firming up Jewish support for Israel, it didn't seem to have any impact on American policy-makers, who were motivated by less sentimental considerations.) Jewish organizations also sought to make American Jews more "Holocaust conscious" to shore up Jewish identity among young Jews in the face of a soaring intermarriage rate which threatened demographic catastrophe within a few generations.

But the role of Jewish organizations in promoting "Holocaust consciousness" among non-Jews shouldn't be exaggerated. If you look at the most important forms of Holocaust remembrance in the United States which I listed a moment ago, you'll find that just about all of them were the result of private initiatives by American Jews, without any involvement by Jewish organizations. This was true of the "Holocaust" TV series, and it was also true of *Schindler's List*, which Spielberg has described as his personal act of Jewish affirmation. The Holocaust Museum in Washington was the initiative of Jewish aides to President Jimmy Carter, who wanted to shore up Carter's support among American Jews, who had been alienated by his "excessively even-handed" Middle Eastern policy. The Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles was created by a Canadian millionaire and an Orthodox rabbi, concerned with shoring up Jewish identity and commitment. Likewise, lobbying for Holocaust curricula, or constructing local Holocaust memorials and museums, have usually been the result of local private Jewish initiatives.

"Holocaust consciousness"—"memory" of the Holocaust if you want to call it that—was initially an internal American Jewish affair. Before he became a top official of the President's Commission on the Holocaust in 1978 (and later of the Washington Museum which was its result), Rabbi Michael Berenbaum came onto the staff of a Jewish organization which was promoting awareness of the Holocaust. On taking the job he wrote: "I have a sense that we are living at an historical crossroads: we will either make the consciousness of the Holocaust a nurturing reality for contemporary Jewry or we will lose this unique opportunity, perhaps forever." Some years later he observed that "for Jews to solidify the place of the Holocaust within Jewish consciousness they must establish its importance for the American people as a whole."

Quite apart from any such aspiration, it is simply a fact—not less of a fact because anti-Semites turn it into a grievance—that Jews play an important and influential role in American cultural life. We are not just “the people of the book,” but the people of the Hollywood film and the television mini-series, of the magazine article and the newspaper column, of the comic book and the academic symposium. When a high level of concern with remembering the Holocaust became widespread in American Jewry, it was, given the important role that Jews play in American media and opinion-making elites, virtually inevitable that it would spread throughout the culture at large. In any case, what is called “Holocaust memory” in America at large is a byproduct—to some extent an unintended byproduct—of American Jews’ heightened concern with remembering the Holocaust.

Whatever their origins, forms of Holocaust remembrance are to be found throughout American society. What have Americans made of them? How much impact has the Holocaust had on their consciousness?

For whatever they’re worth, there are opinion polls. Awareness of the Holocaust, according to surveys, is higher than it has ever been. In a survey of Americans’ knowledge of World War II, 97 percent of those polled know what the Holocaust was. This was substantially higher than the percentage who could identify Pearl Harbor or knew that the United States had dropped an atomic bomb on Japan. It was much higher than the less-than-half of the population who knew that America and the Soviet Union fought on the same side in the War. But what does “knowing what the Holocaust was” mean for that portion of the population—over a third, according to a recent survey—who either didn’t know that the Holocaust took place during World War II, or “knew” that it didn’t.

Whatever their "knowledge" of the Holocaust, those who respond to surveys are sure that it's important. A clear majority in a recent survey, presented with a list of catastrophic events, said that the Holocaust "was the worst tragedy in history."

My colleagues who do survey research are fond of a cartoon showing an exasperated pollster saying to an interviewee: "Those are the worst opinions I ever heard in my life!" No doubt this resonates with their own unvoiced exasperation in similar circumstances. But it points to something else that is relevant to our interpretation of these results. Most people have a pretty good intuitive sense of what are "better" and "worse" opinions in response to pollsters' questions—particularly when they're asked whether they agree with benign-sounding propositions. Are these, in any worthwhile sense, "opinions"—let alone deeply-held beliefs? The most suggestive reason for skepticism on this score is provided by the responses to a question in one survey: "How important is it for all Americans to know about and understand the Holocaust—is it essential, very important, only somewhat important or not important?" There were separate tabulations for those who said they knew "a great deal," "a fair amount," or "little or nothing" about the Holocaust. Not surprisingly, the more one knew (or said one knew) about the Holocaust, the greater the tilt toward the "importance" end of the scale. But almost two-thirds of those who said they knew little or nothing about the Holocaust thought it was either "essential" or "very important" that all Americans know about and understand it. They may not have known much, but they knew what the "better" answer was.

The Washington Holocaust Museum has been overwhelmed by millions of visitors, mostly not Jewish, "voting with their feet" for the encounter which the Museum provides. Some unknown portion of that stream of visitors has been led to its doors by deeply-felt interest and concern. But for some equally un-

known portion of visitors, the Museum has become something that one has to "do" when one tours Washington, just as one has to "do" the Louvre in Paris.

Still, it remains true that, in a diffuse sense, Americans have been receptive to Holocaust commemoration. We don't know for sure what's moved them in this direction, but some suggestions have been offered.

One of the most interesting was put forward by a sociologist who saw the mass viewing of NBC's miniseries *Holocaust* in 1978 as a "public ritual"—dramatizing the moral chaos and breakdown which Americans feared; offering reassurance that good and evil remained clearly distinguishable. The program aired in the wake of Vietnam and Watergate; amid continuing racial violence and concerns about the erosion of traditional morality; at a time when there was a sharp rise in the number of Americans who believed that the country had "pretty seriously gotten on the wrong track." The sociologist wasn't just speculating about the relationship between fear of chaos and the search for moral order on the one hand, and interest in the Holocaust on the other hand. On the basis of a very large number of responses to a detailed questionnaire he found a strong correlation between the two:

Whether someone was politically liberal, moderate, or conservative, that person was more likely to be interested in the Holocaust if he or she perceived serious problems in the moral order. . . . It was the Holocaust as symbol of everpresent evil rather than the Holocaust as historical event that was of interest to persons troubled about the moral fabric.

Different viewers, he found, understood what they saw differently, and came away with different lessons. Religious conservatives, for example, saw the Holocaust as stemming from

the breakdown of traditional Christian values—which dictated their remedies for preventing a recurrence; liberals saw social causes and social remedies. Thus in one sense, viewing *Holocaust* was a ritual of solidarity expressing common abhorrence of “evil incarnate”—an affirmation of shared values, albeit expressed negatively. In another sense the Holocaust became a screen on which people projected a great variety of values and anxieties.

This view of the reception of the television series is suggestive for understanding the continuing functions of Holocaust commemoration within American society. Anxiety about moral chaos and social disarray, and a yearning for firmer moorings, are more widespread than ever; the Holocaust continues to be a symbol of both. As I mentioned earlier, the leaders of the Washington Holocaust Museum have described it as exemplifying—by showing their negation—traditional American values; have expressed the hope that in this way it would be “a moral compass” for the nation.

In this spirit, many have argued that the greatest value of the Washington Museum—and of other encounters with the Holocaust—is that it offers a standard of “pure” or “100

The Holocaust, in American discourse, is often said to be the bearer of important lessons that we ignore at our peril. Where once it was said that the life of Jews would be “a light unto the nations”—the bearer of universal lessons—now it is the “darkness unto the nations” of the death of Jews that is said to carry universal lessons. There has been much acrimonious dispute about what those lessons are, but that has not diminished confidence—cere confidence—that the lessons are urgent.

On the general and philosophical level, those on the Left, Right, and Center have had no difficulty finding in the Holocaust lessons which prove the correctness of their respective world views. Then there are the very particular lessons which

Americans have drawn from the Holocaust. No lesson of the Holocaust has a broader and more enthusiastic constituency in the United States than the dictum that legalized abortion is "the American Holocaust." To those for whom the fetus was as entitled to protection as any other human life, to legalize abortion was to tacitly endorse the Nazi slogan, "life unworthy of life." No less a figure than the Surgeon General of the United States, C. Everett Koop, saw a progression "from liberalized abortion . . . to active euthanasia . . . to the very beginnings of the political climate that led to Auschwitz, Dachau, and Belsen." Feminists have suggested that the dominance of "patriarchal values" made the Holocaust possible; pointed out that it was "mostly men" who designed and ran the death camps. An Oklahoma congressman, after viewing NBC's *Holocaust*, explained to his colleagues that it taught the dangers of "big government." Animal rights activists call fur farms "Buchenwalds for animals." Harvard sociobiologist Edward O. Wilson's critics accused him of reviving the ideas that "led to the establishment of gas chambers in Nazi Germany." Campaigning against gun control, the American Rifleman ran an article entitled "The Warsaw Ghetto: Ten Handguns Against Tyranny."

Surely one of the reasons that the Holocaust appears so often in American discourse is that it is a powerful and evocative symbol capable of being deployed for any number of causes. The sampling I've just given is only a sampling. As the Holocaust is invoked in American discourse it has "something for everybody."

Unlike the situation elsewhere, remembrance of the Holocaust in the United States is "cost free": imposes no demands, political, moral, or material. There are, in America, no equivalent to unreconstructed Vichyites or Waffen SS veterans groups; no one is discomforted by Holocaust commemoration. There is, on the mall in Washington, no Museum of Slavery. (It is as if Germans

said that while of course the Holocaust was a terrible, terrible thing, what was really important was that there be, in Berlin, a monument to American Black Slavery.) Whereas a serious and sustained encounter with the history of hundreds of years of enslavement and oppression of blacks might imply costly demands on Americans to redress the wrongs of the past, contemplating the Holocaust—ritually deploring the Holocaust—imposes no costs whatsoever. It is not that Americans are in any way insincere in their horrified response to representations of the Holocaust which they are invited by their Jewish fellow-citizens to contemplate—not at all. But their horror remains . . . “cost free.”

Remembrance of the Holocaust is, for the American public at large, quite uncontroversial. And this points to the final sense in which it seems to me not a significant American collective memory. I've spoken earlier of collective memories which expressed some sort of significant collective consensus. But another way in which a memory may continue to be important in a society is when it is the framework for continuing conflict. In France, the Revolution was a living memory for centuries not because the population agreed about it, but because the major political divisions in the country—the major struggles—seemed to date from that event. In Israel (though less now than formerly) the Holocaust has been both a source of collective identity and a framework within which partisan conflicts were played out. In Germany, attitudes toward the commemoration of the Holocaust have often been a reflection of political and ideological (as well as generational) conflicts. In France the Holocaust has become entangled with later struggles over racism and xenophobia. In Poland it remains a touchstone in cultural conflict between the forces of clerical reaction and of liberal modernism.

The so-called “politicization” of the memory of the Holocaust is often deplored. But collective memory, when it is con-



sequential, when it is worthy of the name, is characteristically an arena of contestation—political contestation—in which competing narratives about central symbols in the collective past, and the collectivity's relationship to that past, are disputed and negotiated in the interest of redefinition of the collective present. In the United States, memory of the Holocaust is so banal, so inconsequential, not “memory” at all, precisely because it is so uncontroversial, so unrelated to real divisions within American society, so apolitical.



# Susan Rubin Suleiman

## History, Memory, and Moral Judgment in Documentary Film: On Marcel Ophuls' *Hotel Terminus: The Life and Times of Klaus Barbie*

*The hell with "teaching" the Holocaust! Denounce and be angry!*  
Marcel Ophuls

*Memory loves a movie.*  
Patricia Hampl

In a famous essay published more than forty years ago, Theodor Adorno asked the question: What does it mean to "work up," to "process," or—as the English translation puts it—to "come to terms with" the past? (*Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*). The word "Aufarbeitung," Adorno wrote in 1959, had already become a highly suspect *Schlagwort*, a "slogan," for it did not imply a "serious working through of the past, the breaking of its spell through an act of clear consciousness."<sup>1</sup> "Working through," which is here contrasted with the suspect "working up," is Freud's word for overcoming resistance to difficult material: to work through such material (*durcharbeiten*) requires effort. Although Adorno himself did not use the Freudian term (instead, he said *verarbeiten*, yet another word for "working up" or "processing") the translators got his meaning right. For Adorno insists, in this essay, on the difference between a genuine

working through of the past in the psychoanalytic sense (further on, he defines psychoanalysis as "critical self-reflection") and a mere "turning the page" on the past which is actually a desire to wipe it from memory. That kind of "working up" is false and ineffective, as well as self-deceptive: "The attitude that it would be proper for everything to be forgotten and forgiven by those who were wronged is expressed by the party that committed the injustice," Adorno notes with dry irony (115).

In the West Germany of 1959, those words had a special significance. Although the Adenauer government had recognized, early on, Germany's responsibility for the Nazi persecution of the Jews and had signed an agreement in 1952 to pay reparations to Holocaust survivors, the general mood in the country was not in favor of remembering. As many historians have noted, the main goal in West Germany after the war was "'normalcy' at all costs."<sup>2</sup> The assumption of responsibility for the "Jewish question" did not, it has been argued, carry with it a full recognition of the "Nazi question": the role of National Socialism and of antisemitism in German life and politics before the war, and their prolongation within the postwar period.<sup>3</sup> (In East Germany, the situation of memory was even worse, as Jeffrey Herf has shown).<sup>4</sup> Adorno's essay reminded his fellow Germans that their desire to "get free of the past," while understandable (for "one cannot live in its shadow") could not be satisfied as long as "the past one wishes to evade is still so intensely alive" (115).

The solution, according to Adorno, was enlightened pedagogy on a mass scale, a pedagogy at once "turned toward the subject"—focusing on individual psychology and aiming for increased self-consciousness and "subjective enlightenment" on the part of individuals—and turned toward objective arguments about history: "Let us remind people of the simplest things: that open or disguised revivals of fascism will bring about war, suffering, and poverty. . ." (128). That particular reminder may

be useful even today—though one may wonder whether Adorno wasn't being overly optimistic in trusting in the power of rational argument, based on self-interest, to counteract the emotional appeals of racism and xenophobic nationalism. But another aspect of Adorno's essay, his emphasis on the need for remembrance, may strike one as no longer pertinent: for haven't we—we Western Europeans and Americans—experienced, in the past decade and more, not an excess of forgetting but rather a "surfeit of memory"? Charles Maier, whose essay by that title has often been quoted, argued in 1992 that the current obsession with memory, especially with the memory of World War II and the Holocaust, in Germany and elsewhere, "is a sign not of historical confidence but of a retreat from transformative politics."<sup>5</sup> For Maier, the fascination with memory, which today often takes the form of group memories vying with each other for recognition of their suffering, "reflects a new focus on narrow ethnicity" (150) and acts as an obstacle to democracy. (For Adorno, by contrast, democracy required a self-critical "working through" of the past). No wonder that Maier concludes his essay with the flippant but serious wish: "I hope that the future of memory is not too bright" (151).

As a historian, Maier is of course not in favor of forgetting. But he pits history *against* memory: the historian, even the postmodern historian who has rejected "naive positivism," seeks causal explanations for events. The "retriever of memory" has no such imperative. The historian seeks understanding, whereas the rememberer seeks emotion—specifically, according to Maier, the emotion of melancholy. Practical democrat that he is, Maier distrusts such emotion as a "collective self-indulgence" (137), seeing in it an "addiction to memory" that is potentially "neurasthenic and disabling" (141). Although Maier's critique is open to debate in its details and its choice of metaphors (is melancholy the only emotion associated with memory? Is drug

addiction the right analogy?), its general argument seems to be a shared one; the last few years have brought extended critiques of memory, and especially of memories of World War II and the Holocaust, by other historians as well. In the United States, Peter Novick's provocative book, *The Holocaust in American Life*, develops the charge that the emphasis on memory of that event has acted as a block against perceiving—and attempting to act on—more current problems, whether concerning human rights or other urgent issues.<sup>6</sup> In France, Henry Rousso—who gained international acclaim for his 1987 book on The Vichy Syndrome, tracing the history of the memory of the Occupation years in postwar France—has deplored, in his more recent works, the “obsession with memory” and the “judaeo-centrism” of current memories of Vichy.<sup>7</sup> This judaeo-centrism, according to him, not only splinters national memory into rival group memories; it is also an anachronistic distortion of history, for the “Jewish question” was not central to Vichy as Vichy saw itself.<sup>8</sup> Most recently, Rousso has insisted on the rights and responsibilities of the historian as opposed to the “witness,” in terms that recall Maier's insistence on the necessary primacy of history over memory, of understanding over emotion.<sup>9</sup>

Personally, I find these recent critiques of memory, together with the foregrounding of the need for continued historical research, on the whole salutary. They are a corrective to the sacralization of memory, the “duty to remember” that can all too quickly degenerate into kitsch, the very opposite of critical self-reflection. Claude Lanzmann, explicating his masterpiece *Shoah* (1985), has insisted on the “obscenity” of any attempt to “understand” the Holocaust, that is, find causal, historical explanations for it. Lanzmann seeks, instead, to relive the most unfathomable aspects of the Holocaust (the organization and industrialization of mass murder on an unprecedented scale) by an active process of witnessing, a joint enterprise of survivors

and those who receive—in reverence and awe—the survivors' testimony.<sup>10</sup> Lanzmann's idea about the "obscenity of understanding" appeared attractive to many people (at least, among literary scholars) when it was first formulated; and Lanzmann's film is a brilliant enactment of it. But the idea, and even the film insofar as it is its enactment, have come under strong criticism in recent years: the refusal to "understand," as Dominick La Capra has argued in an extended critique, has its limits, both ethical and aesthetic.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, the emphasis on memory has been justly criticized because it can lead not only to dogmatism and kitsch but to political instrumentalization of every kind, including some very bad kinds. As has often been pointed out about the bloody ethnic wars in the former Yugoslavia, collective memory of ethnic humiliation or of religious conflict can be put to cynical political uses. In a different register, the bitter debates of the past few years over the Holocaust memorial in Berlin can be considered as examples of the political instrumentalization of memory, in addition to being (in some instances) critiques of it.<sup>12</sup>

As salutary as the recent critiques of memory may be, however, there is also a sense in which they miss the point. For the obsession with memory, by the very fact that it is an obsession, is not something that can be made to go away. Whether in the purely private realm, as manifested by the increasing practice of diary and memoir writing, most of which will never reach publication, or in the public realm, as manifested by the unabated interest in (and production of) memorials, anniversaries, documentaries, public commemorations, and literary memoirs—including especially the historical memoir that recounts an individual experience in a time of collective crisis or trauma—memory and memorialization continue to be central preoccupations in Europe and the United States.

The question we might salutarily ask, therefore, is not (or not only) "why the obsession with memory?" or "when will it fade?" but rather "how is memory enacted or put to public use?" A poetics of memory, rather than a history or a politics. And, I would add, an ethics too—not only "how," but to what good end? The question then becomes: How is memory *best* enacted or put to public use? But since all poetics and ethics are situated (in the Sartrean sense: located and given meaning in a specific time and place), history and politics come back another way: How is memory best served at a given moment, in a specific place? And who does the judging, to what end?

At this point, we encounter once again Adorno's idea about critical self-reflection. It is a good point from which to launch a discussion of Marcel Ophuls' Academy Award-winning documentary, *Hotel Terminus: The Life and Times of Klaus Barbie*.

### Other People's Memories

*Hotel Terminus* was first screened at Cannes in 1988 and was immediately recognized as a major work, winning the Academy Award for best documentary the following spring. It is readily available on video (unlike most of Ophuls' other films), but in movie theaters it had very short runs, both in Europe and in the United States; and surprisingly few people have seen it.<sup>13</sup> Aside from being a difficult and brilliant work, I think it is a film that makes many viewers on both sides of the Atlantic uncomfortable. It is that lack of comfort that will be my focus in discussing the film.

But first, a bit of historical background. Klaus Barbie, born in 1913 in Bad Godesberg in the Rhineland, into a family that came from the Saar region near the French border, was head of the German security police (SIPO-SD) in Lyon during the German Occupation of France, from November 1942 to late August



1944. Known as “the butcher of Lyon” because of his cruelty, Barbie was responsible for the torture and deportation of many hundreds of Jews and members of the Resistance during that period. In particular, he was known as the man who had arrested and tortured to death the best-known hero of the Resistance, Jean Moulin. After the war, Barbie disappeared from view; it came to light much later that for several years he had worked for the American Army’s Counter-Intelligence Corps (C.I.C.) in Germany, which was deep into the Cold War almost as soon as World War II had ended. In 1951, the C.I.C. helped him escape from Europe via the “rat line,” the notorious escape route for former Nazis organized by members of the Catholic Church. In 1952 and again in 1954, he was tried for his war crimes in France and condemned to death *in absentia*.

In the early 1970s, Barbie was tracked down in South America. Under the false name of Klaus Altmann, he was living at ease with his family in Bolivia and Peru, involved in shady business deals and very close to the military rulers in La Paz. In the late 1970s, pressure built up for his extradition to France, thanks in large part to the efforts of Beate and Serge Klarsfeld. But Altmann, interviewed by French newspaper and television reporters, denied categorically that he was Barbie; and he was confident in the protection of the Bolivian government. The French government, under conservative president Giscard d’Estaing, was not overly eager to press the matter. It was only in February 1983, after changes in regime both in France (where Socialist president François Mitterrand was elected in 1981) and in Bolivia (where President Siles Zuazo replaced the military junta in late 1982), that Barbie was flown back to France and incarcerated at Montluc Prison in Lyon, the scene of his own earlier exploits (this was for symbolic reasons—he was transferred out of Montluc into a more secure prison a week later).<sup>14</sup>

The arrest and return of Klaus Barbie to Lyon, more than forty years after he first arrived there and set up his headquarters in the luxurious Hotel Terminus (which gave its name to Ophuls' film), caused an immense uproar in France. His trial took over four years to prepare, and at times it was not certain that it would take place; The trial—which unfolded over an eight-week period between mid-May and early July 1987—was a watershed in the history of French memories of World War II; and in the history of French jurisprudence as well, for the case brought about a new definition of “crimes against humanity” in French law. By an interesting coincidence, the trial took place the same year as the publication of Rousso's *Le syndrome de Vichy*, which ended with the claim that the memory of Vichy had become, since the early 1970s, a national “obsession.”<sup>15</sup>

What were the reasons for the French obsession? Probably the most important was the disappearance of De Gaulle from the political scene and the demythologizing of the Gaullist version of wartime France as a “nation of resisters.” The Gaullist myth of a France united against the occupant—all save for a few traitors who received their just punishment—had served a useful unifying function in the decades following the war; but it was definitively laid to rest in the early 1970s. Robert Paxton's 1972 book *Vichy France* (translated immediately into French) documented the Vichy regime's more than eager collaboration with the Germans, as well as the deep ideological and political divisions that had existed in French society during the decades preceding the war; Marcel Ophuls' groundbreaking 1971 film, *The Sorrow and the Pity*, based on dozens of interviews with people who remembered those years, showed the very wide range of choices, most of them indubitably less than heroic, made by the citizens of France during the Occupation.<sup>16</sup>

The other important reason for the obsession with Vichy was the emergence of a new extreme right in French politics (Jean-

Marie Le Pen's Front National), along with a French brand of Holocaust negationism (represented by Robert Faurisson and others). This provoked a strong reaction, from liberal intellectuals as well as from a wider segment of the population.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, a certain part of the extreme left embraced the negationist theses as a way of supporting the Palestinians against Israel. Whatever the exact position one adopted, the Holocaust loomed large—this at a time when the accelerating memory of the Holocaust was becoming an international as well as a French phenomenon.

During the four years that preceded the Barbie trial, the national obsession was given ample opportunity to grow and develop. The list of charges against Barbie required plaintiffs and witnesses, producing an immense amount of testimony and public attention.<sup>18</sup> The trial also brought to the fore a painful aspect of the collective memory of the Resistance around the person of Jean Moulin, whose arrest along with six other Resistance leaders in June 1943 was known to be the result of a betrayal.<sup>19</sup> Internal dissension within the Resistance—among Gaullists, Communists, and several other factions—was gleefully emphasized by Barbie's defense team, headed by the well-known lawyer Jacques Vergès. Vergès, who had represented a number of Algerian terrorists in the 1960s and later, was pursuing his own agenda in defending Barbie: he wanted to use the trial as a way of putting France itself on trial, not for what it had done under Vichy but for the tortures it had practiced during the Algerian war. Furthermore, Maître Vergès sought to exacerbate possible conflicts between Jewish plaintiffs and plaintiffs who had been tortured or deported as members of the Resistance. At stake here was an important point of jurisprudence, for at first the prosecution excluded all charges *except* those brought by Jewish victims: Barbie's crimes against *résistants* came under the heading of war crimes rather than crimes against humanity, and

had therefore expired under the statute of limitations. Besides, in his trials of the 1950s Barbie had already been condemned for a number of war crimes, and he couldn't be tried for the same crimes twice.

Maître Vergès was overjoyed when, acting on the request of various Resistance groups, the French Supreme Court of Appeals ruled in December 1985 that certain charges could be maintained even though they featured crimes of torture or deportation against *résistants*, not only against Jews. In effect, this ruling changed the definition of "crime against humanity" in France, and was criticized for that reason by a number of intellectuals. Alain Finkielkraut, for example, argued that the ruling played into the hand of Vergès, for it seemed to say to the Jews: "You ask us to suffer with you, but your memories are not ours, and your narcissistic lamentations do not bring tears to our eyes."<sup>20</sup> According to Finkielkraut, by extending the definition of crimes against humanity, the ruling actually fomented rivalry among group memories and group suffering. In his view, the murder of the Jews in the Holocaust was a universal concern, not simply a "narcissistic lamentation;" therefore, the definition of crimes against humanity did not need to be expanded.

Of course, Alain Finkielkraut is Jewish. That's a horrible thing to say, isn't it? But it is what Jacques Vergès, and not only he, would say (and did say, in different words) in response to Finkielkraut's argument. Or so Finkielkraut would say. Or so I say that Finkielkraut would say. With those multiple twists in mind, we are ready to talk about Marcel Ophüls' *Hotel Terminus*.<sup>21</sup>

The film opens with a dark screen, then the names of the American producers appear with piano music on the soundtrack: someone is playing, haltingly, the opening bars of the slow movement of Beethoven's *Pathétique* sonata. After another credit line, and another stop and start in the music, a

black and white photo appears: three men in medium close-up, evidently at a party, laughing: the one on the left, a young man, has his arm around the shoulder of the one in the middle, who holds up a wine glass in a toast; he is wearing what looks like a party hat; his other hand holds an upraised cane. The camera zooms in on him, the music fades, and we hear a man's voice speaking English with a German accent: "We had a New Year's Party almost fifteen years ago, and Barbie was sitting at the end of the table." The camera cuts to a medium close-up of a youthful, jovial-looking man sitting on a sofa, and his name and occupation flash on the screen: Johannes Schneider-Merck, import-export. "And then I said that this bastard Hitler had, you know, betrayed the idealism of German youth. He jumped up, furious, and shouted, 'In my presence, nobody insults the Führer!'" In the middle of this sentence, the camera cuts back quickly to the close-up of the man with the party hat, who is now identified as Klaus Barbie, then back to a close-up of Schneider-Merck; the attentive viewer may have noticed that this jovial interviewee is the young man in the opening photo, with his arm around Barbie.

Schneider-Merck continues his story: "His face turned red, it was like something exploded in him—it was something he really believed in, there was no arguing: 'The Führer is Number One,' you know, and I'm sure that in his prison cell in Lyon, he has got. . . ." Schneider-Merck, laughing, draws a frame with his fingers to suggest a photo, and the camera cuts to a close-up of the Christmas decoration on the side-table next to him; another voice, that of the interviewer Marcel Ophuls, has said something, but one cannot catch the words. Schneider-Merck: "Has he got a photo?" Ophuls: "I don't know!" and both men laugh. "Maybe we should send him one for Christmas!" Schneider-Merck jokes. The camera now cuts to a view of a prison, evidently the prison in Lyon, and the film's title appears over the image.

In the meantime, some music has been playing. Exactly at the moment when Schneider-Merck, mimicking Barbie, says, "The Führer is number One," the pure voices of the Vienna Boys' Choir are heard singing a plaintive song in German. To French or American viewers, the song is probably not familiar—but to most Germans it is well known, a folk song, a love song. *Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär / und auch zwei Flüglein hätt' / Flög ich zu dir / Weil's aber nicht kann sein / Weil's aber nicht kann sein / Bleib ich all hier.* "If I were a bird and had two wings, I would fly to thee. But since that cannot be, but since that cannot be, I will stay here."<sup>22</sup>

Speak of multiple twists: a former close friend, now one no longer, recalls Barbie's love of the Führer, and shares a laugh with the filmmaker. Schneider-Merck, involved in an unspecified kind of import-export, will explain later that Barbie and his pals cheated him out of half a million Deutschmarks, which he had entrusted to them as part of a currency speculation. No one in this tale has very clean hands, certainly not its narrator. Yet the viewer, like the filmmaker, has shared a laugh with him at Barbie's expense. But upon reflection, the viewer may wonder: What exactly did Schneider-Merck mean, at that party long ago, when he said that Hitler had betrayed the idealism of German youth? "He had, you know, betrayed..." But what do we know? Did Hitler betray German youths' idealism by leading them into the war? Or by losing the war? Did their idealism embrace Nazi ideas, for example about the danger of the "Jewish race"?

Schneider-Merck addresses his "you know" not to us, but to Marcel Ophuls, son of the German Jewish emigré filmmaker Max Ophuls—Max was born in Saarbrücken, Barbie's *land*, in 1902, and left Germany with his wife and young son (Marcel, five years old at the time) in 1933. Marcel Ophuls knows German folk-songs, as well as French ones and American ones. "I don't have

any roots," he has said about himself, "but I have ties . . . very deep ties to the Anglo-Saxon world and to America. I have traditional ties through my mother and father to Germany."<sup>23</sup> Does Marcel Ophuls know what German youths' idealism was, and how Hitler had betrayed it? Later in the film, while interviewing one of the former American intelligence agents who had employed Barbie after the war, Ophuls asks him, somewhat aggressively: "What is a Nazi idealist?" The agent had called Barbie, in a memo he wrote for the State Department in 1947, "a Nazi idealist"—now, almost forty years later, he tells Ophuls that he doesn't remember what he meant by that phrase, but wishes he could rewrite it. "Yes, perhaps especially right now," Ophuls replies cruelly.

But he is not cruel to Schneider-Merck; in fact, he shares a joke with him. We too laugh—until we start to wonder why we're laughing.

Then there is the music. Does the beautiful old love-song allude, ironically, to Barbie, who longs to fly to his beloved Führer? Or does it allude, with different degrees of irony, to anyone whose wings have been clipped: Barbie in his prison cell, idealists who have been betrayed, import-exporters of doubtful integrity who have been cheated, Jews who were expelled from home? The next song we will hear in the film, a few sequences after this, is another folk-song sung by the Vienna Boys' Choir: *Ade nun mein lieb Heimatland*, "Farewell now, my beloved homeland." It was sung by political exiles after the 1848 Revolution, as well as by those who left or were made to leave after 1933.<sup>24</sup> Ophuls puts it on the soundtrack over images of the village of Izieu, near Lyon, from where forty-four children were deported to Auschwitz in April 1944 on Klaus Barbie's orders—the most damaging of the charges brought against him at his 1987 trial.<sup>25</sup>

“Farewell now, my beloved homeland.” After shots of the village and the building where the children lived, we see black and white photos of some of the children: a little brown haired girl, a young boy. There follows a montage of voices without music, talking about Barbie; then the song starts again—but this time we’re in the border city of Trier, where Klaus Barbie went to high school. As the camera pans over the city with the song on the soundtrack, the filmmaker’s voice is heard, reading a letter written by Klaus Barbie in 1934: “Like my mother, I am a child of the [river] Eifel.” The camera cuts to the old German farmer Johannes Otten, who knew Barbie as a child and calls him affectionately *der Bub*, “the Boy.” In the Izieu sequence we have just seen, a French farmer said he remembered “the little Jews” of the children’s home, with the same song playing on the soundtrack.

Is Ophuls suggesting, with that parallelism, that the boy Barbie and the children of Izieu were alike? That the “butcher of Lyon” was once a lovable boy who had to leave his homeland? Are we supposed to feel sorry for him (Otten recalls that Barbie’s father, a teacher, became very violent when drunk—he beat the boy), the way we feel sorry for the children of Izieu? Or is the parallelism ironic, suggesting not similarity but difference: Barbie was a boy who left home, but he grew to a ripe old age in exile; the children of Izieu were gassed upon arrival at Auschwitz, and it was Barbie who had sent them there.

Similarly, we might ask what role the *Pathétique* sonata plays in the opening sequence. Later, several people who knew Barbie in Bolivia will remark that he was a fine musician, a masterful pianist. Is Ophuls giving us, ironically, the familiar trope about Nazis who listened to Beethoven after a day’s work of killing? Is he mocking the torturer who plays the most clichéd melody of Beethoven, and stumblingly at that? Or is he seriously wondering what relation can exist between sublime music and crimes against humanity?<sup>26</sup>



The film does not answer these questions, certainly not explicitly. This does not mean that it adopts a position of moral relativism—Ophuls has stated that he's "very Manichean."<sup>27</sup> But the moral judgments the film proposes must be arrived at through work, and struggle, by both filmmaker and viewer. On the filmmaker's part, the work and struggle are not only in the filming but in the montage. "I intervene enormously in the editing, for it's there that the narrative is formed," Ophuls said in an interview about this film. "*Hotel Terminus* is by far the most difficult thing I've done in my life. I'm quite pleased and optimistic to have been able to come out of it alive, I really thought I'd drop dead in that godforsaken editing studio in Billancourt."<sup>28</sup> He wrote five different scripts at the editing stage, and barely considers the film finished.

The brilliance of Ophuls's editing lies in its capacity to pose uncomfortable questions for the viewer—or, to put it another way, its capacity to force the viewer into uncomfortable subject positions in relation to the material. Never—or at least, never for long—do we have a chance, in this film, to bask in righteous indignation or moral superiority, not even toward a villain like Barbie. The extremely rapid and complex montage of soundtrack and images not only demands close attention, but creates a destabilizing effect on the viewer's understanding, on his or her moral certainties, and even, I would say, on his or her sense of self. "Whom do I believe and who do I think is lying? Whose ideas do I share? Whom do I identify with? Where are my loyalties?" These are among the questions that Ophuls obliges the viewer to confront with his editing. Like all of his documentary films, *Hotel Terminus* is what theorists call an interactive documentary, whose standard form is the interview, or generally multiple interviews.<sup>29</sup> Already in *The Sorrow and the Pity*, Ophuls had perfected his technique of "dialectical montage" in editing the interviews: this consists in cutting up the individ-

ual interviews and juxtaposing various pieces, so that the statements of one witness are qualified, or even totally contradicted, by those of another witness (or several others) in quick succession. In some cases, it is the insertion of documentary footage, or of an unrelated film clip or a musical soundtrack that produces the "dialectical" effect, qualifying visually or aurally what is being said by the interviewee. Since Ophuls refuses voice-over or "voice of God" commentary in his films, whatever meaning the viewer derives must be gotten from his juxtapositions; and if the juxtapositions are rapid as well as dialectical, the viewer is kept off balance.

Contributing to the viewer's sense of instability, narrative and visual fragmentation are much more present in *Hotel Terminus* than in *The Sorrow and the Pity*. Geographically and temporally, *The Sorrow and the Pity* focuses on the city of Clermont-Ferrand between 1940 and 1944, whereas *Hotel Terminus* moves among five countries (France, Germany, the United States, Bolivia, Peru) on three continents, covering a period of more than forty years. In *Sorrow*, the languages are almost exclusively French and English (with a few short sequences in German); in *Hotel Terminus*, we hear substantial amounts of German (with some dialects) and Spanish, as well as French and English, including English spoken with a wide range of foreign accents. As for *dramatis personae*, the final credits for *Hotel Terminus* list ninety five people seen and heard in the film—and since some items on the list are plural ("citizens of Marburg"), the number we actually see and hear is even greater, a hundred or more. (*The Sorrow and the Pity*, only seven minutes shorter, lists thirty-five interviewees). For anyone not familiar with at least some aspects of the Barbie case, and even for someone who is, a first reaction to *Hotel Terminus* may be nothing short of bewilderment at the succession of voices and faces, not to mention musical motifs, landscapes, and inserted elements. If the filmmaker had to struggle with his editing, so does the viewer.

Paradoxically, however, this is not a flaw in the film. On the contrary, by means of his montage, Ophuls creates what I would call (harkening back to my earlier question about “public use”) a *good* public use of memory. *Hotel Terminus* presents an unusually wide range of individual memories (or lack of memories, whether genuine or feigned) referring to a man who, by the force of circumstance, looms large historically. Around the figure of Barbie, individual memory, collective memory, and historical memory converge, and often clash: the film’s subtitle turns out to be serious as well as parodic—this really is a film about the “life and times” of Klaus Barbie, on a world stage. Ophuls’ editing emphasizes both his and the viewer’s difficulty in confronting and evaluating the testimonies he gathers (or fails to gather, in some cases). But the issues as he presents them are not undecidable; they are merely not to be resolved without a struggle.

Is the struggle only intellectual, a matter of critical judgment? (Ophuls has stated, somewhat haughtily, that his films are not intended for people with less than a secondary school education. But he added, in the same interview, that the “man in the street” is often more canny [*malin*] and attentive to difficult works than he is given credit for being<sup>30</sup>). In fact, the viewer is summoned not only to evaluate critically, but to situate him or herself affectively, as a subject—an ethical subject as well as the subject of aesthetic perception—in relation to the film’s rendering of “other people’s memories.” I want to suggest, in what follows, that Ophuls achieves this by putting himself into the action—in front of the camera as well as behind it.

### The Filmmaker’s Self

As film theorists have pointed out, the interactive documentary allows for a wide range of intervention on the part of the

filmmaker, who can participate more or less noticeably in the interviews. At one end of the interactive spectrum is what Patricia Hampl has called the "memoir film," where the filmmaker and his or her friends and family are the real subject of the story.<sup>31</sup> At the other end is what Bill Nichols calls the "masked interview," where the filmmaker is neither seen nor heard in the final cut, but has in fact instigated the conversation and simply edited signs of him/herself out of it.<sup>32</sup>

In a film whose proclaimed subject is a historical event or personage, one would expect a relatively unobtrusive presence on the part of the filmmaker, closer to the "masked interview" than to the memoir film. Ophuls, however, has—with increasing insistence and provocativeness from *Hotel Terminus* on—played against this expectation. Already in *The Sorrow and the Pity*, his presence was clearly felt. Although that film showed only a handful of *images* of the filmmaker, he was present in almost every interview as a voice: respectful toward some, witheringly ironic toward others, and adopting a wide range of tones in between. The range of attitudes communicated by Ophuls' voice is one indication of the moral spectrum of the film: At the positive (respectful) end, we find Pierre Mendès-France, who joined De Gaulle in London after escaping from a French prison, and the peasant Grave brothers, members of the Resistance who were denounced and deported; at the witheringly ironic end is Marius Klein, the merchant who put an ad in the papers around 1941 to inform people that despite his name, he was not Jewish. Between these extremes, Ophuls' expressive voice modulates from that of neutral information-seeker (as when he inquires from the owner of a movie theater what kinds of films were played during the Occupation) to that of calm adversary, as when he corrects some "facts" advanced in defense of the collaborationist Prime Minister Pierre Laval by his son-in-law. These interview techniques were one element that made *The Sorrow and the Pity*

a groundbreaking documentary—its influence on Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* is obvious in this regard, as in some others.

*Hotel Terminus* uses the same interview techniques, but adds to them a new set of procedures that emphasize the filmmaker's visual presence and subjective responses. Recalling the many scenes in *Shoah* where Lanzmann appears in the frame, we might see in Ophuls' self-representations a piece of reverse influence: he started filming *Hotel Terminus* just around the time that *Shoah* came out (1985), and has himself drawn a parallel between his subjective interventions and Lanzmann's.<sup>33</sup> (He also interviews Lanzmann briefly in the film, in what appears to be a homage and a gesture of solidarity more than anything else). But Ophuls has suggested, as well, that it was the subject he was dealing with that dictated his (as well as Lanzmann's) choices: "I feel frustration, bitterness, and revolt, and because I believe that documentaries should reflect the mood of the moment, it's all up there on the screen."<sup>34</sup> Can one make a film about other people's memories of Klaus Barbie without putting one's own self and emotions into the film? Ophuls' answer is No.

I propose to call those moments of self-representation and subjective expression where the filmmaker's self comes strongly into play the *expressionist moments* of the film. While this is a somewhat loose definition, it allows us to discount those scenes where Ophuls is visible without any strong affect involved. As suggested by Ophuls himself in the remark I quoted above, frustration and anger are the strongest affects displayed; but there are a few others. In my view, these expressionist moments are the most original—as well as the most problematic—moments in the film, aesthetically and thematically. Furthermore, it is in these moments of visually highlighted subjectivity that Ophuls points the viewer to the central moral issues raised by his work.

The first expressionist moment consists of three sequences in succession, linked by a single theme. The series occurs quite

early in the film, just after the lengthy segment Ophuls devotes to Jean Moulin and the problem of his arrest and betrayal. Returning to an earlier interview with Daniel Cordier, a distinguished-looking man who was Moulin's young assistant in 1943 and is now his respected biographer, Ophuls asks him, off-screen: "Do you think that the Moulin case has overshadowed other tortures: the Holocaust, deportation, the death camps?" Cordier answers that indeed, Barbie owes his "glory, in quotation marks," to Moulin—otherwise, he was just an ordinary torturer. "Atrocious but ordinary," Ophuls ventures. "Yes, atrocious, monstrous, but altogether ordinary—he did what thousands of other Nazis did or would have liked to do." As Cordier speaks this sentence, the camera cuts to a view of Ophuls from the back, reaching the top of a staircase. On the landing, an elderly man stands in the doorway, expecting him. Ophuls speaks to him in German: "I'd like to ask you—what crimes against the Reich could a 2-year old girl commit?" The man gestures with his hand as if to say "not that again," and starts to shut the door, then opens it partially and says: "That little girl . . . I didn't even look." At this point, an identifying tag appears on the screen: "Karl-Heinz Muller, former Gestapo chief in Toulouse." Muller continues: "Whoever was there, signed. If I had separated the two-year old girl. . . ." Then, abruptly: "Oh what's the use!" and shuts the door as Ophuls cries "*Bitte!*" "Please!" Ophuls turns toward the camera, with an odd smile on his face; in the meantime, a chorus has started on the soundtrack, in English: "Joy to the World, the Lord Has Come!" "*Fröhliche Weihnacht,*" "Merry Christmas," Ophuls says to the door, as the camera cuts to a sign that reads "*Frohes Fest,*" "Happy Holiday," in a store window.

In a perceptive essay on this film (with whose main argument I don't agree), Richard Golsan refers to this scene as one of several filmed in Germany, in which "Ophuls abandons any real

pretense of objectivity” and uses “heavy-handed techniques to make his case.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the irony of the Christmas carol, and more generally of the Christmas motif here and throughout the film, may be called heavy-handed. But what, exactly, is the “case” Ophuls is making in this scene? That old Nazis continue to live among their neighbors, undisturbed? That old Nazis don’t like to be reminded of their crimes? Neither of those cases had to be made, I think, to European or American audiences, *circa* 1985. If that were solely—or even principally—the point of the scene, Ophuls’ efforts would seem to be wasted, or at the very least, not cost effective: too much effort for the point. But what if the point of this scene were something different: for example, the encounter between an old Nazi and an aggressive Jewish filmmaker who doesn’t even introduce himself or ask to be admitted before launching into a question expressly designed to get the door slammed in his face? What if the point were precisely to lead to the odd smile with which the filmmaker glances at the camera as he is left standing there? And what if, furthermore, the point of the scene were to prod the viewer to exclaim: “Hey, you staged all that! That was a *mise-en-scène*!”

In a long interview with a French film journal in 1988, Ophuls stated a general rule of documentary film: “One shouldn’t do any staging [*mise en scène*].”<sup>36</sup> Critics who find his irony too heavy-handed are responding to what they perceive as Ophuls’ transgression of this rule.<sup>37</sup> The reason for the rule is important, for it distinguishes the documentary genre from fiction: the seriousness and authenticity of documentary as a representation of reality demands that the filmmaker eschew techniques of make-believe. As if he were replying to this criticism, Ophuls adds in the same interview: “In *Hotel Terminus*, the only moments where there is staging it’s comedy, and it’s so obvious that I hope people will be amused by it” (27–28). In other words, there is no deception involved since the staging is obvious.<sup>38</sup>

Ophuls mentions, as an example, a scene later in the film where he and his German assistant Dieter Reifarh mimic one of the many refusals they are receiving from people in Bavaria who claim they never knew Barbie and have nothing to say. This scene is indeed broadly farcical, with Ophuls playing a Munich lady who is at first very interested when she hears of a documentary being made, but as soon as she finds out what it is about she retreats behind feigned absence of memory and lack of knowledge about politics. Ophuls has explained, in various interviews, that in *Hotel Terminus* his main difficulty was how to deal with people who either claimed forgetfulness and ignorance, or else constantly lied and “manipulated.” The farcical scene of mimicry in Bavaria (one of the major “expressionist moments” in the film) was one way he found to express his frustration. “There’s no contradiction in handling often tragic subjects in depth and the idea of game playing. On the contrary, I see no other way out,” Ophuls told an interviewer in 1995.<sup>39</sup>

In psychoanalytic terms, we might speak of such “playing” as a defense against overwhelming feelings of sadness and anger. In a 1988 essay titled “The Sorrow and the Laughter,” Ophuls tells the story of a woman he once met in London, whom he employed to dub one of his films into English. She was a survivor of several Nazi and Soviet concentration camps, and “between takes she would tell me of her own experiences. . . . Most of her stories turned out to be uproariously funny, I’m sorry to say.”<sup>40</sup> But of course, he is not sorry at all. Mrs. Pravda’s (for that, he claims, was her name: Mrs. Truth) way of coping with tragedy is exactly his own. Immediately following the above remark, he states what can be considered one of his aesthetic credos: “The reason Ernst Lubitsch’s *To Be or Not to Be* is the greatest film ever made on National Socialism is that he debunks it, makes it ridiculous.” As for his own films: “through the method of



investigative sarcasm, you can make a point against the horror but also demystify the horror at the same time" (115).

Aside from being an outlet for personal feeling, "playing" in a documentary is a sign of self-consciousness about the form. As Ophuls put it to his 1995 interviewers, it is a way to "stress the form, to put it up front"—a tendency he sees as "part of the maturing process."<sup>41</sup> In this self-reflexive mode, which Bill Nichols mentions as one of the canonical modes of the contemporary documentary genre, the filmmaker "speaks to us less about the historical world . . . than about the process of representation itself."<sup>42</sup> By mimicking the woman who refuses to be interviewed, Ophuls emphasizes his own role—as well as his own difficulties—as a documentary filmmaker. I would say, however, that in this process he *also* "speaks to us about the historical world." For he prefaces his little farce scene with a somewhat less farcical direct address to the camera: "This is February something or other 1986, and we are still in Bavaria . . . I represent Memory Pictures. . . ." Here, metacommentary about the process of representation merges with commentary about contemporary history. Ophuls suggests that the willed forgetfulness of some Germans in 1986 refers not only to the Nazi past, the years before and during the war, but also (maybe especially) to the continuing survival of Nazism. It is significant that this sequence, explicitly dated (February 1986), was shot during the early days of the historians' debate (*Historikerstreit*) that was being waged heatedly in the German press at that very time, a debate that concerned precisely the origins and the historical meaning of Nazism.<sup>43</sup>

Of course, we could say that the farcical scene is heavy-handed, like the scene with the old Nazi—but the question about the case Ophuls is making can be asked here as well, and even more so the question of his own position with regard to it. If his "case" is that we should condemn all those who claim to have

forgotten the past (and who include, as the film makes clear, not only former Nazis but many others, of various ages and nationalities), then we might see Ophuls' heavy-handedness as a method of forcible recall, with all the aggressiveness and sadism that such methods imply. Clowning an old Munich housewife with a dubious past, the filmmaker affirms his own superiority, just as he does in more overt fashion in other scenes where he confronts reluctant or "forgetful" individuals (like the former American agent Robert Taylor, who called Barbie a "Nazi idealist") with past actions they would rather not think about. One critic has compared Ophuls' role to that of a psychoanalyst bringing repressed memories to light.<sup>44</sup> But the sadism of such scenes suggests a different comparison, one that Ophuls himself has made. He has compared his role to that of an "interrogator," noting the "cruel enjoyment" [*jouissance méchante*] that both he and the viewer could take from his playing that role<sup>45</sup>—precisely the role that, as we hear over and over from witnesses, Klaus Barbie was so good at. But if we allow that association to surface, then the notion of the filmmaker's "heavy-handedness" takes on a new, more troubling, meaning; it becomes both a sign and a cause of the viewer's discomfort—and I would guess that Ophuls intended it as such, whether consciously or not.

In a quite amazing passage in his 1988 interview, Ophuls remarked on a certain similarity between himself and Klaus Barbie: "It's true that there is, between Barbie and me, at least one point of identification (or maybe several, I too yell a lot, but I don't torture. . .), it's the cosmopolitan aspect. Both born in Germany, followed by a diaspora. His is the diaspora of the torturers, mine is the other one. But our knowledge of languages, of the way people think in other countries. . . . He's a man of considerable intelligence, a man who knows the mentality of those he deals with, and who used his knowledge professionally. . . . Well, me too."<sup>46</sup> If the viewer has enjoyed Ophuls'

sadism, whether overt or farcical—and inevitably, one has, as Ophuls knows—then the viewer must also say “me too.”

Odd and uncomfortable couplings, whose implications go far. I don't mean toward a facile conclusion about complicity between victim and perpetrator, but rather toward the question of what it takes to genuinely “work through” a subjective relation to the Holocaust. Ophuls' film suggests—and brilliantly enacts—the proposition that any attempt to deal with that question involves making one's own fears, angers, and prejudices visible, both to oneself and others. That means, for a filmmaker, not standing back behind the protection of the camera, with the illusion of objectivity and the inevitable superiority that that affords, but putting oneself at least occasionally in front of it, even if it makes one look bad—like a sadistic interrogator, or like an “aggressive Jew” who gets the door slammed in his face; or, simply, weak, sad, or ridiculous.

That brings us back to the old Nazi Karl-Heinz Muller, and the silly grin on Ophuls' face as he stands by the door: he looks at once sheepish and triumphant, for this is what he expected from Muller—otherwise, why would he have asked him that question, with no preliminary *politesses*? But Ophuls also looks, necessarily, manipulative, somewhat obnoxious (does he have to play “Joy to the World” just then?), angry—and anger impedes control, whether of one's own behavior or that of others.

The theme is failed encounters with old Nazis living in retirement. Ophuls repeats it with the two sequences immediately following this one, in a crescendo of anger and loss of control, matched by increasing emphasis on his own role. After Muller, he tries to interview a man named Steingritt, who worked for Barbie in Lyon and was tried after the war and served time in jail. We see Ophuls gesturing to the cameraman to follow him as he climbs the steps in the hallway of Steingritt's apartment building. Steingritt, who has come downstairs, puts a piece of

paper up to block the camera; Ophuls chases him into the stairwell, and is finally stopped by the closing of the elevator door as Steingritt rides away. "Why won't you talk to me? You don't even know what I want to ask?" Ophuls keeps saying. "Leave me in peace, I've served my time. And stop filming!" Steingritt responds. The sequence ends with a striking image: Ophuls staring at the closed elevator door, whose glass reflects his own silhouette and the outside door, then walking out of the building as "Joy to the World" starts up again.

In this scene, the emphasis is less on the filmmaker's superiority or aggressiveness than on his weakness. The old Nazi gets the better of him—he blocks the camera's view, and attacks Ophuls verbally. Rather than being in the position of sadist, Ophuls appears here in the position of victim: the other man won't allow him to ask a single question. Of course, in one sense Ophuls is still in control, for he controls the camera and the editing—but what he chooses to show us is the scene of his own humiliation and lack of control. The look on his face this time is not smirking, but grim.

The third sequence in what I am calling the initial expressionist moment is the longest, and it stages the filmmaker's self in the most complex way of the three. It begins with Serge Klarsfeld, who has acted as the "expert informant" about all three of these former Nazis in intercut shots, and who explains that Bartelmus, Barbie's assistant for Jewish affairs in Lyon, was tried after the war but condemned to only ten years in prison—which proves, says Klarsfeld, that crimes against Jews were not even considered as serious as war crimes at the time. The camera cuts to a road with a sign indicating entrance to a town, then to rooftops, a row of houses, a street sign (*Friedhofstrasse*: Cemetery Street). Off-screen, we hear Ophuls' voice, very low and polite: "Frau Bartelmus?" A woman's voice answers. He would like to speak with Herr Bartelmus, Ophuls tells her. Yes,

she knows, she answers, but her husband has no comment. Cut to Ophuls, wearing a raincoat and matching cap, walking in a vegetable garden. As he bends over rows of vegetables, he calls out repeatedly, in a loud voice: "Herr Bartelmus? Herr Bartelmus?" A double mug shot, front and profile, of a brutal-looking man, evidently Bartelmus at the time of his postwar trial, appears on the screen. A woman's voice, coming from in front of the vegetable garden offscreen, asks Ophuls what he's doing there. Looking for Bartelmus, he answers. "You won't find him there," she says coolly, then asks him to leave the premises: private property. The camera cuts to her balcony, and we see her from afar as Ophuls leaves the garden and stands below: a youngish woman, born after the war.

The camera is now behind Ophuls, as he looks up at her—a balcony scene, with the filmmaker as Romeo, but this Juliet is indifferent. "His past [*Vergangenheit*] doesn't interest you?" Ophuls asks. "No, it doesn't interest me," she answers. Cut to a man's voice, then a close-up of an elderly man in profile, shaking his head—he is speaking in Bavarian dialect: "I'm not at all interested, not at all interested." The camera cuts to another youngish woman, a gas station attendant who has just filled up Ophuls' car. "You're doing it for the sensationalism, that's what I think," she says as she walks back to the pump, then takes the money handed to her by Ophuls' assistant; Ophuls and another assistant stand looking at her. "Old people should be left in peace, not hounded from place to place," the woman continues. Cut to the old man who is "not interested." We hear Ophuls' voice, evidently asking about something he has just said and that we haven't heard: "What do you mean?" "You're selling pictures," the man answers. "And what about the children who never grew old?" Ophuls asks, as the camera cuts to a young girl opening the door of a ground-floor apartment. "Do you think it will help the children if you make an old man's last years

difficult?"—it's the gas station attendant speaking again, and the camera pans over to her in medium close-up, with Ophuls and his assistant listening.

Cut now to an extreme close-up, the eyes and nose only, of the frontal mug shot of Bartelmus we saw previously, with Ophuls' voice on the soundtrack: "So your husband had nothing to do with arresting Jews?" Mrs. Bartelmus, unseen, replies as the camera pulls back to show the whole face in the photograph: "I can't say Yes or No. It was something that happened not only in Lyon, and it wasn't just Barbie who was responsible. Frenchmen too were involved." The camera cuts to another black and white photo: two French policemen on the left, one on the right, and between them a young man wearing a suit and matching cap, with a scared look on his face. This is evidently a wartime roundup, a *raffle*, and the French police are in charge.

What has happened here? The sequence starts like the other two, with Ophuls rebuffed and angry; sarcastically, he clowns the bumbling but clever detective looking for his prey in a vegetable patch (his attitude and his raincoat may remind one of Inspector Columbo, one of Ophuls' heroes, as he has stated in interviews). In the balcony scene, he gets a young German woman to state that the old Nazi's past doesn't interest her, presumably producing a negative effect on the viewer. Then, in the gas station, the situation turns: Ophuls himself becomes the accused. "You're selling pictures." Do the accusations make the accusers look bad—ordinary Germans denying responsibility, still not interested in the past? That may well be. But in a telling way, the accusations hit home: Ophuls *is* making a picture, and he will sell it. Are the murdered children of Izieu only an alibi, a justification for "selling pictures"?

At the opening of *Hotel Terminus* at Cannes, Ophuls recounts in "The Sorrow and the Laughter," he was confronted during intermission by a tearful elderly woman, "small and rather stout"

and full of gratitude—she wanted to tell him about the nightmares and sleepless nights his film had revived in her. His own reaction, however, was one of embarrassment, and a desire for distance from this victim. “Ever since, much against my will, I’ve become ‘specialized’ in films about old Nazis, collaborators, and their victims, I’ve tried learning to cope with such encounters,” he writes stiffly. Victims of the Nazis who see his films tend to “project their own desperate feelings” into them, reacting to his own “mostly professional involvement in intensely emotional ways,” he adds. “How could I explain to that lady in the lobby... , after she had rolled up the sleeve of her summer blouse to show me the concentration camp number tattooed on her wrist ... that my main satisfaction was that the audience had *laughed* in the right places and my main concern was that it would continue reacting favorably to my film?” (112). This anecdote, told by Ophuls, puts him in a curiously unattractive light. Instead of siding with the grateful survivor, he insists on his difference from her: his own involvement in the material is “mostly professional”—he wants his film to meet with critical success, that is his main concern.

This may, of course, be an elaborate defense on Ophuls’ part—a defense against his own “desperate feelings” (he has spoken of “fits of paranoia” he experienced while making the film<sup>47</sup>) as well as against the pain of identifying with a concentration camp survivor. But in addition to being defensive, Ophuls’ statement confirms the accusations thrown at him by the “ordinary Germans” at the gas station: he is acting out of self-interest, “selling pictures.”

It is precisely in order to counter this accusation, we may surmise, that Ophuls brings us back, at the end of the sequence, to Bartelmus, the brutal man in the mug shot. The filmmaker may be selling pictures, but this man’s past should not be forgotten. In a final twist, however, Mrs. Bartelmus’s rejoinder

brings both Ophuls and the viewer up short: "the French too were involved." Yes, they were: Ophuls gives us the photo of the roundup with French policemen, bringing the sequence to a close. The filmmaker is not innocent, and neither are the French, yet Barbie and his henchmen are guilty. Barbie and his henchmen are guilty, even though the filmmaker is not innocent and neither are the French. However one turns the phrase, the truth that emerges is uncomfortable. But it is the truth we are asked to grapple with here.

If I have dwelt at such length on this first "expressionist moment" and on the associations it calls up, it is not only because I admire Ophuls' complex artistry. It has been to show that the moments of the filmmaker's highlighted self-representation in this film are also the moments when questions of moral judgment are posed in the most acute and compelling way. These questions concern not only the enormously difficult subject of guilt and responsibility in the Holocaust, and of the proper way to approach it today, but also the role of documentary filmmaking in representing those very questions. This is not to say that they don't arise at other moments in the film, for they do. But they attain particular force, and are explored with particular acuity, in those scenes where the filmmaker's subjectivity is expressed not through indirect means (by the editing, music, placing of witnesses in the frame, and all the other cinematic means at his disposal) but directly, visible on screen as a corporeal presence. It is when the filmmaker himself becomes a "social actor" (the name given to people filmed in a documentary) that the moral *and* aesthetic issues raised by the film are most clearly highlighted.

As a final example, which will also lead us toward a conclusion—and, as it were, to the heart of the matter—I want to focus on a brief but intense expressionist moment from the second half of the film. It occurs as Ophuls is tracking Barbie's escape to



Bolivia after the war, by way of the so-called "rat line" operated out of Rome, which furnished many Nazis with falsified travel documents. Ophuls interviews Ivo Omrcamin, a Croatian living in the United States who was closely involved with the operation of the "rat line." In a typical dialectical montage, Omrcamin's statements are intercut with those of a very different interviewee, the Brooklyn District attorney and former Congresswoman Elizabeth Holtzman—a handsome woman dressed in blue, sitting at an oval table in her office. Ophuls is only heard with Omrcamin, but he is in the frame with Holtzman. At one point, Omrcamin says, in his heavily accented English: "There is that segment of the Jews who will never stop before turning the last stone, and such Jews are helped by immense riches in this country [who] want to prosecute Barbie." Ophuls' voice, smooth, encouraging, asks one of those questions he is famous for, letting witnesses reveal the ugliest things about themselves: "You think they're a vengeful people. . . ?" "Oh, yes," says Omrcamin. Ophuls repeats: "The revengeful ones." Omrcamin, looking pleased, adds emphatically, pumping his arm up and down: "To fabricate the crime and then accuse somebody of having committed those crimes—and hang them!" Ophuls' voice, strangely quiet, responds: "I see."

Next we are back in Elizabeth Holtzman's office, and the camera slowly zooms from a full view of Ophuls, sitting facing Holtzman and seen in half profile, to a close-up of Holtzman as Ophuls asks, very slowly, in a low voice: "Do you ever get the feeling, Ms. Holtzman, that, um, only . . . Jews and old Nazis are still interested in . . . Jews and old Nazis?" Her reply is quick: "Actually, not. Actually, the whole problem of Nazis in America was brought to my attention by a non-Jew who was horrified, as a human being, that for example our government could protect Nazi war criminals living here and allow them to stay here." After another dialectical cut to Omrcamin, who accuses Holtz-

man of opportunism—she wants to get reelected in Brooklyn, where the “vengeful Jews” live—Holtzman continues, speaking straight into the camera: “There is a view that somehow the Holocaust is simply a Jewish problem—when indeed the dangers of the Holocaust affected millions of non-Jews as well. And the threat that it represents today is to *all* humanity, not only to Jews.”

Holtzman functions, in what looks like a deliberately staged scene, as the spokesperson for what we might call the moral and philosophical credo of the film, its ethical center: the Holocaust concerns all humanity, not only Jews. She says this in reply to Ophuls, who, in the quietest, most depressed moment of the film, wonders whether “only Jews and old Nazis” are still interested in that event. He has just been told, by the negationist Croatian exile, that the Holocaust is a Jewish invention. Unable to reply anything except “I see,” Ophuls turns to Elizabeth Holtzman, a fellow Jew. She reassures him that not only Jews are interested in the Holocaust, and makes an eloquent case for the universally human relevance of that historical event. But just to destabilize matters, Omrcamin indicts her for acting out of crassly political motives.

So here we have the moral heart of the matter: whose concern is the Holocaust? Ophuls, in his interview with Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, stated that he was constantly aware, during the shooting of the film, “including during my fits of paranoia in the streets of Germany, France, and Bolivia,” of something that bothered him greatly: “I felt the aspect of ‘Ah! a Jewish film!’ [*un film de juif*] weighing on me” (26). “Un film de juif” is more exactly translated as “a film by a Jew, for Jews”—in other words, not a film of *human* concern or interest, but merely another piece to add to the storehouse of group memories and to the skirmishes of identity politics. What really bothered him, Ophuls explained, was the thought that this “Ah! a Jewish film”

feeling existed “on both sides of the camera”—not only on the part of those he interviewed, which would be understandable, but on the part of those who assisted him, in Germany and elsewhere. “It drove me crazy, at times.”

Whose concern is the Holocaust? Who should remember, or want to remember, the Holocaust? The gas station attendant in Germany says, “leave the old men in peace, don’t exploit them for your profit.” Marcel Cruat, a French billiard player in Lyon, tells Ophuls right at the beginning of the film: “Personally, I’m not one for vengeance, and forty years is a long time.” Besides, his own family was not touched by the deportations, “if you see what I mean.” Much later, Paul Schmitt, the warden of the Montluc prison who first received Barbie when he was returned to France, tells Ophuls: “If you want my opinion as an average Frenchman, *un français moyen*, forty years is a long time—if they had wanted to kill him earlier, they would have.” Are the memory of the Holocaust and the demand for justice purely matters of self-interest, then? That’s what the negationist Omercamì claimed: The Jews care about the Holocaust because they are “the revengeful ones”—and besides, there was no Holocaust. Elizabeth Holtzman contradicted him, reassuring the filmmaker that his film was not just a “film de juif.” But earlier, we heard the “average” French billiard player affirm that he had nothing against Barbie because his family was not “affected by the deportations.” And soon we will hear Barbie’s Bolivian bodyguard and friend, Alvaro de Castro, telling Ophuls (in the next-to-last of the great expressionist moments in the film) that Barbie had some Jewish friends in Bolivia—those who weren’t angry, who didn’t keep a grudge, “sin rancore.” Ophuls, who has just lost his temper with De Castro (“Look at me! Do you know that I’m a Jew? Do I look Jewish? Did Barbie teach you how to recognize a Jew?”) will repeat, incredulous: “The Jews are not full of anger? This is what Barbie thought?” De Castro: “So he

said." But we next hear an anecdote from a German acquaintance of Barbie: he once saw Barbie attacked and almost hurled to his death from a balcony by a German Jew, who recognized him and screamed that his whole family had been wiped out by the Nazis.

Klaus Barbie, as he was boarding the plane that took him back to France, gave a last television interview in Bolivia, which Ophuls reproduces. The white-haired old man, unbowed and unrepentant, says in excellent Spanish: "I have forgotten. If they haven't forgotten, it's their concern. I in any case have forgotten." That brings us right back to where we started: "The attitude that it would be proper for everything to be forgotten and forgiven by those who were wronged is expressed by the party that committed the injustice." That was Adorno, in 1959; and that was Klaus Barbie, in 1983.

And what do people say in 2001? The Omrcamins and the David Irvings are still with us, as are the "average citizens"—of France, of Germany, of Bolivia, of the United States—who think that all moral judgments are a question of self-interest. These average citizens are not "assassins of memory," as Pierre Vidal-Naquet has called the negationists. But they are impatient: they want to "turn the page on the past" before working through it.

Fortunately, there are also others—like the non-Jews who first alerted Elizabeth Holtzman to the problem of Nazi war criminals in the United States, or like Jews who write denunciatory books about the genocide in Rwanda in the 1990s or about King Leopold's genocide in the Congo a century ago.<sup>48</sup> Ophuls knows this too. At the end of *Hotel Terminus*, after the trial and condemnation of Klaus Barbie—for he was tried, however belatedly, and condemned to life imprisonment for crimes against humanity—the filmmaker stands at the top of the stairs with Simone Lagrange, one of the witnesses he truly respects, a survivor of Auschwitz who was arrested with her parents by

Barbie's men when she was a schoolgirl. She and Ophuls have been talking about two of the neighbors she remembers from that time: Madame Serre, who still lives in the building and whom we have just heard conversing with them from her upstairs window (yet another "balcony scene," with an aged Juliet), and Madame Bontout, now deceased. When Barbie's men were leading the family down the stairs, Simone Lagrange says, Madame Serre stayed carefully behind her locked door; Madame Bontout (how lucky Ophuls is with names: Mrs. Goodall) opened her door and tried to pull the young girl inside, only to receive a slap in the face that sent her reeling. As the filmmaker and the woman stand perched on top of the staircase, another woman's voice (the voice of Jeanne Moreau) informs us that "this motion picture is dedicated to the late Madame Bontout, a good neighbor."

From which one might conclude two things. It is better to be a good neighbor than a bad neighbor, even if it gets you a slap in the face. And in order to have the right to say that, one must earn it—which means that, like the filmmaker, one must be willing to engage in critical self-reflection, just as Adorno said. Only then will we viewers, individually and collectively, be able to "put the past behind us and turn the page."

That would be the cautiously upbeat ending. But following Ophuls' own dialectical lead, I want to end on a somewhat less stable and less comforting note, by returning once again to Ophuls' anecdote about his encounter with the Auschwitz survivor at the screening of *Hotel Terminus* in Cannes. As we recall, Ophuls distanced himself from the emotional victim, affirming his own cool professionalism. And he went even further. After the woman, in an angry outburst, screamed, "I want all Germans killed, they're all alike," Ophuls bid her goodbye: "At that point, I was unable to repress the urge to tell that unhappy woman that the intermission was over, that my wife was

waiting for me in the theater, and that *my wife is German*. I know I shouldn't have done it."<sup>49</sup> Why not? Because it was sadistic? The woman, silenced, walked back into the theater, where she started a commotion with her shouts: "They should all be killed!" Then other members of the audience got into the act, berating the woman, supporting her, or bringing up their own memories of the Resistance. Finally, it was Ophuls himself who, in an effort to calm things and get the film back on the screen, announced that in his opinion, "any concentration-camp survivor was entitled to any opinion she might have about Germans," or about anything else.

Earlier, he wanted nothing more than to affirm his difference from this woman; now, he took her side. This intricate dance of closeness and distance, identification and disavowal, may be a more just image on which to conclude than that of a page finally turned. For the viewer as for the filmmaker, questions persist: Where do I stand? Whom do I resemble? Maybe, where memory of the Holocaust is concerned, no "turning of the page" is yet possible. Or is that just a Jewish obsession?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Theodor Adorno, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" trans. Timothy Bahti and Geoffrey Hartman, *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (Bloomington: Indiana UP 1986) 115. Further references to this essay are given in the text. The German version is in Adorno, *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit*, ed. Gerd Kadelbach (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972) 10-28.

<sup>2</sup>Moishe Postone, "After the Holocaust: History and Identity in West Germany," *Coping with the Past: Germany and Austria after 1945*, ed. Kathy Harms, Lutz R. Reuter, and Volker Durr (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1990) 238.

<sup>3</sup>See Anson Rabinbach, "Beyond Bitburg: The Place of the 'Jewish Question' in German History after 1945," *Coping with the Past*, 192-194. For a

detailed and nuanced account of Adenauer's and other West German politicians' positions in the 1950s, which presents similar conclusions, see Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997) ch. 8. The situation changed dramatically in the 1960s, especially after the student movement of 1968.

<sup>4</sup>Herf, *Divided Memory* ch. 5.

<sup>5</sup>Charles S. Maier, "A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy and Denial," *History and Memory* 5:2 (1993) 150. Originally delivered as a conference paper at Yale, October 1992.

<sup>6</sup>Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999).

<sup>7</sup>Henry Rousso, *Le syndrome de Vichy, de 1944 à nos jours*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Seuil, 1990); Eric Conan and Henry Rousso, *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas* (Paris: Fayard, 1994); Rousso, *La hantise du passé: Entretiens avec Philippe Petit* (Paris: Eds. Textuel, 1998). All three exist in English translation.

<sup>8</sup>The argument about judaeo-centrism is made most explicitly in Conan and Rousso, *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas* 269–274.

<sup>9</sup>Rousso, *La hantise du passé* 122ff.

<sup>10</sup>Claude Lanzmann, "The Obscurity of Understanding: An Evening with Claude Lanzmann," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP) 200–220; and Lanzmann, "Hier ist kein Warum," in *Au sujet de Shoah: le film de Claude Lanzmann*, ed. Bernard Cuau (Paris: Belin, 1990).

<sup>11</sup>Dominick La Capra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998) ch. 4.

<sup>12</sup>For informative accounts of the debates over the Berlin memorial, see James Young, *At Memory's Edge: After-images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000) and Caroline Wiedmer, *The Claims of Memory: Representations of the Holocaust in Contemporary Germany and France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999).

<sup>13</sup>This was only an impression of mine, but it has been borne out recently as I have lectured on the film at universities in Germany and the United States: typically, only a small handful of people in a fairly large academic audience had seen the film independently of my lecture. In the general population, the proportions must be even smaller.

<sup>14</sup>My account here is based in part on Erna Paris' *Unhealed Wounds: France*

and the Klaus Barbie Affair (New York: Grove Press, 1985) chaps. 2-6. Paris' book appeared two years before the actual trial, but is informative and reliable about Barbie's earlier career and about the efforts to extradite him.

<sup>15</sup>Roussio devotes a whole chapter to the Barbie case, including an excellent explanation of the legal issues involved, and alludes to Barbie often throughout the book; the 1990 edition has even more on the trial. For a virtually day to day account of the trial, based on dispatches by the daily *Libération*, see Sorj Chalandon and Pascale Nivelles, *Crimes contre l'humanité: Barbie Touvier Bousquet Papon* (Paris: Plon, 1998) 13-164.

<sup>16</sup>Robert Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order* (New York: Columbia UP, 1972); Marcel Ophuls, *Le Chagrin et la pitié* (screenplay) (Paris: Alain Moreau, 1980); the film was released in 1971.

<sup>17</sup>An early and passionate intellectual response to negationism in France was Pierre Vidal-Naquet's *Les assassins de la mémoire* (Paris: La Découverte, 1987), written at the time of the Barbie case; in English: *Assassins of Memory* (Columbia UP, 1992). For a detailed historical account, see Valérie Igounet, *Histoire du négationnisme en France* (Paris: Seuil, 2000).

<sup>18</sup>The best known memoir provoked by the Barbie trial is Lucie Aubrac's *Ils partiront dans l'ivresse* (Paris: Seuil, 1984), in English: *Outwitting the Gestapo* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1993); see also Lise Lesèvre, *Face à Barbie: Souvenirs-cauchemars de Montluc à Ravensbrück* (Paris: Pavillon, 1987).

<sup>19</sup>Actually, seven others were arrested with Moulin, but René Hardy escaped on the way to prison; since Hardy is generally thought to be the one who betrayed Moulin, his escape appears to have been prearranged.

<sup>20</sup>Alain Finkielkraut, *Remembering in Vain: The Klaus Barbie Trial and Crimes Against Humanity*, trans. Roxanne Lapidus with Sima Godfrey (New York: Columbia UP, 1992) 32.

<sup>21</sup>There is no published screenplay for this film; my quotations in what follows are based on multiple viewings of the 2-part video. Considering Ophuls' importance as a filmmaker, it is surprising how little serious critical attention his work has received. Aside from a few articles I will cite below, and aside from brief appearances in general works on the history of French film or on films of the Holocaust, I have found no critical commentaries on *Hotel Terminus*—and none at all that devote detailed analysis to its formal procedures; even *The Sorrow and the Pity* has received little close scrutiny from film analysts, despite its acknowledged importance. The best sources, so far,



for detailed commentary on Ophuls' work are the interviews and articles he has given to French and American film journals (see notes 27–28, 30, 33, 40).

<sup>22</sup>I am grateful to Dr. Marion Kant, a musicologist and a Fellow, with me, at the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania in spring 2001, for her help in identifying the German folk songs Ophuls uses in the film.

<sup>23</sup>Reported by Melinda Camber Porter, *Through Parisian Eyes: Reflections on Contemporary French Arts and Culture* (New York: Oxford UP, 1986) 10–11

<sup>24</sup>Marion Kant informs me that German-Jewish exiles (including her father) sang this song in an emigrants' choir in London in the 1930's and early 1940's.

<sup>25</sup>See Serge Klarsfeld, *Les enfants d'Izieu: Une tragédie juive* (Paris: The Beate Klarsfeld Foundation, 1984).

<sup>26</sup>Ophuls' use of music in his films (one recalls Maurice Chevalier's songs in *The Sorrow and the Pity*), and in *Hotel Terminus* in particular, would deserve a separate study. The sentimental folk songs, all sung by the Vienna Boys Choir (in addition to the two already mentioned, there are two more "wanderers' songs": *Muss i' denn, muss i' denn*, which was taken up by Elvis Presley in the 1960s, and *Das Wandern ist des Müllers Lust*) function as veritable leitmotifs. For a study of the role of music in memory-films about the Holocaust, see Jean-Louis Pautrot, "Music and Memory in Film and Fiction: Listening to *Nuit et Brouillard*, *Lacombe Lucien*, and *La ronde de nuit*," *Dalhousie French Studies*, in print; for a study of Ophuls' use of film clips from Hollywood musicals in a later film, *November Days* (1990), see Nora Alter, "Marcel Ophuls' *November Days*: German Reunification as 'Musical Comedy,'" *Film Quarterly* 51:2 (1997–98) 32–43. Ophuls uses a few musical clips, notably the soundtrack from a Fred Astaire film, in *Hotel Terminus* as well.

<sup>27</sup>Richard Porton and Lee Ellickson, "The Troubles He's Seen: An Interview with Marcel Ophuls," *Cinéaste* 21:3 (1995) 11.

<sup>28</sup>Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, "Entretien avec Marcel Ophuls sur *Hotel Terminus*," *Positif* 331 (September 1988) 29 (unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the French are my own). Interestingly, Ophuls says that it's the editing that "almost killed" him, although—as he recounts earlier in this interview—he was physically attacked on a beach in Rio on his way back from Bolivia. He blacked out during the attack, and had to be operated on in Paris. Even now, he still has some "troubles de mémoire" (26).

<sup>29</sup>For a thorough discussion of the various modes of documentary film, see Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991) 32–75; for the interactive mode, 44–56.

<sup>30</sup>Marcel Ophuls, "Faut-il fusiller Speer au lieu de le filmer?" ("Should we shoot Speer instead of filming him?"), *Positif* 200 (Dec. 1977–Jan. 1978) 115.

<sup>31</sup>Patricia Hampl, "Memory's Movies," *Beyond Document: Essays on Non-Fiction Film*, ed. Charles Warren (Middleton: Wesleyan UP, 1996) 51–77.

<sup>32</sup>Nichols, *Representing Reality* 51.

<sup>33</sup>See Michel Ciment, "Joy to the World: An Interview with Marcel Ophuls," *American Film*, September 1988, 38–43; the allusions to Lanzmann are on pp. 41–42.

<sup>34</sup>Ciment 42.

<sup>35</sup>Golsan, "Revising *The Sorrow and the Pity*: Marcel Ophuls' *Hotel Terminus*," *Vichy's Afterlife: History and Counterhistory in Postwar France* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2000) 87. Golsan's general argument is that by widening his scope to include Germany, the United States, and South America, Ophuls gets "sidetracked" in this film, away from the question of "Klaus Barbie, his wartime crimes in Lyon, and France's efforts to come to terms with these crimes" (77). In my reading, the wide scope is precisely the point of the film, not a "sidetracking." Rather than letting France off the hook, as Golsan implies, the wider perspective shows that other countries too were implicated, if not directly then indirectly by protecting Nazis after the war. In my view, Ophuls does not "revise" *The Sorrow and the Pity* with this film; rather, he extends and enlarges his inquiry.

<sup>36</sup>Jeancolas, "Entretien avec Marcel Ophuls" 27.

<sup>37</sup>A particularly trenchant critique (which nonetheless recognized the importance of the film) appeared in the MIT student paper, *The Tech*: Manavendra Thakur, "Hotel Terminus is sidetracked by director Ophuls' pent-up feelings," February 7, 1989, 16 and 21. On the Web at [archive@the-tech.mit.edu](mailto:archive@the-tech.mit.edu).

<sup>38</sup>One can contrast this with the famous scene in Lanzmann's *Shoah*, where Lanzmann stages a haircut by Abraham Bomba, who cut women's hair in the gas chamber in Treblinka. For a critique of this *mise en scène*, see La Capra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* 96.

<sup>39</sup>Porton and Ellickson, "The Troubles He's Seen" 9.

<sup>40</sup>Ophuls, "The Sorrow and the Laughter," *Premiere*, November 1988, 115.

<sup>41</sup>Porton and Ellickson, "The Troubles He's Seen" 9. Ophuls says here that the "big change" in this direction came with his 1990 film, *November Days* (about the fall of the Berlin Wall); as I am trying to show, however, it actually dates from *Hotel Terminus*.

<sup>42</sup>Nichols, *Representing Reality* 56.

<sup>43</sup>For a good account of the historians' debate, see Rabinbach, "Beyond Bit-burg" 206–214. For an overview of recent German debates about Nazism in Germany, see Régine Robin, "La honte nationale comme malédiction: autour de l'affaire 'Walser-Bubis,'" *Revue Internationale et Stratégique*, Spring 1999, 45–69.

<sup>44</sup>Jay Cantor, "Death and the Image," *Beyond Document*, ed. Charles Warren, 39.

<sup>45</sup>See Jeancolas, "Entretien avec Marcel Ophuls" 25.

<sup>46</sup>Jeancolas 26.

<sup>47</sup>Jeancolas 26.

<sup>48</sup>Philip Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: stories from Rwanda* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998); Adam Hochschild, *King's Leopold's Ghost* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

<sup>49</sup>Ophuls, "The Sorrow and the Laughter" 115.