

Introduction

THIS BOOK ASPIRES TO HELP CREATE a better perception of the ways in which the Shoah, a tragic historical event, left a unique mark upon its century and decisively influenced all manner of representation—above all the cinema. This “influence,” or rather this radical questioning, started happening as the event itself was taking place and has not ceased ever since. Although its effects are much more far-reaching than the cinema, we believe it is through the cinema that the question must be posed. Why the cinema? Because it is a documentary tool that has played a decisive role in the building of knowledge for this period, with great effect in terms of historical education, the building of ethical criteria, and political strategy. And because at the same time it is a process of fiction that builds our visual and auditory imaginative faculties, which in turn configure our knowledge, our ethics, and our commitment. Because the cinema, as a mass-media pastime, is a means of diffusion of these representations, both real and imaginative, and this has tremendous impact. And finally—perhaps above all—because the cinema is an art form, and as such it is a source of emotions felt by each of us and a challenge to all of our established representational systems. Cinema therefore creates a possible questioning of our world vision and our self-image. This has a bearing upon the phenomenon of genocide. And thanks to *Survival in Auschwitz* and *The Human Race* by Primo Levi and Robert Antelme, we know to what extent genocide affects the world.

Our book is both collective and plural. Its plurality is in the manner of enunciation (essays, conferences, interviews, group discussions, visual archives, documented descriptions, and filmography), in the range of geographic origins (France, Germany, United States, Israel), and in the various professional points of view (philosophers, filmmakers, historians, film critics, art historians, teachers, and archivists).

The purpose of this book is to make these different approaches resonate to the reader. One of the common threads throughout these chapters is the historical accuracy of the topics discussed.

Cinema and the Shoah was conceived and produced from 2004–07, based on an idea that came about during preparations for the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz on January 27, 2005. This idea, formulated by Annette Wieviorka, Sylvie Lindeperg, Jacques Mandelbaum, and Jean-Michel Frodon, was initiated by the Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah, which has since supported the book project. We wish to express our thanks to the Foundation now. To remember these origins and these dates is, in a way, to say that if this type of book had been developed fifteen years ago it would have been an entirely different project, and that its very spirit makes it possible for others in the future to challenge and rethink it.

This book is divided into six parts. Although deliberately heterogeneous, it nonetheless follows a logical evolution. Beginning with a theoretical, philosophical, and critical discussion (in the sense of artistic criticism), this work progresses toward a more historically focused reflection, in view of the perspectives revealed in the first part of the book.

The first chapter (“Intersecting Paths,” by Jean-Michel Frodon) aims at clarifying the overall project, the spirit in which the book was conceived, and the factual and theoretical backdrop upon which it centers.

The section “Milestones” undertakes to mark out more specifically three possible approaches, and each of the pieces in this chapter offers a particular focus regarding the entire issue. The first approach is philosophical (“The Shoah as a Question of Cinema,” by Marie-José Mondzain), defining the very nature of the question as well as the methods of thought and formulation that it engages. A second approach, an aesthetic one from a film critic’s perspective (“Recovery,” by Jacques Mandelbaum) reveals the recurrence of certain forms of narrative, both visual and auditory, within a vast body of films that do or don’t refer explicitly to the Shoah, and that question our relationship to what is true and false, to what is visible and invisible, regarding the radical crisis created by the Shoah. A third approach, again an aesthetic one but this time with an art history angle (“A Cinema No Longer Silent,” by Hubert Damisch), reveals the stature and validity of “statements” (verbal, scriptural, iconic) as films relating to the Shoah reconfigure them, specify them, or challenge them.

“Three films” attempts to demonstrate the proportions and complexity of the questions surrounding representational procedures through three exemplary works, which also relate to more contemporary audiovisual productions. “Fatal Rendezvous” (by Jean-Louis Comolli) revisits

the British film *Memory of the Camps*, which remained unscreened for forty years, in order to review the manner of stating reality and cinematic models, properly speaking, of certain representations. Thanks to the rigorous historical records of the conditions in the making and diffusion of Alain Resnais' film, "*Night and Fog: Inventing a Perspective*" (Sylvie Lindeperg) clarifies the constituting of visual archetypes and the unstable fate of the filmed image, recycled according to the perceptions and strategies of various periods and different situations; incorporated into this long-term study is the debate on the existence and legitimacy of "images of the Shoah" as it was formulated. *Shoah*, by Claude Lanzmann, played a decisive role in building our modern comprehension of the genocide, and holds a prominent place in the history of modern cinema. The coherence between these two aspects is the very principle of this book. The interview with Lanzmann covers the nature and meaning of the technical and artistic choices made in the creation of this film.

"Conversations at the Mill" took the form of a discussion between five participants (historians Sylvie Lindeperg and Annette Wieviorka, philosopher Marie-José Mondzain, filmmaker Arnaud Desplechin, and film critics Jean-Michel Frodon and Jacques Mandelbaum), an exchange fueled by having watched three films together: Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be*, Resnais' *Night and Fog*, and Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura*. The transcript of these two days spent together at the Moulin d'Andé, away from our daily routines, is an attempt at challenging the different approaches, the methodologies and formulations of the participants, distinct in their various fields but sharing the same concerns and commitments.

"Cinematography Put to the Test" examines how references to the Shoah in the cinema of three different countries have affected their systems of collective representation and thus contributed to clarifying the evolution of people's mentalities. This is less a question of "measuring" if, and in what quantities, this cinematography has referred to the Shoah, than of making an attempt at understanding, by formulating a specific question to each of the three, how these representations, silences, and symbolisms have played out. Aside from France, discussed at great length elsewhere in the book, the three countries in question—the United States, Israel, and Germany—are those for which the relationship to the theme of the Shoah is the most instructive. Bill Krohn discusses prevailing tendencies, much more differentiated than is commonly thought, in the approaches of the American cinema during the period of the growing threat of extermination, and then when it had occurred ("Hollywood and the Shoah, 1933–1945"), notably the strategies used by various studios, and the often paradoxical behavior of those involved, depending upon

their positions in the community or their political ties. With the Israeli cinema, Ariel Schweitzer talks about the rapport between modes of reference to the Shoah and the ideological statute of Zionism as an ideological concretization for the country (“Forgetting, Instrumentalization, and Transgression: The Shoah in the Cinema of Israel”). And finally, Ronny Loewy uses the significant example of producer Artur Brauner, who sought for several decades to encourage reference to the camps and the extermination in mass-market German cinema (“‘The Past in the Present’: The Films of Producer Artur Brauner and the Dominant Narratives on the Genocide of European Jews in German Cinema”).

“Tools for History” offers two critical approaches to cinema practices in historical research of the Shoah. As the author of the book *The Era of the Witness*, Annette Wieviorka reveals in her chapter, “The Filmed Witness,” the complicity in strategies elaborated around the personality of witnesses and the unique challenges represented in the act of filming witnesses and using the gleaned images. Stuart Liebman, a specialist in audiovisual documentation regarding the Shoah, questions certain effects in the discourse that has come to accompany historical research concerning films about the Shoah, and the inherent risks of impeding or instrumentalizing it, in his chapter, “Historiography/Cinema of the Holocaust: Challenges and Advances.”

“Resources”: It would have been flippant and even irresponsible to attempt to “illustrate” a book in which the use of images is precisely the object of a complex and disquieting examination. On the other hand, it did appear useful for us to assemble, in the chapter entitled “Referent Images,” those images that from the forties until the present time have fueled debates more or less closely centered on the Shoah. And with the intent of making information about films available to everyone (teachers, researchers, programmers, etc.) we put together the most complete “Filmography” possible to date of films dealing with the Shoah. Prepared thematically and not analytically or critically, this filmography obviously does not mention all of the films referenced in preceding chapters. And finally, we asked Ronny Loewy to present a project that has no existing precedent, entitled “Cinematography of the Holocaust,” which he developed at the Fritz Bauer Institute in Frankfurt. Our sole objective was to offer a well-balanced archival record, available to anyone interested, of all audiovisual documentation linked to the Shoah.

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Translated from the French by Anna Harrison