

The Ethics and Aesthetics of Testimony in Claude Lanzmann's Perpetrator Outtakes

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In this paper, I will analyse three of the interviews with perpetrators which Claude Lanzmann cut from his Holocaust documentary *Shoah* (1985). I will ask two central questions about this material: whether such interviews produce what can be called testimony from 'the perpetrator side', and if the aesthetic form associated with these interviews makes their ethical significance sufficiently clear for us to consider them in this way.

These interviews do not appear in *Shoah* at all, but exist in Lanzmann's archive at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, along with 250 hours of other discarded footage. All these unedited interviews consist of unedited 11 minute film reels, in which sound and image are just as they were at the moment of filming. This footage is fascinating and valuable on its own account, as well as shedding light on the final version of the film, by showing what was discarded in order to shape it. In my examples, the three perpetrators are:

Hans Gewecke, a former Gebietskommissar, or governor, in Siauliai, Lithuania (5.3 hours, in German)

Gustav Laabs, a gas-van driver at Chelmno (1.1 hours; interviewee not present, French and German)

Pery Broad, who had been a guard at Auschwitz (2.2 hours, mixture of English, German and some French)

Since all Lanzmann's secretly recorded interviews are with perpetrators, their shared look has the force of a 'semantic code', as Roland Schöny puts it in an analysis of what he calls 'surveillance aesthetics'. Schöny describes footage of this kind as consisting of, 'A constantly flickering image, colour distortion and fragmented sequences, complete with a visible time-code'. In Lanzmann's case, a look of this kind is so firmly associated with capturing former Nazis on film, that it has taken on the status - not quite of a surveillance aesthetics, but of what we might call instead a perpetrator aesthetics, in the service of gathering testimony of this kind.

Viewers are accustomed to the way this footage looks from Lanzmann's secretly recorded interviews in *Shoah*, with the former Nazis Franz Suchomel, Walter Stier and Franz Schalling: it consists of blurred, grainy footage, and awkward, improvised camera movements, due to the hiding-place of the secret camera, in a casually but crucially positioned canvas bag. The soundtrack similarly conveys the nature of the unusual situation and the recording process, rather than clearly matching what we see with what we hear.

Such a mise-en-scene and soundtrack are uncannily appropriate for interviews with perpetrators in the meaning that arises from the technology. They convey such qualities as fixity and stasis, as well as a look of fogginess which could be equated with evasion and unclarity. I will conclude by asking whether such a clearly marked formal identity allows us to conceptualize these interviews as 'testimony'.