

## Article

# Bearing Witness in Analog and Digital Witness Films: Ethical Aesthetics in Shoah [1985] and Waltz with Bashir [2008]

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**Abstract:** In the ongoing and passionate debates over the digitalization of visual media, many questions about the ontology or materiality of the new digital image have been raised. Analog representation is often thought of in terms of indexicality and sometimes a naive belief in the truthfulness of the photographic image, whereas the digital image is, in a way, no longer an image anymore, but a set of data in flux, superficially coded and easy to manipulate. The following article examines how this shift to digitalization affects the ethical genre per se: the witness film. In a film analytical close reading of Claude Lanzmann's *SHOAH* and Ari Folman's *WALTZ WITH BASHIR*, resonances become visible to psychoanalysis, Deleuzian film philosophy and the debates over the materiality of the analog and digital image. Lanzmann draws on a specific kind of indirect indexicality, which is highly interested in the psychic and embodied realities of surviving, witnessing and the passing of time, whereas Folman develops a politics of the powers of the false: truthfulness, accessibility and memorability are abolished in favor of false images, screen-memories and traumatic misrepresentation, which are staged noticeably digital and altered, revolving around the impossibility to grasp the ungraspable.

**Keywords:** digitalization; documentary; fabulation; film; genocide; indexicality; media materiality; psychoanalysis; trauma; witness



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## 1. Introduction

Approaching the heavy burden of genocides, and especially the Shoah on a cinematic level, means dealing with questions of the appropriateness of certain representation styles and the search for an ethical form of aesthetics. The stakes are so high; thus, discussions around these issues tend to become heated and often center as much on the negation and dismissal of certain forms as on the celebration of others. One of the most notorious examples in this regard is *SHOAH* director Claude Lanzmann's polemic against Steven Spielberg's acclaimed *Schindler's List*, accusing him of squeezing the Holocaust into the schematic genre modes of a Hollywood melodrama (Hansen 1996). Although one could argue that both films create different public spheres and politics of remembrance and succeed in making the topic of the Holocaust accessible to a broader group of people (Hansen 1996), questions of the appropriateness of filmic forms of narrativization and fictionalization remain to this day.

In this article, I examine how the recent turn of digitalization affects the genre of the witness film and plays a part in contributing new forms and strategies of bearing witness. These new forms are able to include narrativization and fictionalization in their aesthetic form without surrendering to historical relativism (Schäuble 2011), the belief in an accessibility of the totality of the event or the using of the event as a mere background setting for conventional story modes and cathartic affect releases. At the same time, they carry heavy theoretical implications for an adjusted understanding of images and the historical event.

As I would define it, the witness film deals with concrete representations and testimonies of a crime, an atrocity and its survivors, aggressors and ongoing duration. The

realities and complex ethical demands of witnessing are bound with questions of transmission and mediality. Although there is an astonishing likeliness in arguments around the alleged indexicality of analog film and the invocations of the suitability of film for purposes of witnessing and trauma therapy by filmmakers, theorists and therapists, these arguments are at stake in the recent turn to the digitalization of film production. I want to illustrate the implications of the digital turn through the discussion of two films:

Claude Lanzmann and his magnum opus *SHOAH* [1985] (*SHOAH*. 1985. Claude Lanzmann. DVD Arte Edition/Absolut Medien) are representative of a sophisticated mode of witness films that move in the frameworks of pre-digital, filmic mediality without falling prey to naive understandings of realism and the belief of an easy truthfulness of the cinematic depiction. Likewise, in *WALTZ WITH BASHIR* [2008] (*WALTZ WITH BASHIR*. 2008. Ari Folman. Accessed via Mubi), Ari Folman tries to develop a strategy of witnessing and genocide representation that abolishes the idea of an accessible truth over wide parts, but differs from Lanzmann in drawing more on aspects of the shattering of representation and the distortion of memories through the unconscious processes of condensation and displacement. Portraying the loss of accessibility to the historical event in digital images, the film also negotiates a recent loss of belief in digital images as the carrier of truth. In the end, however, Folman fails to resist the powerful ideological investments of analog truthfulness and breaks the visionary promise of its own approach, choosing an ending in which the naivete of an oversimplified understanding of indexical realism is both celebrated and exposed.

This article wants to bring Lanzmann's and Folman's different filmic strategies into dialogue with each other, situating them in broader discussions of media and film studies, psychoanalysis and trauma studies. Far from drawing a line of improvement or a telic history of witness aesthetics, it seems more productive to read these strategies as two complex articulations and concepts in the transmission of an event that, by definition, is not graspable, transmissible or understandable on a global level. Both approaches deal with different genocides, different roles (survivor, perpetrator, bystander) in the concerning events and different times and locations of the filmmakers. Although both films are embedded in different traditions and genealogies of thought, negotiating central questions of witnessing in different ways, they share similarities and continuities, founded in their common goal: witnessing itself.

## 2. The Transmission of Truth: Shifted Indexicality of Traumatic Events in Shoah [1985]

### 2.1. *The Promises of Binding: Trauma and Indexicality*

When dealing with a former victim giving a testimony of the horrors of a genocide, every modification feels like an act of violence in itself. How could you edit the unagitated, silent moments in which nothing much happens on the level of narrative or content? How could you cut away information you already know or have or consider to be historically wrong, or alter the set-up in which the testimony was originally given? The unease of these procedures that are central for filmmaking itself draws on a central problem of witnessing in the realm of conventional, narrative aesthetics. What is at stake here are not so much macro-historical questions of truth or content concerning the historical event or narrative integration, but micro-historical (freely adapted from [Ginzburg 1993](#)) questions of concrete embodied experience: the master stories, chronology, and righteousness of the events versus the affective »How?« of the historical event and its impact for the concerned people. In micro-historical research practices, video testimonies might function as a lens through which we could reevaluate and reconfigure the historical master stories in a process that steadily moves back and forth from the small detail to the big picture without dissolving the imminent incompatibility of both (Appendix A, A1).

Central to the conflict between the micro and the macro of historiographic practice is an argument described by famous trauma theorist, therapist and Holocaust survivor Dori Laub in one of his texts, in which the testimony of a 70-year-old woman is presented. Whispering her statement, she seems absent and not really in the moment, speaking as if the

events had not really affected her. During the statement, suddenly, a shift happens, as she reports on the demolition of a crematorium chimney by a resistance group. All of a sudden, her mode of expression changes, being present, passionate, loud and captivating. The moment she reports the defeat of the resistance group, her voice and presence disappear again, leaving her in the state she was before. In a conference, historians proved that her account of the event was partially wrong and unreliable because she perceived the incorrect number of chimneys. In opposition to the historians that tried to dismiss the woman's account as worthless, Laub argued that the woman "[...] is bearing witness to the demolition of the all-encompassing frame of the Holocaust, that prohibited any form of Jewish resistance. She witnessed the breaking of a whole worldly system. That's the historical truth of the account" (Laub 2000, p. 71, Appendix A, A2).

Beyond the work of historiography, there is another important aspect of witnessing, that has nothing to do with the acquisition of information of any kind. In the work of bearing witness, a therapeutic process takes place, which reintegrates the survivor through the acknowledgment and externalization of the testimony. Genocides and atrocities such as torture or rape are acts of de-subjectivation, targeting the very humanness, the intimate vulnerability and sensitivity of body and mind for others (Göring 2014). The violence of trauma is often expressed in the inability to distinguish between the self and the other, even concerning one's own image of oneself. The process of witnessing and symbolization is deeply entwined with the address of the other and a reclaiming and re-externalization of the own suffering, which to that point is overdetermined by the incorporated image of the perpetrator (Laub 1992). Laub writes:

"There was no longer an other to which one could say 'Thou' in the hope of being heard, of being recognized as a subject, of being answered. The historical reality of the Holocaust became, thus, a reality which extinguished philosophically the very possibility of address, the possibility of appealing, or of turning to, another. But when one cannot turn to a 'you' one cannot say 'thou' to oneself. The Holocaust created in this way a world in which one could only bear witness to oneself". (Laub 1992, p. 82).

Witnessing's main role in this regard is the rebinding of the survivor to the other and the world—connections which were unmade and betrayed in the intimate horrors of trauma. Elaine Scarry writes in her famous book about torture that it is a part of "[...] pain's triumph [...] to archive] its aversiveness in part by bringing about, even within the radius of several feet, this absolute split between one's own reality and the reality of the other person" (Scarry 1985, p. 4). The witness film can be read, in this regard, as an act of resistance against the all-encompassing and devouring impact of the event and as a form of suture, in which the split is stitched up. As a process of reappropriation and reconnection, the witness film opens up a room to speak one's truth and to break the enforced silence of the trauma.

It is not surprising that Dori Laub sees an analogy in the processes initiated by trauma therapy and the experience of being recorded on film and video during testimony: "Video recordings are another possibility to provide the traumatized victim with a listener, another tool for the reexternalization of the event and its historicization. I consider the processes initiated by the psychoanalytical praxis and the video interview as identical" (Laub 2000, p. 79, Appendix A, A3). Film functions here as an addressable Other, something that carries on the burden of the unprocessed traumatic event itself and helps with the symbolization and translation into an accessible form, to reconcile the traumatized person with the world, promising a quality ephemeral therapy cannot provide: the promise of endurance and eternity.

Laub's belief in the powers of film coincides and draws on a long and ongoing discourse about the medium of (analog) film and its alleged dimension of indexicality. Charles Saunders Peirce develops the idea of the index in his theory of mind (Peirce). Processes of signification occur in a dynamic relation of the sign, its object, and interpretant. In Peirce's theory, signs are formed in the overlapping and intertwined affecting of up to

three sign modalities, that build up on and contain each other and become entangled and inseparable in the process of signification. The basis of each sign is the mode of firstness or iconicity, understood as a carrier of similarity to the denoted object. This similarity is easily misunderstood as a form of substantiality or representation but has to be read as a form of potentiality, becoming or addressing which enables the possibility of perception (at least according to Reinhold Görling's Deleuze informed reading, [Görling 2014](#)). Building on the iconicity, indexicality is defined in terms of a direct, physical relation or boundness to the object, not in terms of visual likeness or recognizability, but as a chiasmus, material touch or left trace of the denoted object. Görling states that indexicality has two inherent dimensions which are important for its way of being: the first one targets the object of perception; the other one indicates a social dimension of shared meaning and intersubjective context ([Görling 2014](#)). Photography—and analog film one might argue—are, for Peirce, one prime example of the sign mode of twoness ([Peirce 1998](#)): indexicality here is thought of in terms of the rays of light, that are reflected from the depicted object and inscribe themselves in a one-to-one-correspondence in the texture of the celluloid filmstrip and become fixed through chemical processes afterwards. The mediality of the film (still) image might be understood here as the dynamic process of signification between the sign modes of the icon and the index. The third sign mode of the symbol or thirdness is defined by the sign's embeddedness in arbitrary conventions, which are not deductive from the denoted object. This dimension can also become part of the film image on the level of narration, content and film language or—as Görling states—on the level of discourse, narrative, and habitus ([Görling 2014](#)).

The history of the appropriations of Peirce's theory of signification for and by film and media studies deserves whole monographies and cannot be examined here to its fullest extent. Far from presenting a homogenous or frictionless field, differences are striking. For example, Peter Wollen connected Peirce to the work of André Bazin and his theory of realism, which bases its argument on the photographic nature of film (according to [Gunning 2007](#)); Gilles Deleuze, however, uses Peirce's theory to develop a whole taxonomy of image types that are central for film exclusively, and in which realism plays, if anything, the role of a background actor ([Deleuze 1989](#)). In addition, the importance of indexicality as a defining feature of the media ontology of film is not uncontested, a point we will address later in the discussion of the digital alterations of indexicality.

Does this mean that the process of giving testimony is indexical? What we can take from this for the discussion of the similarity of indexicality and the process of giving testimony is the following: the sign mode of indexicality combines two dimensions. First, there is a movement of touch or transmission happening in the relation of object and sign. The process of witnessing as an act of signification enables the witness to externalize and translate in order to pass the burden of bearing witness over to film, as a carrier or embodiment of the spoken truths during testimony. The second dimension of indexicality can be understood as a shared room of meaning and intersubjective relationality and embeddedness. This coincides with the process of rebinding the witness and suturing the split between witness and world. To be recorded on video is, therefore, to become re-embedded and re-integrated into a world of shared meaning through a process of reappropriation and meaning reconfiguring. Indexicality and realism are not the same things; therefore, I want to argue in the following that the witness film can obtain a lot through a critical engagement with indexicality, whereas the use of a realist aesthetics and direct representations can still be refused.

## 2.2. Displaced Indexicality and the Non-Realism of the 'Transmission of Truth'

Genocide representations on a photographic or filmic level operate in complicate fields of tension between truth claims, authenticity effects, affectivity, mediation, responsibility and also proof functions that point to their embeddedness in public criminology ([Elander 2017](#)). These aspects become crucial for the aesthetics of the witness film and draw attention to the ways in which knowledge and signification are produced on the level

of the film mediality. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that they become focal points for Lanzmann's witness politics in SHOAH. The camera as the optical-visual medium per definition takes on a highly specific, but context-dependent and heterogeneous role in the filmic arrangements. The concrete networks of the actors involved in the production of the film and the specific circumstances of the filmed interviews become extremely visible and inscribe themselves in the quality and materiality of the image and the forms of generated knowledge. For example, the interview with former SS-Unterscharführer Franz Suchomel is filmed with a hidden camera, creating a place of safety for confessions and witnessing from the perspective of the committer. Only without the fear of the public opinion, consequences and the threatening lens of the camera do these testimonies become possible. Far from concealing the technical setup and the highly complicated arrangements of the interview background, Lanzmann makes them not only visible, but exhibits them. Lanzmann used 16 mm analog film for the rest of the film; however, this particular interview was recorded on video transmission, itself a hybrid between analog and digital film techniques. The film alternates between the grainy, delicate images of Suchomel, interviewed by Lanzmann in the belief of an anonymous interview, the working technicians and their complex device arrangements and panorama shots of Treblinka, the concentration camp in which Suchomel held a leading position. While Suchomel explains the technical details of the mass extermination, we observe the gestural vocabulary of a self-opinionated teacher, who insists on his own pseudo-profound idioms concerning the Shoah and operates the pointer authoritatively: "Auschwitz was a factory. [...] I give you my definition. Pay close attention! Treblinka was a primitive but well-functioning assembly line of death" (Disc 2; TC: 00:02:10–00:02:30; Appendix A, A4). As Suchomel talks about his role in the events with the same cold logic of procedures, orders and obedience, the spectators slowly develop an embodied idea of the attitudes and ways of thinking that enabled the atrocities of the Shoah. There are also moments that follow the opposite logic, in which the camera is not concealed to produce knowledge, but becomes extremely visible and is addressed during filming. While interviewing the Polish population in front of a church during a memorial for the Jewish extinction, some people scramble for the attention of the interview (Disc 2; TC: 01:34:18–01:37:14). Using the spotlight not for testimony or witnessing but for their own narcissistic pleasure of staying in the spotlight, they even supersede an actual survivor. Passionately arguing that the Jews were killed as retribution for killing Jesus Christ and conjuring that his blood should come over their heads and that of their children, they blame the Jews for their own extinction, making the provincial 'piousness' and underdevelopment of the village perceivable. The camera and recording situation—far from being invisible and innocently detached from the scene—assume the role of a binding focal point that triggers processes of self-exposure and self-revelation of persons as much as of reality itself. Documenting the provincial sameness and continuities over the last fifty years, we encounter ignorance, hostility, and neglected responsibility, not described as an impeachment, but enacted by the people themselves.

The main focus of the film lies, however, not on bystanders, eyewitnesses or persecutors, but on the surviving victims. In one of the most heartbreaking testimonies in SHOAH, Filip Müller makes a report that captures the essence of the film's witness politics (Disc 4; TC: 00:27–10:00:3:20). Describing the descending of devastation and recognition upon a group of deceived Jews facing their near death in the gas chambers, they start to resist and sing their national anthem. Müller, who worked in a Sonderkommando at that time, was so profoundly touched, that he decided to die with them, but the soon-to-be-dead women came to him and told him to get out and survive, so he could pay witness for them and report the injustice that happened. While giving the testimony, Müller suddenly becomes absorbed in this powerful memory and starts to cry. This gradual change in the affective embodiment and presence indicates that the processes Laub described can be accomplished. As a "spokesperson for the dead" (Lanzmann et al. 1991b, p. 99) (women), he fulfils the promise he gave to them and inscribes the knowledge of the violence and injustice they



experienced into the medium of film, meaning it can be transmitted, remembered and acknowledged.

In this regard, Lanzmann's ethics of witnessing are very close to the notions of witnessing we discussed concerning Dori Laub. From a present-day perspective, this 'school of witness thinkers' is already beginning to be historized. A central argument in this respect is made by Michal Givoni who situates the work of Dori Laub and other pioneers of trauma theory like Giorgio Agamben and Shoshana Felman in the realm of poststructuralist thought and notes that the Holocaust was for a long time regarded as an original blueprint to other genocides and served as a main object of inquiry, revealing later that some of their underlying assumption and theoretical conceptions that worked for the western public sphere and the genocide of the Holocaust are not transhistorical and universal, but proved insufficient to understand other, non-Western genocides (Givoni 2016). Givoni criticizes that instead of regarding witnessing as an ethical problem, it has to be understood in its political dimension, which became

“an inescapable feature of Western public spheres. Whether it is called upon to provide factual support for political arguments, a face to collective grievances, a touch of reality to analyses of political evil or a boost to civil mobilizations, the voice of individuals exposed to or affected personally by violence and persecution has reaffirmed itself as indispensable to a broad range of public projects and initiatives, ranging from collective memory to human rights campaigns and from processes of reconciliation to popular revolts”. (Givoni 2016, p. 4).

Givoni argues that a fundamental shift in the last century occurred, in which Laub, Felman and others had a share, that separated witness theory from its political dimensions and performed an ethicalization of witnessing practices that dissolved the juridical, historiographical approaches of witnessing and its missing separation between eye-witnessing (observer) and bearing-witness (survivor), replacing it with a re-actualization of the “Christian doctrine of witnessing, which casts the witness—or in his Greek name, the martyr—as a lived testimony of a transcendent truth that he incarnates in flesh and spirit” (Givoni 2016, p. 12). It is no coincidence that Dominick LaCapra concluded Lanzmann's interest in witnessing in similar words as a “quest [ . . . for] the incarnation, actual reliving, or compulsive acting out of the past—particularly its traumatic suffering—in the present” (LaCapra 1998, pp. 99–100). LaCapra argues that the dichotomic divide of, on the one hand, acting out, understood as a mode of traumatic relieving and repetition of an unprocessed event that can neither be abandoned nor finished, and, on the other hand, working-through, as a process of mourning and remembrance, collapses in Lanzmann's film because through the repetition, re-working, and reenactment of the testimonies a process is triggered that encompasses both (LaCapra 1998). To accomplish this balancing act between acting out and working through, Lanzmann adopts a strategy of staging that is remarkably influenced by film and theatre practice. The witnesses are encouraged not only to recount, but to reexperience, be carried back and reenact the situations to which they bear witness. Elements of play, reconstructed settings and gestural repetitions are used in a way that is highly influenced by Sartre's concept of existential psychoanalysis, “in which physical materiality must be present before the symbolic formation of language or signs can take place on its basis” (Koch 1991, p. 131) and the “fictitious becomes the phenomenological physiognomy of fact” (Koch 1991, p. 131). In this tension, the event is present and absent, and real as well as imaginary; a condition that becomes the basic condition for ethical actualization and workability of the traumatic event that would otherwise consequently lead to re-traumatization.

Peeling the testimony and remembrance out of the witness is a process that requires a lot of work, intuition and sensitivity. In part, Lanzmann recreated circumstances that resembled the situations the witnesses were trying to remember. The testimony of Abraham Bomba, who cut the hair of the female inmates right before they were led into the gas chambers, takes place in a hairdressing saloon (Disc 3; TC: 00:30:10–00:34:41). Lanzmann

described the technical challenges, the need for the right timing and the process of opening and breaking of Bomba in the course of the multi-day testimony in the following way:

“When you shoot with a 16 mm camera you have to reload every eleven minutes; you have to change the magazine holding the film. If you change, you have to cut the scene, you have to stop. [...] However, I had only one camera because I had no money. I felt that the tension was growing. I did not know; it was just a feeling. I did not know what would happen, and if it would happen, but I had an instinct. There was five or six minutes of film left in the camera, which is not much. I said “Cut”. We reloaded immediately and we started again immediately. It was a good thing the change was made very quickly because it is after that he starts to break. It was very important. It would have been impossible to ask him, ‘Please cry again ... ’”. (Lanzmann et al. 1991b, p. 95).

Bomba cuts the hair of his customers for the whole testimony, reaching the core of his horrible experiences through the repetitive rhythm and trance-like activity of hair cutting. However, the differences are just as important as the similarities: he is only cutting men’s hair, everyone is dressed, and he has a lot of time to do his work. The situation is not about triggering and the cruel re-traumatization in a reproduction of sameness, but rather a distorted similarity, a shortcut to access feelings and memories that are deeply buried and suppressed in the psyche through the knowledge and memory of the body. The camera enacts a comparable dynamic as the interview style by Lanzmann: being at times distant and opening space; at other times pursuing and close to Bomba. The core of the testimony is the questions of feeling and emotion in the camps. While Bomba explains that one could not have had feelings in a concentration camp and survive, he gives the example of a former colleague that had the order to cut the hair of his sister and his wife right before they died. Over the course of this example, he breaks, refuses to talk and cries. This takes three minutes of extreme intensity in which everything is at stake. It is no coincidence that the cruelty of the event is recognized directly after the question of emotion and feeling and not about the symbolizable details and order of the event. This can be understood as the belated arrival of emotion and feeling that has been suppressed for so long. Bodily expression through gestures and the small, embodied contradictions, nuances and mimetic deviations and displacements in the giving of testimonies are something that only film can record and make visible. It is important to note that the missing of memories and representations in the cause of trauma does not necessarily affect body memory. Alloo criticizes this missing separation of episodic and body memory in discussions about trauma. While the episodic memory is overwhelmed by an event that, based on its magnitude, and blasting of perceptual frames, cannot be processed and experienced, the bodily inscriptions, incarnated repetitions of everyday life, are still present and an important part of strategies of reenactment and remembrance. He further concludes that the gestural dimension of testimony offers a way out of the privileged and overvalued use of oral testimonies, which always ends up betraying the magnitude of the original affects in the act of symbolization. Drawing on the discussion around the (allegedly missing) ability of pictures to perform negation, he affirms this dimension of images and stresses its important contribution for genocides such as the Holocaust or the mass murders under the communist government of the Red Khmer, that fought against the visibility of their own crimes and created a totalitarian dictatorship in which one was always under a panoptic view of ongoing surveillance (Alloo 2012). While I agree with Alloo in most of his argumentation, I think he neglects the usefulness and importance of symbolization in trauma therapy that helps the concerned people to grasp and control their traumas, and hence, to survive—especially through the ability of symbolization to locate and captivate the traumatic experiences. I would argue that filmic reworkings of genocides are, like the process of witnessing itself, acts of a translation, in which the event is only represented through an act of symbolization or aesthetical formation from a present-day perspective.

Significant for this reading is the work of Gertrud Koch and Gabriela Stoicea’s article, which states that multilingualism, translation and spokenness of the testimonies play a

crucial role in SHOAH as a “metaphor for the wide and always palpable psychological space between witnessing the traumatic event and testifying to it” (Stoicea 2006, p. 51). Inducing an element of foreignness similar to the traumatic event into the tissue of the film, translation bridges the complicated histories of diaspora, expulsion, the “banishment into a language other than [ . . . the Jewish survivors] mother tongue” (Stoicea 2006, p. 46) and the abuse of language by the Nazis. She argues that the disembodiment of the testimonies through a voiceover adds a new dimension to the visual images and autonomous camera movements that enable Lanzmann to transcend individual trauma into a collective historical dimension (Stoicea 2006). Arguing that SHOAH situates itself at the “borderline between documentary and fiction” (Stoicea 2006, p. 43), she attests the film a similar status as German film scholar Gertrud Koch, who researched on the film for years. Koch notes that in SHOAH “the camera’s movement is aesthetically autonomous, it is not used in a documentary fashion, but imaginatively” (Koch 1989, p. 22), situating the film, therefore, as embedded in a tradition of autonomous art that performs an “aesthetic transformation” (Koch 1989, p. 24). Autonomous art has become precarious in times after the Holocaust, manifesting itself, for instance, in the discussion of whether poetry is possible after Auschwitz. This leads to two fundamental questions asked by Koch: “The moral question would be whether, after all, hope for the stability of the human foundation of civilization had been destroyed, the utopia of the beautiful illusion of art had not finally dissolved into false metaphysics—whether, generally, art is still possible at all. The second, material question concerns whether and how Auschwitz can and has been inscribed in aesthetic representation and the imagination” (Koch 1989, p. 15). The project of autonomous art is obliged to a certain notion of imagination that privileges “a notion of art as idea or image (Vorstellung) rather than representation (Darstellung), expression rather than illustration. [ . . . and] can project, annihilate social existence, transcend it to become radically other, while allowing the speechless, hidden substratum of nature in the mute body to reappear” (Koch 1989, pp. 17–18). Due to Koch’s embeddedness in the theoretical tradition of Frankfurt School, it is not surprising that she seems to argue that the most appropriate way to represent genocides is through a negative dialectic embodied in the work of autonomous art. To represent here means making present only through the presence of an absence. The documentary’s dialectic relationship of the event’s facticity and the aesthetic imagination of the cinematic form becomes central for a “dialectic of forgetting and remembering [that] implies that recollection is a process played out in the realm of imagination: things that have been, and no longer are, return as representations bound up in aesthetic form” (Koch 1991, p. 121). A fundamental negation persists in Lanzmann’s poetics that structures SHOAH around the aesthetical paradigms of the traumatic experience. The interrelated contradiction between the inability to remember and the inability to forget increases and performs a qualitative shift that gives birth to recollection understood as an aesthetic transformation of fiction or imagination that introduces a moment of mimetic alterity. The event of the Holocaust becomes appropriated and charged up with meaning by the spectators, but cannot be contained or grasped. It is present only in its inaccessibility as a black box, but becomes included in a process of artificial memory formation, or as Koch writes:

“[ . . . Lanzmann] thus creates the possibility of a discourse on forgetting and remembering that must deny its own subject matter: the repressed facticity of the mass extermination is inscribed in memory, through the aesthetic fiction. The discrepancy between not being able to forget, and being locked, for that very reason, in the memory-less terror of facticity, and the aesthetic transformation of this discrepancy by mimetic means addresses alterity: the audience of Shoah appropriates facticity as material for recollection, and the traumatic reflexes of this facticity lead, like physical footprints, to the black box which cannot be contained in the spectators’ memory. Shoah, then, is a film neither for nor about recollection, but a mimetic construct of a memory which, from the perspective of



the participants, knows no forgetting and, from the perspective of the audience, must be loaded with facticity". (Koch 1991, pp. 131–32).

Striking for me in this passage is the metaphor of the footprints that lead to the inaccessible and unrepresentable event. Footprints are one of the most popular examples of the indexical sign mode are here figured in terms of a pastness that leaves only disembodied traces of a now-absent present. It seems that the use of indexical signs in SHOAH's aesthetic is inherently split into two modes of which one is discarded: the film is missing indexes such as piles of hair, shoes or suitcases, that would invoke a nearly metonymical relation to the signified object of the murdered Jew, becoming too recognizable and too close to the illusion of a present representation. To examine this tension closer, we have to look at Lanzmann's own comments about his work. In a seminar about the film production of SHOAH, he explains that his focus in filming was the 'transmission of the truth' (Lanzmann et al. 1991b, p. 90) and asserts that "[...] all the questions of content were immediately questions of technique and questions of form" (Lanzmann et al. 1991b). A statement he tapers in the following condensed ethical politic of Holocaust approaches:

"It is enough to formulate the question in simplistic terms—Why have the Jews been killed?—for the question to reveal right away its obscenity. There is an absolute obscenity in the very project of understanding. [...] I had clung to this refusal of understanding as the only possible ethical and at the same time the only possible operative attitude. [...] "Hier ist kein Warum": Primo Levi narrates how the word "Auschwitz" was taught to him by an SS guard: 'Here there is no why [...]'. Because the act of transmitting is the only thing that matters, and no intelligibility, that is to say no true knowledge, preexists the process of transmission". ("Hier ist kein Warum", referenced in Lanzmann et al. 1991a, p. 478).

What does this transmission of truth look like? Notoriously, Lanzmann said he would have destroyed archival footage of the Holocaust if it had encountered him in his research (LaCapra 1998). This means that he abolishes the idea of a direct indexical representation of the Shoah, at least from the perspective of the perpetrators. Possibly, he would have acknowledged and recognized the value of the photographs taken in Auschwitz by members of the Sonderkommando, which engender the dangers, resistances and horrors of the concentration camps and the context of forbidden recording, not primarily on a level of content, but particularly in the opacities, vagueness and blurriness, the space of the image that fails to denote (Didi-Huberman 2007). While very much committed to questions of truth and precise reconstruction of the historical events in a historiographical sense, Lanzmann uses a cinematic style far from cinematic realism or an illustrative representation of the events. Mimesis would be obscene. What we experience in the complex assemblages of testimonies, reenactments and present time recordings of the concentration camps is not about immersion, lifeworldly resemblance, or a correlation of what we see and what we hear. Lanzmann's conception of 'reality' does not mean a visual depiction of everyday life in the concentration camps, although on the level of testimony, this is a key subject. Reality neither means an experience of the Shoah, but rather an embodied and lived understanding of the contexts, embeddedness and details of the events, a working-through knowledge as opposed to a rational knowledge about the Holocaust. He states: "Before [filming], my knowledge had no strength, no force. It was an abstract knowledge, an empty one. The whole process of Shoah was to connect, to link up, to accomplish the whole work of remembrance. I think there is a word of Freud to describe this process: *Durcharbeitung* (working-through)" (Lanzmann et al. 1991a, p. 487). This structure explains the underlying temporal logic of the film that aligns—as Shoshana Felman notes in a conversation with Lanzmann—with the temporality of trauma itself. The film "disrupts chronology, disrupts a certain kind of linear temporality, even though it deals with history. The film, very much like psychoanalysis, works through repetition and through ever-deepening circles [...]" (Felman cited by Lanzmann et al. 1991a, p. 476). This temporality is further queered through the temporal gaps between the testimonies we hear and the cartographic scanning

of the landscapes and ruins that replaced the places of mass annihilation. Koch analyzes this precisely when she writes:

“The juxtapositions, on the same temporal plane, of real events separated by very distant locations [...] are designed to irritate our realistic sense of spatiotemporal certainty: the presence of an absence in the imagination of a past is bound up with the concreteness of images of present-day locations. Past and present intertwine; the past is made present, and the present is drawn in the spell of the past”. (Koch 1989, pp. 21–22).

How do these complex spatiotemporal configurations affect our understanding of cinematic indexicality in this specific case? Indexicality is framed productive only in the constraints of the passing of time and the duration/endurance and displacement of the event. What must be presented are not optical similarities or realistic depictions of the Holocaust, but, in contrast, the unbridgeable abyss between the ungraspable horrors of the genocide and the nearly innocent-looking material leftovers of the places where those took place, however, bound and connected through the body of the trace. Lanzmann tries to reach the buried past only by the traces found from the perspective of the present-day standpoint, which aligns him with the project of historiography. Stressing the similarities between cinematography and historiography, Simon Rothöhler makes an interesting point about their shared strategies:

“Cinematography and historiography are cultural techniques of realization [...]. What is envisioned [...] is both present and absent. Something is represented and re-presented, enacted and reenacted. There is a strong relation to history, but what is enacted is not the past, but a specific view, a constellation consisting of rests, traces, opinions, interpretations and overwritings”. (Rothöhler 2018, p. 29, Appendix A, A5).

### 3. Digital Witnessing: Visual Politics of Falseness in *Waltz with Bashir* [2008]

#### 3.1. *False Remembrance, Intersubjective Alliances and Processes of Reconstruction*

A gray, dirty city and a yellow sky: black, snarling bloodhounds with yellow eyes without a look move their way violently through the city, passing mothers, cars, and frightened passengers. While the ‘camera’ (better understood as a rendering or animation of the view) moves backwards—as if it were itself afraid of the mob—we hear a haunting, dark, accelerating electronic musical accompaniment that resembles the trip-like “Lola rennt”—soundtrack; however, a trip gone bad. While we, as spectators, are increasingly immersed and sucked into the animated scenery, the credits roll by. As the mob of dogs finally comes to a halt and starts to bark, we find ourselves with them under the window of a man, looking outside the window.

This title sequence (TC: 00:01:02–00:03:15) is a prime example of a historically quite new style of documentary that film theorist Bill Nichols calls ‘performative documentary’. Originating mainly from new experimental approaches of feminist, queer, black and PoC filmmakers since the 1990s, this genre moves away from the dominating referential quality of documentary to free expressive, rhetorical and poetical elements. Allusions and evocation underline politics of the subjective that draws on the historically embedded experience of concrete, mostly marginalized people. Less concerned with questions of authenticity and indexicality, these films rely on the immersive powers of film and its emotional potential to electrify and move the audience (Nichols 1995). The techniques of the performative documentary allow Folman to draw on specific filmic devices that are more common in narrative and fictive cinema, but become crucial for Folman’s project of staging and enacting the particular experience of trauma and missing representations itself. Like the protagonists, the viewers are sucked into scenes which appear as distorted and condensed visualizations of the unknown, or flashbacks triggered by words, images and other testimonies. These are the moments of the viewer’s highest affective investment and immersion in the film, usually coinciding with expressive movements circling around

protagonists, intense background music, and the use of intensive qualities like rain, wind, or color that appear as protagonists on their own.

Following the eye-catching title sequence, there is a dialog between two friends that spend time in the Israeli military during the genocide of Sabra and Shatila (TC: 00:03:15–0:06:36). One of them is the director himself, Ari Folman; the other one, Boaz Rein-Buskila, is the dreamer of the recurring nightmare we just witnessed. In the explanation of the events, we learn that the scene relates to his experiences during his service in Lebanon. During a mission that included the killing of some ‘terrorists’, his military fellows referred the task of killing the watchdogs to him, because he was unable to kill human beings. The dogs, if not eliminated, would awaken the sleeping victims-to-be and warn them against the invaders. In his dreams, they act as stand-ins for the real victims of his actions: the human beings that were killed in the aftermath of his killing of dogs. Now, they are reborn as undead distortions, haunting figurations of a justice yet to come, and an inversion of that very violence they endured. Only through the screen-memory of the blood dogs coming for revenge, Boaz’s own ambiguity towards the events and his repressed guilt affects can become perceptible. This exact feeling of guilt for the omittance and participation in a genocide is a theme that runs throughout the whole movie and builds the core of Folman’s own unprocessed experiences and non-conscious co-perpetration in the massacres of Sabra and Shatila. In some way the dogs appear as what Deleuze calls in his terminology ‘intercessors’, *Für-Sprecher*, meaning a being, who speaks for someone who is unable to speak and is spoken through the other one (Deleuze 1993, 1998). Following the interview, Folman experiences flashbacks and nightmares after twenty years of successful repression and begins a trip of remembrance. As with the bloodhounds, the likewise distorted and surreal testimonies of Folman’s following interview partners trigger a process of consciousness-raising and remembrance in Folman himself. On the level of cinematic representation, they structure the narrative spine of the plot, becoming clues, focal points, memory pieces for Folman to reconstruct the blank spaces in his recollection. His own recollection of the events is completely missing for him, submerged in unknown areas of his mind; therefore, he has to move into an intersubjective area in which his intercessors think through Folman as much as Folman thinks through them. In the process of reciprocal forgery, they move away from a univocal truthfulness, the pure recollection and fulfilled remembrance of the inaccessible event, to open themselves to fabulation, symbolization and fictionality, which are inseparable from a political dimension.

On Folman’s ride home, the sensory qualities are accelerating (TC: 00:06:36–00:09:10). The music is slowly building up; lights and shadows are passing by; the movements of the wiper are structuring our view; rain is drumming on the windshield. While Folman explains that after the reunion with his friend for the first time in twenty years flashbacks to his time in Lebanon reappeared in his mind, we see him in a long shot leaning in the roaring wind to the sea, the door of his car still wide open. A shoulder close-up performs a circling movement until the raining of yellow lights from the sky comes into picture, indicating that we are slowly tilting from the time of the present actuality into a mental time, a haunting scene from the past. Structured through the same yellow of the falling lights, we see a panorama shot of naked men swimming in the sea in front of a destroyed city front. The scene changes its atmosphere into something strangely transcendent, magical or highly spiritual. Appearing almost like in a sort of baptism, we see Folman twenty years younger in the sparkling, shimmering sea. The group of naked men stands up to leave the water; one is wearing a weapon. As the melancholic-spiritual music rises, we see only the black silhouettes of the men getting dressed in front of a shining, all-devouring yellow. The moment they enter the city, all color starts fading into grey. As they move through the destroyed streets, we see election posters of Bashir Gemayel, followed by another highly expressive camera movement that exposes a cortege of veiled women with frozen grimacing faces, walking by the standing Folman. The camera movement ends with a close-up of his face.

It is obvious that this scene is not a realistic recollection of the true events, but censored along with the principles of the unconscious: distortion and displacement. The vision functions as an abstract screen-memory that veils the memories of past experiences to protect the self from unbearable affects and unprocessable knowledge. I would define screen memories as conscious (but possibly false) memories, that obscure and conceal deeper unconscious meanings, making them accessible only through the processes of the unconscious: displacement and condensation.

The chosen animation style takes this into account and makes it the underlying aesthetic principle:

“The film was first shot as a ninety-minute, live-action video telling the same story scene-by-scene, becoming an initial reenactment in its own right. This included both staged battle scenes and interviews that were conducted on a soundstage. Folman, however, did not use this video for the animation technique commonly known as “rotoscoping,” where the image is directly painted over to create a unique look for the movement of the plastic image, but used the video instead as a visual reference for a stand-alone process of animation where the images were crafted frame by frame using drawings and vector-based computer technology [...]”. (Kramer 2015, p. 61).

Rotoscoping, meaning formerly the shooting of a life-action film with subsequent projection and copying, and contemporary digital techniques such as motion tracking and onion skinning, are techniques that stay committed to correspondence, a more or less direct analogy between the filmed and the animation. In Folman’s approach, this direct correspondence is discharged, because the unconscious is not following a simple logic of replaceability and translation. In mental processes, there are multiple factors at work: the submerged memories as much as linguistic proximity of certain words and expressions, psyche-structuring scenes from the past and the unconscious re-actualizations and re-processings of the very same memories after the event. The screen-memories, therefore, do not work as simple overpaintings that follow the same logic and visualization of the underlying material, but as independent, reluctant and complex chains of signifiers that oppose a simple interpretation.

### 3.2. *Witnessing in the Times of Digitalization*

At the same time, it is striking how much *WALTZ WITH BASHIR* exhibits its own digitality, dealing self-reflectively with questions about its own cinematic form. Folman addressed the corrosion of indexicality and concomitant loss of truth and believability through digitalization during an interview and stated: “In the end it will be a digital image. It will be made of pixels. So is it more real if it’s done by pixels or by beautiful artists who can draw someone for two months? And both images are using the same voiceovers, so what is more real?” (Folman cited by Kent, 310).

What impact has the fundamental media-ontological disruption of digitalization had on the understanding of film as inherently indexical? Is there even a fundamental media-ontological disruption? David Davies, for example, argues, that the positions which stress the differences between analog and digital films are exaggerating the impact of digitalization. While he agrees that the indexical connection to the worldly referent is lost, he denies the impact of indexicality as the basic condition for film itself (Davies 2011). Tom Gunning, preceding Davies with a similar critique of an allegedly oversimplified understanding of film, argues that the notion of indexicality is too constricted, reducing the index to a pastness and neglecting the complex approaches and interlocking connections of the different sign modes in Peirce’s theory of mind. Despite acknowledging that digitalization causes a huge shift in the filmic ontology that affects the alleged indexical dimension, he observes an oversimplified analogy between analog and indexical; digital and non-indexicality; indexicality and realism. Arguing for the separateness of these concepts, he focuses on the embodied perception and participation of the viewer, who tends to be involved and sucked into movement. Movement is something we want to believe in, and we have to be part of it

to experience it—we have to become animate ourselves (Gunning 2007). While I agree with Gunning that indexicality and realism are two separate phenomena and the importance of the movement of the motion pictures can hardly be overestimated, I argue that these argumentations often tend to understate the importance of the technical foundation of film. Although manipulation, trickery and animation have always been central elements of film practice, there is a huge difference if this happens in front of an analog camera, that causes the referent to inscribe itself in the matter of the filmstrip; or on a digital camera, that stores no images and just differences and information, ready to be discreetly addressed and changed pixel by pixel and bit by bit. A more sophisticated argumentation is proposed by Daniel Strutt: Arguing that events of technological change “[...] do not distance us from reality, but rather reconfigure our metaphysical consciousness such that ‘reality’ is mediated differently” (Strutt 2019, p. 11), Strutt shifts the focus to aspects such as embodied perception, reality effects and a restructuring of our spatiotemporal experience and affect economy. This reading resonates with Pierce’s understanding of processes of signification as dynamic acts between sign, object and interpretant and relocates the production of signs more explicit than the other approaches in embodied-corporeal and historically structured recipients. Furthermore, Strutt’s argumentation seems to negotiate in the same division of the indexical that is proposed by Reinhold Görling (Görling 2014, p. 185): although the notion of a chiasmus-like boundness to the object is no longer sustainable in digital film and photography, the dimension of an intersubjective and shared context of meaning is still in place (Appendix A, A6). Indexical signs could still be separated from the symbol which is denoted by the means of conventions and arbitrary, learned correspondences, and would still refer to an object in a deictic mode. At the same time, the question must be asked whether a metaphysical understanding of indexicality can really be upheld, if the perception is structured just by means of a similarity to a reactivated mental image or corporeal experience in the interpretant and without a necessarily independent existence of a material referent.

To examine the questions of the changes in film theory caused by digitalization, we have to delve deeper into the nature of digital processing, image production and visualization. ‘There are no digital images’ is a well-known saying by German media philosopher Claus Pias. He argues that digitalization is based on a logic in which images, numbers and letters make no difference whatsoever because everything follows an underlying logic of information theory. Information—far from being meaningful—is entirely virtual, dealing more with probability and possibilities that can be predicted and processed to minimize data storage. Most of the time, there is no whole image anymore, just the saved difference from one pixel to the next as information by which the images can be reconstructed and simulated. The fundamental infinity and thickness of the analog image is cut, reduced to a set of distinct data to make it operable. In this way, information exists without a fixed materiality of appearance and can be shown in different mediums (as sound data, images, text, etc.). In fact, digital images cannot appear, because the digital is invisible by the means of its existence; there are just analog procedures of visualization. Digital images are a paradox that reconciles “[...] reality and idealism, transcendence and empiricism, timelessness and time boundness, formal logic and history [...]” (Pias 2003, p.54), data and data carrier. Simon Rothöhler leads this to the assertion that digital images are in a constant process of ubiquitous diffusion, transportation, saving, mutating and simulation—being a constant fluid process with just ephemeral fixation or actualization. They function as an intersection of “[...] infrastructures, actors, processes, distribution [...]” (Rothöhler 2018, p. 14, Appendix A, A7) and constant negotiation between visualization and processing and storage. Thinking digital images means thinking in transport calculations, the viral mobility and circulation that constantly affects the usage and production of the very same images. Instead of one place, one medium and central agency, there are multiplicities of entangled agencies. Sebastian Richter explains how digital cameras technically differ from analog ones: the invading light waves are not electromagnetically recorded as in a video camera or react with and inscribe themselves in the microcrystals of a gelatin plate. They



are converted into electric charge, converted into a digital code by a CCD (charged coupled device) and stored (Richter 2008).

Although the debates around digitality are certainly not settled and difficult to negotiate, as they proceed from different underlying assumptions, I think it is important to note that digitalization deepens mistrust in the truthfulness and reality status of film images, and I want to argue here that Folman's display of digitality is deeply embedded in his project of untrustworthy representation. Mirroring the distorted memories, that are both rich and empty; suggestive and cryptic; subjective and collective; floating and directed; Folman's use of digital images stands for a deep shock of traditional beliefs in the realistic powers of film. It is one of the great accomplishments of the film that this alleged weakness is turned productive and is integrated into a psychological as much as a political quest for atonement.

### 3.3. Politics of Fabulation and the Arrival of the Possibility of Mentalization

It is one of those puzzling moments in the research for a text when the sources begin to speak for themselves and similarities are found which would not have imagined beforehand. One of those rare moments was when I noticed that the massacres of Sabra and Shatila were a central inspiration for Deleuze's and Guattari's development of the politics of fabulation. Drawing on Genet's novel *Un captif amoureux* that 'grew out of the massacres like a cancer' (Guattari 1996, p. 218), Guattari adopts them as a background for his own argumentation on fabulous images. Deleuze writes even more directly: "The Palestinians enter the process of nation-building in the moment of expulsion, depending on the degree of resistance. [...] Against predetermined fictions originating from the colonial discourse opposition must draw on minority discourses, originating from intercessors" (Deleuze 1993, p. 182, Appendix A, A8). The Palestine struggle for survival and land becomes a focal point for a politics in which the people are missing, that draws on the powers of the false to create a language for the people yet to come. This solidarization with the Palestine struggle for freedom resonates unfortunately with a certain trend in leftist politics of antisemitism that Deleuze participated in to some extent, especially in his cinema books, consisting mainly of the invocation of uncontextualized stereotypes like a world conspiracy and dubious powers that collect money (Deleuze 1989, Appendix A, A9). The Middle East conflict is highly complex and has a complicated history that cannot be dealt with within the limits of this article. However, it is remarkable that Folman, as an Israeli filmmaker, decides to center his film around a massacre of Palestinians through phalangist militia. His own (passive) complication in the genocide is reflected when Ori Sivan explains to him that, in his mind, there is a connection between his own actions and the crimes his family endured during the Holocaust. Non-consciously, he had become aligned with the persecutors that committed the crimes by firing lightning missiles. Directly afterwards, the final testimony of one former soldier emphasizes this analogy by comparing his memories of Palestine liberation to a famous picture of the Warsaw ghetto during the Second World War.

Tracing back the reception history of *WALTZ WITH BAHIR*, Eleanor Kent showed that this procedure was one of the most explosive and enraging aesthetical decisions (Kent 2011), because it levered out discourses that based their arguments on notions of a fixed, self-identical and essential identity, in favor of blurred, layered, and forged attributions and identifications. Victimhood is understood here sometimes as something eternal or inheritable, that excludes the possibility of becoming responsible as persecutor or bystander in other contexts. Maybe Folman enacts here a promise and potentiality that psychoanalysis and Deleuzian thinking pose until today: a movement of thinking that is constantly in flux, reworked, becoming actualized, and not congruent in fixed identity with itself.

The simile of the massacres and the Holocaust is initiating the ending (TC: 01:20:42–01:23:29). In a simulation of a slow tracking shot, we move closer to a wall of bodies, and the cortege of grieving women we saw in Folman's distorted vision. Enclosed between two house walls on each side, our view gradually broadens. Suddenly, the glowing, blazing sun comes into our field of vision and tinges the whole scenery in the same unreal yellow

hue. Subsequently, we are following and overtaking the grieving women in an accelerating movement, that targets Folman standing at a checkpoint with a rifle in hand. Now, the film breaks with its chosen digital aesthetics, showing video footage of the dead bodies and screaming, mourning women of the ghetto. The way it is cut, we read this scene as an arrival of complete remembrance. The false and untrustworthy images of digital animation are replaced with truthful video-footage of the massacre's aftermath. The problem is that this alignment is completely false: what we see is not Folman's memory or former perception; it is archival footage made by someone else. In the same moment in which the film invokes the powers of truthful, analog representation and filmic realism, they are already deconstructed as the naive belief they always have been. No image is free from the constant need of supplemental contextualization; the rich, infinite universe of analog images is still too narrow to give us the full picture—including the person behind the camera, the circumstances of filming and a confirmation of its actual reality status.

"Waltz with Bashir, in its final minutes, seems to fall within this trap of showing the modern condition of the world at its worst, the trauma of human suffering, as something that can be contained and distilled down to the most dramatic, visceral document of the massacre possible—the archival video clip—which somehow can satisfactorily sum up the truth of that calamity. In this way, the film betrays the momentum toward a truly authentic representation of the Sabra and Shatila massacre, where the film was headed before its final, non-animated sequence". (Kramer 2015, p. 66).

Eleanor Kent objects to readings of this kind, arguing to understand the ending not as giving in to "an impulse to rest on its [the events] final truth than out of a compulsive need to re-view these images. [ . . . The film is therefore in line with Libby] Saxton's description of a destabilised notion of the historical event and subsequent demotion of the image's testimonial power" (Kent 2011, p. 362). Kent, similar to my thesis, states that this is in line with Folman's use of the "technological insecurity of digital film, its subjectivity granting the medium the capacity for fidelity to an idea or experience" (Kent 2011, p. 310). In favor of Kent's argument, one could argue that the style break to analog film is readable as fulfilled recollection only at first sight. On a second notion, the footage becomes understandable as embedded in a photojournalist tradition, indicating that it is impossible that Folman could have experienced the visions of the film images himself. Furthermore, the intertwining of memory and visualized footage hints at the ways our memory in general, and especially in the cases of genocides, is structured along the lines of visual mediations by film and photography (Elander 2017). Nevertheless, it is a tough call to decide whether the film is exposing the naive beliefs in film as the bearer of truth and unmediated reality, or just fails to resist its ever-present lures of seduction.

Instead of deciding which one of the readings should be favored I, therefore, want to read the ending through the lens of Deleuzian minority processes and psychoanalytical insights in the psychic realities of hostility and intergenerational ethnic conflicts. In the complex exchange processes between multiple testimonies and perspectives, the Jewish and Palestine victims, and both genocides, there is—beyond a fundamental incompatibility—a moment of reconciliation and primal vulnerability. The ending paralleling the completion of the process of remembrance with the arrival of intense affects of deep mourning, symbolized through the bodies of the grieving mothers and wives as the sole survivors of the genocide, shows, on a global level, the advent of the possibility of mentalization, meaning the ability to attribute feelings to another person and uphold an empathetic relation (Fonagy et al. 2004). This ability is highly contested in moments of mutual hostility (such as in the present-day Middle East); thus, the ending of WALTZ WITH BASHIR might also be read as a moment of reconciliation with the other, a form of making peace with the past and coming to terms with one's own actions and responsibilities through another political conflict. Maybe this process underlines a point made about the performative documentary made by Nichols, who owes a lot to Deleuze's work on minority politics, without quoting him:

“One of the possible implications of this shift is the creation of a collective subjectivity that reconciles the abstract with the concrete, the common with the special, the individual with the social and the political with the private in a dialectic transformative fashion”. (Nichols 1995, p. 152, Appendix A, A10).

#### 4. Conclusions

As we have seen, the turn to digitalization causes a huge shift in our understanding and reading of images, that affects the witness film. Although the discussions concerning the impact of digitalization and its consequences are far from being settled, it is safe to say that there is also a profound shattering of trust and belief in the ontology of film images themselves that complicates reality and truth claims. The naive beliefs about the content’s truth based on the media ontology or form of analog film have, of course, always been shortsighted and far away from the possibilities of manipulation, even in analog film. However, far from being understood as a solely negative development, digitality causes new challenges and opportunities for visual representation of images to arise, that are at stake, precarious and inherently torn. This new type of image can, as I have shown here, intersect with the complicated ethical demands for appropriate representation imposed by the genre of the witness film, refreshing and extending, but also diverging from a long tradition of filmmaking and critique. SHOAH represents one of the most extensive, self-reflective and uncompromising elaborations about the possibilities of cinematic representation of genocides and the thoughtful consideration of aesthetic form. WALTZ WITH BASHIR shows us what a possible engagement with witnessing in digital times can look like. Both develop insightful strategies of thinking about the enduring effects of genocides for survivors, bystanders, and perpetrators, including the temporality and representability of trauma. Both films have still a lot to offer in asking encompassing questions of the appropriateness of certain film forms and the consequences of technical developments for the aesthetics of media.

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#### Appendix A

A1: For a brilliant discussion of film as a form of microhistory and its impact on historiography, I recommend Linda Waack’s dissertation on Siegfried Kracauer historiographic writings, in which the language of film functions as a model for a narrative style of a historiographic practice, which is moving in constant flux from the small to the great, the personal to the collective, the material to the narrative, the master story to its rests and inconsistencies (Waack 2019).

A2: Loose translation by the author, original quote: “Die Frau legt Zeugnis davon ab, wie der alles bezwingende Rahmen von Auschwitz gesprengt wurde, der keine bewaffneten jüdischen Aufstände erlaubte. Sie bezeugt, wie die Grundlagen des Systems zerbrachen. Darin besteht die historische Wahrheit ihres Berichts” (Laub 2000, p. 71).

A3: Loose translation by the author, original quote: “Videoaufzeichnungen sind ein anderes Mittel, dem traumatisierten Opfer einen Zuhörer zu bieten, ein Mittel zur Reexternalisierung des Ereignisses und damit zu seiner Historisierung. [ . . . Ich] halte [ . . . ]

den Prozess, den die psychoanalytische Praxis und den Prozeß, den das Videointerview in Gang setzt, für identisch" (Laub 2000, p.79).

A4: Franz Suchomel original quote "Ausschwitz war eine Fabrik [...] Ich sage Ihnen meine Definition merken sie sich das! Treblinka war zwar ein primitives, aber gut funktionierendes Fließband des Todes" (SHOAH, Disc 2: 00:02:10–00:02:30).

A5: Loose translation by the author, original quote: "Kinematographie und Historiographie sind kulturelle Techniken der Vergegenwärtigung [...]. Das, was vergegenwärtigt wird [...], ist dabei anwesend und abwesend zugleich. Etwas wird repräsentiert und repräsentiert, dargestellt und erneut aufgeführt. Dabei existiert ein starker Bezug zu dem, wie es gewesen ist, aber aufgeführt wird nicht, was war, sondern eine Ansicht dessen, eine Konstellation aus Resten, Spuren, Meinungen, Interpretationen, Überschreibungen" (Rothöhler 2011, p. 29).

A6 Michaela Schäuble's article rightly suggests that the film is performing a therapeutic function: "From this point of view, the film itself can be understood as a form of psychotherapy—a personal as well as national confrontation with repressed memories and with a violent past that has been denied" (Schäuble 2011, p. 210). She omits questions of digitality in favor of the discussion of animation as a practice that "challenges the claim to unmediated reality in documentary" (Schäuble 2011, p. 204).

A7: Loose translation by the author, original quote: "Das Bild als verteiltes zu begreifen, führt zu Infrastrukturen, Akteuren, Prozessen der Distribution, zur Schnittstelle zwischen Bildern und Transportdaten [...]" (Rothöhler 2018, p. 14).

A8: Loose translation by the author, original quote: "[...] A]b dem Moment, wo die Palästinenser von ihrem Territorium vertreiben werden, in dem Maße, wie sie Widerstand leisten, treten sie in einen Prozeß ein, in dem sie ein Volk bilden. [...] Den vorherbestimmten Fiktionen, die immer auf den Kolonialdiskurs zurückgehen, muß man Minoritätendiskurs entgegensetzen, der durch Fürsprecher zustande kommt" (Deleuze 1993, p. 182).

A9: I would like to thank Dennis Göttel for this important notice in the course of a seminar.

A10: Loose translation by the author, original quote: "Eine der möglichen Implikationen dieser Aspektverlagerung ist die Schaffung einer kollektiven Subjektivität, die das Abstrakte mit dem Konkreten, das Allgemeine mit dem Besonderen, das Individuelle mit dem Gesellschaftlichen sowie das Politische mit dem Persönlichen in einer dialektischen, transformativen Weise verbindet" (Nichols 1995, p. 152).

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