Ghosts, Imagination and Theatre: re-enacting the futural past through documentary film

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Ghosts, Imagination and Theatre:
re-enacting the futural past through documentary film

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Abstract

This practice-led research looks at creative strategies to address the under-represented and marginalised history of Roma persecution in WWII.

The research has resulted in a film, *The Deathless Woman* (89' 2019), a hybrid documentary film that has been created in response to European sites of atrocity against the Roma. This practice employs a number of experimental strategies that seek to supplement the limited historiography of the genocide of the Roma during WWII and formulate an innovative approach to documentary production that questions notions of authenticity and indexicality in Western knowledge formation. Starting in 1942 with the murder of a Roma family in a small village in Poland, the film aims to bring these events into the present by employing strategies such as the use of ghosts, fantasy and theatre within a documentary framework. Through this, the film aims to visualise and connect the traumatic past of the Roma to other traumatic pasts and to the traumatic present.

This research project interrogates two central research questions. Firstly, how might a phenomenological approach to the invisible be employed in knowledge production to reframe our relationship to traumatic or marginalised histories and make their legacy relevant? Within this, I employ an experimental approach to empiricism that foregrounds the sensory as a device to investigate sites of atrocity. That these events were traumatic and centred on specific geographic sites is critical in my choice of sensory methods. I have paid particular attention to atmospheres, ghosts and affects in constructing both a film and an academic argument that foregrounds sensory experience as a method for knowledge production. Critical to my methodology is my decision not to make binary distinctions between imagination and reality (or truth and fiction), but rather to see the two as interrelated and intertwined. More specifically, this extends to declining to rationalise such things as ghosts, but rather to treat the ghost as an object of experience and this has led to the employment of a ghost as a legitimatised narrator within a documentary film.

This fantastic notion has been extended into the film's production through the application of theatrical methods as strategies to further critically challenge and redress the failures of both the archive and of history and has led to my second research question – how might creative strategies in hybrid documentary film practice be effective in reframing marginalised histories in

an affectively-impactful way? I demonstrate the potential for non-realist modes such as the literary fantastic, the methods of documentary theatre and the tableau vivant to offer audiences a route to thinking about complicated and traumatic subject matter while simultaneously revealing the virtues and flaws of its sources. The seemingly paradoxical nature of combining documentary and the fantastic comes out of a consideration of what role ghosts might have in the way traumatic histories are communicated and represented, and most importantly, how the ghost has the capacity to bring the past forwards to us in the present. This inter-relationship between imagination or artifice and moral or political thought is at the heart of my work.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors Dr Uriel Orlow and Professor May Adadol Ingawanij for their guidance during the writing of this thesis, and the support staff at University of Westminster for supporting my practice. Thanks also to the Visual Sociology team at Goldsmiths, University of London for introducing me to the notion of the ghost having political agency and where this research began to take shape. Thanks also to the friends and colleagues at conferences and symposia who gave me valuable feedback as this research developed: *Visible Evidence XXIII*, *The Poetics and Politics of Documentary* (University of Sussex), *Ecstatic Truth: Defining the Essence of Animated Documentary* (Royal College of Art), *The Forensic Imagination* (The American Comparative Literature Association), *The Tableau Vivant: Across Media, History, and Culture* (Columbia University, NY.). The Polish, Hungarian and Roma people who willingly offered their testimony on camera, even though at times this was a difficult undertaking for them. The many other Roma and Travellers in the UK, Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic who welcomed me into their homes and communities and helped facilitate this research. My partner Jeremy Williams who amazingly gave up holidays to accompany me on field trips to visit death camps, locate mass graves, and record witness testimony in Poland and Hungary – it was through conversations with him about landscape, history and atrocity that this project began. And most importantly, my father Alfred Mortimer who always championed my work and offered unconditional support, but to my great sadness, did not live to see me complete this project. In gratitude, all.

Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Part One: Practice

The film

The Deathless Woman.

HD video, 89 minutes, 2019

Written, Produced, Directed and Designed by Roz Mortimer

The Deathless Woman was made with the support of a considerable number of filmmaking professionals.

Key Credits

Cinematography (re-enactments): Peter Emery

Cinematography (testimony, landscapes and actuality in Hungary and Poland): Roz Mortimer

Aerial Cinematography: Louis Carraz, Tony Baur, Josh Cate, R.J. Sindelar, Ian Titchener

Additional Cinematography: Fred Fabre, Tomas Frigstad, Jessica Mitchell, Gaby Norland

Visual Effects: Joe Pavlo

Sound Designers: Chu-Li Shewring, Stefan Smith

Production Design, Model and Set Construction: Roz Mortimer

Set Dresser: Mark Hill

Editor: Daniel Goddard

Script Editor: Margaret Glover

Interpreter, Hungary: Clara Farkas

Interpreter, Poland: Magda Bartosz

Interpreter, Czech Republic: Martin Gálas

Translators: Gyula Vamosi, Clara Farkas, Dorota Miklasinska

Romani Language Consultant: Gyula Vamosi

Cast

The Deathless Woman: Iveta Kokyová

The Seeker: Loren O'Dair

The Boy: Oliver Malik

On practice, process and creative collaboration

The production of *The Deathless Woman* stretched from summer 2011 to autumn 2019. During this period, I made several research trips to Hungary and Poland. Material filmed and gathered during these field trips has been incorporated in the film and includes landscapes; footage of the sites of the mass graves at Várpalota, Bielcza, Borzęcin, Żabno, Szczurowa; footage filmed at the Tarnów Tabor ceremony at Bielcza; general views of the local villages, cemeteries and forests; footage filmed at the Gypsy-Family Camp at Birkenau; and the testimonial interviews recorded with witnesses and survivors (filmed in Poland in 2012 and Hungary in 2018). In Hungary and Poland I was assisted with production management and interpretation by Clara Farkas and Magda Bartosz, and with sound recording by Jeremy Williams.

I wrote the first partial draft of the script in 2012 immediately after Zofia told me her story of the woman buried alive in Bielcza. Some of this material became the basis for my MA Visual Sociology dissertation at Goldsmiths, University of London in 2014 (*Writing the Story of The Deathless Woman: sensory methods, affect and a concern for justice)*. I continued to add to the script up to early 2018 by which time I had a feature-length draft, and from that point the screenplay benefitted from the generous expertise of script editor Margaret Glover. The screenplay was based around three interwoven narratives: the 'testimony' of the Deathless Woman as written by myself after my encounter with Zofia, the testimony of the Seeker which is based on my notebook and diary entries and played in the film by the actor Loren O'Dair, the original documentary testimony of the witnesses recorded in Poland and Hungary.

The theatrical sets were designed myself (see Appendix for original set design drawings and production photographs) and I made the majority of the models and props myself (with assistance from Mark Hill, Jeremy Williams and Hylton Stockwell who helped make the trees, bird book and wax arms respectively). Installation of the sets was a complex and demanding task and was achieved with the help of Mark Hill and other assistants. Visual Effects expert Joe Pavlo contributed to the project during post-production, adding detail to the underwater tableau, adding birds in flight and producing the motion graphics for the end scenes.

My early experiments with using a drone to achieve a spectral presence were supported by a technology grant from the *Transmissions and Entanglements* research project in 2014. This was later consolidated in Montana in summer 2016 (whilst attending the *Visible Evidence XXIII* documentary conference) where I was able to work with an experienced drone operator (R.J. Sindelar) to experiment further with creating the spectral swoops and movements of the Deathless Woman in the burnt-out forests of Gallatin County. Later, whilst filming the burnt house on the ruins of the Dale Farm Travellers' site in Essex, drone cinematographer Louis Carraz perfected this strategy achieving long, ghostly, drifting moves coupled with a forensic examination of the detail of the charred building that perfectly embodied the spectral presence and affective inquisitiveness of the Deathless Woman.

The first tableau was built in summer 2016 and photographed by Steadicam cinematographer Fred Fabre. Fred had previously filmed my short film *Safety Tips for Kids* (Mortimer, 2003), where we had worked together to devise a methodology for using the Steadicam in a very subjective way – most commonly the Steadicam is used to follow a protagonist, but in *Safety Tips*, I wanted the camera to be the protagonist. This is a style of filming that we used again in the forest tableau for *The Deathless Woman* where the camera became the point-of-view of someone lost inside the forest. Lighting this scene was a challenge, with about 50 vertical trees potentially casting shadows, so we set it up as a moonlit scene allowing us to light the whole set with one large top-mounted HMI, thus eliminating any issue with multiple shadows. This was initially a practical decision, but quickly became a creative strategy that set the tone for the use of contrasting light and darkness in many of the subsequent tableaux. Later, in 2017 and 2018, other Steadicam, jib or gimbal devices were used by other cinematographic collaborators – all with the intention of representing the spectral point of view of the Deathless Woman (R.J Sindelar used a Ronin to move through the burnt forest in Montana, Tomas Frigstad used a combination of studio jib and Steadicam to film the model concentration camp huts, and the Steadicam to move through the multiple projections of the scene representing the inside of the Internet, George Pearton used the studio jib to film languorous moves down from the artificial forest to reveal the grave of the Deathless Woman).

The principle production of the film ran from August to December 2018, and at this point Peter Emery, the film's Director of Photography, came on board. This led to a highly productive creative association where we discussed the material that had been filmed for the project up to that point and devised a cinematic strategy to depict the point-of-view of the Deathless Woman and the re-enactments of the Seeker. The Deathless Woman's perspective needed to not be bound to earth, or to human-height or movement – this had been at the root of my early experiments with drone and Steadicam. Although I already had some drone material, and some of the tableaux filmed, a strategy was needed for the close perspective of the Deathless Woman as she is haunting the Seeker. I wanted her point-of-view in these scenes to be non-human and otherworldly as she comes close to the Seeker for an almost forensic examination of her as an object of interest. The devices we had been using so far would not allow the amount of control needed for this type of detailed and close work. Peter suggested using a hand-held gimbal whenever the Deathless Woman was scrutinising something (the Seeker, the library archive) and he worked to perfect a technique with the gimbal that felt live and embodied.

Unusually for a documentary film, the film was entirely scripted, and when it came to post-production the film's editor, Daniel Goddard crafted an initial assembly of the film using the script as a template. Over the subsequent months, we worked closely together to refine the film into its final form. This work included creative collaborations with sound designer Chu-Li Shewring and composer Stefan Smith. Chu-Li worked on creating the close, detailed soundscapes of the Deathless Woman's world – specifically inside her grave and as she moved around the archive. Our discussions centred on the need to bring the audience into this world, and Chu-Li built up a subtle and dense aural soundscape around the magnified sound of insects and invertebrates. Stefan and I had many conversations about the perspective of the soundscape – in the tableaux I wanted the audience to feel as if they were falling into these claustrophobic spaces, perhaps even as if they were drowning. The soundtrack needed to reinforce a sense of unease – I wanted to audience to feel uncomfortable in these spaces. The sound that accompanied the Deathless Woman herself when she was in the air travelling between places was also critical. We discussed the perspective of this as she moves unseen through space and time, and we decided to use the capabilities of 5.1 surround sound in a non-conformist

way. We placed the voices of the Seeker and the witnesses at the front and centre of the cinema, but the Deathless Woman's voice is only ever encountered through the speakers at the side and rear of the cinema. In this way, both the image and the soundscape echo Roland Barthes' observation that the Lazarean is never in front of us, but always around us (Barthes, 1989: 182) – we cannot locate her or scrutinise her, it is her that is scrutinising us and this is an intentionally uncomfortable position for the audience.

Once the picture was locked I turned to the process of translating the narration of the Deathless Woman from English to Romani. There are many Romani dialects and I drew on the expertise of Hungarian-Roma linguist Gyula Vamosi. Gyula suggested Lovari and Kalderash as the most appropriate dialects, taking into account the location of the Deathless Woman's grave and making some assumptions about her (unknown) heritage. We decided on Lovari for the translation which was undertaken by Gyula and later refined in collaboration with Iveta Kokyová, a Czech-Roma writer who voices the Deathless Woman in the film.

I am grateful to all the creative team mentioned above and the many more that were involved in the making of the film.

The beginning

An elderly woman, who I have never met before takes me by the hand and leads me to a forest clearing next to her house in the Polish village of Bielcza. As I stand listening to her talk and watching her gesticulate, it is obvious that she is visibly upset, traumatised even. She points down to a patch on the ground between the trees where I can see the earth has slumped, leaving an indentation. She pounds her chest, gesturing back towards the village and then up towards the sky. On the short walk there, she had pressed a blue post-it-note into my hand. Something important is written on it. A few months later I return with an interpreter to record Zofia's testimony.

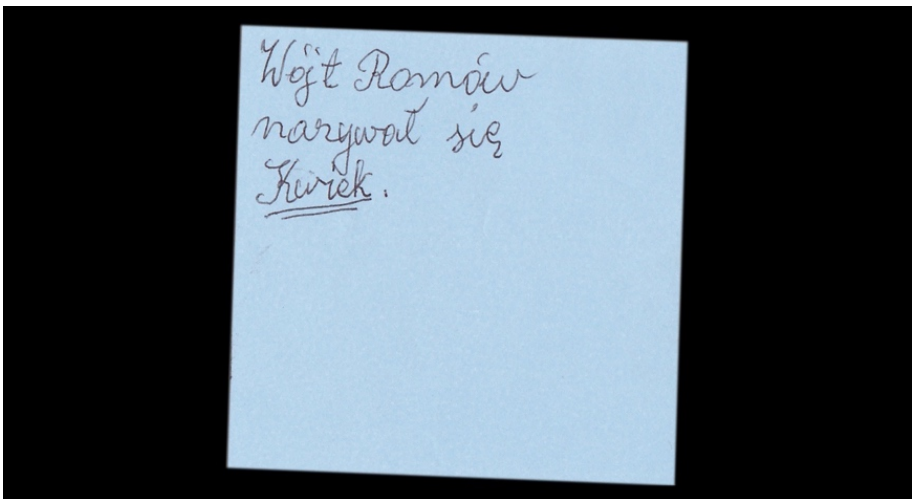

Fig. 1 Zofia's post-it-note[1]

I had known there was a mass grave somewhere in Bielcza. A local historian[2] had told me that a Roma family had been massacred there on the 16th of July 1942 and some years later the bodies had been exhumed and re-buried in the village cemetery where there is a tombstone with a memorial plaque. The number of Roma killed that day is uncertain: the historian had settled on nineteen, although a plaque on the village church states '41 Gypsies from the Kwiek family, from 5 months to 69 years of age'.

The original forest grave remains unmarked. Over the course of that summer I had travelled in Hungary and Poland following up on months of archive research to trace sites of Roma massacres during the Nazi era. On the outskirts of Várpalota in Hungary I stood at the edge of an idyllic man-made lake. In 1945 one hundred and eighteen Roma

[1] Translation: 'The wife of the Roma leader was called Kwiek'
[2] Adam Bartosz, who was then the director of the Tarnów Regional Museum.

woman and children were murdered there by the Arrow Cross and buried in a trench. Nobody in the town would talk to me about it and I could find no marker or memorial at the lakeside. In Poland, in Borzęcin Dolny, a few miles down the road from Bielcza, in a forest that was eerily absent of life, I searched for the unmarked grave of twenty-nine Roma. The following year Józef described to me how in 1943 when he was fourteen years old, soldiers made him dig that grave and throw in the bodies of the Roma. In Żabno I was taken to a scrubby patch of wheat that Janina tells me grows over the bodies that she saw buried there when she was twelve years old. I am the first person outside of her immediate family that she has ever told.

Nine months later, when I am back in Bielcza I set up my camera in Zofia's living room to record her testimony. First, she tells me what her husband's uncle had witnessed in 1942. He saw the matriarch of a Roma family repeatedly get back up from the ground each time the German soldiers shot her. She was angry and had laid curses on the men. When they finally buried her, she was still breathing. Years later, Zofia had witnessed the villagers exhuming the bodies from the unmarked forest grave. As they dug down, the bodies were decomposed to 'dust and bone', apart from the body of the Roma matriarch who was lifted out of the ground by the village men 'untouched, looking as she did on the day she was killed'.[3]

Later that day I returned to my hotel room and began to write the story of *The Deathless Woman*. I drew on the empirical research I had been doing in archives over the course of the previous two years. Research into the largely unknown history of the genocide of the Roma during World War Two. I imagined the Roma matriarch as a ghost and wrote the story in her voice, as if she possessed me. Her voice was charged and angry. I envisaged her rage as a physical and powerful force capable of setting fire to the forest, of cursing her killers, of killing living beings. She rose up out of her grave and skimmed along the tops of the trees to look down on and witness terrible events.

And then I wrote in my own voice, telling the story of how I came to find her grave. I imagined her watching me as I researched the sparse history of the Roma in libraries and

[3] Zofia Kołodziej's video testimony, recorded by Roz Mortimer, July 2012. Trans. Dorota Miklasinska

archives, that it was no accident that I had found myself in Bielcza. I thought back to all the strange things that had happened to lead me to her grave and wondered if she had been there all along, guiding me to find her, guiding me to see the right things.

Part Two: Written Thesis

Introduction

Research background and motivation

In 2009 I began thinking about landscape and atrocity – specifically places where atrocities had taken place but had not been memorialised. I was interested in what happens in these instances – when society denies or downplays atrocity, turns a blind eye and chooses not to memorialise – could this be interpreted as a licence for the perpetuation of atrocity? Further to this, I wondered if there might be an affective residue of trauma at these places – a kind of metaphorical haunting – and how one might respond to that or capture it as an artist. My research began in the archive where I filled a notebook with details of places, events and dates. As this process progressed I amassed an overwhelming amount of material and realised I needed to reduce the focus of the enquiry. First, I narrowed it down to consider only events in the twentieth century, and later I narrowed the enquiry further to a corridor stretching from Poland to present day Syria. I settled on four events and their associated landscapes – the Armenian Genocide (1914-23), the Famine Genocide in Soviet Ukraine (1932-33), the Roma Genocide during WWII (1935-45) and the genocide of the Bosnian War (1992-95).

In 2010 I travelled to Syria and followed the route of the death march of the Armenian Genocide, from Aleppo to Deir-ez-Zour, with the intention of returning at a later date to start working on a film. In 2011 I was living and teaching in Montana and began to research unmemorialised sites of historic atrocity relating to the American Indian Wars, particularly in the Rocky Mountains and the Great Plains. I took my camera to some of these sites and started to experiment with a methodology that involved filming for extended durations from a fixed viewpoint.[4] By the time I returned to Europe, war had broken out in Syria, and it was no longer possible to consider returning to Deir-ez-Zour. I revisited my earlier research notes and a photocopy I had pasted into my notebook of a page from a collection of images included in *Pharrajimos* (Bársony and Daróczi, 2004). Titled *Jeltelen sírok* (trans: unmarked graves) the image was a photograph of Lake Grábler

[4] This work eventually became *Sites of Memory*, a collection of 36 'video paintings' (Mortimer, 2011)

at Várpalota in Hungary, the unmemorialised site of the massacre of 118 Roma women and children in 1945.

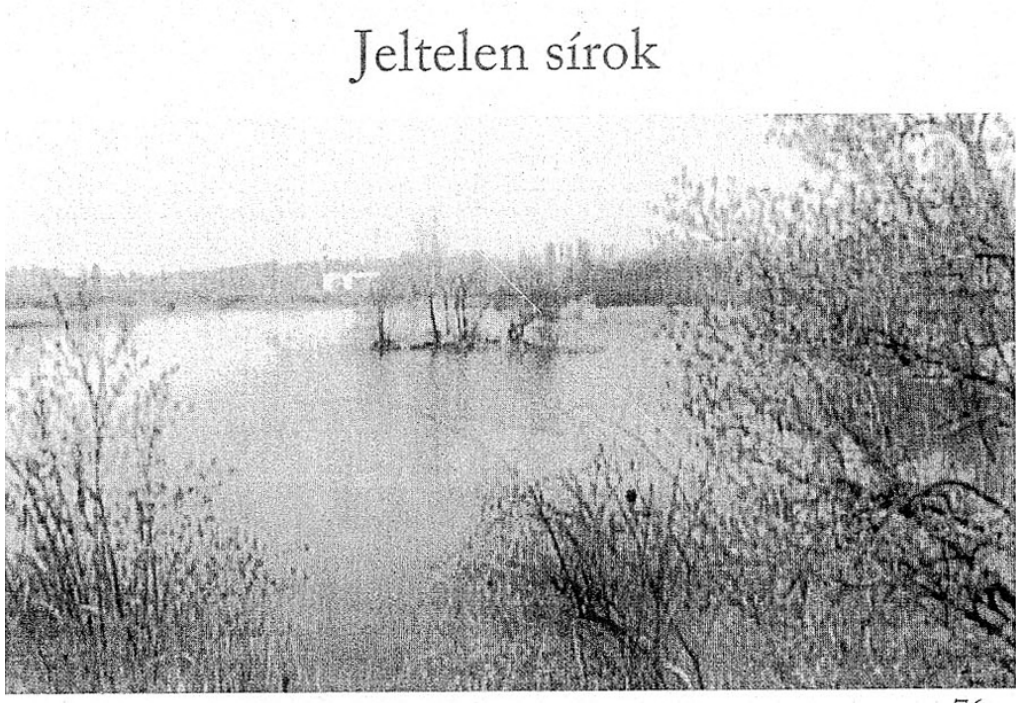

Fig. 2 Lake Grábler near Várpalota (Bársony and Daróczi, 2004)

Still working with the methodology of fixed extended-duration filming, I went to Várpalota and set my camera up at the edge of Lake Grábler. I felt uncomfortable in the town. Nobody wanted to talk about the massacre of the Roma in 1945, and there was no mention of it, or anything about the Roma in the town's museum. I had been in touch with an archivist at the Open Society Archive in Budapest, and he had told me they held no records of atrocities committed against the Roma during the war and that journalists had only started to write about this after the regime change in 1989.[5] I sensed an uneasy atmosphere in this place and worked with the camera to try and convey something of that translated through the natural world by, for instance, picking up the way the surface of the water rippled and the chaos of the wind in the bulrushes. These two moments – finding the image of the lake at Várpalota and standing at the side of the lake, feeling

[5] See communication in my blog *Reduced to Silence: Landscape, atrocity and a culture of forgetting*. Now archived at: https://reducedtosilence.wonder-dog.co.uk/category/varpalota/index.html

unsettled as the wind whipped up and disrupted the tranquillity of the summer's day – marked the beginning of my unexpected entanglement with Roma history and culture. Later that same trip, after field research at the sites of former concentration camps at Płaszów and Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland, I travelled to Tarnów at the invitation of Adam Bartosz, the director of the Tarnów Regional Museum – a historian who had been doing important work identifying and memorialising Roma mass graves in the neighbouring villages and forests. It was in a nearby village, that I met Zofia and she handed me the blue post-it-note. At Adam Bartosz's invitation I returned the next year to participate in the museum's international Roma memorial initiative.[6] During that field trip in 2012 I encountered other witnesses to these historic murders who were still alive, still living in proximity to the mass graves and eager to have their testimony recorded.[7] Without seeking it out, or expecting it, my research began to shift to thinking about testimony and trauma. I filmed the testimony of several Polish witnesses and one Roma survivor, all of whom had been children at the time of the Einsatzgruppen massacres in 1942-3 (in Szczurowa, Borzęcin, Bielcza and Żabno) and for some of them this was the first time they had spoken openly about what they had seen. This work became a 31 minute film *This is History (after all)* (Mortimer, 2014), a single screen installation that set out to interrogate the relationship between past atrocity and present-day traumatic memory through the memory and first person experience of witnesses.

When recording Zofia's testimony (as a child-witness to a massacre at Borzęcin), she began to tell me ta story about a grave hidden in the forest next to her house in Bielcza. She hadn't been living there in 1942 when the massacre of the Kwiek family had taken place but had subsequently married into a local family and moved into their home where she still lives today. Her husband's uncle had witnessed the murders in 1942 and had told her what he had seen. Some years later she had witnessed for herself the village men exhuming the mass grave and taking the remains to the village cemetery. This strange story stayed with me, and Zofia's talk of curses, a woman who refused to die and a body that refused to decompose, aligned with my own uncanny experiences and

[6] *Międzynarodowy Tabor Pamięci Romów w Tarnowie*

[7] Material that I filmed during these research trips has been included in *The Deathless Woman* film. This filmed material – landscapes, footage of the sites of the mass graves, footage from the Tarnów Tabor ceremony at Bielcza, footage from the local villages, cemeteries and forests, footage from the Gypsy-Family Camp at Birkenau, testimonial recordings with witnesses and survivors.

observations that felt as if they had played a part in pointing me towards this woman and this place. It became clear, as I began to develop the film, *The Deathless Woman*, that I needed to include my own experience and my own journey in the film – in part as a strategy to foreground and explore my uncanny experiences, but also to clearly reflect my positionality in all this as a filmmaker working outside my own culture. To this end, when writing the screenplay, I introduced an autobiographical character (the Seeker, played in the film by actor Loren O'Dair) who could voice my observations, re-enact my experience, and who is positioned, like me, as an outsider who learns about the historical and contemporary persecution of the Roma.

I began this research as someone who knew very little about Roma history or Roma culture. My research journey has spanned nine years and has been enabled by the support of Roma organisations[8] and individuals[9] who facilitated my filmmaking by making introductions, inviting me into their homes, sharing their histories and experience with me, teaching me about their language and culture, and encouraging me to continue with this work. That I was an outsider seeking to make a film about the Roma Holocaust, was met with surprise by many of the Roma I worked with. A common perception from within this community is that the rest of the world does not care about Roma, either past or present, and that their experience during World War Two has been intentionally marginalised within wider discourse about the Holocaust. Roma are vocal in their belief that their voices are not heard and this can be contextualised in relation to the ongoing xenophobic persecution many experience in Europe today – 'we keep

[8] For instance, the Roma Support Group who co-hosted my first public engagement event about the Roma Holocaust in London in 2014; Amnesty International who invited me to present my early-stage research at the symposium 'Roma: self-representation and the popular media' in 2012; the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) who invited me to join as an associate member; the Dale Farm Travellers who graciously allowed me to film on their land; the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma who hosted a screening of the film to mark Roma Holocaust Memorial Day 2020; the Romedia Foundation in Hungary who hosted a discussion event and screening of the film to mark International Human Rights Day in 2020.

[9] For instance, historian and author Valdemar Kalinin who I enjoyed many long conversations with about Roma history and who allowed me to use his poem *Its Going to Rain* (Kalinin, 2005: 258) in the film; Grattan Puxon, activist, author and historian who introduced me to many people who facilitated the production of the film including the Dale Farm Travellers; Ágnes Daróczi, activist and academic who introduced me to Judit Lang the grand-daughter of the survivor of the massacre in Várpalota and the Csorba family in Tatárszentgyörgy and has since become a friend and supporter of the film. Ágnes' book *Pharrajimos* (Bársony and Daróczi, 2004) was my first encounter with Roma history and her frankness in conversation was enlightening and helped me to think through ideas about fear and affect in relation to the Roma experience of persecution. And many more, including the generous Roma people who appear in the film either as performers or witnesses, and those who helped with translation and production.

saying, in vain: these are not simply instances of racism and prejudice, but they have the same roots as Nazism – racial superiority, not considering us as humans, taking away our human face and this is precisely the process that makes it possible for them to [continue to] kill us' (Ágnes Daróczi speaking in: Romedia Foundation, 2020).

Marginalised and under-historicised histories

The genocide of the Roma during World War Two is often called 'the forgotten Holocaust' (About and Abakunova, 2016: 7). But for something to be forgotten, it has to have been remembered in the first place. Although the witnesses I encountered have individually remembered single events, they have generally not shared these memories, so in this case there has been no formation of collective memory relating to witnessing or experience. Individually, these witnesses have not forgotten. In fact, the reverse is the case – they would like to forget, but the traumatic nature of their witnessing prevents them from forgetting. The images, sounds and smells of the events will not leave them. Many of them expressed the same sentiments – 'it is before my eyes every day'[10] or 'now that I have told you, it is yours and maybe I can be free of it'.[11] These were unwanted memories that could not be forgotten.

At the beginning of this research, particularly during the making of *This is History (after all)*, my approach was focused on thinking about memory in two ways. There were the personal specifics of traumatic memory (as experienced by witnesses and survivors) and then there was the omission of meaningful collective memory of what had happened to the Roma during the Holocaust. On the one side there were traumatic personal memories that had not been shared and kept returning to haunt the witnesses, and on the other side there was a fairly patchy societal memory that was never fully formed in the first place. Collective or cultural memory seemed to be more or less absent. So, in relation to these events and the wider persecution of the Roma during World War Two there was both the relentless recurrence of individual traumatic memory and the near-absence of cultural memory. It was this paradoxical conflict that was at the root of my initial research.

[10] Filmed testimony from Józef recorded by Roz Mortimer, 2012. Trans. Dorota Miklasinska.
[11] Filmed testimony from Janina recorded by Roz Mortimer, 2012. Trans. Dorota Miklasinska.

During this early research period my main motivation was to find and document unmarked or unmemorialised sites of atrocity. It was the lack of memorialisation of these sites that interested me, raising the question: what happens to a society when collective memories of such atrocities are not formed? My initial points of reference were Halbwachs' *The Collective Memory* (1980) and Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (1996) – both essential texts in the study of how we collectively memorialise and remember past atrocity. But the absence of either a coherent collective memory or of effective memorials to anchor the memory of these atrocities led me to Marc Augé's *Non Places* (Augé, 1995) and Roma Sendyka's research on what she calls 'sites of non-memory' (Sendyka, 2013), namely sites where there has been no memorialisation, no formation of collective memory. Even though there was undoubtedly something interesting to explore in the absence of collective memory, it was my later investigation into the current-day rise of the far right in Europe that sparked a shift in my thinking away from collective memory to focus on history – specifically the failure of history and historiography to adequately record the fate of the Roma and the failure of society to fully incorporate the Roma experience into the wider narrative of the Holocaust.

It is important to note that even though I reframed my research to consider the failures of history, I do not see history and memory as being polarised. As Diane Taylor points out in her critique of Nora – they are not separate, nor are they binary, nor is it 'true or false, mediated versus unmediated' (Taylor, 2003: 20). One needs the other, and their relationship is fluid and symbiotic. In this context Jay Winter's term *historical remembrance* is useful as 'a way of interpreting the past which draws on both story and memory, on documented narratives about the past and on the statements of those who lived through them' (Winter, 2011: 427).

There is a comparatively small amount of published historical material about the genocide of the Roma during the Holocaust. Many of the existing texts have been written and researched by Roma historians and sit as marginalised accounts, often excluded from wider Holocaust discourse and resulting in poor societal understanding of the experience of the Roma during the Nazi era. A key text in my initial research was the Hungarian language *Pharrajimos* (Bársony and Daróczi, 2004, published in English 2008), a record of oral histories from witnesses and survivors of atrocities against the

Roma during the 1940s – it was in *Pharrajimos* that I found the testimony of Judit Lang's grandmother and the photograph of Lake Grábler that were the starting point for my field research. Additionally *Gypsies Under the Swastika* (Kenrick and Puxon, 2009), part of a trilogy of books that document the fate of the Roma during the Nazi era. Both surviving authors, Ágnes Daróczi and Grattan Puxon became active supporters of this research project and allies in the making of *The Deathless Woman*.[12]

The Roma historian and academic Ian Hancock has published widely on the lack of historicisation of the Roma Holocaust.[13] In the publications *The Roots of Antigypsyism* (1997a) and *Antigypsyism* (1997b), Hancock makes clear links between the lack of historicisation and the ongoing persecution of the Roma in Europe today. Similarly and more recently, *The Genocide and Persecution of Roma and Sinti* (About and Abakunova, 2016) propose that the historicisation of Roma persecution has been marginalised, slow and fragmentary, without the benefit of any cumulative knowledge-building (2016: 7). About and Abakunova acknowledge the difficulties of building comprehensive histories under National Socialism: 'The study of the Roma persecution during the war is still a subject avoided by state, society and academia [in post-Soviet countries], and the historiography of these countries does not include Roma history in general or Roma persecution in particular' (2016: 8).[14] This 'organised forgetting' is explored by Connerton in relation to wider issues of the erasure of uncomfortable histories in totalitarian states where media has been controlled, 'historians are dismissed from their posts, and people who have been silenced […] become invisible and forgotten' (Connerton, 1989:14-15).

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[12] Another Roma-authored text of note is *Roma Holokauszt a Grábler-Tonal* (Harmat, 2015), a recently published and comprehensive historical account of the massacre at Várpalota. Other publications by Kenrick include *Gypsies During the Second World War* (Kenrick, 2006). Two essential texts published by researchers at Auschwitz-Birkenau are the aural history collection *Roma of Auschwitz* (Kapralsk, S., Martyniak, M., Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, 2001) and the *Memorial Book: The Gypsies of Auschwitz-Birkenau* (State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the Documentary and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma, 1993) which is a facsimile of the Nazi's own record-book listing the names and dates of every Roma prisoner who entered Auschwitz – both of these texts appear in, or are quoted in *The Deathless Woman*, as does the first-person account of life in Auschwitz published by Philomena Franz, *Zwischen Liebe und Hass* (Franz, 1985).

[13] for instance, *The Neglected Memory of the Romanies in the Holocaust/Porrajmos* (2011), *Downplaying the Porrajmos: The Trend to Minimize the Romani Holocaust* (2001), *Responses to the Porrajmos: The Romani Holocaust* (2009).

[14] This is a position that I recognise from my own experience of researching in Hungary, where I found a near absence of documents relating to the genocide of the Roma in Hungary in the 1940s in archives and regional museums. Reflections on this and my communication with archivists in Hungary can be found in my (archived) blog, *Reduced to Silence: Landscape Atrocity and a Culture of Forgetting* (Mortimer, 2013).

In particular, About and Abakunova draw attention to how few studies have examined the experiences of Jewish and Roma populations side by side in the genocidal process (2016: ix). This lack of associative historicisation has been compounded, in part, by cultural factors such as a lack of written record-keeping by the Einsatzgruppen or within Roma society itself and the lack of parish registration of settled or itinerant Roma. As a consequence, many of the murders occurring at roadsides were undocumented, unobserved and resulted in unmarked graves. Further, as positioned by Hancock, many European societies' ongoing antigypsyism has perpetuated a disinterest in historical accountability for these atrocities.[15] As a consequence, nearly eighty years later, the Roma experience of the Holocaust remains marginalised and under-historicised.

Socially engaged filmmaking

In Max Silverman's analysis of Jean Cayrol's concept of concentrationary art he identifies two major principles: 'art as a reminder and warning against forgetting, and art that can draw together the concentrationary reality and the post-war world of renewed normality to show their interconnections' (Silverman, 2019: para 9.13). This has been the political motivation behind my research – in part to redress the imbalance of the lack of knowledge and awareness about the fate of the Roma during the Holocaust, but most essentially because the Roma (and other marginalised and migrant peoples) are in imminent danger again from state-sanctioned xenophobia and violence from the far right in Europe (notably in Bulgaria, Ukraine and Hungary, but also evident in France, Italy, Slovakia, Albania, Czech Republic and Kosovo).[16] As the far right is rising again in Europe, it is all the more critical that new ways of representing past atrocities are explored, particularly those that take the event out of history to create clear parallels with the current xenophobic political climate in Europe.

[15] The term antigypsyism can be paralleled to antisemitism as a term that determines a specific form of racism. The term is recognised by the European Parliament and has its origins in Russia in the 1920s. (The Alliance against Antigypsyism, 2016: 17).

[16] See the European Roma Rights Centre for details of recent xenophobic attacks against Roma. http://www.errc.org/media/new

This xenophobia is exacerbated by the widespread prevalence of either romanticised stereotypes or negative representations of Roma in cinema.[17] Common anti-Roma stereotypes include child-snatchers, criminals, thieves, liars, exotics and grotesques. Recent negative factual television programming in the UK has included the inflammatory and dehumanising programme from Channel 4's *Dispatches* strand: *The Truth About Traveller Crime* (Popp, 2020) into which Ofcom launched an investigation after receiving 897 direct complaints and many thousands more via Roma and Traveller NGOs who reported an increased wave of hate speech as a result of the programme (*Ofcom launch investigation into Channel 4 show,* 2020*)*.

Roma organisations who have welcomed recent films such as *The Deathless Woman* and Alina Serban's *Letter of Forgiveness* (2020) reflect on a need for positive representation to counter-balance prevalent negative stereotypes. 'There is a need to bring to the foreground alternative films, ones that display a self-reflective awareness of antigypsy motifs and conventions, and that come up with successful artistic solutions to counter the latter' (Mladenova, 2020: 5). This is where *trauma cinema*, as determined by Janet Walker, can be helpful as a sub-genre of documentary film that puts alternative practice to work in the creation of films that actively set out to subvert and challenge colonial and hegemonic representations of marginalised people and their traumatic experience.

Walker's work on trauma cinema (2005) became the primary frame for my research and led me to consider how the acknowledgement of complex and multiple frameworks of trauma could help us to interpret historical meaning and to consider alternative strategies for representing the after effects of atrocity. Walker proposes that 'the wild past does not come down to us purely and simply through a collection of eyewitness testimonies and tangible artefacts' (Walker, 2005: xvi) and that experimental (or hybrid) documentary filmmaking that moves beyond realism might be well-placed to accurately evoke the paradoxes of lost, marginalised and traumatic events, where histories are imperfect and frail and evidence is telling but changeable, inconclusive and subject to interpretation (Walker, 2005: 190). In this way, trauma cinema comes out of post-colonial

[17] For a detailed analysis of the history of the exploitation and negative representation of Roma in cinema see the publication *Antigypsyism and Film* (Mladenova et al., 2020) and Anikó Imre's article Screen Gypsies (Imre, 2003)

and feminist film practice as theoretical frameworks that readdress configurations of power, dismantle othering and stress cross-cultural interaction within the representation of the fractured and complex nature of postcolonial and post-genocide societies (see Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988; Barry, 1995; Visweswaran, 1994). It is important to recognise that trauma, for many peoples, is not just the consequence of a single event, but of an ongoing insidiousness which, in the case of Roma, is the historical consequence of suppressing the acknowledgement of genocide.[18]

I particularly frame my documentary practice within the tradition of feminist ethnographic practice which is intended as a critique of 'positivist assumptions' and established (failed) modes of knowledge production (Visweswaran, 1994: 23). This position is relevant when considering the Roma realities that this research project seeks to address – namely a history that has not been embraced by wider discourse about the Holocaust, and a people who are still openly subjected to racist violence and abuse.[19] This work comes out of a long engagement with feminist ethnographic practice – for instance my films *Gender Trouble* (2002) and *Invisible* (2006) are works that challenge both hierarchies of knowledge and ideas of social and cultural authority. *Gender Trouble* sets out to counter the hegemonic scientific approach to the bodies of the intersexed, where for decades clinicians had been largely ignoring the personal narratives and experience of patients. The film is constructed from the direct-to-camera testimony of four female-identifying intersex women, with no platform provided for clinicians. In this way the film goes some small way to restoring authority to these women – authority over their experience and the choices they might make about their bodies, and indeed their gender. By passing the authority over their narratives to the subjects of the film I sought to create an alternative form of science documentary that explicitly moved away from positioning the women as anomalies or medical case studies and thus 'other'.[20]

[18] Beatritz Zapata's essay on decolonising trauma is a very useful text here. Zapata draws on Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory* (Rothberg, 2009) to highlight the 'impossibility of bringing justice to those subjects who are not able to articulate their voices, who are still struggling for recognition, waiting to take part in the dialogue between traumatic histories, waiting to become part of history' (Zapata, 2015:533).
[19] It's important to note that in making *The Deathless Woman* I have not set out to create an ethnography of the Roma people, rather the film is an ethnography of hatred and fear.
[20] *Gender Trouble* became part of an active and successful campaign that argued for change to the established medical protocol for intersex babies.

In *Invisible*, a film that is ostensibly about the contamination of our bodies by environmental chemicals, the story is told through the testimony of Inuit mothers and foregrounds traditional Inuit environmental knowledge over Western science. It is the voices and narratives of Inuit women who are given the authoritative centre-stage in this film. *Invisible* also challenges the othering of Inuit – the film starts with a scene where a non-Inuit traveller (myself) is approaching Iqaluit in a small airplane, consulting a map. The character is travelling to a land unknown to her, and on closer inspection the map she consults as a (flawed) navigational tool is a copy of the *Hereford Mappa Mundi* – a 14th Century map created out of a Christianity-driven configuration of the world which positions Jerusalem at the centre of the universe and a series of 'othered' mythical monstrous races at the periphery. The film proceeds to gently dismantle this Western colonialist interpretation of authority, knowledge, supremacy and otherness and its associated ethnographic pastorialism to confer moral, environmental and scientific authority to the Inuit community whose stories are at the centre of the film (Strong, 2007).

Like the Inuit, the othering of Roma or Gypsy culture allows for society to marginalise their histories, silence their voices and their claims for reparation.[21] Central to the methodologies used in *The Deathless Woman* are devices intended to challenge colonialist cultural representation. For instance, the film positions Romani language as central – the voice of the Deathless Woman is the first and last voice we hear in the film – she introduces herself to the audience and her articulate and passionate language is a direct contrast to the base hate speech of the Neo-Nazis that we encounter later in the film as on-screen text. This contrast between the *lexification* of the Roma ghost and the *dislexification* of the Neo-Nazis positions the non-Roma oppressor firmly as not just oppressor, but also as morally objectionable (both the original Nazi perpetrators and the contemporary Neo-Nazis who have enacted violence against Roma in Europe) – it is

[21] See (Woolford and Wolejszo, 2006) for an outline of the unsuccessful post-WWII compensation demands made against the German State by Roma and Sinti survivors of Nazi state-sponsored violence.

them who become the immoral 'other'.[22] Here, it is the neo-Nazis who are denied agency which is a privilege reserved for the Roma ghost and the witnesses who give testimony (in their own words and their own language) to the atrocities perpetrated against the Roma. Other creative strategies employed in *The Deathless Woman* such as the use of theatre and the tableau vivant (as discussed in Chapter 4) seek to draw the audience into uncomfortable spaces within the film and are specifically created to generate a sense of culpability and complicity for Western (non-Roma) audiences – for we are all implicated in these contemporary atrocities by having turned a blind eye. This is where the ghost exercises her ability as a powerful social being as she reveals to us our blind spots (Gordon, 2008: xvi) and becomes our social conscience as she reflects back to us our discomfort and shame at what we might have previously chosen not to see (Mroz, 2016: 45).

A number of the films that are discussed in this study have drawn on a post-colonial positionality by employing experimental methodologies to better represent and address the complex traumatic residue of atrocity with the aim of creating informed versions of history that are critical of established and dominant narratives. Autobiographical and autoethnographical works such as Rea Tajiri's *History and Memory* (1991) and Rithy Panh's *The Missing Picture* (2013) confer authority to the filmmaker to speak about their own histories and as such the works are threaded through with strategies that first draw our attention to absence, and then proceed to re-present the past from a personal perspective that is quietly and gently authoritative and deeply engaging. The work of Tajiri and Panh not only set out to destabilise dominant narratives within history, they also challenge practices within documentary filmmaking that have traditionally held dominance in discourses around authenticity, indexicality and truth. In this way, their histories are reclaimed from their positionality as excluded, minority or subaltern histories, and it is through the autoethnographic practice of the filmmakers that they are

[22] In his seminal work about how the dead affect the living, Robert Pogue Harrison defines *lexification* as 'allowing the past to reach out to us from the future and the future to meet us from out of the past, transforming human finitude into a field of historical relations'. He further defines *dislexification* as 'the failure of words to retain their binding power, to preserve their humic past, and to access their historicity. One could say that in the age of the new barbarism words lose their moral memory'. When the Deathless Woman enters the Internet and encounters the contemporary hate speech of the Neo-Nazis she tells us 'the voices are violent and full of hatred… voices and words that have lost their moral memory' (Harrison, 2003: 85-86). This is a clear example of dislexification in contrast to the lexification of the Deathless Woman's voice as she speaks to us from both the past, present and future.

able to not only formulate a more representative history, but to oppose and counter-balance the exclusionary historiography of the grand narratives of the colonial past (Chakrabarty, 1998: 15).

By contrast, other works discussed in this thesis such as *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer et al., 2012), *The Battle of Orgreave* (Deller and Figgis, 2001) and *In the Crosswind* (Helde, 2014) do not come out of autobiographical experience in the same way, but similarly seek to subvert the documentary form with the explicit aim of challenging dominant (and sometimes inaccurate) versions of history. *The Deathless Woman* is similarly authored by an outsider and I have sought to make that explicit within the film by including a non-Roma character (the Seeker) who is based on myself and my own subjective experience – this reflexive approach foregrounds the subjectivity of the researcher in the production and representation of ethnographic knowledge and ultimately produces a negotiated version of reality (Pink, 2013: 36-37). We follow the Seeker in both her interactions with the Deathless Woman and her articulation of her methods to an unseen panel of historians. It is not the Seeker who makes discoveries in this film, rather the narrative and exposition are controlled by the ghost of the Roma matriarch who invites us into the film at the start and signs off at the end with a call to action. It is this Roma matriarch who reveals to the Seeker (and through that, the audience) what has been concealed by society, yet has been hiding in plain sight all along – namely the hidden history of the Roma and their ongoing persecution. Critical to thinking about *The Deathless Woman* through a post-colonial lens, is to recognise that the film foregrounds a cultural interpretation of trauma, atrocity and loss that is central to Roma culture, rather than the hegemonic interpretation that is central to Western ideas of trauma and the formation of history. Namely that *The Deathless Woman* seeks to put an ideology into practice that reflects the 'way Roma think about death, the dead, the returning soul' (Ágnes Daróczi speaking in Romedia Foundation, 2020).

Moving beyond the empirical

Empirical research is the mainstay of both documentary filmmaking and historiography. This is how we learn about past events. We interview people. We ask them to testify. We base our findings on experience, a posteriori. During the course of my early field research

I had been experimenting with an alternative approach to information-gathering by paying attention to atmospheres, feelings, affect and any strange phenomena that I came across. Employing experiential strategies that give equal weight to the tangible and intangible draws on the recent turn towards sensory methods (see Mason and Davies, 2009: 587 and Coleman, 2017) and alternative forms of sensory or affect-led empiricism that allow 'a rethinking of bodies, matter and life through new encounters with visceral perception and preconscious affect' (Clough, 2009: 44).

I started to think about the landscapes as primary sources – as witnesses to these past traumas – and began to make visual, audio and written notes of the uncanny phenomenon I encountered. I saw this approach as an alternative form of empiricism, one that was based on information-gathering, but was led by sensory experience and was highly subjective and self-reflexive and might incorporate thoughts, experiences and sources of knowledge that more traditional empirical methods might discount.

When I heard Zofia's testimony about the Roma matriarch whom I came to later call the Deathless Woman, I recognised that something uncanny was being presented to me. This was a story about curses; a woman who refused to die; a body that did not decompose, and I felt that it was no coincidence that I had ended up there, in Zofia's living room, in a small village in Poland. I thought back to the unsettling sensation I had had the year before when I felt something was preventing me from leaving the village and to the other curious occurrences that had led me to Bielcza. All of these things could be rationally explained – a mis-drawn map, roadworks, weather patterns – but it felt like a series of strange things coming together and my subsequent research has focussed on strategies for presenting these potentially irrational 'things' within the framework of a documentary film and of using this alternative empiricism to redress the imbalance of historiography by addressing the gaps of what gets legitimised as history.

If historians would discount Zofia's testimony about the Deathless Woman as unreliable, what would happen if I chose not to question the veracity of her testimony, to never ask the question 'is it true'? What could we learn from paying attention to these strange and uncanny occurrences? And how could one create an effective and politically-motivated documentary film out of it all?

Research structure

The film, *The Deathless Woman* has been devised to both reflect my research concerns and to appeal to a non-academic audience.

I began this doctoral research having previously completed field research in Poland and Hungary and with a partial draft of the film's written script. The later sections of the film that address contemporary neo-Nazi violence against the Roma were developed further into the research process as the direct result of online research into hate speech, a second visit to Hungary and my conversations with Roma witnesses there.

The relationship between practice and theory has been, to an extent, symbiotic – one has informed the other and vice-verse. As I began the theoretical research, ideas from that started to inform the development of the script and the methodology behind the practical creation of the film. In this way, the theoretical ideas I have developed have been woven into the fabric of the film. Much of the early development of the practice (i.e. the script-writing) has been informed by sociological texts. For instance, Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* (2008) and Grace Cho's *Haunting the Korean Diaspora* (2008) introduced me to the possibility of a ghost having political agency and led me to consider the potential of a ghost as a narrator in a documentary film. The work of Patricia Clough (2009), Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (2010), and Kathleen Stewart (2007, 2010) led me to consider how personal responses to experience and affect could be valid forms of empirical research and gave me the confidence to incorporate my own experience in the film. Subsequently, my reflexive and subjective methodology has placed experience at the centre of this research (both my own experience and that of my witnesses) and the aim has been to translate something of this experience to the film's viewer. As the historian Ankersmit says: 'experience is ontological rather than epistemological' (Ankersmit, 2005: 225), but my intention has been to foreground the role of experience in the construction of knowledge.

As I came to consider how to visually and aurally construct the film, my practice was further influenced by Rosemary Jackson's interpretation of Todorov's analysis of the fantastic (Jackson, 2002 and Todorov, 1975). Thinking about the role that fantasy might have in a documentary film led me to consider the work of documentary theatre

theorists and practitioners and this had a substantial impact on the film, leading to the creation of tableaux vivants, re-enactments and model-making as strategies for exploring traumatic experience, and later, Jodi Brook's text on stillness and *tableau-isation* (1989) led me to incorporate new scenes in the film (such as the rotating rioter). These theatrical elements of the film were produced between 2016 and 2018, allowing me to reflect on the experience of creating the tableaux and the other elements of the film that were influenced by the practices of documentary theatre in this theoretical text.

Although the works I reference in this thesis have predominantly been contemporary films that loosely fit into the genre of documentary,[23] I have also drawn on a number of literary works. The inclusion of literary works feels appropriate as the framework for the practice for this project was the creative writing of a screenplay.

The written thesis is structured in four chapters which lay out the methodology of this project in a chronological way. The thesis is written in the first person as a self-reflexive methodology is at its core. Chapters are structured around an explanation of the methodology that has driven both my practice and theoretical thinking. The opening Introduction lays out the starting points for the project and addresses my early shift from framing the research through memory studies whilst positioning the background to this study in terms of my collaborations with Roma in Europe and the UK, the lack of comparative historicisation of the genocide of the Roma and its consequences in 21st Century Europe, and how the film relates to other works that are discussed in more detail later in this thesis. Each chapter starts with an introduction that articulates a research inquiry and also serves as a contextual review.

Chapter One outlines how I came to consider the intentionality of affect and how it moves through the world and how this led me to start experimenting with filmic strategies to convey the its force, intention and transmission. The chapter goes on to cover how I came to view witnessing in its broadest sense, leading to a sensory and affect-driven interpretation of my own experience and that of my interview subjects that leads to the prosopopoeial writing of the witness testimony of a ghost. These

[23] I use the term documentary throughout this thesis, although some of the works I reference can further be categorised within the sub-genres of experimental or hybrid documentary.

experiences and my theoretical interpretation of them became the starting point for the Seeker's 'black box' dialogue in the film – in these scenes the character of the Seeker is defending her unconventional methods and presenting some of the basic tenets of the research in a simplified form.

Chapter Two covers how a ghost can be a political entity with agency and intention. This theoretical research into haunting and ghosts strengthened the way that I wrote and visualised the ghost of the Roma matriarch who drives and narrates the film. This work draws on Jean Cayrol's concept of the Lazarean (1950), particularly how the concentrationary universe exists simultaneously in the past and present and this idea is explored through an analysis of John Burgan's autobiographical essay film *Memory of Berlin* (1998). My positioning of the ghost as a personal and political entity with agency comes out of a reading of the post-colonial works of Grace Cho (2008), Toni Morrison (1987), Sadiya Hartman (2008), Apichatpong Weerasethakul (2009 and 2010), Juanita Onzaga (2018) and within this I specifically position the ghost as an object of phenomenological experience by drawing on the work of Dylan Trigg (2012).

Chapter Three questions the limitations of historiography and proposes a number of filmmaking strategies that can reflect the counter-rational qualities of traumatic memory with the aim of re-claiming or disrupting established historical narratives. Drawing on Walker's traumatic paradox (1997), this chapter acknowledges post-war developments in historiography and in trauma studies but positions that historiography in particular has failed the Roma. Through the autobiographical work of filmmakers Rei Tajiri (1991) and Rithy Panh (2013), this chapter explores how filmmaking and theoretical strategies which are focused on imagination and the fantastic in particular, can become methodologies that reflect the nature of traumatic experience, challenge dominant historical discourse and disrupt and destabilise the dominance of the index in documentary film.

Chapter Four centres on my use of theatrical staging, re-enactment and the tableau vivant and explores how a methodology that has been influenced by an interest in the methods of documentary theatre can have relevance to documentary film production. This chapter draws on the work of theatre theorist Carol Martin (2010), and politically-driven practitioners such as Deller (2001), Hotel Modern (2005), Helle (2004), Panh (2013)

and Oppenheimer (2012) to explore ideas about how suspending distinctions between the real and the artificial can be a critical element in the formation of politically-motivated film practice. Within this I have experimented in subverting the traditional use of the tableau vivant as a spectacle with the aim of using it as a tool to both evoke experience and challenge established narratives.

Chapter 1: Experience, Affect, Witnessing

> I was searching for traces, for an atmosphere… a residue of emotion left from the past. What do you do when there is no record of something? When there is nothing visible left? [24]

1.1 Introduction

The history of what happened to the Roma during the Nazi era is neither widely-known, nor especially visible. Many of the atrocities against the Roma took place as roadside massacres in villages rather than in concentration camps: in Poland by the *Einsatzgruppen* who were often assisted by the Polish police, and in Hungary by the Arrow Cross. Due to the mainly undocumented status of the Roma and the extent of these killings – which often wiped out whole communities leaving no survivors – very few records have been kept of these roadside massacres (Bunyan, 2019). The methodology of the Einsatzgruppen was to disappear bodies without a trace,[25] and subsequently these events have been comparatively under-documented and historicised and as a consequence are under-represented in the world's Holocaust archives. When this research project started there were relatively few published historiographies of the Roma Holocaust[26] or public memorials.[27] We might say Roma history has been banished and even in the present day, Roma quite literally continue to be banished or made invisible through, for instance, murder, the denial of citizenship, deportations, and even (in Slovakia) whole communities are concealed behind high concrete walls (Thorpe, 2010).

In the immediate years following WWII we came to rely on oral history and witness testimony to inform us of the horrors and reality of the Holocaust. From Lanzmann's epic documentary *Shoah* (Lanzmann, 1985) to the formation of Holocaust film and video archives, witness testimony has been the primary method by which a historiography of

[24] Excerpt from the Seeker's dialogue. *The Deathless Woman* (2019).
[25] See transcript of Nuremberg Trials (Missouri, 1948).
[26] See *Roma of Auschwitz* (Kapralsk, S., Martyniak, M., Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, 2001), *Pharrajimos* (Bársony and Daróczi, 2008), *Gypsies During the Second World War* (Kenrick, 2006) and *Gypsies Under the Swastika* (Kenrick and Puxon, 2009).
[27] For instance, *The Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism* was opened in Berlin in 2012, eighteen years after its approval and twelve years after construction was started. The project was fraught with conflict and disagreement (Aderet, 2012).

the atrocities of the Holocaust has been compiled.[28] Yet Roma witnesses were not invited to testify at the Nuremberg Trials and the genocidal nature of WWII crimes against the Roma was only officially recognised by the German government in 1982.[29] Existing witness testimony is scant and has often been deemed unreliable, or unverifiable and not included in historiographical records.

The decision to move my research out of the archive and into the landscapes of these atrocities, was borne partly out of a frustration at the limited amount of accessible Roma Holocaust witness testimony. The incomplete and fragmentary nature of the historicised narrative had given me limited knowledge. How could this knowledge be expanded? I had some information about places that were, or had been, sites of mass graves – both marked and unmarked – and these became my first port-of-call. As the killings happened over seventy years ago, I was not actively seeking witnesses and had no expectation of finding any. I was interested in the landscapes and to discover whether they held any indexical trace of past atrocity. We generally talk about the indexical in relation to the photographic image, but the index can equally refer to any visible trace or imprint. The index is, as defined by Kraus, '[a] type of sign which arises as the physical manifestation of a cause, of which traces, imprints, and clues are examples' (Krauss, 1977: 59). One would think that a forest that grows over an unmarked grave concealing any trace of the grave's presence would also conceal the visible indexical marks of its history. In the case of the gravesites at Bielcza and Várpalota, I had to rely on the experience of being in those places rather than any visible evidence.

There are a number of contemporary photographers who have worked with sites of historic trauma that bear no visible indexical marks. Notably, Joel Sternfeld's photo-series *On This Site: Landscape in Memoriam* (Sternfeld, 2012), Dirk Reinartz's *Deathly Still: Pictures of Concentration Camps* (Reinartz, 1995) and Simon Norfolk's *For Most of This I Have No*

[28] See, for instance, the *Fortunoff Video Archive* at Yale, the *Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive* at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Wiener Library collection in London. These archives do not hold substantial collections of Roma testimony. For example, in the *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive* only 407 out of 52,000 video interviews are from Roma and Sinti survivors. The majority of these are accounts of cultural life rather than testimony of genocide, and many have never been translated. There has never been an international project to specifically collect oral material from Roma witnesses or survivors (About and Abakunova, 2016: 9).
[29] See the *What Is the Roma Genocide?* (Open Society Foundations, 2019) and recent Wiener Library exhibition: *Forgotten Victims: The Nazi Genocide of the Roma and Sinti* (October 2019 – March 2020).

Words (Norfolk, 1998). There is a rigour to the work of Sternfeld, Reinartz and Norfolk which presents an emphasis on place devoid of overt historical reference. On the surface, these photographic works, with their minimalist aesthetic, show mundane landscapes with no visible trace of their past trauma. We rely on their titles and the umbrella title of the series to frame the images as portraits of historic sites of atrocity. These are works whose central tenet is to draw attention to absence – to what is missing – and lead us to consider that which is lost, in the past, and not visible. If Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (Nora, 1984) proposes that monuments and memorials allow for a cohesion of societal memory, the unmemorialised (and often un-noticed) places that Sternfeld and Reinartz present could be classified as 'non-sites of memory' (Sendyka, 2010). At the sites of historic Roma atrocity, we are similarly confronted with an absence of visual markers of the trauma. Yet the minimalist aesthetic of Reinartz et al is a strategy that works effectively to communicate something of the banishment and subsequent invisibility of the past but does not communicate anything about the horror of the events. The atrocities are positioned as not just 'non-sites of memory', but also as lost and abandoned histories. What strategy could be employed to resurrect such forgotten histories and to communicate something of the traumatic excesses of the event?

The traumatic excesses of the past were concealed in these sites of Roma atrocity which looked so ordinary. The idea of something extraordinary being concealed by ordinariness is critical in the understanding of these sites of non-memory. Kathleen Stewart's alternative approach to anthropology as laid out in her book *Ordinary Affects* is borne out of a recognition that within everyday occurrences there is generally 'something [that] needs attending to' – these somethings are sensations that Stewart recognises as needing 'speculative and concrete attunement' (Stewart, 2007: 128). In this, affect in its 'prelinguistic, preconscious and preindividual capacity' to impact on us plays a critical role (Clough, 2009: 153). Adopting a sensory approach that looks beyond traditional evidence-based methodologies might enable us to also look beyond the ordinariness of place to access the extraordinary excesses of the past by seeking non-visible traces of the past trauma.

In his book *The Memory of Place: A Phenomenology of the Uncanny*, Dylan Trigg suggests we might move beyond traditional evidence-based interpretations of past events (such

as visible evidence or witness testimony) to a more physical and sensory interpretation that might draw on recognising and responding to affect as a primary strategy in the formation of knowledge (Trigg, 2012). Drawing on Heidegger and Merleau Ponty, Trigg proposes a practical interpretation of the world that calls for an attunement to embodied experience that prioritises the relationship of the body to the world, or 'being-in-the-world' over the visual model of knowledge formation that is generally dominant in society (Trigg, 2012: 33).[30] For Trigg, place has to be understood experientially and in an affective way: 'our bodies orient us in place, and in doing so become the primary source of how we apprehend a given environment' (Trigg, 2012: 6). He goes on to propose 'affective intentionality' – 'when our everyday experiences are disturbed by an agency from another time and place, then the thing that comes to us does so deliberately' (Trigg, 2012: 289). This is affect's 'inexhaustible potential for activation' (Clough, 2009: 153). In this we can start to consider the possibility of not only our own pre-conscious affective response to place, but of the place (or the traumatic past of that place) having the potential to communicate with us in a conscious and intentional way.

It is not just the researcher who can potentially have an affective encounter at these sites of atrocity, but also witnesses. Despite the sparsity of archived Roma witness testimony about roadside killings during the Nazi era, in Poland I found there were still living witnesses who were prepared to testify to what they had seen seventy years earlier. In this case, their testimony to the events they witnessed was imbued with a sensory reflectiveness that appeared to acknowledge an affect-driven relationship with event and place that transcended the temporal gulf between these past events and their present-day lives. Claude Lanzmann recognised this sensory and affective relationship to place in both himself and the witnesses in *Shoah* (Lanzmann, 1985). On arriving at the former concentration camp sites (such as Treblinka) he is confronted with 'nothing, with absence'. He says: 'How do you do a film about nothingness, with nothing […] *Shoah* is not a historical film…the purpose is not to transmit knowledge…it is something else, it

[30] For Heidegger, *Dasein*, a 'thereness' or 'being-in-the-world' was a method of understanding the world that is rooted in our relationship to the world (i.e. places, spaces, people, objects) and stands as an alternative to the rational or empirical (Heidegger, 1996). Similarly, Merleau Ponty opposed pure scientific thinking as a method for understanding human experience and approached *being-in-the-world* as 'a certain energy in the pulsation of existence' which is 'pre-objective' and pre-conscious (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 80).

is a different mental experience […] the film is an *incarnation*, a *resurrection* […] a film full of fear and energy' (Lanzmann, 1986).[31]

Lanzmann's methodology was led by a desire to create a film led by affect, and in this way, *Shoah* doesn't fit within the traditional definition of a historical film where the dominant methodology of historians is to 'consider the Holocaust according to "scientific" procedures' (Rothberg, 2000: 4). These procedures define a rigorous framework for the authentication and classification of Holocaust witness testimony and this has informed how testimony is recorded for archive purposes and whether or not it is included in historiographical accounts. Shoshana Felman, writing about Lanzmann's testimony-driven film with its inclusive and affect-driven approach to testimony says the film 'places in perspective […] the very limits of historiography' (Felman, 1991: 47), continuing her analysis to point out that the film performs 'the historical and contradictory double task of the breaking of the silence and of the simultaneous shattering of any given discourse, of the breaking-or the bursting open-of all frames' (Felman, 1991: 57). In this way, artistic works that incorporate unconventional use of witness testimony can potentially break frames of established historical discourse.

Dori Laub proposes that the Holocaust is an 'event without a witness' in that the Nazis tried to exterminate all witnesses, and those that did survive were confronted with the psychological impossibility of witnessing (Laub, 1992: 80). The idea of the *event without a witness* is expanded on in Agamben's seminal text *Remnants of Auschwitz*. When Agamben talks of survivors bearing witness to 'the impossibility of bearing witness' (Agamben, 1999: 34) he is partially alluding to the much-discussed critical debate on the impossibility of Holocaust representation which is fraught with ethical and societal constraints,[32] but also to a more nuanced view proposed by Primo Levi that those most

[31] This sentiment accurately reflects my intention with *The Deathless Woman* – a film that does not set out to transmit knowledge about the Holocaust, but rather transmit something of the affects of fear and hatred that are present in the lives of Roma.

[32] The magnitude and specific traumatic nature of this historic catastrophe led to Adorno's injunction on how the Holocaust is represented in art and literature (or whether it is represented at all) leading to his well-known objection, that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (Adorno, 1951). Adorno's position – that the events of the Holocaust were incomprehensible and thus unrepresentable – was later reinforced by Elie Wiesel's call for authenticity in any representation of the Holocaust on film, stating that his preference would be that Auschwitz is neither explained nor visualised (Wiesel, 1978). For many subscribing to this position, the Holocaust became untouchable, and recording it was the domain of historians and not artists, the domain of facts and not imagination.

affected by the Holocaust cannot possibly bear witness as they did not live to testify for themselves (Levi, 1989). These are the witnesses Agamben terms *superstes* (Agamben, 1999: 17). 'At the heart of Agamben's interpretation of *superstes* is the dynamic of an afterlife, a life that has outlived its own duration and yet persists through that expiration' (Trigg, 2012: 267). Agamben is hinting at an afterlife, whether it be in the memory of the surviving witness, or perhaps we can argue for an actual afterlife for the *superstes*, the ones who do not survive.

The impossibility of the dead bearing witness is challenged by the acceptance of the dybbuk in Jewish literary tradition and folklore. This ghost (usually a malignant spirit) inhabits a living body and speaks through that body.[33] Polish author Hanna Krall's short story, *The Dybbuk,* intermingles folklore, religion and the traumatic narratives of the Holocaust to tell of a man possessed by the anguished spirit of his half-brother who had died as a child in the Warsaw Ghetto. A Buddhist priest helps him to (unsuccessfully) exorcise the ghost, saying 'I did not summon [him]. I only gave him his voice, I made it possible for him to be heard' (Krall, 2005: 152). From the Yiddish tradition of the dybbuk such as *A Blessing on the Moon* (Skibell, 1999), to the fictional prosopopoeia of Alice Sebold's *Lovely Bones* (2002), to the first-person Holocaust narrative of Sylvia Plath's *Getting There* (1962) and the narration of a murdered nun in the post-apartheid video work of Penny Siopis (2011), the creative practices of novelist, poet, artist or filmmaker are devised to give voice to the dead. In doing so they build on literary strategies such as prosopopoeia or more unconventional strategies such as spirit writing to challenge the *impossibility* of the dead bearing witness and challenge the notion of *event-without-a-witness* to create, identify and give voice to the dead.

> It is the silence of the witness's death, and of the witness's deadness, which precisely must be broken, and transgressed. (Felman, 1992: 219)

[33] For a fuller understanding of the dybbuk see *The Dictionary of Jewish Lore and Legend* (Unterman, 1991: 62) and Alina Molisak's essay *On Behalf of the Dead: Mediumistic Writing on the Holocaust in Polish Literature* (Molisak, 2019).

1.2 The invisible index: traces of trauma

I am standing at the back of a cemetery on the edge of a Polish town called Żabno. I am here to film a ceremony to bless a new memorial stone marking a mass killing of Roma that took place here in 1943.[34] After everyone has gone, I remain in the cemetery filming. An elderly woman approaches me nervously and tells me she had seen something as a child – a different massacre that she had never told anyone about – she'd been too scared to tell. But she wants to tell me, so through my interpreter, we arrange to visit her at her home a few days later. It is a beautiful, tranquil day and I stay on alone in the cemetery for a while longer. Suddenly, a tremendous wind blows up and the birch trees above me start to thrash about, sending out their branches like tendrils. They look and sound like they are communicating with each other. The movement of the wind in the leaves makes a sound like loud whispers. It feels like an extraordinary moment that has come out of nowhere. The trees appear to be reaching out to each other. They also seem angry.

The trees had my attention. Their behaviour seemed unusual. Maybe their violent activity was a response to the mass grave, the Roma ceremony, and the woman's confession. It felt strange and I turned my camera up to the sky to film them. Trees trying to communicate with each other. Trees trying to communicate with me, or perhaps to alert me to something – something I was missing. Pay attention. This is important. We've waited a long time.

Employing a methodology that is centred around paying attention to the landscapes of these grave sites was a starting point borne out of my expectation that I would not find traditional empirical sources of knowledge. I already knew there was very little archived material about the genocide of the Roma during WWII, and seventy years after the event, I was not expecting to find people who could testify to having witnessed these atrocities, but I *was* hoping to find traces of these atrocities within the landscapes.

[34] The mass grave in the cemetery at Żabno is relatively unusual in that there is a memorial in place. But even so, the exact date of this massacre, the number of people killed, or their names are all unknown. Other sites of mass graves in the area, such as the one beside Zofia's house in Bielcza, are completely unmarked.

A few days later we collect Janina from her apartment, so she can take us to the mass grave she'd mentioned. I was surprised when she led us back towards the cemetery – I had assumed the mass grave she was talking about was in a different village. She stops just before we get to the cemetery and points at a patch of wheat at the side of the road. 'This is where the bodies are', she says, 'still there, under the wheat'.[35] Across the road I can see the memorial stone that I'd been filming in the cemetery the week before, and the birch trees that I felt had been trying to communicate something. The trees are between the wheat field and the cemetery – between the two mass graves. Trees as witnesses. Trees with secrets.

There was no visible evidence at the wheat field to indicate traces of the mass grave. Within Holocaust studies, traces are most commonly considered to be material remains, for instance, the ruins of a gas chamber, or the slumped ground showing where a mass grave once was. These traces have a clear relationship to the historical events that left them. They are tangible things. But as Francesco Mazzucchelli points out in his essay *From the 'Era of the Witness' to an Era of Traces*, a trace as evidence is ambiguous, it is not able to tell us anything by itself – it is an index that simply points to something else, asserting nothing, it only says: 'There' (paraphrased from Mazzucchelli, 2017: 176). Ambiguous evidence is not necessarily a negative thing. What is important is the ability of the trace and the index to point us in the direction of something that might not have been otherwise noticed. At most of the grave sites I visited, there were no visible traces of the past atrocity – trees had grown to conceal a grave or a lake had flooded where a pit full of bodies once was. Nature had been allowed to erase the traces and society had decided not to preserve the traces. Erasure had been taking place insidiously over years. Where was the index in these places?

In Bielcza, at the site of the 1942 grave of the Roma family, there was a visible trace of the mass grave. Sitting between the trees, a literal imprint in the earth showing where the soil had slumped after the bodies had been dug out as part of the village-led exhumation in around 1960. This indentation was the closest to the traditional idea of a trace or index that I found at any of the graves. At best it gave me clarity on the exact

[35] Janina's full testimony and the trees in the cemetery at Żabno can also be seen in my film *This is History (after all)* (Mortimer, 2014). Trans. Dorota Miklasinska.

location of the grave, yet despite returning to that place many times, I failed to draw any other information from this indentation in the ground. It simply said 'there, this is the place'. In the cemetery at Żabno, on the site of the known mass grave was a marble tombstone, a memorial to the unknown Roma buried there. Yet paradoxically, this memorial was so large that it was obscuring any trace of the original grave, and the site felt devoid of any affective residue of the traumatic event it memorialised. Over the road the wheat field was also devoid of traces and gave no clues to the bodies buried underneath. The trees in between the two, however, seemed to have agency and seemed to be trying to communicate.

In van Alphen's analysis of the presence of trees in the Holocaust artworks of Armando, he talks of the 'edge of the forest as index' (van Alphen, 2000: 10). The trees at the edge of Armando's forests were present at the time a past atrocity was committed and their position at the perimeter gave them an unfettered view of events. The same trees, then and now, which van Alphen posits have the potential to be read as an index. But he goes on to say they betray their indexical meaning – the trees were there when the atrocity took place and are still there today, yet as they grow, they slowly alter the landscape and contribute to the inevitable creep of invisibility and the erasure of the traces of past violence. For Armando, the trees are witnesses and their contribution to the erasure of history and their stoic refusal to testify to the past atrocity makes them culpable (van Alphen, 2000: 11). Their guilt is determined by their silence, their refusal to testify and their role in the increasing invisibility of the atrocity – by continuing to grow they contribute to the erasure of the indexical traces of the trauma.

I couldn't equate the thrashing birch trees at Żabno with Armando's guilty trees. For me the trees at Żabno were trying to express something – some affect – in this case anger, although I later came to realise: fear. I felt that the trees and the wind were trying to alert me to something, and in doing so, were resisting the erasure of the indexical trace of the violent acts they had witnessed. There may be no visible trace of the mass grave in the wheat field that Janina took me to, but the trees remained attentive and were communicating something to me. We may be comfortable with the thought that the movement of trees or wind might be being capable of eliciting or triggering affects in us, but what if we invert that thought to consider that the trees or wind might be

intentionally doing so because they have something to express? This may seem like an outlandish notion, yet affect does not originate in our bodies, rather outside of our bodies, passing between the world and us.

1.3 Affects with intentions

The flow of affect is outlined by Gregg and Seigworth as the *force of encounter*. This is where affect behaves in a way that is not necessarily forceful in a violent sense, but can often be gentle and unexpected, operating 'within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities: all the miniscule or molecular events of the unnoticed' (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010: 2). The force comes from affect's pre-conscious impact on us. If we place our bodies in these situations and allow our senses to tune in to these subtle shifts, to recognise what might otherwise be unnoticed, we are allowing an encounter with affect. But this is not just a random encounter, it is intentional. The affect, like the index, is pointing us towards something. It is saying 'look' or 'there', or simply 'pay attention'.

Affect's force is in its capacity to break through 'both into and of the interstices of the inorganic and non-living, the intracellular divulgences of sinew, tissue, and gut economies, and the vaporous evanescences of the incorporeal (events, atmospheres, feeling-tones)' (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010: 2). It flows between the environments we inhabit and us as living beings. It communicates though our senses and is felt in our bodies. Affect is the residue that seeps through the invisible membrane that separates ordinary daily life and the extraordinary events of past traumas. It flows between the past and the present and by breaching the temporal division between past and present, affect is behaving as a disruptive and productive emotional force.

The trees at Żabno were communicating through affect, they had affective agency. The fear they were expressing flowed between them and from them to me. Why does affect behave like this in places like Żabno? Because there is a lot at stake. Because there is something that needs to come forward from the past. Kaja Silverman defines this as the

'futural past'[36] (Silverman, 2000: 59). This temporal shift of something from the past coming forwards to the present (and beyond) is activated by affect and is a response to place or event. In this instance, a traumatic and unjust event and an unmarked grave.

The genocidal past cannot be separated from the affects that it generates. These are unquiet affects. Affects that want attention and are learning how to attract attention in the same way that we are learning how to notice. Dylan Trigg's term 'affective intentionality' – by which he means being consciously attentive to a 'heightened sense of affectivity in the world' (Trigg, 2012: 302) – implies not just a seeking-out of affect, but an ambition to develop an awareness and sensitivity to affect. Kathleen Stewart describes such an awareness as 'atmospheric attunement […] an alerted sense that something is happening and an attachment to sensing out whatever it is. It takes place within a world of some sort and it is itself a generative, compositional worlding' (Stewart, 2010: 4). When we attune ourselves in this way, we use our senses to focus on affect and atmospheres as critical elements of experience, and a potential route to knowledge.

As I travelled to sites of mass graves in Poland and Hungary I allowed myself time to experience each site, attuning myself to notice the behaviour of the natural world, trying to be attentive to each place and to my experience of being in the world. I was using sensory methods to recognise and respond to traces of affect within these landscapes with the intention of developing an experiential methodology that could translate affect into a visual or aural form that might communicate something beyond simple fact. I looked for whatever traces I could find and as I travelled from grave to grave, the unconventional traces that I found became a catalogue of affective signs that revealed themselves like messages or clues. These traces were often ephemeral, sometimes non-visual, and had no obvious indexical relationship to the past atrocities, yet still warned me to pay attention. The strange behaviour of the trees at Żabno, the flutter of a leaf caught in a cobweb at Szczurowa, the movement of ants in the forest at Borzęcin, the overwhelming feeling of dread as I stood at the lakeside at Várpalota, and the owl that swooped low and circled my head one evening as I photographed another lake. In these

[36] Silverman is drawing on Heidegger's *Being and Time* and goes on to say "There is something in the past – which due to its repetitive force – might be said to be our future'. This is particularly pertinent if we consider the rise of the far right today as Europe takes a turn back to past extremism. Or perhaps it is unresolved past extremism that is coming forwards to the present and into our future.

instances, affective forces had animated the everyday and the ordinary (the leaves, the birds, the weather) to expose traces of something extraordinary that was existing in parallel to these places.

> [Affects move] obtusely, in circuits and failed relays, in jumpy moves and in the layered textures of a scene. They surge and become submerged. They point to the jump of something coming together for a minute and to the spreading of lines of resonance and connection that become possible and might snap into sense in some sharp or vague way. (Stewart, 2007: 4)

Stewart's use of the terms 'circuits, relays and surges' suggests that affects are alive, and operate as pure energy. I would further argue that these affects themselves have intention, yet their intention can only become know when they engage in an encounter with a body. A body that attends to them. The historian Ruth Leys writes, in her analysis of contemporary affect theory: 'Human beings are corporeal creatures imbued with subliminal affective intensities and resonances that so decisively influence or condition our political and other beliefs that we ignore those affective intensities and resonances at our peril' (Leys, 2011: 436). These are affects that have intention and can form an essential part of our interpretation of the social and political world.

The affects I encountered at the grave sites did not (could not) in themselves tell the stories of what had happened in these places in the 1940s. They were signs that there was something to attend to. The trees at Żabno were inviting me to look beyond the manicured memorial in the cemetery, pointing me towards a hidden, more messy and less controlled relationship the town has with the past. They also suggested an atmosphere of anger or fear as they violently thrashed in the wind and poignantly seemed to be reaching out to each other. The fear in this case was not the fear of the dead as proposed by Sendyka in her essay *Sites that Haunt* on the affects, ghosts and ruins of the Płaszów concentration camp in Kraków (Sendyka, 2016). The trees at Żabno were illuminated by Janina's fear of being seen or found out – a fear that led to her waiting over seventy years before telling anyone what she had seen. Fear had prevented her memory from being shared and becoming something more concrete – history. In this way, fear has been employed as a highly effective tool for supressing history. The fear expressed by the trees at Żabno was also that of the un-named people Janina had

witnessed being murdered, and whose bodies still remained there under the wheat field – although perhaps this fear could more accurately be described as terror.[37] And then there was my state of mind as I stood at that place and considered the fear that I was encountering in every exchange I had with Polish, Hungarian and Roma people in relation to not only what had happened in the 1940s, but what was happening in the present day across Europe.[38] The trees, the graves, the witnesses, the secrets, the violence, the fear, the terror, the anger, the hatred and rage. So many bodies and so many affects existing across decades in this one place.

1.4 Breaking the frame of Holocaust testimony

When this research began I had a fairly conventional view of what a witness could be. And that was certainly not a tree, or a ghost. I hadn't expected to find actual witnesses, and I hadn't been looking for witnesses. It hadn't occurred to me that child witnesses of the Nazi atrocities in the Tarnów area would still be alive, let alone still living in proximity to the mass graves.

By putting myself in these landscapes and employing a sensory methodology, I came to recognise that the trees at Żabno could be witnesses of a sort. But I also gradually began to find human witnesses – or rather, on some occasions, like Janina, they found me, approaching when I was filming at the grave sites and asking to share their stories. In this way I met Zofia, Janina, Anna, Krystyna, and Józef whose ages when they experienced these events in 1942 and 1943 ranged from three to fourteen years old.[39] Each witness offered subjective testimony, which created a powerful and authentic first-person picture of events from their past. Beyond describing what they had seen, each offered detailed observations about the environment (landscape, trees, soil, weather), and about

[37] The escalation of affect is at the heart of Silvan Tomkin's physiological affect theory and his identification of the seven key affects and their amplified partners. Fear becomes terror. Anger becomes rage and so on (see Tomkins, 1963). This amplification is a further indication of the alive-ness of affect.
[38] For example the lists compiled of attacks against Roma in Europe between 2009 and 2012 by the ERRC (European Roma Rights Center, 2012) were an early source of information for my research. As my research progressed, I also started to collect links to Roma-generated news reports and videos of attacks and abuse posted on YouTube and Facebook. Some of these videos have been used in the film along with the (anonymised) abusive comments that they attract.
[39] The film *The Deathless Woman* also includes important adult witness testimony from Erzsébet, filmed in Hungary in 2018.

their own sensory experience (sights, smells, sounds, feelings). As they testified, something happened that conflated a factual re-telling of the events of atrocity with a description of their affect-laden and sensory engagement with both place and event. It seemed that, for my witnesses, empirical facts (time of day, date, names, location, events) were not enough to communicate their extraordinary and traumatising experiences. And often these empirical facts were not consistent, or perhaps not even known. They primarily wanted to talk about the sensation and the physical impression of what they saw and what they felt. Each had a complex and ongoing relationship to the place where they had witnessed the atrocities. Janina walked past the wheat field every day. Zofia lived next door to the grave of the Roma matriarch and her family, but was afraid to go there, and neither she or Józef ever went near the forest in Borzęcin. Krystyna had moved away but returned to the cemetery at Szczurowa every year for a memorial ceremony. Anna still lived in Szczurowa and was eager to take us to the grave and describe the sights, sounds and smells of the night of the massacre.

Whenever possible we recorded the testimony at the place where the atrocity had happened, and paying attention to their relationship to place, their mood, gesture and body language became an additional source of information for me. As they talked I endeavoured to be passive and non-directive – I was recording testimony, not interviewing subjects. Yet I also endeavoured to remain present and alert to my own experience of being in the presence of the witnesses and their narratives, and to be receptive to whatever was unfolding. Dori Laub posits that it is only through the awareness of the affective flow between witness and listener that the listener 'can become the enabler of the testimony – the one who triggers its initiation, as well as the guardian of its process and of its momentum' (Laub, 1992: 58). As they talked, affect did flow between us. They wanted to quite literally pass their trauma on to me, to be free of it themselves, but I don't think that was ever achieved. The affective resonance of their trauma seemed to flow in a circular manner, from them to me and back again. It was like an energy that encircled us.[40]

[40] Janina voiced her wish to pass the trauma onto me quite explicitly by taking me by the shoulders after we had finished filming and saying: 'now that I have told you, maybe I will be free of it'.

As they spoke, some telling and re-enacting their stories for the first time, I became a witness to their re-telling.[41] Such double or secondary witnessing constitutes not only a reciprocal exchange of affect between listener and testifier, it also constitutes a contract. The listener becomes complicit in a 'joint responsibility for the re-emerging truth' (Laub, 1992: 85). These elderly witnesses wanted their testimony recorded before it was too late – this was their own responsibility to the people they had witnessed being murdered. My responsibility to them and to those murdered, was to bring their testimony to an audience.

When I return to Bielcza nine months later to interview Zofia, she begins to tell me the story about the forest grave next to her house. She recounts the murder of an extended Roma family who had lived in a wooden house next door to her husband's family in 1942 (as told to her by her husband's uncle who had been present at the murder). She describes how the matriarch of the Roma family had been buried alive after repeatedly getting back up out of the shallow grave each time she was shot by the German soldiers. Each time she got up, she had cursed the soldiers and the Polish men who accompanied them. She tells me how the Polish men and their descendants had subsequently died strange deaths (struck by lightning, kicked by a horse). Years later, when Zofia was married and living in the house in Bielcza, she witnessed for herself the exhumation of the forest grave and the subsequent relocation of the bodies to a new grave in the village cemetery. She describes the exhumation in detail – there was the smell of decomposed bodies, there were the bones of the children, but when they lifted out the body of the matriarch, she was 'fully preserved, intact, looking as she had on the day she had died'. Zofia looks out of her window in the direction of the grave: 'everyone is afraid to go there, as you just do not know'.[42]

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[41] The multiple experience of witnessing led me to create the character of the Seeker (played by actor Loren O'Dair) who is entirely based on my own experience. The process of meeting these people and becoming witness to their testimony was an essential part of her process of discovery. Shoshana Felman describes the scope of the filmmaker as witness in her essay on Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) – 'The creator of the film speaks and testifies, however in his own voice, in his triple role as the narrator of the film (and the signatory–the first person–of the script), as the interviewer of the witnesses (the solicitor and the receiver of the testimonies), and as the inquirer (the artist as the subject of a quest concerning what testimonies testify to; the figure of the witness as a questioner, and of the asker not merely as the factual investigator but as the bearer of the film's philosophical address and inquiry)' (Felman, 1991: 50).

[42] Partial transcription from Zofia Kołodziej's, testimony recorded by Roz Mortimer, July 2012. Trans. Dorota Miklasinska.

When Zofia told me the story of the Roma woman buried in the mass grave next to her house, she made no attempt to rationalise this strange tale. She presented me with a description of a woman who had been buried alive, and whose body had refused to follow the usual processes after death – namely decay and decomposition. In recounting her story of curses, the supernatural and excess, Zofia was breaking the frame of Holocaust testimony. Dori Laub gives a powerful example of breaking the frame in his essay *Bearing Witness* (Laub, 1992: 59). He describes how historians responded to the testimony of a traumatised camp survivor who witnessed the Auschwitz uprising. Her eyewitness testimony was full of vivid and sensory detail, of flames, stampedes of people, screams, shots and explosions, yet her account was dismissed by historians because they recognised it was factually incorrect. She had mis-remembered the number of chimneys that were blown up, stating all four were destroyed, where the historians knew it had been only one. Laub later speaks to a psychologist who was present at the woman's interview, and whose interpretation of the woman's testimony differed from the historians':

> The woman was testifying, not to the number of chimneys blown up, but to something else, more radical, more crucial: the reality of an unimaginable occurrence. […] The woman testified to an event that broke the compelling frame of Auschwitz, where Jewish armed revolts just did not happen, and had no place. She testified to the breakage of a framework. That was historical truth. (Laub 1992: 59)[43]

The frame is a device of control. It is how we control the narratives of history. The memorial tombstone in the cemetery at Żabno fits into the frame. The adjacent wheat field with its forgotten bodies still buried under the ground, does not. The memorial headstone for the Roma family in the cemetery in Bielcza fits into the frame, but their unmarked forest grave, and Zofia's narrative about the unruly behaviour of the Roma matriarch's body does not. These bodies that sit outside of the frame do not belong to any established narratives of the Holocaust.

[43] The psychologist Laub quotes is un-named.

The woman who had witnessed the Auschwitz uprising had been categorised as an unreliable witness because her memory was factually inaccurate.[44] Other elements of testimony that might be discounted or deemed inadmissible evidence by historians are the 'stuff of religious belief and ritual: [i.e.] miracles, magical events, godly events.' (White, 1987: 66). In 2012 the director of the Tarnów Regional Museum warned me that Zofia was an unreliable witness. He has declined to be specific about this claim, but it is important to note that there is no question that there was a massacre of Roma in Bielcza in 1942 and the mass grave is located in the forest-clearing next to Zofia's house. By 2012 the annual memorial ceremony initiated by the museum had stopped visiting the grave in Bielcza or including Zofia and her family in their ceremony.[45]

A historian had disavowed Zofia in the same way as historians had disavowed the witness to the Auschwitz uprising. Of course, whenever something is disavowed, we know we should pay attention to it. Perhaps Zofia's transgression is that she refuses to remain quiet about the Roma matriarch. She might be deemed to be an unreliable witness by historians, but perhaps a better description is that she is an unruly witness. She is a witness who has broken the frame of Holocaust testimony by voicing her story of the curses, the refusal to die and the immaculate body. These things were witnessed by Zofia and her family, and despite the endeavours of historiography to bury her testimony, if we take her testimony at face value we should recognise her words as historical truths. Just like the psychologist recognised historical truth in the testimony of the witness to the Auschwitz uprising.

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[44] This an example of Walker's 'traumatic paradox' (Walker, 2003) – discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

[45] Since 2001 the Tarnów Regional Museum has organised the *Tabor Pamięci* (or *Gypsy Caravan of Memory*). Traditional painted Roma caravans from the museum's collection become the centrepiece for a three-day memorial procession to several WWII Roma mass graves in the area. In the early years the Tabor visited the unmarked forest grave in Bielcza and Zofia and her family were included in the memorial ceremonies. Zofia and her son-in-law made their own memorial on the site of the forest grave with flowers and painted stones in 2009 (See YouTube video *X Tabor Pamięci Romów* authored by 'Felicity004', 2009), but they told me that the participants of the Tabor dismantled this memorial in 2011. By 2012 the Tabor had stopped visiting the forest grave, instead only visiting the memorial in the village cemetery (footage from the 2012 memorial ceremony in the cemetery at Bielcza can be seen in *The Deathless Woman*). By 2015 the Tabor no longer stopped in Bielcza at all – neither the forest grave or the cemetery. There is, however, no dispute that there is a Roma mass grave in the forest next to Zofia's house in Bielcza or that the bodies from this grave have been disinterred and relocated to the cemetery where they are marked with a memorial stone. Bielcza remains the only uncommemorated location on the Tabor's route. I am grateful to Aleksandra Szczepan for clarification on dates.

1.5 The rupture between two worlds

When you break the frame of something, you create a rupture, a breach. That thing is no longer contained or controlled. Equally, those things which had previously been excluded and kept outside of the frame are able to pass through the breach and into the frame. In this way, these memories and these bodies become unrestrained and in that moment they determine their power and agency. They can become productive. But how productive? Could the dead also be witnesses?

There exists in Holocaust studies, a taxonomy or hierarchy of witnessing. There are secondary witnesses, such as myself (and at some point in the future, the cinema audience) – those that witness the witnessing. And there are the primary witnesses: survivors who had direct experience of the event either as observers, participants or victims. Within this, Agamben identifies two forms of primary witness – *terstis* who are testifying for the 'acquisition of facts' (for instance for a trial or documentary film) and *superstes* who have fully 'experienced an event from beginning to end' (Agamben, 1999: 17). Janina and Zofia (and to an extent, the trees at Żabno), are superstes. But their witnessing is not complete. What they saw was only part of the event. They had not, and could not possibly have, experienced the events in their totality. That prerogative is reserved for the Roma women and their children that were murdered in the wheat field in Żabno in 1943 and the forest at Bielcza in 1942. These murdered victims of the Holocaust are what Primo Levi terms the 'submerged' or 'complete' witness – they are the ones who did not survive, who are unable to testify for themselves (Levi, 1989: 63–4). They are 'complete' because they are the ultimate witnesses, having experienced the atrocity from both sides – life and death, inside and outside – but they have not been able to return to tell about it.

> We, the survivors, are not the true witnesses […] we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the 'Muslims',[46] the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have complete significance. They are the rule, we are the exception. (Levi, 1989: 64)

[46] The slang term 'Muslim' or 'Musselman' in the context of Holocaust camp testimony refers to the prisoner who was extremely emaciated and resigned to their inevitable impending death. They are 'the weak, the inept, those doomed to selection' (Levi, 1985: 88), the ones who did not survive.

Levi's use of the word 'submerged' suggests a body that is being hidden from view under water. Submerged bodies do not cease to exist, they have an embodied presence but are no longer accessible or visible to us, and the lines of communication are broken between us and them. They are unable to alert us to the horror that they experienced. They are under water, under the earth, or perhaps in another realm.[47] For Primo Levi, Holocaust witnesses fall into two categories only: the drowned and the saved. The drowned or submerged witness cannot testify for themselves, but rely on the saved witness to speak for them by proxy (Levi, 1989: 64).

> The survivors speak in their stead, by proxy, as pseudo-witnesses; they bear witness to a missing testimony. And yet to speak here of a proxy makes no sense; the drowned have nothing to say, nor do they have instructions or memories to be transmitted. They have no 'story', no 'face', and even less do they have 'thought'. (Agamben, 1999: 34)

Zofia is a pseudo-witness of sorts – she speaks for the murdered Roma matriarch although her testimony is limited to recounting what she or her family actually saw or experienced.[48] And in this way she keeps the memory of the Roma woman alive. But what if the dead could speak for themselves? Could this be another method for breaking the frame? By allowing the dead to speak might they be able to help us address those gaps and unknowns that have led to the lacuna between what happened to the Roma and how it has been recorded in historiography? Could the Roma matriarch who was buried alive in Bielcza be the ultimate witness? One who had lived through not only her own death, but who had witnessed the traumatic experiences of many others since her death. One who had returned to tell what she had seen. Was she a ghost? Was she a Lazarean who had risen from the dead?

Here was Zofia, a witness who was presenting me with testimony that ruptured the frame of Holocaust testimony. This was not a rupture that allowed something to *escape*

[47] The idea of the dead or those in peril being trapped or submerged in an interstitial space between the world of the living and the realm of the dead has been creatively visualised in recent cinema and television works such as the black void of the 'Sunken Place' in *Get Out* (Peel, 2017) and 'The Upside Down' of *Stranger Things* (Duffer and Duffer, 2016), and in literature, the 'Inbetween' of *The Lovely Bones* (Sebold, 2002).

[48] The murder of the Roma matriarch and her family in 1942 was originally witnessed by Zofia's husband's uncle. It was he who passed the story on to Zofia – an example of 'postmemory'(see Hirsch, 2012).

the frame, but rather a rupture that could allow something unruly and unconventional to *enter* the frame of historiography and thus gain legitimacy. If the seeping affects were the subtle overspill of something that did not want to be contained in the past, that wanted to attract our attention, here was something bigger, more urgent, a force that Zofia had allowed to exist by voicing it. By breaking the frame in this way Zofia had presented the beginnings of a path that could take this research away from the limitations of traditional forms of historiography. This was a rupture not only between past and present, but between two worlds, that of the living and that of the dead.

1.6 When she addresses us in her voice she ceases to be forgotten

> It is the silence of the witness's death, and of the witness's deadness, which precisely must be broken, and transgressed. (Felman, 1992: 219)

After Zofia told me what had happened in Bielcza, I returned to my hotel room and began to write the story in the voice of the Roma matriarch. Although I was knowingly using a device, it initially felt as if she was writing the story through me, in her own words.[49] It was as if she possessed me, as if she was resurfacing. She felt very present. I named her the Deathless Woman and the resulting text became the beginnings of the narration for the film *The Deathless Woman* (2019).

When we can't place the dead in their 'proper place' – for instance within the frame of Holocaust testimony – we can be forced to find other ways to deal with their presence. In Polish Holocaust literature there is a tradition of 'mediumistic writing' where 'the living articulate experiences undergone by those who perished' (Molisak, 2019: 49). Alina Molisak's use of the term 'mediumistic' suggests a type of automatic writing that might fall under the umbrella of spirit writing – something that is performed unconsciously by a medium who is a conduit for a spirit who desires to communicate with the living. An alternative view would be that of prosopopoeial writing – namely a literary style that takes the form of the voice of an imaginary or dead person. By

[49] Although originally written in English, the Deathless Woman's dialogue has been voiced in the Lovari-Romani dialect. This was the result of a process of translation, re-wording and recording with Roma linguist Gyula Vamosi and the Roma actor and writer Iveta Kokyová.

appropriating the voices of the dead by either of these pre-conscious or conscious methods, we speak for them. Agamben names those that speak for the submerged witness, as 'pseudo-witnesses':

> Whoever assumes the charge of bearing witness [in the name of the submerged witness] knows that he or she must bear witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness. But this alters the value of testimony in a definitive way; it makes it necessary to look for its meaning in an unexpected area. (Agamben, 1999: 34)

The idea of speaking for a submerged witness, of being a pseudo-witness, filling in missing testimony by appropriating the ghost of a Holocaust victim is, of course, ethically challenging. I do not claim mediumistic writing, but the events that had led me to the grave of the Deathless Woman led me to believe that the she had a strategy towards me, and that it was no accident that I had ended up in Bielcza, meeting Zofia and finding her grave. In her essay *Who Claims Alterity*, Spivak challenges the patronising and prevailing consideration that the subaltern subject might be 'incapable of a strategy toward us' (Spivak, 2012: 60). The voice that I wrote was thoughtful, but charged and angry. She had agency and I envisaged her rage as a physical and powerful affective force capable of setting fire to the forest, of cursing her killers, of killing living beings. In this text she rose up out of her grave and skimmed along the tops of the trees to look down on and witness the terrible events of the 20th century, to witness the persecution of the Roma that occurred then and is still occurring today.[50] When the Deathless Woman addresses us her voice is political and she ceases to be forgotten, buried or submerged. Unlike the trees at Żabno who were only capable of suggesting and alerting, the ghost (in literature, if not in real life) is capable of real agency. But for a ghost to have agency she must have a voice.

> A ghost can express itself in the form of a voice that comes through the wound. It is an alien voice, disembodied, but one that has witnessed something that the hearer has not. It is a voice that has *seen*, and that demands to be listened to […] Together the listener and the voice speaking

[50] The Deathless Woman speaks only of events that I have researched through historical texts, archives or interviews, and thus all the factual details are epistemologically accurate. I have generated her presence at a series of key moments in Roma history, narrativised her experience and constructed her character through reference to her imagined emotions and affects. This paradoxical conflation of 'facts' and experience is explored in more detail in Chapter Two.

> from the wound constitute a kind of storytelling machine, an assemblage of seeing, speaking, and listening components. (Cho, 2007: 165)[51]

Both components are needed – speaker and listener – agency is formed when the ghost not only speaks, but has a listener to bear witness to her testimony. As novelists, poets, filmmakers and artists we can position ourselves as listeners, but more importantly the nature of our work means it brings an audience. By allowing the ghost to have a voice, and bringing that voice to an audience, the witnessing continues.

The central protagonist in Alice Sebold's novel *The Lovely Bones* (2002) is the ghost of fourteen-year-old Susie Salmon. In the first-person, Susie describes her abduction and death, and then proceeds to chronicle for us the unfolding of her family's grief and the police investigation as she witnesses it, looking down from heaven. As the sole witness to her murder, as a submerged witness, she tries to break through the space between heaven and earth – a place she calls the 'Inbetween' (Sebold, 2002: 180) – to alert people to the facts of her murder in an attempt to seek justice. Her father comes to think that she is watching him. She comes to realise: 'that the line between the living and the dead could be, it seemed, murky and blurred' (Sebold, 2002: 48). Sebold uses this prosopopoeial device to great effect and has the ethical freedom to do so, as *The Lovely Bones* is wholly fictional. Sylvia Plath uses a similar method in her Holocaust poem *Getting There* (1962). In this poem, an unnamed prisoner relates her experience whilst travelling in a boxcar across Russia.[52] Matthew Boswell interprets Plath's work not as a literal exposition of personal experience, rather an exploration of the sensory '*relationship* between the personal experience of those who were not there and the historical experiences of those who were' (Boswell, 2012: 42). In so doing, Plath is drawing on the power of affective engagement – through her words we can imagine ourselves in the boxcar of *Getting There*. As James Indigo Freed (designer of the US Holocaust Memorial

[51] Grace Cho's terminology of the *wound* deeply links the ghost's vocal expression to traumatic experience. The term trauma derives from the Greek 'titrooskoo', meaning 'to pierce'. The relationship between ghosts and trauma will be explored more fully in Chapter Two.

[52] Plath's prosopopoeia was ill-received because of the perception that she was conflating her (well-known) personal trauma with that of the victims of the Holocaust, with the additional caveat that the poem was written in English, a language that was not generally spoken by Holocaust victims. Critics interpreted Plath's first-person address as referring to herself rather than a prisoner travelling across Russia (Gubar, 2002: 114–115). Rather than providing a compassionate interpretation of an unknowable horror, this poem was seen to be denying the victim their authentic (although impossibly absent) voice.

Museum) puts it: 'I don't believe you could ever understand the Holocaust with the mind. You have to feel it. Feeling may be a better way of getting at it because horror is not an intellectual category as far as I can tell' (quoted in Young, 1994: 96).

Nearly fifty years after Plath wrote *Getting There,* the South African artist Penny Siopis' use of prosopopoeia in her short experimental film *Communion* (Siopis, 2011) attracted no controversy.[53] In this film, a murdered white nun, Sister Aidan Quinlan posthumously narrates the circumstances of her own death in 1952 at the hands of angry villagers during the Defence Campaign apartheid protests. Siopis compiled the nun's narration (presented as on-screen text) from facts gleaned from newspaper articles and court records and it is delivered in the first person, as if Quinlan is speaking from beyond the grave. Drawing on factual sources, the positioning of the narration as authentic is critically important here. Even though these are not the actual words of Sister Quinlan, they have been written as the direct result of detailed research into the archived history of the events of her death. When coupled with the alluring found footage (on super 8 film) with its non-diegetic imagery and the rolling, foot-tapping melody of the music (a traditional African lullaby), Sister Quinlan's ghost's words become deeply affecting. Siopis has re-positioned her from victim to witness.

Fig. 3 Film stills: *Communion* (Siopis, 2011)

In a similar way to Siopis, to create the structural frame for *The Deathless Woman*, my script-writing methodology has centred on rooting the narrative in known facts. I took archive material, journalistic sources, testimony and visual documentation as my starting points in determining and describing the events that the Deathless Woman encounters

[53] *Communion* is part of Siopis' wider body of work reflecting on the turbulent history of South Africa, with specific focus on the apartheid era. See https://pennysiopis.com/film/

in the film. For instance, her narration as she 'participates' in the uprising of the Gypsy Family Camp at Birkenau in 1944 has been constructed with reference to fragments of witness testimony found in archive sources, weather reports and a photograph of the camp taken by the SS. This assembly of facts forms the structure that the Deathless Woman's intention and emotions – which are of course wholly imagined – can be woven around. It is through this conflation of knowledge and affect, fact and imagination that this ghost became an active character in the film. What I had read and experienced became what *she* had seen and experienced. In this process I found a way to combine the seemingly contradictory approaches of my initially discarded empirical research into the 'facts' of the Roma genocide with my affect-driven fieldwork which centred around an experimental empiricism that foregrounded experience over historical fact.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has followed a journey of methodological discovery relating to experience, affect and witnessing. Starting with a realisation that elements within a traumatic landscape could be interpreted as witnesses, the methodology developed to encompass more conventional witnesses and how their unconventional testimony might be interpreted by historians and creatively re-claimed by an artist. And from there the methodology folds back to the unconventional witness, this time, the potential for the dead to perform a witnessing, not just of their own death, but of other events that have taken place across space and time and for us as witnesses to form an essential part of this process.

The Deathless Woman presents a series of witnesses whose testimony focuses on experience and affect rather than knowledge. These are witnesses that include not only human witnesses to the atrocities of the Holocaust, but also more unconventional witnesses such as trees and ultimately a ghost. Rationality is side-stepped as an irrelevant concern. What is critical is the acknowledgement that something remains alive from the trauma of the Holocaust. What remains alive in these sites of atrocity are memories (traumatic ones for Zofia et al – memories that they can't escape from), ideologies (such as antigypsyism) and also something less tangible – traces of affect that are linked to the

past atrocity and are actively and intentionally trying to breach the divide between past and present. My methodology has centred around finding ways to explore the past as an event that remains relevant, alive and unresolved.

My aim became to draw on these (in part) unconventional methods of witnessing and to respond to place to construct a phenomenological rather than epistemological understanding of past events. Such a strategy that foregrounds the 'political force of affect' (Bal, 2013: 90) as part of a methodology for understanding the world might present opportunities to address the lacunas and gaps that historiography has chosen not to include. The liminal or in-between spaces that the empirical and evidential neglects are the spaces that affect inhabits. Paying attention to these affects is a route to creating meaningful art works that not only address or present elements of the past that historiography has neglected, but the foregrounding of affect could allow the film's audience to have a cognitive emotional experience which is increased by their position as witnesses themselves.

One might question the prospect of bringing something as potentially irrational as a ghost into an historical account or a documentary film. But rationality seems to have no place in thinking about genocide. Perhaps turning away from rationality can present creative possibilities for thinking about (and representing) historic atrocity and by doing so, we might be able to accomplish the important work of re-considering the past's relationship to the present. It is here that the ghost in particular is useful – she is not bound by time (or place), and exists simultaneously in the past, the present and the future. She has witnessed not just her own death, but everything else that has come after and as such she is the ultimate witness.

In her autoethnographic book *Haunting the Korean Diaspora* – which offers a postcolonial critique of the supressed and traumatised history of the relationships between Korean women and American soldiers both during and since the Korean War – Grace Cho talks of 'the ways in which listening to the voice allows us to see trauma, how seeing and speaking are mutually important parts in an assemblage of trauma' (Cho, 2008: 166). This puts the responsibility for recognising, interpreting and responding to the atrocities of the past firmly with the audience (those final witnesses to the story).

Spivak reminds us that 'speaking is a transaction between speaker and listener' (Spivak, 1996: 289). By witnessing these films, we are engaging in a reciprocal contract with their ghosts.

The survivors, the listener, the camera, the cinema audience, and now possibly the ghost – we all become witnesses and we all become implicated in this narrative.

Chapter 2: Trauma, Ghosts, the Uncanny

> It's dark now and I am beginning to feel that something is trying to keep me here, telling me that I should not leave.[54]

2.1 Introduction

My uncanny experiences in the villages near Tarnów led me to learn how to think about ghosts – about how a ghost might have agency and be a social and political force. If the ghost is treated as a witness, and given a voice, could the ghost be capable of challenging the established forms of knowledge production which have failed the Roma? If historiography has failed the Roma, then perhaps a more experimental and unconventional methodology could in some way begin to redress this failure.

As Grace Cho points out in *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, the notion of the existence of a ghost (let alone the ghost being an active witness) might be 'met with ridicule by those who are trained to see the world through a strictly positivistic lens' (Cho, 2008: 31). I cannot argue for the actual existence of the ghost of the Deathless Woman, nor have I ever asked or answered the question of whether she is 'real' or not. The important thing is that she aligns with my experience and she is the direct result of my determination to understand what had happened in these traumatic places by employing a methodology of attending to feelings, atmospheres and affects. The ghost of the Deathless Woman has, as far as I know, never appeared to anyone. Zofia had seen the undecomposed body of the Roma matriarch, but she never spoke of a 'ghost'. Her tale was of an unjust killing, curses and a body that refused to decompose – clues and suggestions that I have assembled to create a ghost. The ghost is mine, her existence borne out of my own sense that something was drawing me to Bielcza, and the uncanny things that happened in England and in Poland to bring me to her forest grave.

Freud's much quoted essay on the uncanny unpicks the slippery nature of this complex sensation which lies at the intersection of the familiar yet strange. Starting with Schelling's definition of the original German term – *unheimlich* – as that which 'ought to have remained hidden, and secret, and yet comes to light' (Freud, 1919: 4), Freud brings

[54] Excerpt of the Seeker's dialogue, *The Deathless Woman* (2019)

into the equation notions of fatefulness, undecidability and the unclear distinction between what is imagined and what is real. Progressing to an analysis of Hoffman's unsettling short horror story *The Sandman* (Hoffmann, 1817), Freud further centres his treatise on the uncanny around 'the question of whether something is animate (alive) or inanimate (dead)… unique, original or a repetition, a copy, cannot be decided' (Bronfen, 1992: 113). Given these definitions, the uncanny has become a term that is frequently used to define the unsettling feeling surrounding the impression that hauntings and the supernatural might exist alongside us in our day-to-day lives.

Although Freud recognises that the uncanny exists (for some people) as a sensation, he goes on to draw a line under the idea of bringing stories of the supernatural into 'the world of common reality', using terminology such as 'tricks' and 'deceit' (1919: 18). His position on the supernatural is that educated people don't believe in ghosts, and only 'savages' or 'the primitive' fear the dead (1919: 14). Yet, for many cultures, a belief in ghosts, spirits and other-worldly beings is a defined part of either cultural or religious ways of thinking. From the dybbuk in Yiddish literature; to the Roma *Mulo*, a spirit of the dead who appears in the form of a mist, veil or animal (such as a bird) to warn of the threat of danger (Ficowski: 1989: 88 and Rombase, 2002); to the spiritual folk belief of animism; to the Shinto belief that 'the spirits of the dead imbue all of nature with benevolent and malicious energies, [and] Buddhist conceptions of an afterlife in which agitated souls seeking peace wander between the realm of the living and the world of the dead' (McRoy, 2015).

Laplanche and Pontalis position the uncanny and ghosts as a kind of psychological displacement or transference, explaining such phenomena as 'those qualities, feelings, wishes, objects, which the subject refuses to recognise or rejects in himself [and which] are expelled from the self and located in another person or thing' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1978: 349). Here, the ghost is seen firmly as a psychological aberration which is in line with the majority of contemporary Western interpretations of haunting. Such interpretations are borne out of psychoanalytical theory, where the ghost is a manifestation of either a personal repressed trauma or a transgenerational trauma – a haunting derived from the suppression of traumatic events, most usually within the family (see Abraham and Torok, 1994; Cho, 2008). These 'phantoms' are in our minds,

lodged there as the result of past trauma, secrets or shame and are something that needs to be reduced if we are to lead healthy psychic lives (Abraham, 1988: 4). The use of the term 'phantom' is telling here – this is a term that can mean 'ghost', but equally means 'figment of imagination'. In this reading, the ghost is not 'there', it is simply something that may seem real, yet is wholly imagined.

The psychoanalytic definition of trauma focuses on the lasting effect a traumatic event can have on an individual's psyche. Freud defines trauma as an experience that 'presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way, [resulting] in permanent disturbances of the manner in which the energy operates' (Freud 1917: 275). Laplanche's reading of Freud positions trauma as 'an event in a subject's life, defined by its intensity, by the subject's incapacity to respond adequately to it and by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the psychological organization' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988: 465).

What if we reconsider this position of trauma as a trigger for a psychological aberration and consider trauma as the thing that conjures the ghost into actuality? What if, in opposition to Nicolas Abraham's assertion that the phantom must be reduced, we seek to activate and amplify the phantom? If we accept that the phantom is brought into being by past trauma, maybe we can reject that it is something fictitious and aberrant lodged in our minds. If we confer materiality to the ghost, perhaps we can view it as an object of experience that has manifested itself to tell us something about the social or political world. This is the position I am taking in my research. I have chosen to approach haunting, not through a psychoanalytical lens, but rather through a phenomenological one that treats the 'ghost as a ghost' and as an object of lived experience (Trigg, 2012: 286).

There are three main contemporary Western schools of thought in relation to haunting that move beyond the psychoanalytical: the intellectual hauntology of Derrida, the sociological haunting of Avery Gordon and philosophy theorist Dylan Trigg's phenomenological interpretation of haunting. Derrida's hauntology focuses on temporal disjunctions, namely ideas from the past that make themselves known in the living present. Derrida describes the ghost as 'the autonomized idea or thought' (Derrida, 1994:

158). For him, the spectre is something that moves between the visible and invisible, but he is not talking of literal ghosts, rather of ideas and thoughts which have been incorporated into the body (Derrida, 1994: 162 referencing Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*). For Derrida, ghosts are metaphorical, and his hauntology is critiqued by Trigg as 'being a concept imposed upon experience, rather than giving credence to experience itself', going on to suggest that, as a concept it has become too far removed from the phenomena it claims to address and the spectre has become subordinated to the role of 'metaphor, metonym or trope' (Trigg, 2012: 285).

Similarly, Avery Gordon's ghosts in her seminal work, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Gordon, 2008) are also metaphorical, although she is less clear about this distinction. Gordon's deep exploration of the importance, relevance and socio-political power of haunting is centred around an analysis of how the ghost is manifested and made visible in contemporary culture, primarily in the magic realist literature of Luisa Valenzuela[55] and Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (Morrison, 1987), both authors whose novels have been created in response to oppressed and marginalised histories. These stories of ghosts and haunting are presented as strategies for challenging the way that social and political history has been formed. Their stories are about what has been unjustly left out when history was written. Gordon interprets these fictional ghosts through the lens of sociological justice and for her the ghost is a social figure with political work to do. She posits that the concept of a ghost can lead us to 'a different way of knowing and writing about the social world' and this is a critical and important point, especially when taken with her further assertion that hauntings come out of 'repressed or unresolved social violence' (Gordon, 2008: xvi). Gordon's ghosts are the result of traumatic, unjust and unresolved deaths.

Trigg is frustrated by Gordon's positioning of the ghost as a metaphor that 'precludes the ghost as an object of experience' (Trigg, 2012: 286). He goes on to make the point that phenomenology would distance itself from this position (and that of Derrida's hauntology), by suggesting that a ghost is an object of experience rather than a metaphorical or intellectual trope.

[55] For instance: *Strange Things Happen Here* (1979), *Open Door* (1988), *Dangerous Words* (1986).

> Were we to invoke a phenomenology of hauntings in the light of both the hauntological and the sociological treatment of ghosts, then we would begin by stationing ourselves at a location as remote as possible from these milieus of thought. Doing so, we would, first, confer a reality upon the ghost, which considers the ghost as a ghost. At the same time, what follows is not a phenomenological defense for the objective existence of ghosts, which would be the concern of another investigation. Rather, our treatment of the ghost as a ghost means we wish to remain open to the experiencing of a ghost as just that – a lived experience that assigns a supernatural category to natural phenomena. (Trigg, 2012: 286)

Trigg is clear that he is not suggesting that ghosts exist. Yet he is also clear that they are not psychological aberrations and that ghosts in some form or other have a place in the world. The presence of ghosts is strongly linked to experience, and often this is the experience of place. Eschewing scientific rationalism is critical in this approach. As Trigg says, one must keep an open mind. *The Deathless Woman* acknowledges both the metaphorical social ghost and traumatic intergenerational haunting, but additionally, brings the prospect of the ghost's materiality, reality and existence to the fore. What is critical here is that the film presents itself as a documentary, a filmic form that is, of course, centred on depictions of reality. At a recent post-screening discussion at the BFI London, and audience member asked in response to the film: 'But is it real? Did it really happen?'.[56]

The ghost I encountered was not a ghost that had been conjured by the silence of the Holocaust witnesses in Poland. Yes, they were traumatised and had remained silent for decades, but theirs was not the ghost. They spoke of affects such as fear, of curses that came true, and of a body that had not decomposed, but not of ghosts. The ghost was mine. Conjured by me out of their silence and the wider more deafening silence of historiography. This ghost was a direct result of my encounter with Zofia and the series of uncanny occurrences that had led me to Bielcza.

[56] This uncertainty, the confusion of reality and fantasy will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

2.2 The uncanny: hiding in plain sight

> I drive on and on along a single track, until, deep in the forest, my way is barred by a barrier across the road. I have to turn the car around and drive all the way back to the village. There are four routes leading out of Bielcza. Next, I choose one heading south. Blocked again, this time by road works… a concrete slab in the middle of the road. Each time I turn around, I end up at the same crossroads at the edge of the village. Later I find out that this place, the crossroads, is just meters from her grave. It's dark now and I am beginning to feel that something is trying to keep me here, telling me that I should not leave. At this point I have no idea about the Roma woman buried here. And it goes on, but on the fourth attempt I take a track southwest through another part of forest and eventually I find my way to the main road. Back in Tarnów a thick fog falls, and I think: 'I cannot leave now'.[57]

This repeated involuntary return to the crossroads in Bielcza felt uncanny at the time, and even more so later when the location of the grave was revealed. Freud gives his own experience of involuntary return (in his case uncomfortably and repeatedly finding himself accidentally returning to the same street of prostitutes in a town in Italy) as an example of an uncanny feeling brought on by experiencing 'something fateful and unescapable' (Freud, 1919: 11). The sense that his actions were not under his own control was disturbing and the uncanny is bound up in the flipside of that fatefulness – that the events took place on an ordinary day on ordinary streets. This is perhaps the most common understanding of the uncanny, the event that sends a chill down our spines, that suggests to us that there might be something more fateful at play in our day-to-day lives. There are many moments in *The Deathless Woman* that fall into this category – from the uncanny resemblance of the two lakes (doubling), the moments when something feels strange to the Seeker (such as the bird that flies over her head at the lakeside), the arrival of the Fieldfare outside her studio door, and the repeated involuntary return to the crossroads. The Seeker learns how to read these signs. Her expertise becomes in firstly attending to and attuning to atmospheres and affects and subsequently deciphering these traces and ghostly impressions. These uncanny moments can be read as classic tropes of the ghost story or horror film. They alert us in a

[57] Excerpt of the Seeker's dialogue, *The Deathless Woman* (2019)

gentle way to the presence of an unseen supernatural force that is attempting to make contact with an unsuspecting protagonist.

Yet we can also consider a more politicised interpretation of the uncanny that draws on Jean Cayrol's post-Holocaust text *Lazare Parmi Nous*, and its notion of the Lazarean as a survivor from the concentration camps wandering in the contemporary world (Cayrol, 1950). The Lazarean is not a material reanimation of death (as in his biblical namesake), rather he is so traumatised by his experience that he leads a 'death-in-life existence' (Baker, 2019: 2). The critical issue is that the Lazarean cannot find a place in society. The trauma of the camps causes him to become a roving ghost. He is displaced, coming from nowhere and never being at peace with where he has ended up. He is a shadowy figure that struggles to have a convincing embodied presence in the world. It is as if his traumatic experience has left him with no compass, no sense of being-in-the-world. The world that the Lazarean inhabits draws on Rousset's 'concentrationary universe' (Rousset, 1946), where Rousset 'warns us of the potential reappearance of a phenomenon that is now latent in our everyday reality' (Silverman, 2019: 4). The latent phenomenon are the uncomfortable traces of the past which we sought to relegate to history. These traces of history have remained concealed and unaddressed, ready to be revealed by the appearance of the wandering Lazarean (Cayrol, 1950: 29). In this way, the Lazarean can be interpreted as a spectre from the past whose existence feeds off the repressed traumas and secrets of the present world environment. Cayrol's Lazarean exists in the space between two parallel worlds. One ordinary and the other extraordinary. He can cause ruptures between the two, and when one world begins to seep into the other, this is where the uncanny comes into effect. This is the moment of recognition and awareness that ultimately leads to an awakening as the past ceases to be dormant or concealed.

When Derrida describes hauntology as 'eskamotage', he means 'the sleight of hand by means of which an illusionist makes the most perceptible body disappear' (Derrida, 1994: 159). Cayrol's Lazarean performs the opposite function – that of becoming visible – the uncanny at work here becomes about the relationship between 'visibility/invisibility, between presence to/absence from sight' (Bronfen, 1992: 113 in her analysis of Freud's *Uncanny*). Similarly, Avery Gordon's ghosts are concerned with making visible rather than

making disappear. They make themselves visible, but in doing so they are drawing attention to the social wrongs that led to their deaths in the first instance, thus bringing visibility to the political intention of the author of the work. This shift to visibility can be metaphorical – we do not necessarily need to 'see' the ghost, but we need to become aware of her presence and agency. This is the ghost as a political being. A ghost that intentionally breaks through the divide to disrupt normality and thus alert us to something that we are missing. The Deathless Woman is a ghost that disrupts normality. Gently at first. But later with purpose and anger. She forces us to witness what has been hiding in plain sight.[58]

Cayrol's 1950 work on concentrationary art directly challenges the long-running discourse against the use of poetry in the representation of the Holocaust instigated by Adorno a year later (Adorno, 1951). Cayrol presents imagination as a valid strategy and proposes a new form of poetic and anti-realist post-Holocaust art.

> The marvelous or the magical leads the real, subjugates, and dazzles it to such an extent that the prisoner no longer perceives the cold. Thus, we find the splitting or dual reality of the Lazarean being, which is amplified by his nocturnal dreams. This being lives on two planes that are distinct, but connected by an invisible thread, the plane of terror and the plane of excitement, that of intoxication and that of detachment… Nothing is amazing; each situation can appear or disappear, reform or distort, outside of the being that experiences it, in a kind of incantation that is characteristic of this diffuse Lazarean magic. (Cayrol, 1950: 807, 809)

Cayrol's separate worlds of the magical and the everyday, are a division that is borne out of trauma. This splitting (of minds, of worlds) is identified in Judith Herman's analysis of the psychology theory of Pierre Janet (which she favours over Freud). Janet's theory is that through 'dissociation' (or splitting), traumatic memories are 'preserved in an abnormal state, set apart from ordinary consciousness' (Janet quoted in Herman 1992: 34). Herman points out that 'traumatic memories lack verbal narrative and context; rather, they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images […] and bodily

[58] Such as the contemporary attacks against the Roma in Europe and the prevalence of extreme anti-Roma hate speech in the Internet.

sensations' (Herman 1992: 38). This definition of trauma could be interpreted as a description of the state of being haunted.

These dual worlds are generated in *The Deathless Woman* as a series of uncanny tableaux vivants which on first appearance seem real or are linked to the real through editing. For instance, the Seeker crouches at the edge of Lake Grábler in Hungary – it's a gentle summer's day and water birds innocently swim on the surface of the lake. But when the camera plunges down to enter the space beneath the surface of the lake we are taken into a parallel world. We are pushed and pulled between the seeming banality of the lakeside on a summer's day and the fantastical suggestion that under the tranquil surface of the lake there might be another world where traces of the of the dead are still present. Their clothes are suspended under the water, their shapes remembering the form of the bodies that once inhabited them. These disembodied clothes have been conjured into being through the testimony of Judit Lang, the daughter and grand-daughter of the only two surviving women from the massacre of one hundred and eighteen Roma women and children at Várpalota in 1945. The worlds are doubled, existing simultaneously yet not visible to each other – the Seeker's ordinary world and the fantastic world that the ghosts of the past inhabit.

The Lazarean's dual worlds are not as simplistic as the past and the present. They also encompass the duality of contemporary worlds that simultaneously exist in the present where, in the instance of *The Deathless Woman* our reality conceals that which we choose not to see, such as the continuing atrocities that echo those of the Nazi era and the fear that still exists for those who are persecuted. Concentrationary art essentially draws our attention to the normalisation of the concentrationary universe – how it exists now, and not just in the past. This is what specifically separates concentrationary art from other forms of literature or film that depict the Holocaust solely as a past event.[59] Judit Lang continues: 'It haunts us to this day, because we did not process the past. The Second World War was not that long ago... I am afraid, of course, I am afraid of being a Roma in Hungary'.[60]

[59] For instance, *Schindler's List* (Spielberg, 1993).
[60] Judit Lang testimony in *The Deathless Woman* (2019), recorded in Budapest, August 2018.

2.3 Absence, gaps, secrecy and silence: bringing the blind spot into view

In his autobiographical essay film *Memory of Berlin* (1998), John Burgan gently introduces the presence of a ghost. Seeking out his birth mother thirty years after she had given him up for adoption he finds her suffering from schizophrenia. She tells him she is:

> Haunted by a ghost. A man who sometimes talked to her, sometimes persecuted her, but was always present. This ghostly shadow had a name, a character, and a history. Apart from being invisible, he was, in every other respect, real. (Burgan, 1998)

Burgan's mother is plagued by the ghostly presence of this shadowy man who arrived on a particular day in 1987 accompanied by her schizophrenia. Burgan describes a visit he had taken in his twenties to a melting glacier in Canada, whose slow retreat is marked by granite year-stones:

> So here, you can really see something that is impossible in real life – time flowing backwards. At the point in the ground representing February 1962 [Burgan's date of birth], I recognise something and instinctively take a photo. It's my first self-portrait taken on the 25th of July 1987. It will be years before I make the connection… on exactly the same day thousands of miles away in London the ghost enters my mother's life. (Burgan, 1998)

Fig. 4 Film still: John Burgan's self-portrait, *Memory of Berlin* (1998)

Burgan's filmic essay draws on trauma, time travel and the schisms of memory to present a documentary film which is an autobiographical ghost story that owes a legacy to Chris Marker's seminal science fiction film *La Jetée* (Marker, 1962). In *Memory of Berlin*, Burgan

makes a connection between his mother's guilt at giving him up for adoption, her mental illness, and the presence of her ghost. Yet, he chooses not to attribute his mother's ghost solely to trauma and its resulting psychological aberration. He very particularly draws out an uncanny relationship between all three of them (himself, his mother and her ghost) that is triggered by his presence in a specific place – the melting glacier that defies the linear movement of time. Burgan makes clear that it is the confluence of three things that allows the ghost to come into being: the shutter closing on his first self-portrait; the location of the portrait at the spot that marks his date of birth; and the configuration of the granite year-stones which suggest a reverse flow of time.

As narrator of the film, Burgan paraphrases a scene from Stanley Kubrick's horror film *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980) – 'some places are like people, some shine and they leave traces behind. People who shine can sense these traces. Sometimes they can see things that happened a long time ago' (Burgan, 1998). Like the Seeker, during the course of the film Burgan learns how to decipher the traces. These are not just the traces or residues of the past, but a leaking of trauma and affect across the membrane that separates worlds.

Burgan begins *Memory of Berlin* with a meditation on two baby photographs of himself – one taken before he was adopted and the other just after.

> Two photos, two mothers, two fathers, two of me. Whatever happened to that other baby, Matthew? Did he stop existing in April of that year? Or is he somewhere in the world, wandering like a ghost? (Burgan, 1998)

By posing this question, and in the contemplative essay that comes after, Burgan presents the ghost of his other (lost) life as a Cayrolean Lazarean wandering between two worlds. This is a ghost borne out of the trauma of loss and of the affects of shame and guilt. Burgan does not specifically refer to affect, or his mother's shame or guilt, but the transfer of affects such as shame and guilt is at the heart of Grace Cho's book *Haunting and the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy and the Forgotten War*, a text centred around the effects of intergenerational trauma within her own family (Cho, 2008). For Cho, haunting is a method for visualising and vocalising trauma when that trauma has been buried in secrecy and shame for generations. The idea of trauma being passed down through generations has been explored in detail by Marianne Hirsch whose term

'postmemory' derives from the study of the children of Holocaust survivors. Within these families, through the sharing of the images and stories of trauma, children begin to develop their own traumatic memories derived from their parents' experiences (Hirsch, 1998: 8). These proxy memories are formed through the projection and transmission of not just experience but affect too. In this way affects are not just behaving in unruly ways (such as leaking between worlds), but when experienced within the close proximity of, for instance, the family, they become sticky, transferring and attaching from one body to another (see Ahmed, 2004 and Brennan, 2004).[61]

But what of those families where the parents do not share their experiences of atrocity? These are the families, like Cho's, where it is the absence and silence surrounding the unspoken traumatic past of the parents that triggers a haunting. 'It is precisely within the gap in conscious knowledge about one's family history that secrets turn into phantoms' (Cho, 2008: 11). In this exploration, Cho draws on Abraham and Torok's seminal work on transgenerational haunting within the families of Holocaust survivors, *The Shell and the Kernel* (Abraham and Torok, 1994). These ghosts populate the lacuna left by both shame and secrecy within the family, and a postcolonial or post-conflict re-writing of history. They are walled up in the in-between space between Cayrol's two worlds, but like all secrets the impulse to reveal themselves ultimately forces the haunting to make itself known. This suppression of the past is not just a personal act, but also a political one.

> [Transgenerational haunting] enables us to understand how the falsification, ignorance, or disregard of the past – whether institutionalised by a totalitarian state…or practiced by parents and grandparents – is the breeding ground of the phantomatic return of shameful secrets. (Abraham and Torok, 1994: 169)

There is a pattern here. A pattern of absence, gaps, secrecy and silence. From John Burgan's thirty-year separation from his mother; to Grace Cho's mother's inability to vocalise her past as a comfort woman, and the rest of her family's inability to acknowledge it; to the lacuna in the history of the Holocaust that is the space where the

[61] See particularly, Ahmed (2004: 120) on the transmission of affect and emotion: 'the rippling effect of emotions; they move sideways (through "sticky" associations between signs, figures, and objects) as well as backward (repression always leaves its trace in the present—hence "what sticks" is also bound up with the "absent presence" of historicity).'

acknowledgement of the genocide of the Roma belongs. These empty spaces are the breeding ground for ghosts. They are the spaces that ghosts inhabit, sometimes wandering in this other world, sometimes rooted to the place that is linked to their trauma, but all the time waiting for a rupture to occur in the spatial or temporal order of things so they can make themselves known and tell their secrets.

It is not just the secrets of the victims or families that are shameful. Avery Gordon says, 'ghosts appear to us when our blind spot comes into view' (Gordon, 2008: xvi), by which she means, at that point when we notice the issues of the past (or present) that are being ignored, blocked, contained or hidden. The moment when the ghost reveals to us the trouble they represent and our ignorance to it, is the uncomfortable and shameful moment when the ghost is witness to our initial blindness (Mroz, 2016: 45). In this, it is our own shame and guilt that are brought into vision by the appearance of the ghost. Our shame that we had not noticed, or had chosen not to notice, something atrocious. The ghost forces us to recognise our implication in creating the blind spots of history and holds us responsible.

2.4 Memory activism: writing the political ghost

> Somewhere between the Actual and the Imaginary ghosts might enter without affrighting us. (Gordon, 2008: 138)[62]

In her novel *Beloved* (1987), Toni Morrison creates a fictional and revisionary postcolonial narrative which mediates the cultural and epistemological clashes of colonial history (Rody, 1995: 93). The text, although fictional, is the result of detailed and meticulous research into the history of slavery and it's traumatic legacy in America (Morrison and Díaz, 2013), a history that was largely documented by white writers and historians whose versions of these historical narratives were selective and forgetful (Morrison, 1995: 91). Morrison structures her research and writing to create a bridge between the actual world (drawn from historical accounts) and her own imaginary world (the fictionalisation of the life of Margaret Garner and the invention of the ghost of her murdered child). Here,

[62] Here Gordon is paraphrasing from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850.

again, we have the twin themes of trauma and dual worlds. In this case the parallel worlds are those of the actual and the imaginary; the living and the dead; and the experience of the slave owners and the slaves themselves. Morrison imagines Margaret Garner's murdered child as a ghost who, years later, returns from an unspecified other place to live with her family. The girl, named Beloved, is seemingly real, fully embodied and demanding attention – not just from her family in the novel, but from us as readers. Borne out of Morrison's imagination, her presence demands that we engage with the terrible actuality of slavery and its consequences.

Morrison's narrative is rooted in fact – in this case the true story of Margaret Garner (see Gordon, 2008: 151-160). Morrison brings her revenant into being with the specific purpose of creating a socio-historical text that addresses the imbalance of how slavery had been previously historicised. Her methods draw on a thick and subjective description of being in history that is the result of an investigation into the experience of slavery and race. In this, Morrison draws heavily on archive accounts of Garner's crime and other detailed historical research – the experience Morrison brings into being is not directly her own, but that of Garner and, by implication, generations of African-American slaves. Through this creative process, she re-claims the written experience of slavery. It is the novel's oscillation between historical data and imagination that allows the ghost to appear, and subsequently gives *Beloved* its political power. Avery Gordon positions ghosts as unquiet bodies who have suffered unjust and, most importantly, unresolved deaths. For Gordon, haunting is active, it presents us with 'something-to-be-done' (Gordon, 2008: xvi). By writing these ghosts into being, we can confer political power and even agency on them. Agency is essential if they are to do political work, but first we need to 'un-disappear' these bodies that have died traumatic and unmemorialised deaths and so restore their lost and denied citizenship. Their death needs to be negated. Conferring a name and a voice are the first steps, followed by the activation of our own moral agency and intention.

How do we imagine (and write) ghosts into being? Literary scholar and cultural historian Saidiya Hartman's postcolonial practice addresses the missing narratives of the women who did not survive the Atlantic slave trade. Hartman is alert to the absences and flaws of the archive which does not represent these women's experience or adequately

document their lives. This lack of representation in the archive is evidence (by omission) of the configuration of power that controls the formation of historiography (Said, 1978: 12). Created as a direct response to the suppression of the female slave-narrative, Hartman positions her work as 'critical fabulation' (Hartman, 2008: 11) – *fabulation* referring to the use of imagination to fill in the gaps and omissions of historical accounts, and *critical* referring to her position on the failures of the archive, of history and of society in general to accurately acknowledge the past. In this way, Hartman uses creative writing as a method to form counter histories. This blending of traditional historical literary method and radical, politicised sociological method leads to what Arjun Appadurai terms 'imagination as social practice', acknowledging the importance imagination plays in 'how we create our worlds, our identities and our sense of belonging' (Appadurai, 1996: 31). This is not pure imagination at play, but a form of critical intervention that is utilised to redress the imbalance of power and to right Western interpretations of history.

Morrison describes her own methodology in writing *Beloved* as 'literary archaeology' (Morrison, 1995: 192), in which she similarly draws on historical records and archives, but also on memory, postmemory and the interpretation of traces. In *Beloved*, Morrison introduces us to not only memory and postmemory, but also *rememory*. Sethe explains that even if something is gone, a picture of it can stay, both in a person's memory and in the world:

> Sethe: 'Even though it's all over, it's going to always be there waiting for you.'
> Denver: 'If it's still there waiting, that must mean that nothing ever dies.'
> Sethe: 'Nothing ever does.' (Morrison, 1987: 44)

Sethe's term *rememory* is centred on reactivating latent trauma from the past. This is not a trauma that remains positioned in the past, but one that still exists in a parallel world 'always there waiting for you'. The act of *rememory* is an activation, an 'imaginative act that makes it possible to realize one's latent abiding connection to the past' (Rody, 2001: 28). By embracing r*ememory* in this way and using it to conjure the ghost of a murdered child, Morrison is enabling herself and her (African-American) readers to enter the traumatic space of the experience of slavery (Bellamy, 2015: 12). And of course, to create and enter this space is a political act, as Morrison makes clear:

> The fully realized presence of the haunting is both a major incumbent of the narrative and sleight of hand. One of its purposes is to keep the reader preoccupied with the nature of the incredible spirit world while being supplied a controlled diet of the incredible political world. (Morrison, 1989: 32)

Morrison is clear that her imaginative act positions *Beloved* as a fiction. By contrast, I position *The Deathless Woman* as a documentary. Despite the levels of imagination at play in the writing of the voice of the Deathless Woman, what she sees and experiences are events that have actually happened, and whose epistemologically accurate detail is derived from witness accounts and historical documents. Cayrol's concentrationary art does not distinguish between the actual and the imaginary, or as Max Silverman puts it, history and writing (Silverman, 2019: para 9.41). To try and disentangle the fictional and the real is a flawed way of approaching *The Deathless Woman* – the two are intrinsically bound together and become an appropriate reflection of the irrationality and absolute strangeness of the events that the film depicts. By this I mean primarily the events of the Holocaust and the contemporary neo-Nazi attacks, but also the experiences of all the witnesses including myself.

If the final solution of the Holocaust can been seen as 'the central metaphor for sovereign and destructive violence… [and] sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die' (Mbembe, 2003: 11-12). And further, 'in a normalizing society, race or racism is the indispensable precondition that makes killing acceptable' (Foucault, 2004: 256). What happens when we metaphorically reverse a racially motivated death? Is returning sovereignty to the 'othered' and murdered individual the ultimate political act? The creation of a ghost has the potential to challenge the ultimate goal of the Nazi regime, namely to leave no witnesses. The ghost's agency turns a biopolitically 'missing' person into 'a crucial site at which sovereign power is challenged' (Edkins, 214: 131) – in this way, imagination is put to work to give agency and sovereignty back to a murdered individual.

To fold back to Gordon's quote from Hawthorne – that the ghost choses to enter 'without affrighting us' is critical in the identification of the political ghost. Beloved walks

barefoot out of the stream at the end of Sethe's garden and introduces herself. The Deathless Woman similarly introduces herself in the opening scene of the film and tells us not to be afraid. These are not the fearsome ghosts of the horror genre,[63] but intelligent and sensitive ghosts who have more important work to do than play with us or scare us. They have come with the specific intention of drawing our attention to social and political wrongs. The formation of the ghost in *The Deathless Woman* acknowledges, yet gently pushes against the negative Western archetype of 'the stranger and the other that are often associated with the threatening presence of the Gypsy' (Loshitzky, 2010: 10). Fear exists in this story, but it is not generated by the ghost, or directed towards the ghost. The ghost of the Deathless Woman is not a threatening presence, she shows us the fear that exists in people's lives. She is sensitive to these affects that are often concealed or not obvious to others.

2.5 Spectral cinema: invisible things are not necessarily not there

The Deathless Woman has agency. She has a voice and addresses us directly. Firstly, from inside her grave, and then from her position as a spectre who is not bound by gravity. As an audience we are not afforded the luxury of 'seeing' her. What we do see in the grave is a mess of hair, clothing and two arms that are clearly cast from wax. It is a ghostly suggestion of her. Later, when Zofia tells us how she witnessed the Deathless Woman's body being exhumed, we see another suggestion of her. This time she is represented by an androgynous human figure who is styled as a facsimile of the depiction of Christ in Caravaggio's painting *The Entombment of Christ* (1603). These teasing substitutions intentionally refuse to give the ghost a believable visual form. Rather than look at her as a spectacle, the audience is forced to look at what she is seeing as for the majority of her screen-time we are offered her point-of-view as our only visual contact with her.

This subjective perspective of the ghost is established through the employment of a variety of camera devices – the gimbal, the Steadicam, the drone. Each selected as part of a visual strategy to represent her spectral perspective. She needed to not be bound to earth, human-height or perspective, and she needed to move in a determined yet fluid

[63] For instance the terrifying child-ghosts of *Dark Water* (Nakata, 2002) or *The Shining* (Kubrick, 1980).

manner that appeared alive and inquisitive. This strategy of spectral spectatorship is established in an early sequence in the film where the Deathless Woman is high up in the sky above the lake looking down at the world, watching as the Seeker comes into view. Two basic approaches were devised – firstly from up high as she either looks down on the world, or moves between locations, and secondly a more voyeuristic, intimate perspective when she descends to get close to and forensically scrutinise her objects of interest (the Seeker, the library books, the burnt house). This visual strategy is underpinned by sound design that aurally reinforces the camera's presence as the ghost. There is the sound of a constant (but almost imperceptible) breath, diegetic sounds as she moves through space (the swishing of a body or the snapping of twigs), and a defined re-positioning of aural perspective as she moves up and away from the earth and the sounds of our world recede.

In her essay on Polish spectral cinema, Matilda Mroz describes the voyeuristic camera of *Aftermath* (Pasikowski, 2012), a film that presents the haunting of a Polish village as it's hidden traumatic history is brought to light years after the war.[64] She suggests that the spectre must be both material and immaterial and *Aftermath* achieves this through combined 'visual and aural techniques [which] draw on a long tradition of horror and thriller films to suggest something, which appears to be weighty enough to draw breath and snap twigs, but which is also invisible' (Mroz, 2016: 46). In both films, although the ghosts remain 'unseen', sound and image are used to give material presence to these spectres of the Holocaust. The films confer absolute presence to their ghosts yet deny us their image. This is what Gordon terms 'visible invisibility' (Gordon, 2008: 16) and in this she is drawing on Toni Morrison's argument that 'invisible things are not necessarily not there' (Morrison, 1989: 136).

As Morrison makes her ghost visible by writing her, Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul employs a variety of visual and cinematic methods to visualise his ghosts. From the disembodied, subjective point-of-view in *Letter to Uncle Boonmee* (Weerasethakul, 2009) to the semi-transparent apparition of the ghost of Huay and the

[64] *Aftermath* is set in the fictional village of Gurówka but is based on the Jedwabne massacre where 340 Jewish villagers were murdered by their Polish neighbours in a burning barn in 1941.

animalistic transformation of her son into a forest spirit in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Weerasethakul, 2010), Weerasethakul's ghosts occupy the liminal space between visibility and invisibility. These two films are both part of Weerasethakul's wider *Primitive* project which encompasses films and installations and came into being after several months' research in Nabua, a village in North-Eastern Thailand. Weerasethakul's fictional and political films come out of his engagement with this place which has witnessed Thailand's traumatic history of oppression yet shows no visible trace of its violent past. The films do not attempt to re-stage or re-construct historical events, rather Weerasethakul draws on the experience of place to attend to the unseen, such as traumatic memories, ghosts and spirits, citing the Buddhist methodology of using 'the body as an apparatus to measure things' (Peranson et al., 2010) – a method that not only challenges Eurocentric notions of knowledge formation, but also bears the characteristics of phenomenology. For Weerasethakul, ghosts are a way to build emotional sensitivity into his work (Mazur, 2011) and are presented as an undeniable part of Thai culture, a culture that 'believes in invisible beings' (Jablonski, 2012) whilst simultaneously doing socio-political work, albeit in a subtle and coded manner, to reflect the repressive political situation in Thailand.

When artists and filmmakers are confronted with subjects or events that lack visibility, this can lead to strategies that bring the invisible to the fore as a way of subverting and undermining established hierarchies of knowledge production. This is most evident in the work of postcolonial filmmakers, whose work often centres on acknowledging the fact that 'the most important things that happened are invisible and unvisualizable' (Marks, 2000: 57). The literary theorist Rosemary Jackson challenges the established Western dominance of visibility in relation to understanding, knowledge and truth in her exploration of the fantastic:

> In a culture which equates the 'real' with the 'visible' and gives the eye dominance over other sense organs, the un-real is that which is in-visible. That which is not seen, or which threatens to be un-seeable, can only have subversive function in relation to an epistemological and metaphysical system which makes 'I see' synonymous with 'I understand'. (Jackson, 2002: 54)

In *Our Song to War* (2018), Columbian filmmaker Juanita Onzaga has created a short experimental documentary that explores the traumatic traces of the 2002 FARC massacre in Bojayá where one hundred and nineteen villagers and paramilitaries were killed. The film starts with a disembodied camera which visually echoes the floating camera of *Letter to Uncle Boonmee* as it moves in a ghostly manner through the air accompanied by a voice-over that suggests the point-of-view of a spirit. The world is seen through reflections in the water while a drone-like soundtrack suggests we are in an otherworldly environment. The narration, written in the first-person-plural reveals itself to be the collective voice of those killed in the massacre. The river water talks to the victims – even the water is a witness to this crime and has a voice. The film interweaves this spectral presence with vérité encounters with villagers who live with the recent memory of the massacre. Despite fearing the spirits of the dead, the villagers call for them to return and have merged the presence of the spirits with their existing religious and folk beliefs. The spirits of Bojayá are just like Cayrol's Lazarean, whose hero is unnamed, 'anonymous, reduced to his voice [and] his gaze' (Barthes, 1989: 190). With the enforced positioning of the camera as the spirits' point-of-view we are always travelling *as* these spectres, they are never in front of us, never available for our scrutiny. In *The Deathless Woman* this trope is extended to reflect Barthes' essay on *Cayrol and Erasure* by positioning the Deathless Woman's voice solely in the side and rear speakers of the cinema. The voices of the mortal witnesses (including the Seeker) are positioned using only the front centre speakers – they appear both visually and aurally right in front of us, their voice and image linked on the screen, unlike the Deathless Woman who is never in front of us, but always around us (Barthes, 1989: 182).[65] We cannot locate her or scrutinise her, it is her that is scrutinising us and this is an intentionally uncomfortable position for the audience.

2.6 Conclusion

Gordon flags 'a concern for justice' as the reason why we would offer a ghost 'hospitable memory' (Gordon, 2008: 64). It is not the ghost who is seeking justice (as in the ghosts of popular horror films who return to denounce or punish their perpetrators), but it is our

[65] This strategy is achieved by utilising 5.1 surround sound and is only present when the film is viewed in a cinema, not through viewing online or on a monitor, where the soundtrack will be in stereo.

concern for justice on their behalf that causes us to pay attention to the ghost and allow the ghost a forum in politicised cultural outputs. In this way, Gordon positions the ghost as 'not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure'. She is clear that investigating the ghost and considering it as empirical evidence can lead to 'that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life' (Gordon, 2008: 8).

Toni Morrison warns us that once we have listened (hospitably) to the ghost, it needs to be exorcised otherwise it will take us, the living, back to the past (Gordon, 2008: 182). But of course, we cannot return to the past, and I would like to propose that the political ghosts of Morrison's novel and films such as *The Deathless Woman*, *Our Song to War* and *Aftermath* are not concerned with taking us back. Rather, it is the ghosts that come forward to us, bringing the past with them. These ghosts (like all ghosts) are not bound by time, they can exist in the past, present and future. They bring the past to us to warn us about the crisis of the present and the future crisis to come. In this way, the ghost is enacting the futural past. 'The unsettling of spatiotemporal boundaries … serves as evidence not only of psychological traumatization but of the failure of ordinary society to respond to the message borne by survivors and of post-war history to alter its course accordingly' (Rothberg, 2000: 165). This is the political intention of the ghost.

It is telling that we might need to rely on a ghost with political intention to address the gaps in history that have been generated by the historiographer's selective and factually-led approach to the strictures of writing historical narrative. There is a perspective within postcolonial studies that presents a rich discussion on the material presence and agency of spirits and deities and how these forms have been excluded from histories which have been written from a Western perspective. It is normative for historians to 'grant the supernatural a place in somebody's belief system or ritual practices, but to ascribe to it any real agency in historical events will be to go against the rules of evidence that gives historical discourse procedures for settling disputes about the past' (Chakrabarty, 2000: 104). Within such discourse, ghosts are generally placed into the category of the 'Unbelieved' (Clossey et al., 2016). In the works referenced in this chapter, it is the ghost, and other experiential and creative strategies that have the potential to address the silencing of subaltern stories and the lack of representation of the histories of marginalised people. And, of course, the reason we might want to do this is to prevent

those histories from repeating themselves now or in the future. In creating these ghosts and imagining their voices that narrate their own and wider histories, this strategy has 'flouted the realist illusion customary in the writing of history, and produced a counter-history at the intersection of the fictive and the historical' (Hartman, 2008: 12).

Chapter 3: History, Imagination and the Fantastic

> I have taken to passing through the archives. It's a compulsion. So many words. So much power. But the real knowledge is not here. These are grand buildings, but they are full of dust… archives of the forgotten. I know it is no accident that my history is not here.[66]

3.1 Introduction

If ghosts and 'unreliable' witnesses are capable of breaking the frame of Holocaust testimony and thus challenging existing historical narratives, what filmic strategies could be developed to further disrupt the historian's rule of evidence and its corollary, the dominance of the indexical in documentary practice? Up to this point in my research, I had amassed a collection of filmed testimonies, field recordings of sites of atrocity and the beginnings of a screenplay written in the voice of a ghost. This material constituted a conflation of the indexical (testimony and field recordings) and the fantastical (the ghost's narration). The tension between the two seemingly opposing forms was of interest, particularly when considering how to evoke the traumatic experience of the witnesses and the wider historical trauma of atrocity. I had amassed all the archival and indexical material that was available to me yet did not feel that I had the right material to construct (or reconstruct) this complex story with its entanglement of trauma, absence, mis-told histories, violence and prejudice. What filmic strategies could be developed to expand this research material into a film that could reflect the traumatic nature of the historical xenophobia against the Roma whilst challenging the realist illusions dominant in historiography, and in doing so, form its own counter-history?

When considering the relationship between the representation of trauma and history, Ernst van Alphen has been highly critical of historiography's emphasis on factual reconstruction. For van Alphen, the truth-claim of a historiography that smooths out the gaps and inconsistencies of history is ineffective when our responsibility should be focused on 'the working through of the traumatic intrusion and the foregrounding of the cracks and tears that are concealed by the coherence of the stories being told' (van Alphen, 1998: 37). He reflects that artists might succeed where historiography has failed

[66] Excerpt from the Deathless Woman's narration, *The Deathless Woman* (2019). English translation.

to evoke the experience of some of history's traumatic and catastrophic events. William Guynn adds: 'to narrate the past, which is what historians do, is to shift from being in the world to giving an account of the world, to shift from a position inside physical/mental life to a position outside and above it' (Guynn, 2016: 5). These positions present a critical reckoning of the limitations of the historian versus the capacity of the artist (or filmmaker) to foreground experience, emotion and subjectivity over scientific objectivity.

There is, however, no singular tradition of historiography. There are a number of postmodern history theorists who challenge the truth-claim of history and acknowledge the levels of selection and construction that are woven into historiography (for instance, Collingwood, 1994; LaCapra, 1987; White, 1973). By contrast, positivist historians such as Langlois and Seignobos argue that amassing empirical documents (i.e. archiving) carries more importance for the historian than an investigation into what the documents might actually mean (see Schaefer and Rhodes, 2012: 3). Their positivism does not accept there is a role for either subjectivity or imagination. At the other end of the scale lays the Bergsonian historical philosophy where the rule of *s'installer dans le mouvement* (to settle in the movement) takes an approach which foregrounds imagination and subjectivity to focus on feeling history as 'something that goes on within himself' (see Collingwood, 1994: 189). It is Bergson's approach emphasising the subjective and sensory that comes closest to my own strategy in developing *The Deathless Woman* and the strategies adopted by a number of other experimental documentary filmmakers.[67]

A necessary shift of emphasis from historical authenticity to subjectivity and experience is a point that is also emphasised by Cathy Caruth in her seminal text *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Caruth, 1995). Raising the point that communicating trauma needs to move beyond issues of veracity, she states that 'trauma does not simply serve as a record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned' (1995: 151). Through this, Caruth draws attention to the paradox of evoking historical trauma when the original event might not have been accurately experienced (or felt) in the first place and goes on to state that the complexities of trauma 'defy simple comprehension' and demand more than 'brutal facts' (Caruth, 1995: 153).

[67] Such as Rea Tajiri, Rithy Panh, Sarah Turner.

Starting in the latter part of the Twentieth Century we can see a general shift of thinking within trauma studies that is not only more tolerant of emotion, experience and imagination as valid modes of traumatic representation, but might actually prioritise these qualities over 'authenticity'. This potentially more open approach to the problematics and challenges of the representation of historical trauma and atrocity recognised the need for new strategies to address the complexities of comprehension. For instance, James Young, writing about post-Holocaust literature, draws attention to a shift away from the 'rhetoric of fact' towards works that are structured to specifically engage 'the emotional experience' of the reader (Young 1988: 62).

This opening up of interpretation and understanding has been reflected in historical studies, particularly through the critically important post-war development of socially-inclusive historical practice such as 'history from below' (Thompson, 1966: 279). This practice that centres on the inclusion of previously unheard minority voices in historiography, primarily through the recording of oral histories (Chakrabarty, 1998: 15) and the recognition of the history-telling capabilities of ordinary people has had a profound effect on how we learn about past events such as the Holocaust. However, it is perplexing that within this, the Roma experience during the Holocaust continues to be marginalised and there has never been an international project to collect oral material from Roma witnesses or survivors (About and Abakunova, 2016: 9). The postcolonial theorist Trouillot points out that the construction of historiographical narratives 'involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production' (Trouillot, 1995: 6).

Roma are vocal in their belief that their voices are not heard when they relate the marginalisation of their experience during the Holocaust to the ongoing xenophobic persecution many experience in Europe today – 'we keep saying, in vain: these are not simply instances of racism and prejudice, but they have the same roots as Nazism – racial superiority, not considering us as humans, taking away our human face. And, this is precisely the process that makes it possible for them to [continue to] kill us' (Romedia Foundation, 2020). This sentiment comes from Roma academic and historian Agnès Daróczi who was instrumental in collecting and collating a comprehensive collection of oral history relating to the Roma Holocaust in Hungary (Bársony and Daróczi, 2004). Yet

the narratives Daróczi collated and published remain largely unincorporated in wider and comparative historical discourse.

Further to this, Zofia's testimony – like the testimony of the woman who survived the uprising at Auschwitz – has been discounted by a local historian due to confusion about dates and to her seemingly outlandish suggestion that the body of the Roma matriarch had not decomposed after being buried for approximately sixteen years.[68] In regard to the supernatural, historian Hayden White is clear about the parameters of acceptable testimonial evidence that should be discounted or deemed inadmissible evidence by a historian, such as the 'stuff of religious belief and ritual: [i.e.] miracles, magical events, godly events.' (White, 1987: 66). Chakrabarty also demands that any account of the past that can be 'absorbed into, and thus made to enrich the mainstream of historical discourse' must 'allow for a rationally-defensible point of view or position from which to tell the story' (Chakrabarty, 1998: 16) and goes further to state that to ascribe the supernatural any real agency in historical events goes against the [historical] rule of evidence (Chakrabarty, 2000: 104).

It is here that the divergence between trauma studies and history studies is at its widest. The prime characteristics of the experience of traumatic memory – namely mental confusion, dissociation and vivid sensations – can lead to what might be perceived as faulty or flawed recall, yet rather than undermining the perceived authenticity and veracity of a memory, these characteristics are 'actually a feature of traumatic memory itself' (Walker, 2003: 106). This is the *traumatic paradox* (Walker, 1997: 822). This term is Walker's, but comes out of her reading of Elizabeth Waites' *Trauma and Survival* (Waites, 1993), a text which places dissociation as a major factor in traumatic memory. Walker posits that 'mistakes and amnesiac elements are actually a feature of traumatic memory itself' (Walker 2003: 106), yet paradoxically it is these mistakes and amnesiac elements that can undermine the perceived authenticity and veracity of a memory, and in effect, this can lead to gaps and omissions in historiography. We can see evidence of this in Dori Laub's example of the camp survivor who mis-remembers the number of chimneys

[68] Personal communication regarding the reliability of Zofia's testimony from Adam Bartosz, the then Director of the Tarnów Reginal Museum and founder of the Tabor. See page 48 for an outline of the relationship between the Museum and the site in Bielcza.

blown up in Auschwitz (Laub 1992: 59). Conscious of the traumatic paradox, I have not discounted fantastic testimony such as Zofia's, not have I questioned the veracity of other witness testimony. For instance, one of the starting points for my research was an archive testimonial account of the massacre at Várpalota recorded in 1975 (Bársony and Daróczi, 2004) that was contradicted by more recent testimony (Harmat, 2015) and by the testimony of the granddaughter of one of the survivors whom I interviewed in 2018. A perfect storm of conflicting 'facts' unified by a surety that a massacre had taken place at Lake Grábler in Várpalota in 1945.

Walker draws on the traumatic paradox to define *trauma cinema*, a sub-genre of experimental documentary films that 'adopt catastrophe as their subject and formations of trauma as their aesthetic' (Walker, 2005: XIX). These are films that actively work against journalistic modes of documentary filmmaking to reflect the characteristics of trauma in their style and structure. They incorporate fictional and autobiographical narratives, fragmented styles and even fantasy constructions with the intention of creating new forms of historical understanding (Walker, 2005: 21). A corollary to Walker's trauma cinema is the *intercultural cinema* of Laura U. Marks, a sub-genre that is typified by experimental and multi-sensory hybrid works that are concerned with making marginalised or forgotten histories visible (Marks, 2000). Although the works Marks references in *The Skin of the Film* address traumatic pasts and could also be classified as trauma cinema – for instance Rea Tajiri's *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (1991), and Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989) – she does not approach these works through the lens of trauma theory, but uses Deleuze's *Cinema II, The Time-Image* (Deleuze, 1985) as a theoretical framework which places her emphasis on embodiment and the senses.

For Michael Rothberg, representing past atrocity in contemporary culture demands an engagement with both the everyday and the extreme. His term *traumatic realism* reflects a complex relationship between realism and creativity (or imagination) resulting in works of art, literature or film that '*point to* the real instead of claiming *to be* real' (Rothberg, 2000: 104) – an idea that raises questions about the role of the index. Walker's term *trauma cinema* and Rothberg's *traumatic realism* (Walker, 2005; Rothberg, 2000), like Hartman's *critical fabulation* (Hartman, 2008: 11) can be applied to cultural works, such as

History and Memory, The Deathless Woman and Rithy Panh's *The Missing Picture* (2013), that have their basis in fact yet employ alternative strategies to move beyond the journalistic constraints of authenticity and the realist modes of traditional forms of documentary to present a more expanded approach to the real and the representation of the traumatic past. Similarly van Alphen presents the notion of artist as historian, a description that is quantified by the artist's practice of 'referring to a factual reality' (van Alphen, 1997: 99). As in *The Deathless Woman*, such works might start with empirical and fact-led research but are not ultimately bound by the historian's rule of evidence. Van Alphen is critical of traditional historiography's treatment of past atrocity. His position that 'history brings with it more responsibilities than only knowing and remembering the facts' (1997: 37) suggests that writing the history of trauma might require different strategies that go beyond the positivist or empirical, or even the collection of oral histories. Walker draws on Hayden White's analysis of Holocaust historiography to determine that when it comes to the representation of traumatic events, it is not that events themselves that are unrepresentable, 'but they are unrepresentable *in the realist mode*' (Walker, 2005: 21).[69]

How can we put these ideas around expanding how we represent trauma and what we consider to be real into practice? Many artist-filmmakers searching for strategies to represent the memory of traumatic events have drawn on the defining characteristics of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) with its emphasis on repetition and possession. PTSD is defined by Caruth as a condition where 'the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who has lived through them' (Caruth, 1995: 151). Examples of such works are Sarah Turner's *Perestroika* (2010), a film which restages a train journey on the Trans-Siberian Express first taken in the company of a friend who has since died. Turner's essay film cuts back and forth between images taken twenty years apart and at times the journey appears to literally loop and repeat. Similarly Rea Tajiri's short film *History and Memory* (1991) uses devices such as the

[69] See Hayden White, *Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth* (1992: 51-52). White proposes that modernism anticipated 'the incapacity of our sciences to explain, let alone control or contain' twentieth century atrocities such as the Holocaust. He suggests that rather than abandon our efforts to represent the Holocaust realistically, we need to revise 'our notion of what constitutes realistic representation […] to take account of experiences [such as the Holocaust] for which older modes of representation have proven inadequate.'

black screen and the recurring (re-enacted) image of Tajiri's mother filling a water canteen to address her family's traumatic but inaccessible memory of internment in the USA during WWII. Shona Illingworth's *216 Westbound* (2014) made in association with neuropsychologist Martin Conway, is a looped installation about the flawed memory of John Tulloch as he attempts to remember his experience of the 7/7 bombings. These are films that have a commonality in their repetitious construction and elliptical approach to memory, being specifically structured to mimic the psychological characteristics of PTSD.

For Walker, trauma cinema is a method for 'disremembering' the traumatic past (Walker, 2005: 17), but what of those traumatic pasts that need to be remembered rather than disremembered? And how might a filmmaker approach the representation of traumatic events and histories that do not stem from a specific individual's experience of trauma and their resulting mnemonic difficulties? Works that might rather focus on representing a wider societal amnesia of uncomfortable or undocumented histories? Of traumatic pasts returning to disrupt the present.

This is where fantasy, or more accurately, the literary and cinematic style of the fantastic can be useful. The term fantasy derives from the Greek 'phantasia', literally 'to make visible'. Laplanche, drawing on Freud, summarises the psychoanalytical definition of fantasy as an 'imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfilment of a wish (in the last analysis, an unconscious wish) in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser extent by defensive processes' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988: 314). Freud identifies three modes of fantasy: conscious phantasies, namely daydreams or fictions; unconscious phantasies which are uncovered in analysis; and pre-conscious, repressed primal phantasies (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988: 316). The psychologist Susan Isaacs has proposed that the spelling 'fantasy' should denote 'conscious daydreams, fictions and so on' as opposed to the 'phantasy' spelling which should refer to 'unconscious mental processes, which may or may not become conscious' (i.e. those of primary interest to psychoanalysts) (Isaacs, 1948). The unconscious phantasy is most frequently linked to trauma – this is fantasy as an escape (or displacement) from traumatic reality, but similarly the idea of conscious fantasy (in relation to film) is useful and can allow the term fantasy to relate to pure imagination or fictions which are closer to the literary fantastic as defined by Todorov (1975).

As a genre of literature or film, the fantastic encompasses a loose collection of fictional forms such as the ghost story, the fairy tale and other fantasy-driven narratives. But more specifically, Todorov defines the fantastic as an event which cannot be explained rationally, existing at the point of hesitation between the uncanny and the supernatural (Todorov, 1975: 25), falling between what can be rationally explained and what cannot. For Rosemary Jackson the fantastic originated as a genre that 'interrogated authoritative truths and replaced them with something less certain' (Jackson, 2002: 15). Jackson takes Todorov's broad definition and repositions the fantastic as being rooted in the critique of social and political norms, focusing on its subversive function and ability to reveal that which is 'unsaid or unseen' in society (Jackson, 2002: 4). For Mikhail Bakhtin, 'the fantastic serves […] not in the positive *embodiment* of the truth, but in the search after the truth, its provocation and, most importantly, its *testing*' (1973: 94). Critically, Todorov, Bakhtin and Jackson consistently refer to fantasy's provocative and symbiotic relationship to the real, or to truth, and their interpretations can lead us to consider the fantastic as a genre that can be employed to challenge authoritative or positivist approaches to knowledge construction.

It is this subversive potential and the provocative relationship to truth that could make the fantastic a powerful tool in the representation of difficult, under-represented, marginalised or traumatic histories. A number of non-European artists have created fictional and documentary works that address trauma by drawing on the fantastic as a strategy to reflect psychological states and/or challenge dominant histories. For example, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), a fictional film that links the materialisation of ghosts to the traumatic history of Thailand; *Our Song to War* (2018), Juanita Onzaga's experimental documentary which evokes the spirits of villagers killed in a violent attack in a Columbian village; Rithy Panh's *The Missing Picture* (2013) in which he re-enacts in miniature tableaux his family's experience of genocide under the Khmer Rouge; and to a lesser extent, Rea Tajiri's *History and Memory* (1991) which opens with the description of a scene as witnessed by the spirit of her dead grandfather.

What might happen if the fantastic is coupled with strategies that challenge the dominance of the indexical within documentary practice and thus disrupt the historian's

rule of evidence? Traditionally a 'fundamental expectation of the documentary [was] that its sounds and images bear an indexical relation to the historical world' (Nichols, 1991: 27), with the indexical being most commonly defined as a trace of an object that leaves it's imprint on the surface of film (Bazin, 1960: 8) – or to update this notion, in the digital encoding of video. But Michael Rothberg proposes that an understanding of trauma requires a different approach to the index – rather than creating 'an awareness [or proof] of having-been-there' (Barthes, 1977: 44), an understanding of trauma requires an acknowledgement of absence rather than presence (Rothberg, 2000: 104). Perhaps a counter-approach to the index could not only more accurately represent trauma, but also further destabilise notions of truth and authenticity, leading us to question who was where and when and to question what is real or not real. How might a documentary film incorporate the fantastic and eschew traditional notions of the index as strategies for creating counter-histories through re-imagining evidence, bodies and environments within the context of historical trauma?

3.2 Trauma cinema: challenging the truth-claim of history

> I began searching for a history. My own history. Because I had known all along that the stories I had heard were not true, and parts had been left out. I remember having this feeling growing up that I was haunted by something. That I was living within a family full of ghosts. (Tajiri, 1991)

Rea Tajiri's experimental film *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (1991) explores her Japanese American family's internment in the USA after the Pearl Harbor attack. In it she probes her mother's involuntary amnesia of the internment and uses experimental strategies to build a documentary that reconstructs a version of the past from fragments of borrowed memories. Tajiri interweaves her own essay-style narration, testimony from her (mostly unseen) family members, archive footage of the camp and archive clips of newsreel and Hollywood movies. In the film, Tajiri says of her mother who was a young woman in 1942: 'she tells the story of what she does not remember', and despite Tajiri's probing, her mother is never forthcoming about these lost years. Rather, Tajiri starts to construct her own memories and as the film progresses she challenges the way that American society has controlled the history of the internments. It is not just Tajiri's

mother who has amnesia – amnesia has been built into the controlled historicisation of post-Pearl Harbor internment in the USA.

Tajiri's personal film presents a highly subjective and fragmentary explication of history constructed through re-enactment and sensory re-imaginings that evoke her family's experience. In her study of trauma cinema and the complexities of historicising traumatic events, Janet Walker suggests that creative works that develop strategies such as poetry, fantasy, subjectivity or imagination to reflect the traumatic state might actually be more accurate than works that are confined by the modernist emphasis on realism and authenticity. Walker proposes that such works should not be seen as separate from reality, nor as an invalid form of historical representation (Walker, 2005: 22). Bringing together autobiography, fantasy and re-enactment within a structure that embraces the fragmentary and elliptical, Tajiri's film exemplifies trauma cinema and her filmic strategies allow us to gain access to her family's supressed traumatic history (and by default the shared traumatic history of over 100,000 other Japanese Americans who were interned). As the film progresses, Tajiri's thesis evolves and unfolds to reveal a critique of the cultural and societal representation of the internment of Japanese Americans, yet her personal relationship to the events (that she herself did not live through) remains stuck in a loop of recurring images. Tajiri's recurring (inherited) memory of her mother filling a canteen of water, her nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and her inability to forget even though her mother has effectively 'forgotten' or blocked her own memories are presented as elliptical and fragmentary, and in this way, the structure of *History and Memory* comes to reflect the qualities of both trauma cinema and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

> The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its forgetting that it is first experienced at all. […] For history to be the history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs. (Caruth, 1991: 187)

Here, Cathy Caruth is stating that the very experience of living through a traumatic event leads to the impossibility of logical memory function. As we have seen, the relationship between trauma, experience and fact is often complex and paradoxical. And if the

original event has not been fully perceived at the time, then how can history, a discipline that insists on authenticity and the rule of evidence, accurately reflect the traumatic experience? More specifically, Caruth alerts us to the need for a more nuanced approach to the representation of traumatic experience – one that moves beyond singular or fact-driven narratives (Caruth, 1995: 153). For Caruth, it is not so much about proving or disproving authenticity, the aim is to understand the traumatic experience and through that 'fully own' and 'gain access to traumatic history' (1995: 151). To propose the idea of 'gaining access' is a concept that reflects the important role subjectivity and experience might play in public and societal engagement with historic trauma. Through her filmic and sensory reconstructions, Tajiri is re-claiming ownership of her family's lost and traumatic history.

It is not just her mother's missing memory that Tajiri challenges in the film, but also the revision of the history of internment in American history. Text taken from a 1990 New York Times article appears on a black screen. In it, a United States Assemblyman 'seeks to have children taught that Japanese Americans were not interned in "concentration camps", but rather held in relocation centres justified by military necessity' (Tajiri, 1991).[70] Tajiri widens the debate by intercutting archive clips from Hollywood movies – patriotic and jingoistic films such as *Yankie Doodle Dandy* (Curtis, 1942) and *From Here to Eternity* (Zinneman, 1953) – with newsreel footage of the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and thus drawing our attention to the way this event has been represented in American culture and the way collective memory has been constructed and controlled through both news and cultural media. In this way, Tajiri moves the debate from the personal experience of her family to encompass wider socio-political prejudice and historical revisionism.

Although it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking about history as being objective and solely defined and bound by facts, one of the key roles of historiography is in narrativising history and this requires a certain amount of subjectivity and imagination. The historian R. G. Collingwood suggests that imagination, when applied by the

[70] This chilling revision of history was recently echoed in contemporary US television news when a Fox News anchor compared migrant child detention centres to 'summer camps' (Ingraham, 2018) rather than the internment camps they actually are (Blow, 2019).

historian, can make the past tangible, at least in our own imaginations (Collingwood, 1994). This is, of course, of prime importance when the past is beyond our reach because it is outside of our lived experience (and thus, outside of our memory). There is an anecdote that Barthes tells in *Camera Lucida* about sorting through photographs of his mother after her death (Barthes, 1981: 65). Reflecting on history through his own personal experience, he implies that in order to see history, we need objectivity and distance – to be separate from it. But I'd suggest that in order to *feel it*, to *understand it*, we have to be included in it. Drawn into it. Experience it. It needs subjectivity.

> I don't know where this came from, but I've always had this fragment. This picture in my mind. My mother is standing at a faucet and its really hot outside and she's filling this canteen, and the water is really cold, and it feels really good and the sun is just so hot, its beating down, and there's this dust that gets in everywhere, and they're always sweeping the floors. (Tajiri, 1991)

Fig. 5 Film still: *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (Tajiri, 1991)

In *History and Memory*, Rea Tajiri understands the need for the audience to connect with her mother's experience in a sensory way. In this description of her own transgenerational memory Tajiri describes an image she has in her head, although this is an image she could not possibly have ever seen. The description is vivid and full of sensory references to the weather, water and environment and how they feel. Through this description and the accompanying short fragments of reconstructed image, we are brought into the concentration camp and invited to brush the dust from our eyes and skin, feel the heat of the sun beating down on us and the cool water running over our hands. This text places us there alongside Tajiri's mother and there is similarly something sensory and alluring in the image (filmed on the tactile and indexical format of 16mm

film) forming a tactile transmission of knowledge (Marks, 2000: 118). By cutting between variations of this action, a black screen, and scrolling text, Tajiri is focussing our attention on this one gesture, and by returning to it throughout the film she offers us repeated opportunities to connect with the sensory experience of being in the camp whilst we reassess our understanding of this action through her re-working of the historical meaning of the 1942 internment programme.

As a reconstruction, Tajiri's image has no indexical link to the actual event or the actual concentration camp. We are invited to look at and imagine touching the canteen of water and feel the heat of the sun and the cool of the water, yet we are under no illusion that this image is 'real'. Tajiri is presenting us with the 'impression of authenticity' (Nichols, 1991: 150) whilst simultaneously telling us that this image is from her own memory and causing us to question whether that makes the image any less valid in terms of evidence of her family's experience.

> The high valuation of the practices and craft of the historian above those of the artist or literary writer has enormous ramifications for those whose creative work deals with [past atrocity and trauma]. Documentary realism has become the mode of representation that novelists and artists must adopt if they are to persuade their audience of their moral integrity – that is, of their reliance on cognitive intentions and their rejection of aesthetic considerations. (van Alphen, 1997: 20)

If, as van Alphen suggests, a hierarchical truth-chain exists based on a judgement of ethics – and this hierarchy takes us from historian to documentary filmmaker (who follows the journalistic or realist school) to artist (or experimental filmmaker) – the artist's position at the bottom of this hierarchy can be attributed to their foregrounding of imagination over realism. The work of the artist is rarely viewed with the authoritative importance of the historian, but Tajiri's work shows that when evoking traumatic pasts, the strategies of the artist which fall into the category of trauma cinema and incorporate imagination, subjectivity, reflexivity, affective intentionality and experimental approaches to narrative do have the potential to present works that possess moral integrity and authority. Insistence on either historical or documentary authenticity is potentially problematic from the perspective of traumatic histories as it places emphasis on the journalistic notions of fidelity and accountability, which are at odds with the paradoxical

nature of traumatic memory. When Walker talks of the 'fluid boundaries' between memory, history and fantasy (Walker, 2003: 114), this is a reflection of a more subjective and less authenticity-led approach to interpreting traumatic histories. The subjectivity of the artist-historian can exceed the limitations of the historiographer and this is might be particularly necessary in the instance of past events that traditional approaches to historiography have been unable, or unwilling, to represent.

3.3 The realm of the fantastic: extending the unthinkable

Rea Tajiri opens her film with scrolling text on a black background – she denies us an image, but the text describes what we should be seeing. It is the point of view of the spirit of her dead grandfather as he looks down on her parents arguing in 1961 about Tajiri's recurrent nightmares which are surely the result of her intergenerational trauma stemming from the family's internment sixteen years before she was born. In this way Tajiri opens her documentary with the fantastic notion of a ghost as witness, and in doing so she initially positions the film as a fabulation, an idea that dissipates as the film progresses and we begin to piece together the alternative version of the truth that Tajiri presents.

If we take the fantastic out of the genre of fiction and reposition it in relation to documentary and history, perhaps it can be utilised it as a strategy that has the capacity to replace established narratives with alternative, hesitant and uncertain narratives. These new fantastic narratives can function to foreground the difficulties of rational explanation of, for instance, trauma and atrocity. The traditional qualities of historiography such as neatness, linearity and authority become replaced by the qualities of the fantastic (and of trauma) such as uncertainty, critique and a testing of the truth (Jackson, 2002: 15; Todorov, 1975: 25; Bakhtin, 1973: 94). The relationship with the real is critical in the re-appropriation of the fantastic as a strategy for documentary film. Jackson proposes that the fantastic feeds off reality, inverting it, showing us the flip-side of it, and ultimately operating as a strategy to subvert authoritative ideas of what is real or truthful (Jackson, 2002: 20). What is particularly important about the fantastic is that it is not pure fiction, but that it relies on a relationship to reality.

> Because one response to trauma is fantasy, the grievances of the traumatized cannot be redressed as long as fantasy is held to mean the absence of truth. This is the *traumatic paradox*. (Walker, 1997: 822)

In this sense, we should perhaps view fantasy not as an escape from the truth, but as a different type of truth. It is not the escape from reality or wish fulfilment that Freud posits (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988: 314), but an active push against rationality and positivism as dominant modes of understanding the world. Jackson's interpretation of Todorov accentuates this subversive political potential of the fantastic, suggesting that the truth might lie in a space somewhere in between the real and the imaginary (Jackson, 2002: 37), an idea that is reflected in the Cambodian filmmaker Rithy Panh's autobiographical documentary *The Missing Picture* (Panh, 2013) with its strategy of pulling us constantly back and forth between his fantastical reimagining of his childhood and the archive documents of the Khmer Rouge.

Panh struggled for years to find a way to translate the complexities of his childhood experience of the Cambodian Genocide onto the screen. He had two strands of empirical evidence: a collection of archive propaganda films produced by the Khmer Rouge, and his own memories. Neither of these sources provided what he terms *the missing picture*, by which he means a single image that might prove that events happened as he remembered them (Panh, 2013). The film's narrator tells of his search in the one-sided archive for the truth, whilst acknowledging that he didn't think 'there is really a truth in the case of genocide…there is something much more than the truth. The truth is not enough' (Panh, 2015). He was looking for an image (and a truth) that did not exist, so, like Tajiri's search for the truth (in the form of lost memories) in *History and Memory*, Panh's film becomes a strategy for creating the missing picture, for filling in the gaps in history.

> For many years, I have been looking for the missing picture: a photograph taken between 1975 and 1979 by the Khmer Rouge when they ruled over Cambodia… On its own, of course, an image cannot prove mass murder, but it gives us cause for thought, to record history. I searched for it vainly in the archives, in old papers, in the country villages of Cambodia. Today I know: this image must be missing. […] So I created it. (Panh, 2013)

Fig. 6 Film still: *The Missing Picture* (Panh, 2013)

The filmic strategy that Panh employs builds on the flawed nature of both his memory and the archive and is developed through the creation of a fantasy interpretation of events that took place thirty-five years previously. To achieve this, he created child-like clay figurines that represent himself and members of his extended family. His memories are re-enacted by these figures in the form of miniature tableaux vivants accompanied by his own testimony as essayistic narration and intercut with the Khmer Rouge archive footage.[71] In this way, Panh eschews realism and infuses the film with fantasy – a method that serves to join together or fill in the missing gaps between his two empirical sources whilst acknowledging their shortcomings as forms of historiography. In doing so, Panh's film is directly exemplifying Walker's traumatic paradox 'whereby the very nature of trauma, with its lacunae and repressions, challenges the requirements of realist narratives, thus making those texts that depart from the format all the more true' (Torchin, 2014).

Through his use of the fantastic, Rithy Panh has developed an elegant strategy that directly challenges the reductionist version of history propagated by the Khmer Rouge through their own archiving process. We see their truth (authentic 16mm film from 1975-79), then we see Panh's truth filmed thirty-five years later and re-enacted in miniature with painted backdrops and clay figures. Yet we do not hesitate to accept Panh's interpretation of history as emotionally and textually accurate. The relationship between truth and the indexical is turned on its head. What we thought of as real turns

[71] *The Missing Picture* is narrated by Christophe Bataille.

out not to be so. By taking into account Caruth and Freud's perspective that the traumatic experience is too powerful, too excessive to be either accurately experienced or effectively resolved (Freud, 1917: 275; Caruth, 1995: 151), perhaps the excessive nature of the fantastic, might be an effective strategy for addressing this excessive economy?

In *The Deathless Woman*, the ghost herself is an excess – an excess of energy, and an excess of trauma. Realism was never an option when devising a methodology for this film. The excessive nature of the unacknowledged trauma of the Roma and the excessive nature of Zofia's testimony led to the generation of a ghost. The fantastical proposition of a ghost who narrates a documentary film was a strategy intended to invite the audience to hesitate and to question. Hesitation and uncertainty are central to the definition of the fantastic in that we need to 'hesitate between a natural and supernatural explanation of the events described' (Todorov, 1975: 33). The risk was that an audience would dismiss the existence of the ghost, but if the ghost was conferred enough authority and agency, perhaps she could become an effective device to allow us to call into question our incomplete understanding of the history of the Holocaust. Uncertainty is critically important. We are uncertain whether the ghost is real or not, yet the Seeker seems to accept her reality. Our rational minds might question that. The Deathless Woman herself addresses us and seems to be rational and knowledgeable and to have a plan (for us and for the Seeker). She takes us to places that she tells us are real, yet we can see for ourselves that they are stage-sets and not 'real' places. She re-positions historical events in these places. Yet nobody else in the film presents a version of reality that conflicts with hers. The film confers authority to her and the other 'unreliable' witnesses (Zofia and the Seeker). Who are we to believe? Do we know what is real and not real anymore? If viewers are no longer sure what is real and not real, perhaps this can help to dismantle epistemological and ontological arguments about authenticity that can be prevalent in the study of both history and documentary.

> When the genre conventions [of documentary] are violated, a shock may occur that activates spectators in a different way. This is how genre can work politically [and] each genre violation opens up a bit more space to extend the unthinkable. (Bal, 2013: 218-219)

By incorporating fantastic elements into films that are positioned as documentaries, works such as *The Missing Picture* and *The Deathless Woman* are building on the fantastic's capacity to unsettle complacent ideas of truth, authenticity and reality. This can only work if the documentary maintains a critical relationship to reality (or truth) whilst simultaneously subverting our conventional understanding of what truth might look or feel like. We know these events happened, yet we are being led into them through unorthodox (and playful) story-telling devices. Through this, the conventions of the documentary genre are stretched, allowing the filmmakers to 'extend the unthinkable', and in the case of genocide, the unthinkable is particularly relevant as an idea to be challenged. Finding strategies that allow audiences to think about the unthinkable is a route to bringing past atrocity into present-day consciousness.

3.4 The absence of the real: disrupting the index

> Arguments about the purity or contamination of the document/ary have needlessly obfuscated the recognition that an examination of reality and a dramatization of its results is *in touch with the real* but not a copy of it. (Reinelt, 2009: 8, emphasis added).

Janelle Reinelt's use of the term *in touch*, moves the argument about documentary representation of the traumatic past away from facsimile, mimesis or even representative transparency and into the realm of proximity, phenomenology and the sensory. It can be related to Rothberg's interpretation of *traumatic realism* as pointing *to* the real instead of claiming to be real (Rothberg, 2000: 104). Here we have *being in touch with* and *pointing to* the real. Terms that suggest that this is what the real might feel like, or this is what the real might look like. There is no authority in these terms. They draw us in to subjectively experience the real whilst simultaneously setting us apart to objectively look at the real. We find ourselves in another in-between space, this time between the subjective and the objective, between experience and document, between the sensory and the analytical.

In an approach that counters traditional documentary methods that centre on evidence as authenticity, in *History and Memory* Rea Tajiri gathers together personal sources of

reference, such as fragments of images and objects that she presents isolated on a black background as if they are a kind of forensic evidence, and thus mimicking the work of the historian or ethnographer. Tajiri is treading a line between artist and historian, using her alternative methods to piece together a traumatic history on her own terms. There is the carved wooden bird belonging to her grandmother; a tiny model of the family house that was lifted up and stolen once the family had been sent to the camp; and a scrap of the tar paper that the camp's huts were covered in. Like the objects the Seeker presents as evidence in *The Deathless Woman*,[72] Tajiri's objects have no inherent meaning, but are elevated to become meaningful when they are incorporated into the discourse of missing history and missing memory. They are objects that can be held in one's hand, objects that have a tangible and indexical link to past experience and thus the past trauma. She can touch the objects even though she cannot access or touch the lost histories. The idea of objects as evidence is reinforced for Tajiri when she comes across a photograph in the United States National Archives showing her grandmother carving the same wooden bird in a classroom in the camp in 1942. The discovery of this photograph validates her object as a traditional form of empirical evidence.

But for the Seeker's objects in *The Deathless Woman* there is no validation. The Seeker, like Tajiri, presents these objects as real and authentic evidence, yet the preposterous and playful notion of a glass jar of fog might lead the audience to question this. Perhaps all is not as it seems. Rothberg's discussion on the role of the index in traumatic realism is useful here:

> The index in traumatic circumstances functions differently than the traditional version. Instead of indicating an object or phenomenon that caused [the trauma], and in that sense making the referent present, the traumatic index points to a necessary absence [and] does not produce an imaginary resolution, but rather programs readers to recognize the absence of the real. (Rothberg, 2000: 104)

Rothberg takes the idea of absence of the real to further emphasise that our understanding of trauma relies on the *displacement* of comprehension (Rothberg, 2000: 137). Embracing the absence of the real could be seen as a disruption of the established

[72] The photocopied map, the Polaroid photograph, the glass jar of 'fog' and the bird's skeleton.

indexical role of the documentary image. Creating an index that is false, displaced or traumatic might be a strategy that reflects Caruth's analysis of Freud's use of the term latency within traumatic cognition, namely that trauma becomes 'fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time' (Caruth, 1996: 17). Ideas of displacement or destabilisation are similarly embedded in Cayrol's *Pour un Romanesque Lazaréen*:

> The Lazarean hero is never where he is. He must perform a vast work of reflection, constantly thinking whether he is there and not somewhere else, because he lived in a world that was nowhere and whose borders were not marked as are those of death. He is always wary of the place where he has just arrived. (Cayrol, 1950: 821)

Cayrol's Lazarean is displaced, coming from nowhere and never being at peace with where he has ended up. It is as if the traumatic experience has left him with no compass, no sense of being-in-the-world. Trauma causes the Lazarean to become a roving ghost. So perhaps accurately representing or translating Cayrol's concept of the Lazarean might necessitate a specific and intentional confusion of time and place: a falsification or displacement of the index. Rothberg posits that 'the concept of multidirectional memory […] highlights the inevitable displacements and contingencies that mark all remembrance' (Rothberg, 2009: 15). His theory of *multidirectional memory* actively challenges the perpetration of competitive hierarchies of suffering that exist within memory, trauma and genocide studies. In this he petitions against neatness and singular representation and proposes that memories and traumas intersect, interact, are implicated in each other, and 'the only way forward is through their entanglement' (Rothberg, 2009: 313). For Rothberg, displacement is a potential route to draw similarities between all traumatic histories across countries, cultures and time.

These ideas around absence and displacement have a commonality in that they push against singular and authoritative representations of trauma and history. I have embedded elements of indexical displacement in the use of objects in *The Deathless Woman*, although this is not evident to the film's viewer. For instance, the Polaroid photograph the Seeker presents as evidence of the barrier blocking her exit from Bielcza is a 'fake' Polaroid created from a digital photograph of a barrier across a different road,

one that leads into a forest at Borzęcin where another Roma mass grave is located. The dress that we see hanging from a tree in the forest and later watch the Seeker laying out to forensically photograph in her studio is, of course, not the dress of the Deathless Woman. It is a second-hand dress I bought from a woman in a street market in Deir-ez-Zor in 2010, intended for a proposed work about the mass graves from the Armenian Genocide in Syria.[73] And so on. In this way the objects that the Seeker presents as significant clues or evidence of the presence and intention of the Deathless Woman also function as (concealed) displaced indexes representing other atrocities and traumas.

Fig. 7 Film stills: The Seeker's objects, *The Deathless Woman* (2019)

When deciding how to make the figurines for *The Missing Picture*, Rithy Panh sent his assistant to the river to collect clay.[74] Etched on the surface of these clay figures, we can see the traces of human-handling and with that comes an awareness of the many hours of labour that have been invested in their making and the indexical quality of human touch as each figure is clearly individually hand-made. Panh cannot give us indexical images from his family's experience in the 1970s – those images are missing – but he can take the clay from the river that runs through the landscapes of genocide in Cambodia – clay that carries the residue or imprint of the past. Like the trees at Żabno,

[73] The 'death march' of the 1915-1916 Armenian Genocide led thousands of Armenians south into present-day Syria and along the Euphrates to the extermination point of Deir-ez-Zor, many dying of exhaustion or starvation along the way. The desiccated remains of many Armenians remain in the desert outside the town in open mass graves (See Dündar, 2011 and Balakian, 2008).
[74] Panh's assistant was Sarith Mang.

the Cambodian clay itself has an indexical link to the traumas of the past. Panh recognises the importance of this methodology, saying: 'and after, these small figures go back to dust, and their only trace will be [their] print on the film' (Panh, 2015). In this way, the film not only retains an indexical link to the place where the traumatic events took place, but there is a circularity at play as the figures that enact the narrative within the film are ultimately recycled and re-absorbed back into the ground.[75]

Fig. 8 Making the figurines for *The Missing Picture* (Panh, 2015)

When it came to creating the tableaux vivants in *The Deathless Woman* (such as the burnt birch forest where Zofia witnessed the Deathless Woman being exhumed and the scene under the surface of the lake at Várpalota), I could not work with the index in a traditional sense as these were re-imaginings of events long past. I could offer indexical images of the dual graves of the Deathless Woman (and present-day images of these sites do appear in the film), but the mass grave at Várpalota presented a particular challenge as the site has since been flooded to form a man-made lake – in this way the change in geography at Várpalota has erased the indexical possibilities of place. My strategy was to re-create these sites, not as exact facsimiles of the original grave environments, but as fantastical re-imaginings of those sites that draw on traces of the residual trauma remaining at the place and the memories and experience of witnesses. The resulting tableaux vivants operate as displaced and alternative indexes that are specifically constructed to reflect traumatic states and to draw attention to the absence

[75] There is something else at play here in Panh's use of 'dirt' and my use of discarded and waste materials in the model-making for *The Deathless Woman* (cardboard, second-hand clothes, scrap materials). These are materials that in themselves are an excess, as in that which is left over, unwanted or unvalued in society, and this can be seen to mirror the societal experience of many Roma, and their experience. In these films, the value-less waste materials have been crafted into something significant.

of historical acknowledgement of these crimes, and indeed the absence of the victims of those crimes.[76]

Panh's figurines represent the absence of image (his 'missing picture'), and in light of this he has not only created his own missing pictures, but also his own index, albeit one that draws our attention to absence. Manifestations of absence and displacement lead to what Ulrich Baer would call the retraction of the promise of 'consoling meaning' that we generally seek in representations of trauma (Baer, 2002: 67). These films do not attempt to console us, rather to present us with difficult and challenging truths. They are disrupting rather than consoling. This is the disruption of the established indexical role of the documentary image. We come to realise that the Khmer Rouge archive clips present a skewed truth, and this is challenged by Panh's re-enactments with the figurines which present an alternative, personal truth.

When constructing the re-imagined sites of trauma in *The Deathless Woman*, it was important to me that they were hand-made and, further, that they retained visible evidence of the process of making. For instance, the cardboard trees that form the set of the burnt birch forest (representing the place where Zofia witnessed the exhumation of the Deathless Woman) can be seen to have charcoal smudges and fingerprints on them where texture was applied and where they were handled. This relationship between researcher and touch is made clear in a scene towards the end of the film where the distressed Seeker is slumped on the floor of her studio rubbing charcoal into the cardboard tree trunks. The clothed headless bodies that form the underwater tableau vivant at Várpalota have a similar imprint to them, although this is not visible in the film. Each body is made from a base of plaster and cloth which was shaped and formed by hand, and under the clothing remain the indexical marks from my fingers.

Similarly, the wax arms of the Deathless Woman (seen inside her grave) are cast from my own arms and are a very literal imprint of myself. If the audience can't touch these arms, figures or trees, then they can at least recognise that the filmmakers have touched them as we perceive their imprint through fingerprints, smudges or the marks made by the

[76] Ideas around traumatic displacement within the tableaux are explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

scraping of a hand-tool. In this way, the index is linked to touch in a very particular way. This strategy of hand-making objects moves the position of the index away from the relationship between photographic image and object or place, and towards the relationship of touch to object and then to audience. In this way, perhaps we can come closer to a tactile and sensory experience of these traumatic events for the viewer.

Fig. 9 Making the headless bodies for *The Deathless Woman* (Mortimer, 2019)

> The primary importance of [the] indexical quality of the photographic image […] is less in the unassailable authenticity of the bond between image and referent than in the impression of authenticity it conveys to the viewer. Even if the indexicality is fabricated – as certain trompe l'oeil techniques of set design, lighting, and perspective or the computer-based technique of digital sampling can do – the effect or impression of authenticity can remain just as powerful. (Nichols, 1991: 150)

Although Nichols rightly proposes that the impression of authenticity is just as powerful as the more traditional interpretation of the index, perhaps for a film to claim documentary status, this alternative approach to the index needs to be counterbalanced with a more traditional indexical image. In *The Deathless Woman* we are pulled between the indexical realities of witness testimony and present-day landscapes of Poland and Hungary and the fabricated indexes of the tableaux. Similarly, in *The Missing Picture* we move between the clips from the Khmer Rouge archive with their recognisable indexical quality (i.e. original 16mm celluloid film) and the fabricated index of Panh's hand-made clay figurines. The unconventional, fabricated and displaced indexes of *The Missing Picture* and *The Deathless Woman* demonstrate a personal ethical responsibility to the truth. It is no coincidence that the process of making these models is labour-intensive

and time-consuming. The hours spent carving figures, making trees, casting arms, forming bodies or meticulously constructing miniature concentration camp huts, are hours spent respecting those who lived and died in these places. In this way, the labour of making is tied to the filmmaker's ethical intention and responsibility to the living, the dead and historical representation.

3.5 Conclusion

> When I call something a Holocaust effect, I mean to say that we are not confronted by a representation of the Holocaust, but that we, as viewers or readers, experience directly a certain aspect of the Holocaust. In such moments the Holocaust is not re-presented, but rather presented or re-enacted. [….] We are no longer listening to the factual account of a witness, to a story of an objectified past. Rather, we are placed in the position of being the subject of that history. We are subjectively living it. (van Alphen, 1997: 10)

The primary concern of van Alphen's *Holocaust effect* is two-fold: direct experience ('subjectively living it') and re-enactment (either literal re-enactment, or re-enactment in the imagination of the viewer). This can, of course be applied to cultural works that address atrocities beyond the Holocaust, such as the internment of Japanese Americans, the African American experience of slavery or the Cambodian Genocide. What these events have in common is that they have been misrepresented in some way by historiography. The work of Tajiri and Panh can be seen to reflect van Alphen's position in that both filmmakers have created works that effectively reclaim their own histories by challenging the supposed truth-claim of established and dominant historical narratives about the traumatic events that their families have lived through. They have done so by subversive use of archive material, through employing fantasy as a legitimate form of historical representation, and by devising strategies that foreground the sensory experience for the audience.

Bringing strategies such as the fantastic into the realm of politically motivated documentary film is an interesting development within documentary studies. Here, we can see that rather than trying to recreate or guarantee authenticity, some artists

working with the documentary form have chosen to draw attention to artifice in the construction of alternative truths. By challenging and disrupting the indexical truth-claim of traditional modes of documentary and taking us into the realm of the fantastic, a film can have the capacity to both reflect the psychological qualities of trauma and challenge established ideas of legitimate evidence and truth. In this way, filmic strategies that eschew traditional notions of authenticity and index whilst creating subjective, tactile and affective experiences for the viewer can effectively reflect the complexities of historical representation. By doing so, they challenge the idea that trauma is too excessive to comprehend, and the real issue becomes *how* trauma can be evoked and understood. In such instances, cultural works need to acknowledge the trauma or the atrocity within their style and structure and not just within their content.

Strategies such as the use of the fantastic can be effective when seeking ways for alternative engagement with past atrocity, particularly those atrocities which have not been effectively or accurately historicised, either through neglect, or a denial of justice. This is not to say that films such as these are a replacement for historical interpretation or more traditional forms of documentary film. Van Alphen presents the notion of artist as historian (van Alphen, 1997: 99), yet the films of Rea Tajiri and Rithy Panh are not setting out to replace or replicate the work of the historian, their work is concerned with creating counter-points to correct the injustices of historical misrepresentation and thus contribute to forming more complete historiographies.

> I think what we do is not the work of a historian. Historians have a very scientific way of working. Sometimes they even deny testimony, because they work in their own way. Also, justice cannot resolve everything in a genocide case; [judges] cannot find all the truth. …But I think that art, like books or films, can complete historians' work and the work of justice. Because cinema opens a new field for people…when people watch and talk together they change immediately. Cinema can also capture, for example, the re-enactment that books cannot, that justice cannot show. (Rithy Panh quoted in Schlund-Vials, 2016: 287)

These provocative works demonstrate that inventive methods built around re-enacting trauma can function as socio-political commentary by directly challenging existing historical interpretation. In these instances, creative strategies can be instrumental in

subverting the manner in which events have been historicised and understood, and reclaiming ownership of the past. Yet it is important to move beyond challenging historical representation and consider how alternative strategies within documentary film can be employed to bring the past into a direct relationship with the present, for this is where the real political work lies.

Chapter 4: Theatre, The Tableau Vivant and Entering the Spectacle

> And I remember with delight their terrified exclamations as they brush the loose earth off my body. For there I am, intact, looking the same as the day I was killed.[77]

4.1 Introduction

The traumatic events of the Roma uprising in Auschwitz-Birkenau on 16th May 1944 are not particularly well-historicised. There exist fragmentary accounts as archived witness testimony which include some detail relating to weapons and the sequence of events.[78] There also exists a grainy black and white photograph of the location of the uprising, the *'Gypsy Family Camp' (Sector BII)*, taken by the SS shortly after the barracks were constructed in 1943. I had visited the ruins of the camp in 2011 and knew that there were no recognisable buildings remaining in Sector BII. My practical dilemma was how to represent the events of that night in a film when the actual buildings no longer existed, so re-enactment at the original location was not an option. In the screenplay of *The Deathless Woman* the ghost hovers above the camp, witnessing and participating in the uprising. Although the Roma uprising at Birkenau was a real event, the presence and involvement of the ghost of the Deathless Woman is entirely a construction. This raised the second dilemma of how to ethically approach this fictive re-imagining of a real event.[79]

A full-scale historical re-enactment of the uprising (either at the actual location or at another location) was not an option I wanted to pursue. There seemed to me to be a fundamental dishonesty in this method – how could we possibly feel ethically comfortable with creating a seemingly 'authentic' re-enactment of an event where there was so little empirical evidence to work with and no living participants to advise. Rather than focus on the scant facts of the uprising, I wanted the audience to feel and consider how it might have felt to be part of the uprising that night in 1944, not from the

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[77] Excerpt from the Deathless Woman's narration (English translation), *The Deathless Woman* (2019)
[78] See Polish political prisoner, Tadeusz Joachimowski's testimony (Kapralsk, S., Martyniak, M., Talewicz-Kwiatkowska, 2001: 101).
[79] The term fictive was coined by documentary theorist Michael Renov to determine 'moments at which a presumably objective representation of the world encounters the necessity of creative intervention' (Renov, 1993: 2).

perspective of the prisoners (it was impossible for me to imagine that), but from the perspective of the ghost as she uses her powers to infuse the men with rage. My strategy needed to have subjectivity at its core and to work towards bringing the past into the present in an impactful way.

Cathy Caruth suggests that at the heart of trauma are two paradoxical and incompatible narratives which present 'a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of survival' (Caruth, 1996: 7). She goes on to expand this notion and draw attention to the nature of the flashback (or memory): 'trauma consists not only in having confronted death, but in having survived, precisely without knowing it. What one returns to in the flashback is not the incomprehensibility of one's near death, but the very incomprehensibility of one's own survival' (Caruth, 1996: 64). In this way, the flashback can be a route to exploring the incomprehensible nature of trauma and survival and through this, the basis of a search for understanding. This emphasis on the relationship between trauma, death and survival is at the heart of Jean Cayrol's notion of the Lazarean. Memory, traumatic flashback and ghosts can all be read as occurrences that come from the past to specifically disrupt the present, and are manifestations of what Caruth calls 'the destructive force that the violence of history imposes on the human psyche – the formation of history as the endless repetition of previous violence' (Caruth, 1996: 65). This is less of a flash*back*, and more of a *coming forwards*.

Caruth's positioning of the flashback can be considered in relation to filmic strategies used to address past traumatic events within the documentary or the historical film. Maureen Turim links the flashback in the historical film to Collingwood's subjective methodology of 'history as re-enactment of past experience' (Collingwood, 1994: 282-302; Turim, 1989: 104). Works that incorporate the flashback to oscillate between the past and present perform two functions. Firstly, they reflect the nature of the traumatic flashback (the return). And secondly, such works can perform a temporal correspondence that situates the atrocity in the present as much as in the past. This strategy becomes critical in concentrationary art where works are intended to draw parallels between past atrocity and a current political situation.

In Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), rather than using flashback to re-enter the historical space, Lanzmann returns Holocaust survivors to the original location of their traumatic experience to record their testimony. In this way we are presented with a physical re-visiting of the sites of trauma, and a simultaneous temporal coming together of past and present through the survivor's presence at the sites of past atrocity. Rather than the past returning to disrupt the present, in *Shoah*, it is the present that disrupts our comprehension of the past. In contrast, Alan Resnais' poetic film *Night and Fog* (1955) punctuates the present with traumatic imagery from the recent past. The film begins with tranquil rural images of what we realise is the present-day site of a concentration camp (Auschwitz, filmed in 1955) and repeatedly flashes back and forth between this colour footage of the unpopulated ruins and archive black and white footage (filmed between 1942 and 1944) showing the absolute horror of the most extreme and haunting imagery of the Holocaust. Resnais' relentless camera and Jean Cayrol's poetic and accusing narration push and pull us between absence and atrocity. Our attention is drawn to the search for traces of the past atrocity and 'the impossibility of grasping the past, and in particular the incomprehensibility of mass trauma' (Wilson, 2005: 90).

Beyond strategies such as the temporal layering of *Night and Fog*, perhaps the closest corollary to the mnemonic convention of the flashback in documentary practice is the re-enactment. In traditional documentary practice, re-enactment has become a useful strategy for occasions when filmmakers are confronted with an absence of actual or archive footage of events, or witnesses to interview – it is a method of reconstructing or re-presenting the past. However, many artists and experimental filmmakers develop re-enactment as a strategy within their documentary films, not because of a lack of empirical material, but out of choice. They are often not concerned with creating authentic re-creations of actual events, with Anke Bangma conceptualising artists' use of re-enactment, not as a genre of 'historical commemoration', but as a 'framing concept that opens up questions about the more fundamentally mediated nature of experience and memory' (Bangma, 2005: 14). Commenting on artists' documentary practice, Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl draw attention to the 'conflict between artifice and authenticity' in the documentary form as something that many artists place at the foreground in their work (Lind and Steyerl, 2008: 25). Documentary theorist Bill Nichols has written widely on documentary re-enactment (Nichols, 2008, 2013a, 2013b, 2014), and has identified five

modes of re-enactment: Realist Dramatisation; Typifications; Brechtian Distanciation; Stylisation; Parody and Irony (2008: 84). However, these modes do not stretch far enough to encompass the use of re-enactment in the documentary works of many contemporary artists and experimental filmmakers – such as Lisa Reihana's *In Pursuit of Venus* (2015), Herman Helle's *History of the World: Part 11* (2004), Rea Tajiri's *History and Memory* (1991) and Rithy Panh's *The Missing Picture* (2013). These are artists whose work eschews authenticity (and parody) in their bid to define strategies for evoking traumatic past events. For these artists, 'the reference to the past is not history for history's sake; it is about *the relevance of what happened in the past for the here and now*' (Arns, 2007, 39). The works of these practitioners result in a complex intermingling of history, memory, fiction and fact that defies Nichols' categorisations and his positioning of re-enactment as 'the more or less authentic re-creation of prior events' (Nichols 2008: 72). In this, Nichols stipulates that re-enactment requires transparency, meaning that it must be clearly flagged as re-enactment rather than reality (Nichols, 2013b).

This definition of the documentary re-enactment can be reflected in Maureen Turim's analysis of films that represent history through the subjective or autobiographical flashback or re-enactment. Her concern (drawing on the critics of Collingwood) is that if flashbacks which are based on imagination are presented as 'reality' then they might undermine the film's integrity and so negate the potential for the film to effectively present socio-political or historical argument or dialogue (Turim, 1989: 105). Artists can overturn such notions by co-opting authenticity to challenge and disrupt established or authoritative historical narratives. For instance, the work of Jeremy Deller and Mike Figgis which restages the 1984 Battle of Orgreave (Deller, 2001; Figgis, 2001) to present a counter-history to that established by the UK government and media. The main issue with an insistence on authenticity within documentary re-enactment is the question of what actually constitutes historical authenticity and integrity. Nichols and Turim's position suggests alignment to the positivist school of historiography rather than a historiography which openly applies imagination to reformulate known facts into subjective accounts that draw on the historian's own personal experience of the world (for instance, Collingwood, 1994 and Ankersmit, 2005). Such subjective accounts are built on a foundation of facts, yet are more concerned with the affective re-experiencing of

past events rather than relying solely on what Werner Herzog has called 'the accountants truth' (Herzog, 2002: 240).[80]

Considering the methods of documentary theatre could be a useful strategy when searching for inventive ways to re-stage history that move away from Herzog's accountant's truth. In his definition of documentary theatre, the theatre director Peter Weiss places the emphasis on fact and authenticity, stating that it 'refrains from all invention; it takes authentic materials and puts it on the stage, unaltered in context, edited in form' (Weiss, 1971: 41). Weiss – referring to his verbatim play *The Investigation* (1965) which re-enacts the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials of 1963 to1965 – is adopting a similar stance to documentary (film) realists by foregrounding fact and authenticity over imagination. But contemporary theatre groups such as Hotel Modern are breaking down the emphasis on authenticity to take a more expanded approach to the translation of traumatic and historical events through performance by combining empirical material with invention and openly imaginative and aesthetic strategies. Unlike cinéma vérité, or the direct cinema movement, contemporary documentary theatre does not seek to deny that there is any intervention between source and spectator. The crafted (or hand-crafted) nature of their interventions are made apparent with methods such as performance, verbatim, fabrication of models, costumes and scenery. Performance theorist Diana Taylor advances that 'theatricality (like theatre) flaunts its artifice, its constructedness […], strives for efficaciousness, not authenticity. It connotes a conscious, controlled, and thus always political dimension' (Taylor, 2003: 13).

This inter-relationship between imagination or artifice and moral or political thought is at the heart of the work of a number of contemporary documentary filmmakers who have employed the strategies of documentary theatre (such as re-enactment and verbatim) in their films which address traumatic subjects with a theatricality that challenges traditional notions of authenticity within the documentary genre. Such as, artist-filmmaker Clio Barnard's documentary *The Arbor* (2010) which re-enacts episodes from

[80] Herzog first presented this in his manifesto *The Minnesota Declaration: truth and fact in documentary cinema* published in 1999. The manifesto calls for a rejection of cinéma vérité with the intention of differentiating between 'facts' and 'truth'. He goes on to say in the manifesto: 'There are different strata of truth in cinema, and there is such a thing as poetic, ecstatic truth. It is mysterious and elusive, and can be reached only through fabrication and imagination and stylization' (Herzog, 2002: 301).

playwright Andrea Dunbar's life in a seemingly documentary style. Yet her film is entirely constructed, with scenes staged as theatrical performances on the street outside Dunbar's house, and the roles of Dunbar's family performed verbatim by actors who are lip-synching to audio recordings of Barnard's research interviews. Peter Middleton and James Spinney's *Notes on Blindness* (2016) also draws on the theatrical method of verbatim to re-stage the memoirs of theologian John Hull with an actor lip-syncing to Hull's own audio recordings as he recounts his experience of losing his sight. Andrea Luca Zimmerman and Adrian Jackson's *Here for Life* (2019) draws on Augusto Boal's participatory theatre model *Theatre of the Oppressed* (Boal, 1985) to create a socially-inclusive film made in collaboration with non-professional performers from the community theatre group Cardboard Citizens. Joshua Oppenheimer and Christine Cynn's film *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer et al., 2012), a documentary about the legacy of genocide in Indonesia where theatrical strategies are put to work to not only expand the documentary genre, but more critically, to form counter-histories through the incorporation of a number of fantasy-driven scenes where the perpetrators of atrocities re-enact their memories and their war crimes. As in Rithy Panh's *The Missing Picture* (2013), the theatrical scenes in *The Act of Killing* are clearly differentiated from the rest of the film by their theatricality, with some presented as tableaux vivants.

The tableau vivant is traditionally characterised by posed or staged action being played out as a single scene before a static camera (or audience), in a form reminiscent of epic theatre, painting or early cinema. Many early cinematic experiments with the tableau vivant echo the construction of theatre and typify the primitive mode of representation (PMR) with its fixed frontal camera position, painted sets and backdrops, proscenium arch and posed figures (Burch, 1990). The term translates from French as a *living picture*. Within the tableau, figures are traditionally motionless and silent, arranged in sometimes exaggerated poses to represent a particular scene which is often allegorical. Often these early trick films were centred on the fantastic and took a fluid approach to notions of life and death – statues appear to uncannily come to life and then revert back to stillness and vice versa (Adriaensens & Jacobs, 2015: 61).[81] In theatre or film the tableau is viewed as a spectacle from a static position – that of the audience member in their seat in the

[81] For instance Georges Méliès' The Devil and the Statue (Méliès, 1901).

theatre (viewed through the proscenium arch) or that of a fixed camera positioned in front of the scene, looking on and looking in. The question is, can theatrical and non-realist strategies such as re-enactment and the tableau vivant be re-appropriated and subverted to evoke the complexities of the experience of past traumatic events in an impactful and subjective way?

4.2 Re-positioning the past: trauma and the ethics of re-enactment

Much of the modernist critical thinking surrounding the representation of the Holocaust has been centred on the ethics of authenticity and representation, but many contemporary artists have specifically developed strategies within their work that challenge and confront these issues.

> When the past has been written by history's winners, and when a linear narrative cannot do justice to the complexity of events, what options exist for telling the story? Certain kinds of truths […] are better sought out through a framework that not only owns up to its contamination by fiction, but goes a step further: revealing, embracing, and working with the fictions that are already operative. (King, 2013: 30)

Here, Homay King is referring to the work of contemporary moving-image artists who work with re-enactment and the suggestion is that artists are increasingly drawn to using fictive strategies such as re-enactment, or re-staging, to address traumatic histories as a specific strategy to confront not only the limitations of historiography, but to also re-position the past within new socio-political frameworks.

Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001) is an excellent case in point. Staged as a mass live participatory performance as the re-enactment of a violent confrontation between striking miners and police in the village of Orgreave in 1984, this work reconstructs an event that occurred during a strike that Deller positions as having had a 'traumatically divisive effect at all levels of life in the UK' (Deller, 1999: 7). Orgreave was an event that was within living memory and as such, Deller was able to co-opt many ex-miners who were involved in the original confrontation to perform alongside professional re-enactors. The work sets up a present-day counter-history with the

intention of undermining the established media, government and police accounts of the 1984 event that were presented at the time as authoritative, yet perceived by many to be biased.[82]

Although Deller's re-enactment can be considered as fictive – it is, after all, a performative re-staging – for many people the resulting film (Figgis, 2001) comes closer to a depiction of the truth than the 1984 BBC news coverage. Deller eschews fantasy, and his methodology focuses on meticulous research of the personal accounts of those caught up in the original battle and, through this, an emphasis on realism that has resulted in a work that effectively challenges and re-positions how we encounter and understand the confrontation at Orgreave. The apparent authenticity of the re-enactment is accentuated by Figgis' filming style, using documentary style handheld cameras that record from inside the melee to create an immersive viewing experience – like the miners, we experience the event from inside the battle. The live performance was critically important for the many ex-miners participating as an opportunity to redress the imbalance and re-live an event that had been historicised unjustly. However, it is the film's existence in the public realm that is particularly impactful as a substitute for justice as there has never been a formal inquiry into the police violence on that day.

Deller's work has an element of the real firmly embedded within it, and although he rightly refers to the miner's strike as being traumatically divisive, the event does not have the traumatic magnitude of the genocide-related atrocities confronted in the work of Joshua Oppenheimer and Rithy Panh. As such, perhaps acknowledging or addressing the violent confrontation at Orgreave is achievable without recourse to fantasy or obvious substitution. The idea of the Holocaust, for instance, as being too terrible to acknowledge has received a good deal of cultural currency, but Janet Walker's position that atrocities need acknowledging in a different way is important. By proposing that 'a traumatic memory weaves itself around and substitutes for an event too terrible to acknowledge non-traumatically' (Walker, 2003: 109), she challenges the school of

[82] Deller's *Battle of Orgreave* has been described as 'more flashback than re-enactment' (Farquarson, 2001: 108). Farquarson's argument is based on the seeming authenticity of the artwork and that it works to redress the gaps in the established narrative of the battle as presented by the media in 1984.

thought that demands authenticity and denies poetry. Instead, she calls for alternative filmic strategies that reflect the nature of trauma in their conception and structure.
In *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer et al., 2012), a film about the legacy of the genocide in Indonesia during the 1960s, Oppenheimer and his co-director Christine Cynn facilitate the perpetrators of the genocide to re-enact scenes from their past crimes. In this work the main protagonists in the re-enactments are the perpetrators of the original acts of genocide (and their prodigies). They perform alongside members of the community whose family members were most likely the victims of the same genocide. Like Deller's performance, these re-enactments do not rely on the detailed research of the historian or the journalistic methods of the documentary filmmaker, their authenticity comes from the involvement of the original players in the events. However, *The Act of Killing*'s re-enactments are fantastical rather than stemming from an emphasis on authentic dialogue, costume and mise-en-scène.

These re-enactments are presented to us as a film-within-a-film. The perpetrators are making a film about their own pasts and Oppenheimer and his team are filming that process. What we witness as an audience is a Brechtian distanciation, an awareness of the mechanisms of the filmmaking process that clearly separates the re-enactment from reality. However, in an essay about the film, Bill Nichols claims that this separation is *not* clear, resulting in a 'befuddlement' that 'confounds the mind' (Nichols, 2013a: 25). It is difficult to imagine that any audience member would mistake the on-screen presence of a film crew, gruesome theatrical make-up, hammy acting and mismatched costume selections of the re-constructions for reality. Most particularly when the actor-perpetrators are openly seen to be performing for the camera and discussing the script.

Nichols goes on to say that 'because Oppenheimer chooses not to clearly indicate where re-enactment, fantasy, and social reality diverge, the killers' vision of reality creates a deep disturbance in the viewer' (2013a: 25). The film *is* deeply disturbing, but not because the audience cannot differentiate between reality and fantasy. The re-enactments serve to give us a window into the lack of remorse that the perpetrators feel for their crimes and this is the disturbing issue at the core of the film.[83] They feel no

[83] An equally disturbing issue that film evidences is the celebrity status that the perpetrators enjoy in present-day Indonesia.

shame and this is evident in their almost gleeful enjoyment of the filmmaking process surrounding the re-enactments. However, these scenes serve another purpose, one that is often overlooked in analysis of the film. Towards the end of the film Anwar Congo requests to view an edit of a re-enactment scene (filmed in the style of the gangster genre) in which he plays a victim being strangled. In re-experiencing this scene from the perspective of a viewer (as opposed to experiencing it originally as perpetrator, and later as victim-performer), he seems, for the first time, to be struck by emotion. It is at this point that he finally begins to empathise with the fate of his victims, asking: 'did the people I tortured feel the way I do here? I can feel what the people I tortured felt'. It seems clear, at this point, that watching the re-enactment has induced his remorse and allowed him to be affected by his past actions – a kind of affective possession occurs. He talks of fear coming, as if affect has arrived and terror has possessed his body. He says he can 'really feel it'. He says: 'it is all coming back to me'. This is the manifestation or return of trauma, and it is this moment or experience of 'waking into consciousness that […] is identified with the reliving of trauma' (Caruth, 2010: 64). It is as if the phenomenological experience of watching the re-enactment has allowed him to finally fully own the experience, if not the responsibility of his actions. Stella Bruzzi points to the transformative and potentially disruptive nature of re-enactment, saying: 'an enactment or re-enactment […] does not leave the original action unchanged, for repetition is nearly always destabilizing in that repetition, or the act of looking again at something, unlocks it, opens it up to re-interpretation' (Bruzzi, 2014: 6). In this way, in its more experimental form, the re-enactment can have the potential to not only reflect the nature of traumatic events, but to also allow a space for the transmission of affect and a re-interpretation of history.

When recording the testimony of witnesses of atrocity for *The Deathless Woman*, even though the events had been witnessed more than 70 years ago, I was struck by the absolute consistency of each witness's recall. Details were recounted in exactly the same manner, using the same language and gestures each time I interviewed a witness. It was as if they were describing an image that was indelibly fixed in their head. And further, most of the witnesses repeated almost identical sentiments to this one from Józef: 'It stuck with us for the rest of our lives…for me, this is for the rest of my life, before my

eyes, that moment, everything'.[84] These observations led me to think about the past event as a frozen moment, and of the witnesses' memories as being almost photographic. In these cases, the trauma had fixed the memory in a way that could be, and was, returned to over and over again. Each witness had a key mnemonic 'flash-point': a visual moment of maximum traumatic impact. For Zofia it was the image of the immaculate body of the Roma matriarch being lifted from her grave and when she described the body being lifted intact from the ground I was struck by her gestures. She used her arm movements to physically re-enact what she had seen; the long hair falling to the ground; the way the oldest man carried the body. Zofia's gestures stayed with me and brought to my mind the gestural pose of the men lifting the body of Christ in Caravaggio's *Entombment of Christ* (1603).

Fig. 10 Untitled collage from found images (Mortimer 2012)

The detail and emotional power of her description brought vivid images into my own mind as I listened, but I was aware of the impossibility of authentically or ethically re-enacting her memory, particularly as by now her memory had become intermingled with my own imaginings. Later I created an allegorical interpretation of Zofia's memory as a collage of found images – a black and white photograph of a burnt birch forest, a tableau of three figures taken from *The Entombment of Christ*, a cluster of birds which hovered around the figures as they carried the body of Christ between them. I was

[84] Transcript of testimony recorded by Roz Mortimer in Borzęcin, Poland, July 2012. Trans. Dorota Miklasinska.

aware of the impossibility of ever being able to visualise accurately what she had seen, so assembling (or re-assembling) a proxy scene from already existing material seemed an accurate reflection of how I was constructing it in my own imagination.

When it came to creating this scene for *The Deathless Woman*, what became important was that the scenario should have a quality that was simultaneously real yet not real. It should at first appear to be an authentic forest, yet on closer inspection should reveal its artifice. I wanted to present the forest as a theatrical mirage of authenticity. To achieve this, I constructed the forest using methods drawn from theatrical prop-making and set-design. The fabricated trees were installed in the film studio, in a large circular space enclosed by black curtains that was more like a stage set than a film set. Amongst the trees we strung up taxidermy birds in flight, with their support wires left visible. At the start of the scene a red velvet curtain pulls back to reveal the forest as if in a theatre.

4.3 Re-experiencing the real: the mirage of theatre

> Theatre is mirage-like. It disappears as you get closer to it, and as you submit it to rigorous examination. (Martin, 2010: 23)

The methods and methodologies of documentary theatre are useful to consider in relation to the role of reconstruction or re-enactment in experimental documentary film practice. What is critical in documentary theatre – or what Carol Martin terms 'theatre of the real' (Martin, 2013) – is that it draws on empirical material in the same way as traditional (or journalistic) documentary filmmaking by taking as its source interviews, transcripts, archive material, film and video, photography and objects. But for documentary theatre this empirical material is only a starting point that practitioners then proceed to re-construct, re-enact and re-present on stage. In this process there is, by necessity, a process of selection, imagination and creativity at play, and, as Martin says: 'this process is not always transparent. Documentary theatre creates its own aesthetic imaginaries while claiming a specific factual legitimacy' (Martin 2010: 18). Martin proposes that this type of theatre has the 'capacity to stage historiography' – literally to rehearse, re-form and re-create material to write or re-write history. She goes on to say: 'at its best, it offers us a way to think about disturbing contexts and

complicated subject matter while revealing the virtues and flaws of its sources' (Martin 2010: 18). In this way, perhaps the imagination-led methods of documentary theatre can be helpful when seeking to evoke the complexities of traumatic, marginalised or subaltern histories.

The Deathless Woman is a documentary film that draws on a variety of theatrical methods. There are the tableaux vivants which are discussed later in this chapter – constructed scenes that intentionally mimic the theatrical stage sets of early cinema, which in themselves were modelled on the mise-en-scène of live theatre. Other overtly theatrical sections of the film are a series of scenes where the Seeker gives testimony to an unseen panel of historians.

In this scenario the actor Loren O'Dair sits at a table facing the camera, and by default her interrogators and the film's audience. This is not a trial or judicial review into the atrocities against the Roma, but rather it is the Seeker's unconventional methods that are on trial. Her presumption is that her methods have resulted in uncovering a truth that has been failed by conventional forms of historiography. Her challenge is to traditional patriarchal forms of authority and it is no accident that the voices we hear questioning her are male. Her defence, although filmed in a closed studio, becomes a public performance at each screening of the film, where the cinema audience become the audience of the trial as the Seeker looks directly to camera, or adjusts her gaze to address us to the left or right. She is surrounded by a black void – we do not know where she is, or when this is (although she speaks in the past tense when recounting her encounters with the Deathless Woman). The scenario suggests theatre, as does O'Dair's heightened performance designed as a reflection of the idea of the trial as a theatrical form (Sontag, 1966: 126).

Here, O'Dair works verbatim from first-person written accounts of my encounters with the landscapes of the mass graves, the witnesses, the people who led me to them, and the Deathless Woman herself. These scenes are not re-enacted – this 'trial' has never taken place in the real world – they are yet another fantasy construction devised as an exercise in oral story-telling that operates as a strategy to communicate information about my methodology whilst dismantling notions of truth and authenticity. The spoken

material is authentic, yet the performance is clearly theatre, with its associated artifice working as a strategy to further destabilise the dominant mode of documentary realism. It is a piece of documentary theatre. The audience, aware of the theatricality of the scenes are, yet again, unsure of where the truth lies. In the process of her theatrical story-telling, the Seeker offers up a series of notebooks (authentic) and objects (inauthentic) as evidence to illustrate her story.

Fig. 11 Setting up the Seeker's testimony scene in *The Deathless Woman* (Mortimer, 2019)

> 'In court, as in documentary theatre, the forensic evidence stored in the archive is as much constructed as it is found. Not only do the police frequently fabricate evidence, but also both the prosecution and the defence do everything they can to credit/discredit evidence that might support/destroy their case.' (Martin, 2010: 20)

The 'trial' scenes that are interspersed throughout the film are modelled on the methods of documentary theatre and as such intended to create an alternative historical account through the intermingling of autobiography with history; the critique of the operations of both documentary and fiction; the elaboration of the oral culture of theatre; and lastly by activating discussion and debate.[85]

[85] Paraphrased and adapted from Martin's list of the six key functions of documentary theatre (Martin, 2010: 22)

The theatre company Hotel Modern are known for their innovative use of the methods of documentary theatre (such as live puppetry and model-making) whilst also drawing on the subjective strategies of film and moving image to create immersive works that strive to communicate the experience of traumatic past events and activate discussion and debate. In their ground-breaking performance about life in Auschwitz-Birkenau, *Kamp* (Hotel Modern, 2005) a sprawling model of the death camp fills the stage and events inside the camp are re-enacted by small puppets operated by members of the company who also wield video cameras that live-stream the miniature performance to screens above the stage. The camera's-eye-view gives the audience a unique spectatorial position that is inside the camp, thus enabling us to come closer to imagining the experience of being in the camp.

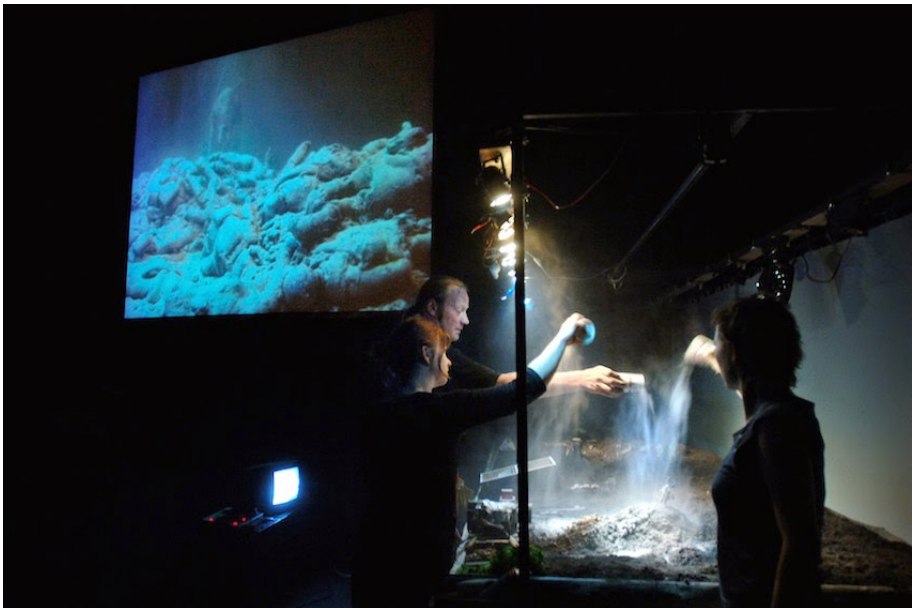

Fig. 12 *Kamp* (Hotel Modern, 2005)

The co-founder of Hotel Modern, Herman Helle, has adapted these methods to create an immersive video work that enables a transgressively subjective experience of the events of 9/11 – *History of the World: Part 11* (Helle, 2004). The events of 9/11 are well known to us, not least because we have surely all watched again and again the news footage of the planes flying into the Twin Towers. Those images were filmed from afar, from a fixed position, and often accompanied by the diegetic sound of either the camera operator or a bystander screaming in disbelief ('oh my God'). By watching, we are firmly positioned at a distance as passive (yet horrified) spectators to the events – and in this we are disempowered. By contrast, Helle's short film presents a reconstruction that allows us

inside the planes and inside the Twin Towers to subjectively experience this traumatic event as it plays out. Helle draws on his background in theatre to construct a model of Manhattan out of food packaging and re-stage the events of 9/11 in crudely animated miniature. By replacing the 'real' with the re-constructed, Helle collapses the distance between event and audience. Using miniature cameras, he places us inside the planes and burning offices and creates a space for us to connect with our own imaginings of what it might have been like. By positioning us inside the scene, he transforms us from passive spectators into active witnesses or participants. The video, although crude, gives us an immersive and visceral experience that is a far cry from the spectacle of the original news footage.

Fig. 13 Film still: *The History of the World: Part 11* (Helle, 2004)

What makes Helle's fabricated interpretation of the events of 9/11 more disturbing than a realist reconstruction such as the drama-documentary *Inside the Twin Towers* (Dale, 2006) which also employs subjectivity as a method? Helle's interpretation is obviously constructed. He positions us inside an event that that we know was real (and catastrophic) and yet his models of the airplane, Manhattan and people are blatantly not real. In doing so, he is drawing attention to the unattainable nature of the event, whilst simultaneously placing us inside that event and this is a deeply uncomfortable place to be. Uncomfortable because we know the terrible outcome, and equally uncomfortable for the sense of moral and ethical transgression that the work presents. In these works, Helle and Hotel Modern demonstrate how the methods of documentary theatre can be useful as strategies to evoke the experience of historic atrocity.

Fig. 14 The Gypsy-Family Camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau. (SS Central Construction Management, 1943)

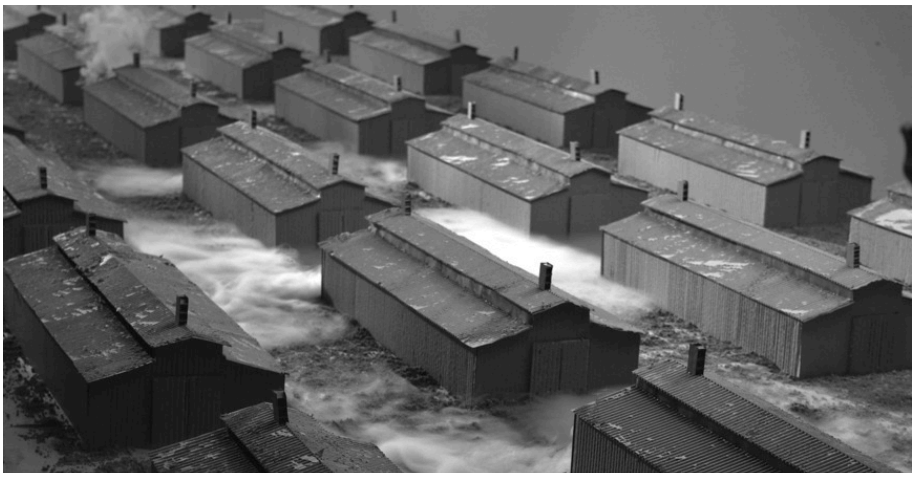

Fig. 15 Film still: *The Deathless Woman* (Mortimer, 2019)

Returning to my dilemma of how to effectively and ethically re-enact the traumatic events and, to an extent, evoke the experience of the Roma uprising at Auschwitz-Birkenau. In this instance the SS photograph of the 'Gypsy Family Camp' (Sector BII) became my visual template for a theatrical re-construction of the camp with thirty-two model huts made out of corrugated cardboard. The huts were laid out in the studio and filmed from the point of view of the ghost as she swoops down through the clouds, bringing us up close and inside the huts. In a wide shot, the set looks uncannily like the original archive photograph – in the absence of any people in the scene (either real or as models), it is difficult to gauge the scale of the set – yet as the camera swings in it becomes clear that the barracks are made from cardboard. The Deathless Woman's affect-centred narration as she 'seeps into the huts' refers to hatred, rage, thrill and pleasure. The uprising was real, the models are clearly not, the presence of the Deathless Woman is less clear. We are caught in a strange temporal space that is neither then or

now and is between reality and fiction and, as with Helle's depiction of Manhattan during the 9/11 attacks, this is an intentionally uncomfortable place to be.

Perhaps it is only by allowing fiction to be part of these retellings of history that we are able to get close to the slippery notion of the truth. Rather than positioning this work as being between (or at the intersection of) fact and fiction, when the division is not clear, these theatre-based methods allow for fact and fiction to be woven together. Much of the scholarship about the fantastic is situated in the opposing relationship between reality and fiction – for instance Jackson foregrounds 'the relationship between them as a central concern' (Jackson, 2002: 37) , but Mieke Bal suggests that the two are intertwined, existing symbiotically without distinction.

> Suspending the opposition [between fiction and reality] is a condition *sine qua non* for political art. The aim is not to establish a preferred presence of 'reality,' but literally to suspend the distinction and thus keep fiction present in a never-resolved dialectic. (Bal, 2013: 69)

Bal recognises the importance of the relationship between the real and the artificial and calls for them to be fused rather than seen as opposites. This is a position that challenges the notion that the truth might lie in a space between the real and the imaginary. For there to be an 'in-between', suggests the two forms are in opposition (just as Nora saw history and memory as being in opposition), but perhaps this binary thinking isn't helpful. The notion of gaps and in-between spaces is alluring for an artist as these are the non-spaces where we often metaphorically position our work. But, perhaps talking of divisions between fiction and reality is divisive and encourages differentiation between the two forms. Bal proposes an ongoing dialogue between the two forms, a dialogue that will never be resolved, and in that dialogue the tension and uncertainty do not dissipate but we are no longer pulled back and forth, we accept a position that encompasses both forms.

4.4 They don't move, they are already dead: the tableau-isation of gesture

In contrast to the traditional filmic strategies of re-enactment or the flashback – which are generally used to create a fluid re-animation of the past to complete missing gaps in

narrative – the tableau vivant presents a past that is not re-animated, but is halted mid-gesture, as if waiting for us to witness its re-animation. This unexpected stillness can be read as latency, a pause: it can be as if history or emotion are waiting to be activated. In this way, the stillness of Rithy Panh's figurines in *The Missing Picture* (2013) draw attention to the potential of the moment of their awakening whilst simultaneously making it clear that re-awakening the past is an occurrence that relies on the imagination of the viewer.

Rather than a representation of the past, Panh's tableaux become triggers for the re-activation of the past. This is evident in his decision to resist animating the clay figures. The figures remain static whilst the camera moves around them. Panh's producers wanted him to animate the clay figures, but he refused, saying: 'they don't move, they are already dead. We move around them, but they don't move' (Panh, 2015). As an audience we are constantly waiting for them to move, willing them to come back from the past, to return from the dead.

In *The Act of Killing* (2012), Joshua Oppenheimer and Christine Cynn set out to challenge the way the Indonesian genocide has been remembered within Indonesia and in the wider world. The perpetrators of the genocide re-stage not only scenes from their past crimes, but also highly theatrical tableaux depicting their fantasy worlds. In a tableau filmed at a waterfall, the ghost of one of the victims of genocide does return from the dead. As eight female dancers and the two paramilitary leaders Anwar Congo (dressed as a preacher) and Herman Koto (dressed in drag) perform to the sounds of the song *Born Free* (a reference to their identification of themselves as gangsters, or free men), their feet remain fixed in position as only their upper bodies move. It is a spectacle: the dancers sway on the spot and the perpetrators raise their arms in beneficent gestures. Part way through this enactment of the perpetrators' fantasy two other men appear. They are victims of the 1965 genocide, returned from the dead. One of them takes a large medal out of his pocket and hangs it around Anwar Congo's neck saying: 'for executing me and sending me to heaven, I thank you a thousand times for everything'. The men all join and raise their hands as if in redemptive and religious ecstasy.

This moment when the men hold a gesture of redemptive ecstasy allows what Jodi Brooks calls 'tableauisation' to occur (Brooks, 1989: 81). Brooks asserts that 'the posed figure can, through its hold on movement, tableau the whole image' (1989: 81). In this way, the entire edited sequence of the waterfall scene in *The Act of Killing* functions as a tableau vivant. The holding of the gesture might be momentary, but this moment of tableauisation is the moment when we take notice. And there is much to take notice of here – the obscenity of the fantasy world that Anwar Congo has created where his victims return from the dead to thank him, and a society that glorifies his involvement in genocide. At this moment of tableauisation, Congo's personal narrative of his heroic role in the genocide is effectively dismantled by Oppenheimer and Cynn. This single moment of theatre is intensely affecting, compounded by the acting out of a transgressive fantasy, the ghost's appearance and the deeply inappropriate swelling music. At this single moment the whole accumulated narrative of the film comes together and that narrative is not of Congo's interpretation, but our own realisation of the undocumented horrors of the genocide that have gone without justice for over fifty years.

Fig. 16 Film still: *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer et al., 2012)

For Roland Barthes, tableaux 'are scenes that are *laid out* (in the sense in which one says *the table is laid*)' (Barthes, 1977: 71) – everything is spread out, carefully positioned for us to see. The tableau becomes about making things visible and this visibility is not necessarily referring to events, objects or people, but rather affects and psychological states. Because of the tableau's ability to collect together events (or images or thoughts)

from a range of temporalities, it can present an interpretation of historical event that takes into account what has come before and what comes after, leading to a mapping of interrelationships across time (and even place) – a joining together – a creation of understanding. The imagery within a tableau is not read sequentially, but the whole layered meaning is seen and understood simultaneously. We can see the waterfall tableau in *The Act of Killing* exemplifies this moment of a complex coming-together of past and present and it is the moment of tableauisation that triggers this moment of understanding. Barthes relates this to Lessing's concept of the 'pregnant moment' as 'the presence of all the absences (memories, lessons, promises) to whose rhythm History becomes both intelligible and desirable' (Barthes, 1977: 73).[86] This could be likened to the metaphorical unfolding of a photographic snapshot – a simple image unfolds to reveal the complexities of its multi-layered and multi-temporal meaning.

Fig. 17 Film still: *The Deathless Woman* (Mortimer, 2019)

As the narrative of *The Deathless Woman* progresses and the focus of the film shifts away from the Holocaust to consider the current events and political climate in contemporary Europe, the ghost of the Deathless Woman enters a theatrical reconstruction of the inside of the Internet. Here, she encounters hate speech and videos of far-right anti-Roma demonstrations.[87] When collating these archive videos, I noticed a recurring image and gesture – that of a masked man, with arm raised, about to throw a home-made petrol bomb. By re-staging the gesture of the rioter poised to throw a bomb, my aim

[86] Also see (Lessing, 1962).

[87] The videos were mostly gleaned from YouTube. Some were posted by Roma-led news channels (such as Romea TV) and other user-generated clips were posted by individuals.

was to 'tableau' the whole 'inside the Internet' scene and crystallise our attention on these videos, their hate-fuelled comments and the people who feature in them. This gesture represents the violence and hatred of contemporary racism and later, as we come to the testimony of Erzsébet and she recounts the details of the neo-Nazi attack in Tatársentgyörgy, we realise that here too was a man who would have had his arm raised as he threw the petrol bomb in through the window of her son's house. It is a gesture that we see across time and across many conflicts in the world. As the actor holds his pose, he slowly rotates so that we can observe him and experience this snapshot of time over an extended duration and from multiple angles. This is a gesture that is loaded with meaning as we know what comes next once the gesture is unfrozen and the petrol-filled bottle is launched.

As a moment frozen in time, the gesture in this tableau can be paralleled to the photographic snapshot in a way that aligns it specifically to trauma rather than Barthes' unfolding of the complexities of meaning. Thierry de Duve differentiates the snapshot from a longer exposure photograph as an image that literally captures an instant of time. For him, the snapshot splits time – we are caught in a space that is between 'not anymore and not yet' (de Duve, 1978: 116), and it is this captured moment that he aligns to trauma[88] – we are too late to witness the event, but too early to see how the event plays out (or indeed, to prevent its consequences). De Duve uses Eddie Adams' 1968 press photograph of the split second before South Vietnam National Police Chief Nguyen Ngoc Loan executes suspected Viet Cong member Nguyen Van Lem during the Vietnam War as an example, saying: 'I'll always be too late, in real life, to witness the death of this poor man, let alone to prevent it; but by the same token, I'll always be too early to witness the uncoiling of the tragedy, which at the surface of the photograph, will of course never occur' (de Duve, 1978: 121). In the case of the rotating rioter in *The Deathless Woman*, the tableau presents us with a snapshot of the past which is no longer preventable despite the extended duration of the scene. The man's gesture becomes not only an image from recent history, but a premonition of what is to come in the future.

[88] In her essay on analogue photography, Margaret Iverson refutes de Duve's alignment of the snapshot and trauma. For Iverson the long-exposure photograph is more representative of trauma, but I think in this instance she might be conflating trauma and pathos (see Iversen, 2012: 803). For de Duve trauma is more aligned to the lost moment than the pathos of a lost past.

The tableaux vivants in *The Missing Picture, The Act of Killing* and *The Deathless Woman* all depict ghosts – those who have returned from the dead. The frozen gestures of the genocide victims within these tableaux are uncannily caught between the animate and inanimate, between life and death. This uncertainty between life and death is explored in Martti Helde's film *In The Crosswind* (2014). Composed of thirteen tableaux vivants interspersed with short live-action sequences, the film tells the story of the mass deportation to Siberia of forty thousand people from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in June 1941. Helde's tableaux are technically and visually impressive in their scale, attention to detail and mise-en-scène.[89] Crowds of displaced people are depicted motionless, frozen mid-action in the prosaic moments that come before and after deportation – jumping aboard trains or toiling in fields. The actors' gestures are fixed, as if in a photograph, but the environment is not – we see curtains, sunlight, clothing, flowers and paper moving in the wind. It is as if these displaced people have been temporarily paused as the world continues around and without them.

Fig. 18 Film Still: *In the Crosswind* (Helde, 2014)

The figures in Helde's tableaux hold their poses for extraordinary amounts of time as they are explored at length by his roaming camera – these are the equivalent of a long-exposure photograph rather than a snapshot – what Margaret Iversen calls the time-exposure that she links to a consideration of trauma and pathos rather than the crystallisation of the traumatic moment that de Duve aligns to the snapshot (Iversen,

[89] Helde has paid great attention to the authenticity of these scenes, which have the appearance of a period drama, with emphasis given to accuracy in location, costume and period detail. Despite being based on real events and a collection of letters, Helde does not classify the film as a documentary – in this respect it stands apart from the other films discussed in this chapter. And further, the film does not set out to challenge existing historical narratives.

2012: 802). We find ourselves looking closely at these figures, longing for an eye to blink or a chest to move with the inhalation of a breath. The camera glides through these scenes with a mechanical disembodied smoothness, not pausing to allow us emotional entry to these moments that have come before and after the trauma of deportation. We are travelling through the tableaux yet remain frustrated spectators. No sooner have we absorbed the details of a woman's face or a child's grasp than they are gone as the camera slides past, on to the next tableau. The entire film feels hypnotic, as if we are experiencing the events in a dream-state where all movement happens at a slowed and steady pace. Although the actors are posed motionless, caught mid-gesture, the scenes appear to have no boundaries, they are neither confined by the proscenium arch or the camera's framing. The constantly moving camera glides across landscapes to encounter the performers who are conjured as seemingly authentic memories.

4.5 Pools of affect: super-charging affect in the tableau vivant

The constantly moving camera of *In the Crosswind* does not pause and the tableaux are not contained or 'enframed' in the manner that we would expect within the traditional tableaux vivants of theatre or early film (Gunning, 1989: 5). By which, I mean tableaux which occupy a framed, contained and bordered space. Whether it is the landscape forming a natural stage in *The Act of Killing*, or the black curtains surrounding the stage-set of the forest in *The Deathless Woman*, these scenes are contained within discrete spaces, as a theatrical production might be. If the tableau is contained, perhaps we can consider it as a physical space or even, more literally, a container. If affect flows from scene to scene within a film and from screen to audience, and we visualise the tableau as a discrete, contained space within the film, then perhaps affect can collect in these tableaux so that within these scenes affect intensifies and runs deeper. We can visualise the tableau as a vessel where affect collects or pools. In this analogy I am drawing on Michelle Langford's point that the tableau operates in an autonomous way that causes 'narrative, like affect, to lose its transitive value and collect within the image rather than forming the connective link between images' (Langford, 2006: 91). My choice of the term 'pool' suggests that there is a stillness to this moment. It is a punctuation, a moment to pause for reflection or possibly re-assessment.

The tableaux in *In the Crosswind* with their un-bordered movement perform in much the same way as traditional documentary re-enactment and are seamlessly integrated into the live action sequences. Because of this, the affect within this film remains constant, level and uninterrupted as it flows from scene to scene as if it is attached to the roving camera itself. For affect to intensify within the tableau, there needs to be containment and a moment of stillness that is shared by both the figure and the camera. As a consequence, Helde's hypnotic tableaux vivants do not appear to generate moments of affective intensity in the same way as the waterfall tableau in *The Act of Killing* or the underwater and forest tableaux of *The Deathless Woman*. The evident containment of these tableaux and the single moments of stillness are the points when all is made clear, leading to moments of increased affective intensity that punctuate the films.

> [The tableau is] a pure cut-out segment with clearly defined edges, irreversible and incorruptible; everything that surrounds it is banished into nothingness, remains unnamed, while everything that it admits within its field is promoted into essence, into light, into view. (Barthes, 1977: 70)

Here, Roland Barthes makes clear the necessity and function of the defined space of the tableau. I would argue that rather than banishing other aspects of the film into nothingness, the tableau has the ability to re-frame the film, to present a case for all that we understood so far to be re-considered. In this way, the spatial containment of a scene becomes an essential element of the tableau vivant's potential for disrupting narratives. These two points of analysis – Barthes' separation of the tableau from the narrative arc of the film, and Langford's conceptualisation of the tableau as a discrete space within the film where affect and narrative are pooled – present the idea of the tableau as an interruption and a disruption, suggesting that the tableau creates its own micro-narratives within a film. And by creating a micro-narrative that is super-charged with affect, perhaps it might be capable of disrupting the wider meta-narrative of a film. It is this potential to disrupt narrative (and concentrate affect) that makes the tableau a particularly useful strategy when creating counter-histories. Which might lead to the question – why might disruption be necessary? And in these instances, disruption is necessary not just to the narrative flow of a film, but to disrupt the established socio-political meta-narrative of what happened during these genocides. Perhaps, in this way,

the tableau can play a small part in disrupting not just the narrative arc of a film, but the established narrative of historiography.

The framing of the waterfall scene in the *Act of Killing* is critically important. The action is contained by the hills to each side and the waterfall behind, with the landscape creating a natural stage. It is landscape as proscenium arch seen from the fixed front and centre viewpoint of the camera. Within this theatricalised space the players direct their performances frontally, and the static camera retains the fixed single point of view of a seated audience. One of the potential problems of using the tableau vivant as a strategy to question the representation of historical events is that in its traditional form the tableau can be interpreted as a spectacle with the audience positioned on the outside, passively looking in (just as we watched the televised spectacle of the Twin Towers falling from a fixed and distant position). The waterfall scene in *The Act of Killing* exemplifies this – we are in a fixed position looking on as the spectacle of Congo and Koto's performance unfolds. But the idea of history as a spectacle is not particularly helpful when one is endeavouring to create agency. Perhaps by subverting the way we encounter the tableau, the audience could be invited into the spectacle so we might no longer be held outside, observing events from a distance. We might enter the spectacle of history to experience it for ourselves.

In *The Deathless Woman*, I chose not to create traditional tableaux with a static camera positioned outside the frame looking in.[90] As Zofia ends her testimony about the disinterment of the Deathless Woman, we cut to a red curtain which pulls back to reveal the theatricalised forest. The camera – taking the subjective position of our own or Zofia's point-of-view – moves into the scene. In this moment, we enter the tableau and we enter the spectacle. We are with the camera as it moves amongst the trees to eventually discover the figures holding poses based on a re-enactment of the Caravaggio painting. The use of the subjective camera is intended to create the impression that we might be roaming around in Zofia's mind, exploring a traumatic memory that has remained constant for her over many years. The subjectivity of the camera is critical, it not only suggests Zofia's point of view as she explores her memory,

[90] The tableauisation of the rotating rioter is the exception to this rule.

but the subjective and performative camera takes away our passive spectatorship. We are forced to be participants, to experience the forest and the discovery of the body for ourselves and in this way, we are confronted with the possibility of agency, complicity and responsibility.

Fig. 19 Film Still: *The Deathless Woman* (Mortimer, 2019)

Once we are inside the forest we know the scene is theatre – we see the trees are not real, we see the black curtains encircling the scene and the wires the birds are suspended from. This revelation of the mechanisms of theatre operates as a Brechtian distanciation, a strategy 'designed not only to tie the spectator into a more active position in regard to the film, but also to reveal and enable a critique of the mechanisms by which classical narrative cinema places the spectator in a fixed and passive position' (Langford, 2006: 170). We have no reason to doubt Zofia's testimony, but we are in a strange unsettling place that we know is constructed, watching a scenario that fuses Zofia's memory with a re-enactment of a painting of the entombment of Christ. The confusion is important – we are unsure what is real and not real. We are unsure of facts and of material objects. We are presented with scenarios and information, only for that to be challenged, almost dismantled in front of our eyes. We are held in that space, surrounded by the black curtains, there is no way out.

4.6 Conclusion

The documentary films that I have discussed here take the tableau vivant and put it to work in a bid to re-frame the telling of traumatic and catastrophic histories in highly theatrical and experimental ways. The use of an overtly theatrical device such as the tableau vivant within documentary is unconventional, yet my argument is that the tableau has the potential to question difficult and occluded truths and thus do political work. To effectively operate as a method capable of challenging established narrative, the tableau vivant needs to embrace three strategies. Stillness creates an affective punctuation – a moment when we stop to pay attention and affect is allowed to intensify. The fantastic disrupts established notions of truth and reality through an unusual amalgam of the empirical and the theatrical. Containment creates a scenario that mimics the theatrical space of the stage or proscenium arch. It is into this space that affect can flow and collect. This still and discrete space also allows the tableau to detach and separate from the narrative flow of the film, potentially enabling the film's wider narrative to be questioned, disrupted or destabilised. Building on this, if we allow the subjective camera to enter the space of a tableau (as in *The Deathless Woman*) we can create agency in the audience by dismantling the comfortable position of passive spectatorship. These elements, stillness, the fantastic, containment and subjectivity can work together to create tableaux vivants that openly state their theatricality, fusing fiction, the fantastic, and reality to create deeply affecting and layered interpretations of historical events that can disrupt time, narrative and socio-political meaning.

Whether it is the genocide of the Roma explored in a tableau vivant staged in a fantasy forest; the Indonesian genocide addressed in a Busby Berkeley-themed song and dance fantasy; or the Cambodian genocide re-enacted in miniature tableaux with clay figurines – what these events have in common is that they have not been adequately or accurately historicised in the first instance and these films seek to redress that imbalance by drawing attention to the frailty and flaws of evidence and authority. But *The Deathless Woman* and *History of the World: Part 11* go further than fusing the real and the artificial. By foregrounding the subjective camera and creating an immersive experience for the viewer, these films move beyond striving to represent history and move into the terrain of evoking experience by allowing the audience, to an extent, to subjectively live through the experience. This is reflected in van Alphen's term the *Holocaust effect*, which

is concerned with 'making the Holocaust present as a performative effect' (van Alphen, 1997: 10). Of course, this is a strategy that can be equally applied to re-enactments of other historical atrocities beyond the Holocaust.

The need to evoke experience presents an argument for experimental strategies that foreground the phenomenological to allow the audience's experience to be led more by affect, subjectivity and the sensory than the analytical. Theatrical strategies such as those outlined in this chapter can produce an experience for viewers that may be sensory, moving, immersive, intriguing and uncertain rather than an experience that is focused on fact, analysis and is perhaps more singular in its expectation of audience experience (or response). Allowing a space for experience might lead the audience to a more affective involvement which could result in a deeper engagement and possibly become a catalyst for re-framing our understanding of past events, or even activism.

Conclusions

This thesis sets out to contextualise my methodology within the field of documentary practice that addresses traumatic and marginalised histories through hybrid and experimental methods.[91] Within this field, my research has resulted in four key contributions to knowledge. Primarily, this research has derived from original recordings of testimony, some of which had never been recorded before (for instance, the story of the murder and subsequent exhumation of a Roma family in Bielcza, Poland in 1942; the murder of a group of Roma in Żabno, Poland in 1943). The genocide of the Roma during the Nazi era has been under-addressed in historiography and marginalised in social and cultural discourse around the Holocaust. My research has set out to addresses this omission by producing a film that documents this new testimony with the aim of bringing dialogue about these events into the public realm and forming connections between these historic events and contemporary atrocities.

To achieve this, I have broadly centred my research on three creative strategies. Firstly, I have employed an experimental form of empiricism which was primarily applied to the gathering of evidence in the field and was originally conceived as a method for working with events and histories that lack visibility in the traditional sense. This methodology gave equal weight to phenomena such as atmospheres, affects and feelings as it did to more traditional empirical sources. Although this was borne out of a frustration with the lack of more traditional sources of knowledge, it proved to be a valuable and fertile methodology which led to the discovery of a ghost, and beyond that, to my discovery of how to think about affect and ghosts and frame them within a socio-political context. These became ghosts and affects that had intentions and agency and could be put to use in a film to provoke thought (and possibly even social change). The focus on a ghost as an active participant in a documentary film led to considering the work of Sadiya Hartman where fabulation is both a mode of address and a methodology for critically reframing history within a postcolonial context. Within this, my initial contextual reference was Penny Siopis' *Communion* (2011), a film that is narrated with the highly affecting posthumous first-person testimony of a murdered woman. This address from

[91] For instance, *The Missing Picture* (Panh, 2013), *History and Memory* (Tajiri, 1991), *The Act of Killing* (Oppenheimer et al., 2012), *Our Song to War* (Onzaga, 2018), *Communion* (Siopis, 2011).

beyond the grave became an important point-of-reference when considering the potential agency of a ghost-narrator. Similarly, a stylistic influence when considering how to visually represent an unseen ghost on screen was the disembodied floating camera in Apichatpong Weerasethakal's *Letter to Uncle Boonmee* (Weerasethakul, 2009). Bringing these methods together and expanding the scope of the ghost's address to critically re-frame over seventy years of history whist retaining the affective intensity usually associated with fictional filmmaking became a methodological blueprint for my practice. Later in my research I came to *Our Song to War* (Onzaga, 2018), a documentary film that, like *The Deathless Woman*, conflates the spectral address and the disembodied camera to create a subjective and repositioned historiography. The unconventional strategies that these films employ are a direct result of the need to confront and articulate difficult issues which 'require a historiography that is not afraid of ghosts' (Oppenheimer, 2004) – namely a historiography that makes visible the thoughts and experience of those who have been persecuted, marginalised, excluded or forgotten.

The Deathless Woman has placed strategies of the theatrical and the fantastic within a documentary framework as creative methods which have the potential to widen critical debate by testing the boundaries of the documentary form.[92] Within this, I have drawn on an ontological position that is rooted in a refusal to make distinctions between what is true and not true. This position goes beyond relativism, in that not only does it reflect multiple viewpoints and beliefs, but actively works to disregard any distinctions or hierarchies between such viewpoints. My research has led me to reconsider the opposition of 'fact' and 'fiction' and come to see them as fused and in constant dialogue (Bal, 2013: 69). I began from a point that set out to challenge the historian's rule of evidence and its corollary, the dominance of the indexical in documentary practice, but came to realise that the index has an important role in this type of fabulation-led hybrid documentary. As an example, I had initially intended to re-stage the witness testimonies with actors working verbatim (from translations of the original testimony) as part of my documentary theatre-inspired strategy of destabilising dominant and authoritative truths by displacing the indexical elements within the film. As my research progressed, I realised that the fantastic elements within the film (such as the ghost and the tableaux

[92] This work has built on my existing practice such as: *Invisible* (2006), *Wormcharmer* (1998).

vivants) needed to retain a strong relationship to reality if they were to subvert or disrupt authoritative ideas. Critically, by retaining some indexical elements in the film I was able to create the confusion between reality and imagination that became an essential part of my strategy to put destabilisation, uncertainty and questioning at the core of the audience experience. This led to the creation of a film whose structure is highly unconventional within established documentary practice. Documentaries that have balanced fabulation and index by juxtaposing colonial archive material with autobiographical re-imaginings, such as *The Missing Picture* (2013) and *History and Memory* (1991) have a binary clarity in their approach, in that the index (as archive) clearly stands for the authoritative truth that needs to be challenged by the fabulation of alternative and personal truths. In *The Deathless Woman*, there is no authoritative truth to challenge, just the omissions and selectivity of history. In this way, the index (as witness testimony) is not presented as a counter-point to fabulation and the divisions between index and fabulation here are not binary. Subsequently there is less of a clear distinction between fact and fiction with the index operating as an anchor for the fabulation, the two work together to form a version of the truth.

My third key strategy has been to explore the potential of a theatrical strategy such as the tableau vivant to create moments of affective and political agency within the narrative of a documentary film. My particular approach to the tableau vivant has involved subverting its traditional form, and in contrast to the use of the tableaux in the films discussed in this thesis (Panh, 2013; Oppenheimer et al., 2012; Helde, 2014), the tableaux in *The Deathless Woman* differ in that they have been specifically designed as affective and immersive spaces that play on confusions about what is real and what is fabricated. But further, my tableaux are filmed in a style that sets out to break with convention and bring the audience *inside* the fabricated space of the tableau itself, with the intention of challenging the traditional spectatorial position and thus foregrounding subjectivity and experience for the viewer so that they might imagine and experience being inside these worlds themselves. I wanted the audience to feel implicated in this story. Creating film sets in the style of theatre sets resulted in theatrical environments that were immersive working environments for myself and the film crew – the days building and filming in the forest, the underwater pool, the grave and the 'inside the Internet' sets felt magical – we were immersed and I hoped some of that might translate

to the film's audience as the camera and accompanying soundtrack brought them into these spaces too. Audience feedback suggests that this strategy has been at least partially successful:

> It was as if I was under a spell of sorts, weaving in and out of a mystery that appealed both to reason and my emotions. Watching it felt like being on a hypnotic, slow-motion rollercoaster ride.[93]

Although this project started out as one concerned with history and the (selective) lack of memorialisation of the genocide of the Roma. It quite quickly became evident that the other urgent story was not historical but contemporary. Namely, the contemporary violent attacks against Roma (and others) perpetrated by the far right. Of course, these two events are not unconnected.[94] Although this research has centred on working with the marginalised history of Roma, I hope that my methodologies can be equally applied to other atrocities, unjust events and lost histories. What we choose not to historicise, will undoubtedly come back to haunt us, or perhaps more accurately, resurface to harm us – this is the warning of the futural past.

[93] Anonymised audience feedback received after a screening of *The Deathless Woman* on 11th March 2020.
[94] Famously, when planning the Final Solution, Hitler asked the question: 'who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?' (Bardakjian, 1985: 568) – a reference to the Armenian Genocide (1915-17), a genocide that is still not globally acknowledged or adequately historicised today.

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