

How to consume Holocaust testimonies with aesthetic pleasure: a critical evaluation of the Survivors of the Shoah Foundation

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Abstract

This article is a reflection on the status of Holocaust testimonies within the context of a culture of consumption, focusing on an analysis Steven Spielberg's original Survivors of the Shoah, Visual History Foundation project, currently based at the University of South California, and duly renamed the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education. The argument presented here is that even the memory of and testimonies about the Holocaust can be aestheticized and absorbed by the cultural goods market in a sanitized and consoling format fit for consumption by a potentially massive audience. Despite his good intentions – if they are, indeed, good – Steven Spielberg emerges as a debatable media “authority” on the Holocaust, shaping the western imaginary about the memory of that genocide through his Foundation and the prior success of the film *Schindler's List* (1993).

Keywords

Testimonies. Culture of consumption. Holocaust. Survivors of the Shoah. Steven Spielberg.

1 The unique trajectory of Holocaust testimonies: from aesthetic object to consumption

In his introduction to *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Portuguese edition, 1998), the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman observes that he was only able to gauge the exact dimension of the genocide after his wife, Janina, a survivor who had escaped the Warsaw ghetto, shut herself away for two years before finally recounting her own experience of the horror. Janina had thanked her husband for enduring her prolonged absence. She needed to leave her testimony: a memoir of a world of darkness that, after all, was not her husband's world. From then on, Bauman realized that he, now a renowned sociologist, shared with much of the world a comfortable distance from that event, which seemed to have “disappeared from the face of the earth,” leaving only “the haunted memories and never-healing scars of those whom it left destitute or injured” (BAUMAN, 1998, p. 09, our translation).

In fact, it would take several decades – after the “liberation” of the death camps – for testimony

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about the Holocaust to become a theme in Western culture and, later on, a cultural product for consumption. The process would begin through literature – establishing the so-called “Literature of Testimony” – and the works of some historians who are especially concerned with a critique of historicism and the (re) appreciation of the issue of memory, especially the intersection between individual and collective memory. This movement is based on a more careful rereading of Walter Benjamin, and has among its main theoretical exponents names like Maurice Halbwachs, Saul Friedländer, Yosef Yerushalmi, Vidal-Naquet, Annette Wieviorka, Shoshana Felman, and Pierre Nora – the author of the classic *Assassins of Memory* – among others. To a greater or lesser degree, all these authors have advocated a joint effort between historiography and memory, as Márcio Seligmann-Silva has aptly pointed out in *História, memória, literatura: o testemunho na era das catástrofes* (History, Memory, Literature: Testimony in the Age of Catastrophes, 2003).

According to Seligmann-Silva, testimony can be understood “both in its legal sense and that of historical testimony,” which corresponds to the tradition of *testimonio* by the victims of Latin American dictatorships, with an emphasis on denouncing and reporting – “as well as in the sense of ‘survival,’ of having gone through an extreme limit event, a passage that was also a ‘crossing’ of death” (SELIGMANN-SILVA, 2003, p. 08). In the latter sense, in connection

to the Literature of Testimony of the Shoah, there is an important shift, as the relationship between language and the “real” begins to be problematized. If testimony about the Holocaust becomes literary art – even to escape the terrible literalness of a world whose violence was humanly *unbelievable* and indescribable – the fact is that it, too, will be slowly absorbed through the sphere of consumption. After all, as Adorno and Horkheimer have demonstrated, since the criticism of the Cultural Industry in the mid-40s, the fate of the arts and culture would be to merge with the economy so as to be treated, in the strictest sense, like any other commodity.

Thus, even the Holocaust itself, like the tradition of testimony that it engendered, would come to constitute different kinds of “cultural products” over the course of the last six decades. And Don Slater, a not exactly critical analyst, has noted (2002, p. 27), we live in a time when “social practices and cultural values, ideas, aspirations and basic identities” have become “defined and guided in relation to consumption, and not to other social dimensions.” Since the values derived from the “realm of consumption” invade other areas of social action, “modern society *in toto* is a culture of consumption, not just specifically in regard to consumption activities” (SLATER, 2002, p. 32). This is the inevitable picture that Fredric Jameson (1995) calls the cultural logic of late capitalism, of which postmodernism is a “dominant cultural form.”

The aim of this paper is to focus on a particular case of the production and consumption of Holocaust testimony and the memory that fuels that tradition: the Survivors of the Shoah: Visual History Foundation project, conceived by Steven Spielberg in the wake of the worldwide success of *Schindler's List* (1993). Now under the stewardship of the University of Southern California, which is the official home of the archives, it has a new name, the “politically correct” and pedagogical title of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education. Even if one takes into account the good intentions of its creator and the institution that currently manages the Foundation’s archives, the material is nevertheless susceptible to uncomfortable questions in light of ethical concerns and the consideration of the intrinsic characteristics of *testimony*.

In fact, from the outset, there has been criticism of the original orientation of the project when dealing with the reports of survivors on the basis of a previously established script whose nature, intent and results could be questioned on the basis of theoreticians as disparate as Theodor Adorno (1991; 1993), Reyes Mate (2003), Roney Cytrynowicz (2000), Arturo Lozano Aguilar (2001), as well as the Jewish filmmaker Claude Lanzmann (1997 in CANGI, 2003) and Holocaust survivor Primo Levi (2004). Considering the aesthetic, moral and ethical demands of these authors, it can be posited that, going against its own original intent, the Foundation’s material

has compromised – and even betrayed – testimony as an historical possibility, as well as the memory of the very event it is intended to preserve, by sullyng its *content of truth*, to use a favorite expression of Theodor Adorno.

Skepticism about the original design of the archive of Holocaust survivors’ testimony, conceived in the early 1990s, and the Survivors of the Shoah, Visual History Foundation, is also based on another argument – and a strong one: the stance and intentions of its creator, filmmaker Steven Spielberg. As I have stressed in another study that focused on an analysis of the over 15 years of existence (and success) of his masterwork, *Schindler's List*, the American director has made himself an “expert” on and even a spokesperson for the victims of the Shoah. More than that, by building up a significant audiovisual work about the Holocaust, Spielberg presents himself within the sphere of the US and global culture of consumption as a kind of *curator*, if we can use that expression, of the representation of the testimony and memory of the victims and survivors of Nazi genocide. It should be noted that I am using *representation* in accordance with the concept derived from Cultural History: the “presentification of an absence, like a new presentation, which illustrates an absence,” in the words of historian Sandra Pesavento (2003, p. 40).

Certainly, to a greater or lesser degree, other filmmakers have tried to appropriate that role,

the most familiar and controversial example, especially in Europe, being the French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann. However, unlike Spielberg, who only realized his *Jewishness* on the eve of the promotional campaign for *Schindler's List*, throughout his life, Lanzmann not only made his stand in the world as a Jewish artist but was an activist, including the thorny role of a defender of Israel, and one can accuse him of anything but a lack of radical commitment and consistency in his career (and his film work). Moreover, unlike Spielberg's production, which uses the same tear-jerking formulas in movies about aliens, sharks, family dramas of the racist South, the rescue of soldiers during World War II and the industrial killing of Jews in the heart of twentieth-century Europe, Lanzmann's benchmark film on the subject, the monumental documentary *Shoah* (1974-1985), is considered by critics to be a masterpiece and a definitive work on the Nazi extermination, albeit little known to the general public. This, incidentally, already gives rise to a fundamental question about the consumption of a cultural product whose theme is, strictly speaking, so indigestible: the most respected and insightful films do not gain the popularity and visibility of those which, although viewed with contempt or concerns, are certainly more appropriate for mass entertainment, to which

we may add, along with *Schindler's List*, works like *Holocaust* (1978) and, especially, *Life is Beautiful* (1997), by the narcissistic clown Roberto Benigni.

The success of these titles – as well as vast revenue brought in by massive consumption around the globe – points to the phenomenon known as the “Americanization of the Holocaust,”¹ which naturally fuelled acerbic criticism of a veritable “Holocaust Industry,” a provocative term coined by Finkelstein (2001). It should be noted that, following the somewhat unexpected *frisson* caused by a film about the Nazi-oid who suddenly became a humanist and savior of the Jews, Spielberg's next step would be to monopolize the representation – and the “story” – of the Holocaust through his Survivors of the Shoah, Visual History Foundation, which collected the stories of survivors from all over the world, including Brazil, in the 1990s.

Part of this material ended up being used in the documentary *Survivors of the Holocaust* (1996), directed, at least officially, by Allan Holzman, and produced by Spielberg. However, the performative success of the project to document the memories and testimony of survivors on a global scale proved detrimental to its creator. The Foundation's work and

¹ According to Finkelstein (2001), North America would make the Holocaust one of the founding stories of its identity. Spielberg has played a key role in this process. The fate of the Schindlerjuden (“Schindler's Jews”) would elevate the infantiloid director to a new and unusual status. The strategy involved finding a widely accepted topic, minimizing its explosive charge and subsequently making it politically correct, which entailed a greater emotional thrill and less reflection on the facts and their consequences. Thus, as Aguilar has noted (2001, p. 27), the most devastating experience for modern Western civilization has ended up being assimilated in a moralizing fashion so it can spread a message of optimism and redemption.

the central role of American filmmaker were relentlessly criticized, leading Spielberg to withdraw and donate the material to the University of Southern California. The removal, so to speak, of the central figure thus far, one of the most famous producers of Hollywood's blockbuster melodramas, would be effected by changing the name of the collection. But the same cannot be said about the content of those documents, as we shall see.

It so happens that there are different ways of dealing with the content of testimonies. The more than nine-hour French documentary *Shoah* contains nothing but the testimony in its most pure and ideal form, that is, the testimony of survivors in the present tense, without any archive images (conducive to the morbid enjoyment of suffering) or additional dramatic props. What we see, in particular, are faces and voices, a clear work of oral history as opposed to the "script" of the narratives collected for the Spielberg Survivors of the Shoah Foundation which, as its name indicates, creates a somewhat hybrid and fragile category: that of a "visual history." In 1997, in an interview with the Argentine newspaper *Página 12*, Lanzmann inveighs against the Spielberg memorial project:

There is a kind of inflation of memory.... Furthermore, the focus is on the survivors, and the survivors are very pleased to be able to tell their personal stories. Do not forget that the survivors of the "Shoah" are very special survivors. One almost cannot call them survivors. They live on death. And they do not bear witness for them-

selves, but for the dead. They are the spokesmen of the dead. There are people there who worked the destruction process to the ultimate degree and could have been killed, and survived due to a combination of luck, a miracle, courage, or the finger of God. "Shoah" is not a film about survivors. The people in "Shoah" never say "I," they never tell their own story, never tell how they escaped. They did not want to talk about it, and I did not ask them about it. I was not interested, because "Shoah" is a film about death, about the radical nature of death, and not an adventure film about an escape (1997 in CANGI, 2003, p. 160).

A look back in time will remind us that Spielberg's "adventure film" renewed and intensified a commotion that had set in in the United States when the TV series "Holocaust" aired about 15 years earlier (1978). Reactions to *Schindler's List* included some mistakes and excesses detected by Aguilar (2001), although it had put a major issue back on the agenda. At the time, groups of educators considered the narrative "an antidote to racism," simplistically linking its pro-Jewish message to the fight against racism in the USA. As expected, major national and media personalities played a prominent role: after seeing the world premiere of the film at Spielberg's personal invitation, President Bill Clinton interpreted the narrative, at a ceremony held on December 1st, World AIDS Day, as a way to understand the nature of human suffering, the appropriate response to it, and the painful difference between people who lose hope and those who manage to stay strong in spite of everything. Oprah Winfrey, the icon of the black community in the United States (people

of “African descent” for politically correct extremists), said that seeing the movie had made her a better person. Thus, 1993 could be regarded as “the year of the Holocaust” in the USA. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum opened in Washington, DC, while elementary schools in some states included a course on the Holocaust – among other genocides, of course – duly illustrated by *Schindler’s List* (AGUILAR, 2001, pp. 29-30).

However, as the Italian chemist and Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi has taught us in his reports and analyses of the Shoah, the vast majority of those who survived included so-called “privileged,” prisoners who obtained some kind of special privileges by “submitting to authority in the camp” (2004, p.15). These people, Levi would say, did not bear witness to their story, and when they did, they introduced gaps, distortions or complete falsehoods. It could be said that, to some degree, potentially, the kindly little old men and women we see parading in the material of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation and its “pilot” film, *Holocaust Survivors*, may fit into that category. Such a past – and its *gray area* – is not compatible with the Spielbergian concept of the *testimony* of his victim-characters,

which is necessarily linear and without nuance (read purely “good” and “innocent”). Of course, for the general public (laymen who are barely aware of the brutal reality of the camps), this past omitted from memories and testimonies, the result of that terrible *gray area*, will necessarily be shocking and compromise their empathy with the characters in the drama.² This is where the problems with regard to historical truth begin.

2 Aestheticization, Memory and Forgetting in the Americanization of the Shoah

Let us recall one of the teachings of historian Jacques Le Goff: becoming the “masters of memory and forgetting” is vital for the classes, groups and individuals that have dominated and still dominate historical societies (2003, p. 422). If the apprehension of memory is always dependent on the social and political environment, we still must attempt to understand the circumstances that converged to induce Spielberg to invade the global imaginary with his postmodern project of collecting testimonies. The process would be driven by the context of the “Americanization of the Holocaust” and the international success of his fictional narrative about Oscar Schindler.

² For those who are familiar with the survivors’ testimonies and the historic accounts of the massacre to which the victims were subjected, it is highly understandable that, to some extent, they were pressured to the point of seeking forms of survival that included varying degrees of submission to authority. However, to the mass audience, characterized by poor knowledge of history and ignorance of the testimonies that have delved more deeply into the remembrance of the Horror, some forms of collaboration by the victims in their own process of destruction are incomprehensible. Thus, the portrayal of these events ends up subjecting the victims to another form of violence: hasty, ill-considered judgment of the survivors’ behavior (and, of course, their character).

Schindler's List has decisively fixed the memory of the Holocaust for present and future generations; it has crowned Spielberg's career with the blessing of six Oscars, including best director and best film; it has generated a parallel fashion through testimony the Holocaust and its moralizing consequences (adapted to many different contexts and always seeking mass consensus), actually very similar to that which was unleashed by aliens, sharks or dinosaurs (AGUILAR, 2001, p. 34).

It was precisely in the wake of that boom that Spielberg launched the Survivors of the Shoah: Visual History Foundation. The Foundation has put hundreds of researchers into action around the world to pursue the story – a standard narrative with the appropriate “organizing memory” – that of survivors, at a time when most of the witnesses were nearing the end of their lives. As Eric Rentschler has aptly noted, the vital and historic relationship that movies have always had with propaganda (ideological and/or political) would reconfirm Nazi Germany and Hollywood as “the most powerful and resonant protagonists that have fueled the imagination of the masses in the twentieth century” (2000, p. 14). If we consider the stance of someone like Primo Levi, that the experience of the death camps had produced two categories of people: those who saved themselves and those who went under, we can see that Spielberg has promoted this observation to its fullest extent. Compared to the six million victims of the “real” Holocaust, the tiny number of “Schindler's Jews” – a little over one thousand people – and the survivors interviewed by the Foundation have won

the right to live and enjoy full visibility in the world of representation.

In both cases, however, we are far removed from the terrible literalness of the concentration and extermination camps and the true subjects/“characters” of the Holocaust, who flit past on the screen. These are the so-called Muselmann or “Muslims,” a kind of camp slang that designated of the hundreds of thousands of men and women with fixed, empty eyes, who are on the verge of death, averaging a maximum of three months of “internment.” How then can the *offense* perpetrated by the butchers of the ghettos and death camps be redeemed by the miraculous and inexplicably generous intervention of the charming Oscar Schindler or the final images of the testimonies of the Shoah Foundation, when the survivors are urged to provide a kind of happy ending and introduce us to their (new) families and descendants?

Also, there does not seem to be an equitable amount of room for *resentment* in Spielberg's testimonial project, that “moral protest against forgetting, demanding the predominance of the victim's point of view,” mentioned by Reyes Mate (2003). One wonders whether, in the beautiful and somewhat fake images in *Schindler's List*, as in the familiar scenes of survivors that feed the multimedia collection of Survivors of the Shoah, we are seeing the world through the victims' eyes – even resentful ones. There is a lingering suspicion that the memory Spielberg

has engendered may have little to do with the imperative one desired by Reyes Mate: “the role of memory is to restore the viewpoint of the oppressed. Seeing the world through the victims’ eyes” (2003, p. 111). As Adorno definitively states (1991, p. 65): “something from these victims is being prepared, works of art hurled into the cannibalism of the world that killed them,” since, “based on the principle of aesthetic stylization and even the solemn prayer of the choir, imponderable fate presents itself as if it had somehow, one day, had some meaning; it is sublimated and loses a little of its horror.” Regarding Spielberg’s testimonies and his imagery of the Holocaust, one can still invoke Aphorism no. 25 from *Minima Moralia*. In that essay, entitled “Think not of Them,” the philosopher accuses: “What is not reified and cannot be counted or measured, falls away. But, if that were not enough, the reification extends to its own opposite, to the life that cannot be immediately actualized; which only lives on as thought and memory.” Thus, the desecrated life “is still dragged along by the victory car of the united statisticians, and even that which is past is no longer safe from the present, which, by remembering it, consecrates it once more to forgetting” (ADORNO, 1993, p. 39).

The spirit, so to speak, of such a monopoly of representation would also be challenged by

historians of the Shoah. Roney Cytrynowicz (2000) draws attention to the consequences of the media treatment of such historically significant events as the industrial extermination of European Jews under Hitler. “A certain hegemony of the discourse of memory, like the Spielberg project, for example, captures memory in a huge mold of production, after which it would be difficult to recognize the subjective experience of destruction.” It seems clear that this is a memory “stored and offered as the industry of entertainment” and as the “memory of entertainment.” It certainly does nothing “for the dignity of the survivors nor the understanding of the Holocaust,” as Cytrynowicz caustically observes (2000, p. 204).

In fact, the discomfort caused by the material housed in the Shoah Foundation can be glimpsed in the documentary that resulted entirely from the early collection of testimonies in *Holocaust Survivors* (1996), by the Holzman/Spielberg duo.³ The film is closely bound to the order of presentation of the classic narrative. We start slowly, with events that reach a crescendo, and then after the climax, as in any good emotional and tearful story, we reach the happy ending. Those men and women who told sad stories and wept copiously seem relieved in the end, displaying their families with sincere pride, all smiles for the Foundation’s camera. The silent message always seems to follow the same litany:

³ The film is marked by the highly fictionalized testimonies and clear propagandistic bent: images, songs, texts and a certain standardization of the testimonies establish the USA as the country that provided a haven for the survivors and sacralize the State of Israel, through a mixture of Zionism and Jewish religious fervor suddenly awakened in Spielberg.

it was horrible, but it's over and here we are with our numerous children and grandchildren in our new life. I was struck by the pathetic statement from a sympathetic survivor who says something like: "Hitler and his bastards tried to kill me but I was smarter and I'm here, in the bosom of my family." As for the mechanical succession of images of replenished families, let us recall the words of Todorov (2002, p. 195): "memory may be made sterile by its shape, because the past, when made sacred, does not evoke anything but itself; because the same past, when trivialized, makes us think about everything and anything."

The material that Spielberg eventually donated to the University of Southern California was basically complete. The design of the statements is instructive: the recordings of the interviews ranged from two and five hours and followed three chronological coordinates of the survivor's life: the period before the persecution, the Holocaust itself, including persecution, deportation, life in the camps, and their return, and finally, the period between their reintegration into post-war life and the present day. Overall, these three phases respectively cover 20%, 60% and 20% of the testimony. "By their very structure, these interviews have already evaded the question of systematic extermination," notes Lozano Aguilar. "The

relevance of the survivors' memories stems from the fact that they are the only ones who can testify to part of the suffering of those who perished. Such testimony, therefore, can only be read as a small synecdoche of the suffering endured by millions of dead people" (2001, pp. 38-39).

Aguilar assesses the implications of the uncompromising Spielberg method. The centrality that mass murder should occupy is mitigated and replaced by the way Nazi persecution affected the lives of the survivors and how they managed to evade it. Thus, the weight of the dead is reduced to its minimum expression: even at the end of the interview, the interviewee lists his or her murdered relatives, recalling the last time he saw them and how they died (if known); to conclude the interview, they will be asked to give a moral to the story and introduce their children and grandchildren, their descendants. The result of this expedient is that the vacuum, so to speak, of dead relatives seems to be filled by members of the new family, which converts the dead into the mere biological predecessors of the narrator. Spielberg's comment on this closure is pathetic: "This shows that it is true that if you save one life you save the world." More disconcerting is Ben Kingsley's rectification:⁴ "and the void left by all who died" (1996 in AGUILAR, 2001, p. 39, our translation).

4 The British actor played the third most important role in Schindler's List, the accountant who helps the German industrialist run his business. The line comes from a verse from the Talmud $\frac{3}{4}$ "And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world" $\frac{3}{4}$ which would be inscribed in a gold ring that Schindler received from his protégés at the end of the film. The growing friendship and contact between the Jews and the industrialist are the driving force for his moral conversion.

The direst consequence of Steven Spielberg's project is not the reification of memory in and of itself. There is something worse: his intention to rise above the characteristics of memory and turn it into history. This begs the question of to what extent edifying eyewitness accounts could affect the process of naturalizing history. We should recall that the very name of the Foundation points to this and indeed does not even mention memory. The research director of Survivors of the Shoah, Ari Zev, when recalling the accumulative system the original Foundation pursued, mentioned the existence of three categories for the interviews collected: "journalistic, therapeutic and historical." The goal, as he stated at the time, was to "use the best of each" (ZEV [2000?] in AGUILAR, 2001, p. 39).

The multimedia system used to store the testimonies is also debatable: once transferred to the database, the testimonies are fragmented into individual items that can be consulted by the interested party regardless of the content of the rest of the memories. What concerns critics goes far beyond the obvious fact that, shaped by computer technology, the younger generation is not in the habit of dwelling on lengthy subjects, accustomed as they are to speed and the ability to navigate from multiple links. One wonders to what

extent and how far an archive set up on these terms is different from the "industry of experience,"⁵ which Lipovetsky underscores in his essay on society's hyper-consumption, in the context of "a new capitalism no longer centered on material production, but on entertainment and cultural commodities" (LIPOVETSKY, 2007, p. 62). For, as Bauman suggests, the culture of the consumer society – based on its intrinsic characteristics – "mainly involves forgetting, not learning." Caustically, the sociologist warns: "It's a lot of fun to experience something one did not know existed, and a good consumer is a fun-loving adventurer" (BAUMAN, 1999, p. 90).

On the screens of the Foundation's system, now under new stewardship, the picture emerges of the survivors recounting their experiences, which, in turn, are illustrated with maps and documentary footage of concentration camps and the cities where they were established, among other related information. During the narrative, as different themes, places or people arise, the system provides links through which those who consult it can connect with the stories of other survivors. "All this technological development decisively affects the testimonies, which abandon their individuality to add to a multimedia encyclopedia of the extermination of Jews in

5 "In addition to equipment and finished products, the entertainment industries today work with the participatory and emotional aspects of consumption, multiplying opportunities to live experiences directly," says Gilles Lipovetsky. In the third phase of the consumer society, the civilization of the object was replaced by an "experience economy," which included leisure, entertainment, games, tourism and diversion (2007, p. 63).

Europe,” chides Lozano Aguilar (2001, p. 40). He observes that the digitization of these accounts and the way they are organized will seriously obstruct a fundamental aspect of memory, namely the unified, coherent report that converts the past into experience. Thus, the arrangement of the testimonies seeks the information contained in each one as if it were all a matter of mapping the Shoah, of replacing historical studies with an accumulation of fragmented, poorly organized information, and the hierarchy governing scientific writing is replaced here with the emotionality of memories.

Aside from the fascination with the technology and amenity of an audiovisual system, we seriously doubt the achievements of the Visual History Foundation. As a historical document, it is of very limited value for three main reasons....⁶ As a collection of memories, its failure is perhaps more emphatic, as the system can eliminate the ethical characteristics of memory. The memory had the inherent quality of reintroducing the human [aspect] into the chronological sequence of events and the awareness of the crisis of Western civilization for having excised from progress the humanity that should guide it. The end result of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, albeit with much less pernicious effects, adds to this dehumanization by emptying the memory of the experience contained in each report, converting it into a mere database (AGUILAR, 2001, p. 41).

The memories of the Holocaust and its victims, offered with a greater or lesser degree of

aesthetic sophistication and technology for the present and future generations as consumer goods produced with their own logic and their own brands, are thus capable of being reflected upon. The collection of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education was built in the semblance of its original creator, and seems to contradict the ideal championed by Jeanne Marie Gagnebin: “inventing collective resistance to the collective process of alienation, rather than strengthening it through small private solutions of consumption” (2006, p. 115). The German Jewish philosopher Theodor Adorno, who unlike six million of his contemporaries would live to see the Holocaust become a pleasantly digestible cultural product, would note in Aphorism no. 30 of *Minima Moralia*:

Progress and barbarism are today so intertwined as mass culture that only barbaric asceticism against the latter, and against the progression of the means, can again produce that which is unbarbaric. No work of art, no thought, has a chance of survival, unless it bear within it repudiation of false riches and high-class production, of color films and television, millionaire magazines and Toscanini. The older media, not geared for mass-production, take on a new relevance: that of exemption and improvisation. They alone can outflank the united front of trusts and technology (ADORNO, 1993, p. 43).

6 The three reasons are: the events cannot be covered in their fullest extent, because the point of view of survivors is really quite limited; it is impossible to contrast the reliability of testimonies (not to mention the inaccuracies caused by the fragility of a traumatic memory); and subjective and personal writing without too much caution when establishing what happened in more accurate descriptive terms (AGUILAR, 2001, p. 41).

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Cómo consumir – con placer estético – los testimonios del Holocausto: una evaluación crítica sobre la fundación Survivors of the Shoah

Como consumir – com prazer estético – os testemunhos do Holocausto: uma avaliação crítica sobre a Fundação *Survivors of the Shoah*

Resumo

O presente artigo reflete acerca do estatuto do testemunho do Holocausto judeu no âmbito de uma cultura de consumo, tendo como objeto de análise o projeto original de Steven Spielberg, *Survivors of the Shoah, Visual History Foundation*, hoje sob a guarda da Universidade da Califórnia do Sul, devidamente rebatizado de *USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education*. Defenderemos a tese de que mesmo o testemunho e a memória do Terror podem ser estetizados e absorvidos pelo mercado de bens culturais, em um formato saneado e consolador, passível de ser consumido por um público potencialmente massivo. Em que pesem as boas intenções – se é que existem –, Steven Spielberg configura-se como uma discutível “autoridade” – midiática – acerca do Holocausto, conformando o imaginário ocidental sobre a memória do genocídio com sua Fundação e o sucesso anterior do filme *A lista de Schindler* (1993).

Palavras-Chave

Testemunho. Cultura de Consumo. Holocausto. *Survivors of the Shoah*. Steven Spielberg.

Cómo consumir – con placer estético – los testimonios del Holocausto: una evaluación crítica sobre la fundación *Survivors of the Shoah*

Resumen

El presente artículo reflexiona acerca del estatuto del testimonio del Holocausto judío en el ámbito de una cultura de consumo, teniendo como objeto de análisis el proyecto original de Steven Spielberg, *Survivors of the Shoah, Visual History Foundation*, hoy bajo la custodia de la Universidad de California del Sur, debidamente rebautizado de *USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education*. Defenderemos la tesis de que el propio testimonio y la memoria del Terror pueden ser estetizados y absorbidos por el mercado de bienes culturales, en un formato saneado y consolador, pasible de ser consumido por un público potencialmente masivo. En que pesen las buenas intenciones – si es que existen –, Steven Spielberg se configura como una discutible “autoridad” – de los medios de comunicación – en relación al Holocausto, conformando el imaginario occidental sobre la memoria del genocidio con su fundación y el éxito anterior de la película *La lista de Schindler* (1993).

Palabras-Clave

Testimonio. Cultura de Consumo. Holocausto. *Survivors of the Shoah*. Steven Spielberg.

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