East European Film Bulletin

ESSAY

The Depth of Grief?

Historical Evidence in the Armenian Films of Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi

VOL. 69 (NOVEMBER 2016) BY MORITZ PFEIFER

From 1987 to 1990 Angela Ricci Lucchi and Yervant Gianikian traveled to Armenia in the search of material on the Armenian genocide. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, they were among the first to be allowed into Soviet archives, which had been publicly inaccessible since the 1920s. Since only very few photographic and no filmic images of the event existed, the filmmakers had hoped that they could find authentic visual evidence of the genocide. Three years earlier, they had already recorded the oral testimony of Yervant Gianikian's father who had survived the genocide fleeing to Italy. In *Return to Khodorciur – Armenian Diary* (1986), Raphael Gianikian recounts childhood memories of his home, forced migration, death marches, and slavery. The material Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi discovered in the Soviet archives, however, failed to provide visual evidence for the memories of Raphael Gianikian and of the experience of those who were less fortunate than him. What the artists found in the archives merely documented the end of tsarist Russia, military campaigns during World War I, and Communist choreographies of workers marking the beginnings of socialist realism. Rare images witnessing 1918 deportations of Armenians from Azerbaijan that were recorded by the British Dunsterforce are the only filmic evidence directly depicting victims of the genocide.

It has often been noted that the perverse perfection of the Armenian genocide resides in the fact that it cannot be visually remembered.[1] Denial was constitutive of the genocide. Every trace of the victims was meant to disappear together with the possibility to remember them. The scenes from the Soviet archives that make up the footage are no exception to this absence. They show the genocide as an undocumented and unrecorded event. Perhaps because the destruction and the concealment of evidence were inherent traits of genocidal policy, it is a common characteristic of artistic representations to depict the genocide as an event without a witness or address questions of representability instead of directly focusing on the event itself.[2]

However, it is now characteristic of depictions of extreme acts of violence, and of genocides in particular, to include reflections about the limits of their representation, regardless of whether the destruction of evidence was an essential part of these acts or not.[3] Most of these questions stem from the observation that even if it would be possible to gather all the evidence and prove all the facts, such acts would somehow still resist the power of depiction. Perhaps feelings of loss, absence and mourning are best expressed in a void, in silence and in shadow. Ever since Theodor Adorno's shocker — his statement that writing "poetry after Auschwitz would be barbarous"— more and more contenders have joined the debate.[4] Adorno himself later changed his mind about what he had said, but demands for "unimaginability", "incomprehensibility", "ineffability", etc. are still common. To meet the irreconcilable demands of historical accuracy and dignified mourning may be regarded as the consensus of a half a century of genocide representation.

When Ricci Lucchi and Gianikian started to deal with their witness portrayal and the found footage of the Armenian genocide, doubts that documentary evidence could meaningfully represent the past were at a peak. More and more films started to address the validity of their own material.[5] By the mid-1980s, whatever was initially meant by "ineffability" had three fairly straightforward implications for filmmakers working with visual evidence. The first stemmed from the observation that historical recordings are never simply evidential but require interpretations that can become misinterpretations.[6] Calls for ineffability, here, were mostly directed against the misuse of archival material by conventional documentaries and newspapers, particularly images of the Holocaust, which were often chosen at random for any narrative in need of an illustration instead of representing the specific moments in which they were made.[7] The second regarded the fact that just like the contextual particularities of a piece of evidence need explanation, so too do its moral implications. Here, the demand for ineffability was a reaction against overly moralistic perspectives, for instance through voice-of-God commentary, that were increasingly criticized for distorting historical consciousness through mythmaking and a dogmatic understanding of the past.[8] Lastly an increasing interest in trauma theory made it apparent that ineffability is an essential characteristic of trauma and mourning. There was thus a demand for representations of such acts to replace conventionally linear, factual, or transparent narratives with ones that would include reflections on silence, absence, and loss.[9]

These demands for ineffability challenged artists who were dealing with historical evidence. Within a cultural climate in which the historical and aesthetic value of visual evidence of extreme acts of violence was increasingly put into question, it is understandable that the lack of archival footage in *Return to Khodorciur-Armenian Diary*, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's only film that relies almost entirely on a oral testimony, has been read as a reflection on the ineffability of traumatic experience. Although the filmmakers returned to

the use of archival images in *Uomini, Anni, Vita,* the absence of visual proof of the genocide in the film has also been regarded as addressing moral and interpretational questions about the limits of representation that go beyond the observation that the event lacked material evidence.

While Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's Armenian works have been disproportionally interpreted by commentators whom I will call "ineffibalists" in this paper, their archival research has also helped some historians to better understand the past. Despite the fact that their historical evidence has been thought to be of little historical interest, feeding into discussions about how to represent far more than into questions of what happed and why, it is far from impossible to understand the role of evidence in their work in the sense of more "conventional" historiography. Indeed, as shall be argued in the second part of this paper which will provide a historical reconstruction of what can actually be seen in their films, the directors seem to share less common ground with the ineffabilists than is often claimed. Instead of reducing the role of evidence to a gesture of grief, I argue that what comes out of these films as an emotional tenor should better be understood as shock, and has political-social more than individual-psychological implications.

Misrepresentation, Misjudgments, Mourning

Realist factual footage of the Armenian genocide exists in the form of amateur photographs taken by different diplomats, missionaries and foreign aid workers such as the German medical officer Armin T. Wegner and the U.S.-American relief worker John Elder. For the most part, these images were taken with the intention to document and inform, in conscious defiance against German and Turkish orders that prohibited photography.[10] Photographs from the German archives have also been made public, some of them depicting German soldiers who fought as alleys alongside the Ottomans posing in front of massacred corpses.[11] These images have a different point of view than those of the aid workers. Quite possibly they were not taken with the aim to prove a war crime but to frame an adventure of war. There is also evidence for the existence of Turkish propaganda recordings.[12] It has thus been reported that Mehmed Reshid orchestrated photographs of tortured and killed Armenians dressed in Muslim costume to falsify atrocities committed by the Armenians.[13] If these photographs ever surface, they too will have to be treated differently from the amateur material of the missionaries.

The few films that were made on the genocide before the 1990s use these images in a way that completely disregards the particular contexts that made them available.[14] Thus in Michael Hagopian's two documentaries *Where Are My People?* (1965) and *The Forgotten Genocide* (1975) images by Armin T. Wegner decorate the voice-over commentary (narrated by the TV-star Mike Connors) more or less at random, creating the impression that there are no holes in our

visual knowledge of the event. However, little is known, for instance, about the much reproduced photograph used in Hagopian's films, which depicts a woman walking with a bundle in her arms on a dirt road. It is unknown who the woman was, whether she was carrying a baby, where and when precisely the picture was taken, and whether she was walking towards famine, disease, abduction, rape or death.[15] Without identity, place or date, such images are at risk of being reduced to illustrative icons for other places and other times. In the absence of other photographs and films, they are forced to represent the whole *Medz Yeghern*, a purpose which they cannot possibly fulfill.

Many historiographies and films working with evidence have since tried to pay closer attention to the history behind the material they are dealing with, critically examining how it was produced, circulated, and consumed.[16] For the 1980s, Paul Ricœur's claim that historians should pay less attention to "evidence" and look instead "at the more fundamental question of what accounts for the interest of a work of history", was paradigmatic for overarching methodological doubts about the status of evidence as a criterion of historical truth.[17] Works that used evidence to represent more than what was given away by the particular context of their making were dismissed as misleading or totalizing.[18] Although the ineffabalists' demand for contextual awareness was not as much directed against evidence per se as against an uncritical use of it, many theorists and artists turned aniconist, rejecting the use of archival footage altogether.

Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985), which came out one year before *Return to Khodorciur*, is often brought up in this context together with the claim that his refusal to use archival images and his reliance on testimony have offered him a way to reject traditional historical methods of "understanding."[19] Here, a photographic record of one of history's most violent moments was prevented from being shown on screen. Film scholar Gertrud Koch was excited, writing that the film, "in its elision, offers an image of the unimaginable."[20] Testimony thus came to be seen as an innovative solution against the perils of contextual abuse that were associated with archival images. Unlike them, the experience in a testimony seemed "unarchivable" in the sense that it could not be turned into an icon for other, different experiences.[21] By the 1990s, some theoretical circles even used the word archive pejoratively, fearing in it a dwelling of misrepresentation and forgetfulness.[22]

Another argument against representation concerning the relationship between evidence and judgment started to gain popularity around this time. Evidence, in the form of photo or film, never contains a judgment that condemns what it depicts.[23] From a moral point of view, the missing judgment in a peace of evidence has quite literally an ineffable side to it. Unless there is a judge, it has to speak for itself. The idea that historical evidence should speak for itself attracted the ineffabalists' sympathies.[24] The demand for less judgment and more understanding regarding filmic evidence of the Holocaust also began in

the 1980s, when moralistic historiographies, in which the narrator takes the role of a judge, became outdated and were replaced by rhetorically more sober accounts whose moral position was either implied or taken for granted.[25] In the use of filmic evidence as well, morally suggestive emotions were often frowned upon, perhaps precisely because they somewhat clumsily try to make the obvious explicit. In this case, the wish for silence or invisibility was not so much directed against evidence per se as against an overly moralistic attitude that is at best tautological and at worst conceited — who are you to judge? Nevertheless, this led some to conclude that horrific images are unable to stir any moral sentiments whatsoever. So better not show them at all.[26]

Enter sadness. A last argument against representation came from trauma studies, which started to gain popularity in the mid-1990s. Highly influenced by psychoanalysis and French postmodernist thought, scholars like Shoshana Felman, Dominick la Capra and Cathy Caruth began to explore the effect of trauma upon Holocaust representations.[27] Studying testimonies, they came to the conclusion that victims of trauma are often unable to describe their experience, choosing silence over words. If traumatic experiences are more about forgetting than remembering, then decades of historical research needed to be turned on its head. Important in a historical narrative was not the event but the effect the event had on those living it, something historians — in the their belief in facts and evidence — had hitherto completely ignored. Forgetfulness, silence, gaps, fragments, in short a genre resisting traditional linear historical writing, has since become essential not only in understanding traumatic events but also in representing them. Eulogies for lost archives outperformed lamentations on the inevitability of forgetting. Indeed, what came out of the representability debates of the 1970s and 1980s was that, while history may resist the power of depiction, the inadequacy of remembering, depicting, and testifying, is itself an expression of what was considered most adequate to understand the past: loss. Thus was born a generation of grief historians. Grief said everything while representing nothing.

Perhaps, then, a cultural climate that was exhausted with the usefulness of archival images for the representation of traumatic events and genocides in particular, made Ricci Lucchi and Gianikian refrain form illustrating Raffael's narrative with found footage. In Yervant Gianikian's own words: "the power of words is greater than that of the images of the genocide."[28] In his monograph on the directors, historian Robert Lumley has noted that in Italy, Primo Levi had made testimony into his principal means of writing about concentration camps.[29] One might add, however, that by the mid-1980s, Levi was already less worried by a culture of forgetfulness than by conundrums over the question of whether it is possible to remember at all. In 1986, he wrote: "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".[30] In other words, what was important in a witness account was not so much the duty to remember a

terrible event as the impossibility of witnessing itself.

Even though *Return to Khodorciur* has been relatively little shown, with a few exceptions, all commentators have since seen the film through one of the above mentioned “ineffability” lenses. Thus French film scholar Danièle Hibon, who organized a retrospective of the filmmakers’ work in 2000, remarked in her catalogue essay that Raphael’s testimony hardly uses any adjectives — making all qualities beyond the factual quite literally ineffable — and liked the whole process of remembering to “a blind spot.”[31] Film scholar Marie-Aude Baronian similarly believes that there is a “destructive element constitutive of [Raphel Gianikian’s] testimony”, suggesting, like Primo Levi, that the formal boundaries of testifying somehow obliterate the testimony itself. Robert Lumley has more specifically evoked aspects of trauma in the work, observing in his brief chapter on the Armenian films of the directors, that Raphael may have passed his traumatic experience — “silences” and “the unspoken” — on to his son, which he, in turn, perpetuated in his art.[32] For all of these commentators, “the act of memory itself”[33] or “the reflection on the limits of the visible”[34], as two more recent writers have put it, seemed to outweigh the father’s memories, the unsaid prevailing over the said.

The return to archival footage in *Uomini, Anni, Vita* may have betrayed some of the more radical advocates of ineffability.[35] But *Uomini* still fulfilled the ineffabilist’s criteria of meaning: there were no images of a genocide in the Soviet archives that could be misused or misinterpreted. Instead, the fact that the directors refused to contextualize their images and the obvious absence of what the film purported to represent, meant that the film could be read in direct continuity to its predecessor, namely as “a history beyond the facts”[36]. The impossibility to tell whether “we are looking at conquerors or conquered […] liberat[ed] history from the pressures imposed by ideological interpretations”.[37] Ideological interpretations, here, referred less to Turkish genocide denials than to conventional textbook history. Historians read Ricci Lucchi and Gianikian’s method as an attack against the historical mainstream and the naivety of believing that it is possible to reconstruct the past “as it really was”[38]. Like *Return to Khodorciur*, *Uomini, Anni, Vita* was thus more regarded as a film about writing history than about history itself and within these metahistorical ruminations as an appeal for drawing attention to the fact that history is always fragmentary, opaque, palimpsestic, in other words, ineffable.

The use of Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* in the film also made it look like the directors’ real concern was trauma, not history, sadness, not evidence. Described as a “melancholy metaphor”[39], “a song of farewell”[40] and “a requiem for the death of a people”[41], many commentators have read *Uomini, Anni, Vita* as a conscious attempt of bringing emotions back into a field whose interest for dry facts often precluded heartfelt mourning. “The painful memory of […] war does not lend itself to public telling”, wrote one commentator, acknowledging

in the same breath that “the experience of grief was what had caused them [the memories] to be written.”[42] With the benefit of a meta-historian’s hindsight, the films thus perfectly matched the dominant paradigm of an emerging trauma culture. Once again what mattered most was everything that could not be seen on screen: the experience of a genocide forever lost to understanding.

Both *Return to Khodorciur* and *Uomini, Anni, Vita* were thus seen as reflections on the inability to adequately represent a traumatic historical past. The imageless testimony in *Return to Khodorciur* was seen as a conscious dismissal of the uncritical use of archival pictures, and horrifying images in particular, as they started to drain conventional documentaries, school classes and museums. The wordless archives in *Uomini, Anni, Vita* questioned the totalizing efforts of conventional historiography and the pretense that history could simply be narrated or written down, for example in conventional history books, school curricula and institutional brochures. More than suggesting alternative modes of representation, however, the films’ self-conscious embrace of the fact that unrepresentability is a constitutive element of history, memory, and grief, was regarded as their true innovation. The emotional melancholy of the works guaranteed that this method did not come across as a Bhartrhari paradox — that something is unnameable but becomes nameable precisely by calling it unnameable.

Historical Evidence

It is one thing to acknowledge the difficult task of understanding and remembering a painful past, however, and quite another to refuse, like Lanzmann and his followers have done, archival evidence altogether. After all, even if *Shoah* gives the impression of the Holocaust as “an event without a witness”, it does so by presenting witnesses.[43] The same can be said about *Return to Khodorciur*. In fact, it is precisely because Raphael Gianikian’s narrative includes very detailed information about when and where his story happened, that it can be considered important evidence of the past.

The historian and Armenian genocide scholar Raymond Kévorkian has thus used Raphael Gianikian’s testimony in his reconstruction of the deportations from the district of Kiskim-Khodorchur. Kévorkian writes that the Armenians of the district comprised 13 villages, which had an Armenian population of 8136. Late in May 1915, the district’s governor Necati Bey summoned the notables of Khodorchur and ordered them to commence the deportations, which were organized in five convoys starting in early June, 1915. Raphael Gianikian lived in a small town called Kisak (in today’s district of Yusufeli). Being 9 years old at the time, he was deported in the fourth convoy, which left Kisak in August with around 350 people. In his own testimony, Raphael recalls how government officials arrived in his village in early June with ten policemen. Within days, the

inhabitants were forced to leave their homes. The convoy passed south-west along the Çoruh and Euphrates River through Hunud (now Çamlıkaya), Bayburt, Erzincan, Kemah, Ağın, Arapgir, Malatya, and Samsat, where it was decimated. The deportees were massacred near Samsat on the banks of the Euphrates, around 800 kilometers south-west of Kisak in February or March, 1916. The death march lasted more than six months with many dying on the way. Raphael managed to escape the killings near Samsat because his father was a blacksmith and someone in a nearby village called Büyükbağ was looking for a craftsman. A total of around 100 people from the Armenian villages in the Kiskim-Khodorchur survived.[44]

How was life like for a 9 year old Armenian growing up in an isolated mountain range “well suited for sheep breeding”?[45] Were families prepared for the deportations, fearfully waiting occupation or preparing for war? Or were they taken by surprise, going about their Christian life without any prior understanding what was awaiting them? Kevorkian writes that Ottoman military forces and rebel groups had plundered villages in the Kiskim district as early as 1914, with different episodes of terror ensuing, the most alarming being the arrest of two village notables in the winter of 1915. Until World War I, however, the Armenians in the Kiskim district had retained good relations with their Muslim neighbors. Armenian scholar Hovann Simonian even sees in Raffael Gianikian’s testimony a proof of the the Muslim neighbors’ admiration for the Armenians of the Khodorchur valley.[46] They were spared from the Hamidian massacres (1894–1896) and only suffered from relatively little hostility which mostly came from neighboring ethnic tribes such as the Laz in the north and the Hemshin. The tribes were, however, encouraged by Ottoman hostility against Christian minorities and pursued acts of banditry in the province. The anti-Armenian policies of Abdülhamid II may have contributed to a more repressive climate, characterized by seizing Armenian property or not paying them rents.[47] On the one had, the Armenian inhabitants of Khodorchur were thus not unfamiliar with ethnic and religious-based discrimination and repression. On the other hand, the signs of growing hostility were probably not threatening enough for them to consider migrating. It is unlikely that serious warnings reached Khodorchur before 1914, when a former bandit, Abdullah Efendi, warned Khodorchur inhabitants of impending government plans against Armenians and urged them to leave for Russia.[48]

While *Return to Khodorciur* avoids archival images, it is difficult to understand how Raphael Gianikian’s testimony avoids either archival representation or analogy. Yervant Gianikian has described the film as “an archive of words”, still hoping to find filmic material that could illustrate Raphael’s experience. Instead of psychologizing the lack of adjectives in his father’s testimony as signs of personal trauma, one could very well argue that the impersonality of the account lends itself to a more universal interpretation. Indeed, this makes it easier to imagine that the fate of the experience of those who did not survive was similar until their death.

What can be seen in *Uomini, Anni, Vita?* Tsarist propaganda films show parades and ceremonies in celebration of the Romanov dynasty; picturesque landscape shots illustrate his oriental conquests against the Ottomans; after the Revolution, Communist choreographies of workers mark the beginnings of socialist realism. It is true that Armenia hardly exists in the film. It is populated by foreign armies, its natural resources exploited by foreign industries, its landscape and people succumbing to the utilitarian gaze, first of an imperialist military culture and then of Communist brotherhood. Even though *Uomini, Anni, Vita* does not directly depict scenes of extermination, it is very much a film about the politics of extermination. In Gianikian's own words, "We wanted to put the Armenian event in a historical context and explore the signs of power of the last years of the tsar".[49]

Parts of this historical context reveal a military culture that instrumentalized the civilian population according to the needs of the imperial state. No sequence shows this better than a scene shot after the massacres of 1915. A woman cries, slumped in a heap of stones that had been her home. Yet the images belonged to a film that was to show to the Tsar the successes of the Russian army against the Ottomans. Upon watching the reels, Nicholas II was enchanted. In a letter to his wife he wrote about "the incomparable beauty of the peaks and the glitter of the snow under the sun." This anecdote is representative for Russia's Armenian policy. As Michael A. Reynolds has observed, Russia's military strategy was not motivated by any specific anti-Muslim or anti-Armenian bias, but became used to regarding civilian casualties as an acceptable loss for the survival of its empire.[50] Indeed the Russians lacked any ideologically coherent ethnoreligious policy, opposing, ignoring and sometimes even encouraging Armenian deportations depending on whether they could gain tactical military advantage from it.[51] With the falling apart of the Russian empire, Armenians were regarded at different times as a political danger, civilian burden, and potential military ally.

This incoherency can be seen in the footage. An intertitle states that the tsarist army defeated the Turkish army, saving the Armenian people from the Turks. By the time the original film was shot, however, the Armenians in eastern Anatolia had already been massacred. Nevertheless, Armenians did seek safety behind the Russian lines, understanding that a Russian military campaign in eastern Anatolia could mean salvation. A successful offensive led by General Nicholas Nikolaevich started in 1916. But the general was far from defending the Armenian cause, considering his predecessor, Vorontsov-Dashkov, to have been too "pro-Armenian".[52] Even if, as historian Ronald Grigor Suny has noted, the Russians advocated an ethnically nonpartisan policy in Anatolia, they certainly did not come as liberators. From a historical point of view, it is thus astonishing that the Russian officials responsible for producing the film that reported on these military campaigns felt obliged to fabricate a pro-Armenian stance.

Perhaps the image of Russia as a potential savior for the Armenians can best be understood within the context of Russia's earlier ethnoreligious policy in the Caucasus. Up until 1880, when fears of nationalism made the tsar adopt more repressive assimilation policies, Russia's perception as a liberator of Armenians had been a trademark of its imperial rule. Thus the seizure of Erevan by Russian troops in 1828 was framed as a liberation of Christians from Muslim monarchs.[53] This was not a political fiction. Many Armenians believed that their best hope for freedom lay with the tsarist system, which had provided property rights, as well as cultural, religious and linguistic freedoms. In the Crimean War of 1853–1856 and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, Russia put itself forward as the true champion of the oppressed Turkish Armenians and many Armenians volunteered to serve in the military. While Russification during the last two reigns, those of Alexander III and Nicholas II (1894–1917), nullified Armenian identification with the empire, some Russian officials still had plans to repopulate the invaded territories in east Anatolia with Armenian and Russian peasants as late as 1916, after the capture of Erzurum in February. For a short period of time, the resettling of the devastated lands seemed conceivable, but it ultimately proved to be a political impossibility. Nevertheless, such plans recalled the modus operandi of previous military campaigns, in which Russia's self-portrayal as Armenia's savior appeared less cynical. Wolgang Gust, in his seminal work on the German archives of the genocide, cites the theologian Johannes Lepsius, who wrote about Russia's conflicting interests in dealing with the Armenians, saying that "Russian propaganda has already succeeded in making most of the people forget the former hostile attitude, and in playing the role of 'liberator'."[54] The opening shot of *Uomini, Anni, Vita* in which Christians and Muslims are seen kneeling at the feet of Holy Mother Russia, can also be understood within the unpredictable policies of its final years, in which tolerance of difference was acceptable as long as it advanced Russia's military goals.

A later sequence in *Uomini, Anni, Vita* showing smiling peasants going on about their labor on Lake Sevan, presents Russia as a different kind of protector. The footage is from the 1930s. The Tsarist empire had collapsed and what was left of the Armenian population in the Caucasus had fallen under the newly founded Soviet Republic. An original caption read: "The peoples on the shores of the lake of Sevan live as a loving family." Again, the Russian state portrayed itself as a savior, this time of exotic traditions and working-class values. As Yervant Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi have noted, the combination of great-power chauvinism and Orientalism were characteristic Soviet visions of Armenia, even of writers like Ossip Mandelstam, who were more critical of the Communist project.[55] Similarly to the more tolerant years of ethnic diversity during the early 19th century, the Soviet policy of korenizatsiia ("nativization") encouraged Armenian traditions so long as this helped to advance its industrial goals.

In the context of Armenia's political relationship with Russia, the found footage

in *Uomini, Anni, Vita* presents evidence for the complete lack of self-determination of the Armenian people. Each scene shows Armenians like puppets in the hands of changing powers and dominant ideologies. Far from limiting our understanding of the past, the film thus shows that *how* a piece of evidence came about advances our understanding of what the evidence depicts. *Uomini, Anni, Vita* may be a "song of farewell." But Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* not only echoes the image of the crying mother in a field of ruins, communicating via music the unrecorded loss of thousands of people. It also provides a soundtrack to a dying empire – Mother Russia – to those who had the power to define what should and what should not be seen.

It may be worrying that the dominance of theories about ineffability in academia and beyond has reached a level at which those preoccupied with uncovering the past are pegged as ineffabilists. Neither *Return to Khodorciur* nor *Uomini, Anni, Vita* may be able to "represent" the Armenian genocide. But if the question of representability is to be taken seriously, the will to try, for instance by putting the genocide in a historical context or taking into consideration testimonies, certainly seems to outweigh conclusions about representational impossibilities, both in the directors' work and in artistic practice. In light of the fact that their archival work appears to have helped our understanding of the past more than obscuring it, one may wonder why they have found so many admirers in the ineffabilists.

At times, a propensity towards pathos — slowmo, sad music, dramatic titles, and vivid colors — may give the impression that the directors' work can be reduced to a singular gesture of memorial lament. There may be a difference between shock as a reaction towards history's catastrophes and mourning. Shock is active and mourning is passive. Shock seeks a holistic understanding of the past, taking into consideration that even seamlessly irrelevant evidence can help us understand what happened. Mourning disproportionally focuses on the victims, replacing history's call for understanding with a dictate for being sad. Trying to understand the past is different from seeking forgiveness. It is the only way not to accept human made catastrophes as acts of inexplicable fate but as questions of recognizable causality. Yet, the shift away from the causal question of *why* something happened towards the metaphysical question of *what there is* and the methodological of *whether it can be represented*, can itself be historically explained. It may thus not be a coincidence that this shift coincided with the end-of-history mindset of the early 1990s, where historical conflicts of class and power seemed vanquished. Human suffering, if there was any left, was understood from an individual perspective, collective sadness only possible in a form of apolitical melancholy. Whether Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi's films can be understood within the context of this expanding grief culture seems questionable though. In their ceaseless effort to understand both individual suffering through what may be called "personal history" *and* political constituencies, state formations, and power relations, lies a historical method that comes closer to a holistic

approach. Indeed, this method refrains from capitulating in front of human catastrophe. Instead of finding consolation in weeping, it draws productive anger out of the realization that, in view of history, more of us could have died.

References

Jean-Marie Carzou. Arménie 1915: Un génocide exemplaire (Paris: Flammarion), 1975; Leshu Torchin. “Since We Forgot: Remembrance and Recognition of the Armenian Genocide in Virtual Archives,” in Roger Hallas and Frances Guerin (eds.), The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture (Wallflower Press), 2007, pp. 82-97. On photographs of the genocide see Tessa Hofmann and Gerayer Koutcharian. “Images that Horrify and Indict”: Pictorial Documents on the Persecution and Extermination of Armenians from 1877 to 1922″, Armenian Review 45, no. 1-2/177-178 (1992), pp. 53-184. While there are photographic images of the Armenian genocide, they are far less part of the collective consciousness than, for example, the images of piled corpses and cattle wagons that have come to represent the Holocaust, even though denial as well as the intent of destroying memory and evidence were also very much a part of the Holocaust. See also Georges-Didi Huberman. Images malgré tout (Paris: Les Éditions de minuit), 2003, p. 15.

In Atom Egoyan’s film “Ararat” (2002), for example, a director is shooting a commercial film about the genocide, suggesting that direct representation is at best kitsch and at worse falsified. Film scholar Marie-Aude Baronian has also shown that a reflection on the invisibility of the genocide is a defining characteristic in the works of contemporary artists Mekhitar Garabedian and Gariné Torossian. See M.A. Baronian. “Missing Images: Textures of Memory in Diaspora”, in A. Demirdjian, R. Grigor Suny & U. Ümit üngör (eds.), The Armenian Genocide Legacy (pp. 303-313). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

See e.g. Saul Friedlander (ed.), Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “final Solution” (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1992. For similar discussions about the Armenian genocide, see Joseline Chabot et al. (eds.), Mass Media and the Genocide of the Armenian: One Hundred Years of Uncertain Representation, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 2015. See also Peter Balakian, “Photography, Visual Culture, and the Armenian Genocide” in Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno (ed.) Humanitarian Photography: A History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2015 pp. 89-114. Themes of absence, invisibility, and silence also dominate the representation of events that have not deliberately taken place off-screen. Thus in Rithy Pan’s “The Missing Picture” (2013), about the Cambodian genocide, the director chooses to restage the hideous experience of his family with miniature wooden figurines, saying in a voice-over that his own memories are full of “missing pictures”. Joshua Oppenheimer’s “The Act of Killing” (2014), which depicts actors of the Indonesian killings of 1965–66, also chose the indirect method of

having the actors stage history as a means of representation. For a theoretically informed discussion about this film, see Joram Ten Brink, and Joshua Oppenheimer (eds.). Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory, and the Performance of Violence, (New York: Columbia University Press), 2012.

Theodor W. Adorno, Notes to Literature, Volume Two, [German original 1961] trans. S. Weber Nicholson. (New York: Columbia University Press), 1992, p. 87. For his own revision of the statement, see Theodor W. Adorno, Can One Live After Auschwitz? [German original 1997] (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2003, p. xvi.

Bill Nichols has called this the reflexive mode. See Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary (Indiana University Press), 1991.

While this is true in all contexts, it is particular crucial for images of extreme acts of violence because they have to at least implicitly conform to the legal standards of a proof. For a legal discussion on film evidence used during Holocaust trials, see the first chapter in Lawrence Douglas, The Memory of Judgment: Making Law and History in the Trials of the Holocaust (New Haven: Yale University Press), 2001.

Hannah Arendt had already commented on this in 1951. “It is of some importance to realize that all pictures of concentrations camps are misleading insofar as they show the camps in their last stages.” See The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951, 1973), p. 446. For a study on the shift from a moralizing towards a normalizing perspective on the Nazis in Germany, see Gavriel D. Rosenfeld. Hi Hitler!: How the Nazi Past is Being Normalized in Contemporary Culture, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2014.

For a study on the shift from a moralizing towards a normalizing perspective on the Nazis in Germany, see Gavriel D. Rosenfeld (2014).

See for example Jean-François Lyotard. The Differend: Phrases in Dispute [French original 1983] trans. by Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1988.

See Balakian (2015), pp. 86-7.

For a history of one of these pictures, see Armen T. Marsoobian. Fragments of a Lost Homeland: Remembering Armenia (London, New York: I.B. Tauris), pp. 268-270.

See the testimony of Rafaël de Nogales, Four Years Beneath the Crescent, trans. Numa Lee (New York, London: 1926), pp. 139-40. See also Wolfgang Gust, The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915-1916 (New York Berghahn), 2013, p. 386. Raymond Kevorkian, The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History [French original 2006] (London: I.B.Tauris) 2011, p. 364.

Raymond Kevorkian, The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History [French original 2006] (London: I.B.Tauris) 2011, p. 364.

Most conventional documentaries continue to use these images in this way. See for instance Andrew Goldberg's "The Armenian Genocide" (2006).

For conjectures about the context of this picture, see Hofmann and Koutcharian (1992), p. 54. See also Balakian (2015), p. 88.

For a discussion on the metahistorical aspects of found footage, see Michael Zryd "Found Footage Film as Discursive Metahistory: Craig Baldwin's Tribulation 99." The Moving Image 3.2 (Fall 2003).

Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, Vol. 1 [French original 1983], trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1990, p. 151.

See for instance Jean-François Lyotard. The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. [French original 1979], trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1984.

Quoted in Jeffrey Skoller, Shadows, Specters, Shards: Making History in Avant-garde Film (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 2005, p. 111.

Gertrud Koch. "Mimesis and Bilderverbot", Screen 34.3 (Autumn 1993), pp. 211-22.

Giorgio Agamben. Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive. Homo Sacer III [Italian original 1998] trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books), 2002, p. 158.

See Jacques Derrida. Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression [French original 1995] trans. Eric Prenowitz Diacritics Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer, 1995), pp. 9-63.

On the conflicting relationship between historical evidence and moral judgments see Carlo Ginzburg “Checking the Evidence: The Judge and the Historian”, Critical Inquiry, Vol. 18, No. 1, (Autumn, 1991), pp. 79-92.

Anette Insdorf has shown how this development can be seen through Alain Resnais’ Night and Fog (1955), Marcel Ophüls’ The Memory of Justice (1976), and Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah (1985). See the chapter “From Judgment to Illumination” in her seminal work Indelible Shadows Film and the Holocaust, 3rd Edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2003, pp. 221-241.

See Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer, “A Controversy About the Historicization of National Socialism”, pp. 102–132 in Peter Baldwin Boston (ed.) Reworking the Past (Beacon Press) 1990; Andreas Hillgruber. Zweierlei Untergang: Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums (Berlin: Siedler) 1986; M. Stürmer, “History in a Land Without History,” in Forever in the Shadow, pp. 16-17.

See Susan Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others (New York: Picador/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003). It is certainly true that depictions of extreme acts of violence will not necessarily convince every viewer that the actions they depict are ethically not justified. From an ethical point of view, however, such acts are wrong regardless of how they are framed or perceived.

Cathy Caruth. Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press), 1996; Shoshana Felman, “Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching”, American Imago 48.1 (Spring 1991), pp. 13-73.

Paolo Mereghetti and Federico Rossin. “Il magazzino della Storia. Incontro con Yervant Gianikian e Angela Ricci Lucchi’, Lo straniero 110-11 (August-September 2009), pp. 119-27.

Robert Lumley. Entering the Frame: Cinema and History in the Films of Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, (Oxford and New York: Peter Lang) 2011, p. 132.

Primo Levi. The Drowned and the Saved [Italian original 1986] trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Abacus Books), 1989, pp. 63-4.

Danièle Hibon. “Retour sur un exil”, in Raphael Gianikian et Yervant Gianikian Retour a Khodorcicur, Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume, 2000, p. 3.

Robert Lumley (2011), p. 67.

Gabi Scardi. “Sur retour à Khodorciur” pp. 195-197. in: Notre caméra analytique (post-éditions), 2015.

Rollet Sylvie. “Personne ne témoigne pour le témoin”, Chimères, 1/2007 (N° 63), p. 191-212.

See for instance J. Hoberman’s very Sontagian review “Atrocity Exhibition”. Village Voice (January 25, 2005), in which he seriously asks: “the underlying question, of course, is, will these sights turn people against war?”

Michel Hommel. “A History Beyond the Facts”, Skrien, Number 44, (January 1991).

Paolo Mereghetti. “The Moral of History”. Cinema anni vita: Yervant Gianikian e Angela Ricci Lucchi. Ed. Paolo Mereghetti and Enrico Nosei. (Milan: Il Castoro) 2000. p. 66.

Diego Leoni. “Quei luoghi, quei volti – Those places, those faces.” In Cinema anni vita: Yervant Gianikian e Angela Ricci Lucchi. Ed. Paolo Mereghetti and Enrico Nosei. (Milan: Il castoro) 2000, pp. 173- 82.

Ibid. Cinema anni vita: Yervant Gianikian e Angela Ricci Lucchi, ed. Paolo Mereghetti and Enrico Nosei. (Milan: Il Castoro) 2000. p. 133.

Ugo Casiraghi. “Inventario balcanico.” Cinema anni vita: Yervant Gianikian e Angela Ricci Lucchi, ed. Paolo Mereghetti and Enrico Nosei. (Milan: Il Castoro) 2000.

Alberto Farassino, la Repubblica (5. February, 1991).

Diego Leoni (2000), p. 181.

Shoshana Felman. “The Return of the Voice: Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah” pp. 204-83. in Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History. (Routledge), 1992. Other works of the period that were praised for their conscious dismissal of archival footage Jackie Farkas’ “The Illustrated Auschwitz” (1992), Orly Yadin’s “Silence” (1998). For theoretical discussion, see John E. O’Connor, “History in Images/Images in History: Reflections on the

Importance of Film and Television Study for an Understanding of the Past." American Historical Review, vol. 93, no. 5 (December 1988), pp. 1200–9; David MacDougall, "Films of Memory" in Visual Anthropology Review Volume 8, Issue 1 (1992), pp. 29-37.

Raymond Kevorkian (2011), p. 308.

Ibid., p. 307.

Hovann Simonian. The Hemshin: History, society and identity in the highlands of northeast Turkey. (London and New York: Routledge), 2007, p. 129.

Ibid., p. 131.

Ibid.

The conversation took place at the Harvard Film Archive on April 19, 2009. A recording can be accessed here: http://hcl.harvard.edu/hfa/films/2009marapr/grl.html [accessed 15/01/2016].

Michael A. Reynolds. Shattering Empires. The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908-1918. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press) 2011, pp. 161-162.

Peter Holquist. "The politics and practice of the Russian occupation of Armenia, 1915–Feb. 1917", pp. 151-74. in Ronald Grigor Suny et al., (eds.), A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2011.

As quoted in Ronald Grigor Suny. "They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else": A History of the Armenian Genocide. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press) 2015, p. 296.

Ronald Grigor Suny (2015), pp. 70-1.

Quoted in Wolfang Gust, ed. The Armenian Genocide: Evidence from the German Foreign Office Archives, 1915-1916. (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books) 2013, p. 116.

See the interview in this volume.