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Sylvie Lindeperg, *Night and Fog: A Film in History*. Translated by Tom Mes. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. xxx + 363 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$82.50 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8166-7991-1; \$27.50 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-8166-7992-8.

Review by Debarati Sanyal, University of California, Berkeley.

A beacon in the cultural landscape of postwar Europe, *Night and Fog* remains the classic film about the Nazi camps. Since its first screening in 1955, this thirty-two minute documentary has given rise to a mass of criticism and interpretation.^[1] This is partly due to the aesthetic density of the documentary itself, but also to shifting and contradictory views on the ethical and historiographical demands of what we designate as the Holocaust. For film critic Serge Daney, who discovered the film as a schoolboy, Alain Resnais's tracking shots conveyed a just or righteous gaze on Nazi atrocity, "the gaze of guilty Europe, Resnais's gaze, and consequently mine." By contrast, Claude Lanzmann condemned the same tracking shots as a stylization of atrocity. His monumental *Shoah*, with its refusal of archival footage, was also a refutation of the ethics of Resnais's cinematic gaze.^[2] Further, if *Night and Fog* is taught in today's classrooms as a Holocaust film, it was initially conceived as a film on deportation, not extermination, and was later denounced for its failure to convey the Jewish specificity of the Final Solution.

Sylvie Lindeperg's masterful *Night and Fog: A Film in History* is the definitive work of reference on Resnais's classic documentary, not only in terms of its tumultuous history and afterlife, but also in light of its positioning in such aesthetic and historiographic debates. We are fortunate to have an excellent English translation of this important and beautifully-written French work, which initially appeared in 2007 (readers of French should seek out the original since some allusions get lost in translation).^[3] In a suggestive foreword to the English translation, Jean-Michel Frodon likens Lindeperg's book to "a constellation constructed around a single film, yet it radiates out in innumerable directions" (p. xv). Indeed, while it provides a vivid, meticulous reconstruction of the film's genesis, production, and reception within its immediate historical horizon, it is also a "microhistory in movement" (p. xxiv) that tracks the film's reverberation across different times and spaces. Part one, titled "The Film's Inception: A Failure of Gazes," focuses on the different stages of the film's conceptualization and production. Part two, "Passage and Migration," investigates its reception in postwar Europe, Japan, Israel, and the U.S., and its mobilization in contexts such as the Algerian War, the Eichmann Trial, and the Cold War. In the course of the book, *Night and Fog* emerges as a mobile site of remembrance, a "'portable memorial' at the service of many interests" (p. xxv).

A major contribution of this book is the light it sheds on shifting conceptualizations of the concentration camp in relation to the Final Solution.^[4] As we saw, the paucity of references to Jews in the film was indicted by figures such as Claude Lanzmann or historian Serge Klarsfeld. Yet Lindeperg invokes several factors for this absence. In postwar France, to isolate Jews from the French nation by referring to them as a specific category of victims flew in the face of the republic's legacy of universalism. Furthermore, de Gaulle's heroic or *résistantialiste* account of the Occupation also privileged the figure of

the political deportee rather than the racial victim. It was not until Eichmann's 1961 trial in Jerusalem that the Holocaust emerged as a distinctive category within the Nazi genocide and Auschwitz displaced Buchenwald as the paradigmatic camp.

Lindeperg's archival research into *Night and Fog's* prior versions opens keen historical insights into these shifting approaches to the Nazi genocide. She excavates competing views on the links between the concentrationary system and the Final Solution within the film itself, from its central historical source, *Tragédie de la déportation* by Olga Wormser-Migot and Henri Michel, to the finished script by Catholic poet and Mauthausen survivor Jean Cayrol. Indeed, anterior versions of *Night and Fog* opened points of contact and also signaled divergences between the Nazi concentrationary system (which regulated life and labor) and the Final Solution (which annihilated a racially targeted population). A prior draft of Resnais's script made reference to Heinrich Himmler's second visit to Auschwitz in 1942, mentioning "the final solution to the Jewish problem," and the "extermination through labor" of populations such as Jews, Poles, Gypsies, and Russians (p. 68). Lindeperg views this as the trace of a distinction between the concentration camp and the killing centers that the film failed to make in its final cut, leading to its vexed legacy as a work that, in the words of one critic, "silently buries six million Jews in universal genocide."^[5] It was Cayrol, the final participant in a "four hands" writing process that included Wormser, Michel, and Resnais, who erased this gesture to the Final Solution and bent the film towards allegory rather than history. *Night and Fog* famously concludes with a warning that the "concentrationary monster" and the "concentrationary plague" are not a thing of the past. These metaphors risk erasing the specificity of the Nazi genocide, and Lindeperg reads them in light of a tension between the universalizing bent of poetry and the particularizing bent of history. Cayrol "wished to give universal credence to the term 'the evil of concentration' in order to better underline the threat to the present day. Poetry, according to Aristotle, is always on the side of the universal and history on the side of the particular" (p. 71). We might add that poetry, or the substitutive force of figures, was precisely what ensured *Night and Fog's* portability and pertinence across a range of political causes and historical frames.^[6]

As the chapter "Writing Four Hands" (*Écriture à quatre mains*) suggests, Lindeperg does not pursue an Auteurist approach to cinema, but brings to light the rich and dynamic collaborations that produced *Night and Fog*. The team included historians Olga Wormser and Henri Michel, but also Chris Marker, Ghislain Cloquet, Michel Bouquet as narrator, and Hanns Eisler, whose musical composition is the subject of a rich and nuanced chapter. The book as a whole is an homage to Olga Wormser, whose commitment to investigating the Nazi deportation began when she joined the Ministry for Prisoners, Deportees, and Refugees and was sent with a delegation to Bergen-Belsen in search of French detainees at the end of the war. Wormser is introduced in the prologue as "the missing link" and her memory is laid to rest in a tender epilogue titled, "Olga's Epitaph." These last pages recount the painful ironies of the end of the historian's career. In November 1968, Olga Wormser defended the first doctoral thesis written on the deportation (and the only one that would exist for the next twenty years or so). In her thesis, Wormser wrestled with the very distinction that *Night and Fog* had failed to pursue and would lead Claude Lanzmann to make *Shoah*: the distinction between concentration camps and extermination centers. Yet in so doing, she erroneously claimed that there were no gas chambers in the western camps and questioned testimonies to the contrary by survivors from Mauthausen and Ravensbrück. Despite her lifelong dedication to the memory of the camps, Olga's blunder led her to be likened to Holocaust deniers such as Robert Faurisson, and she never fully recovered from this accusation.

Lindeperg's careful reconstructions and narrative verve bring to life the various stages of the palimpsest and portable site of memory that is *Night and Fog*: Olga's story, but also the filming in Poland, the difficult process of *montage* in the cutting room, the negotiations at Cannes where *Night and Fog* was initially censored for fear of a diplomatic fall out with West Germany, and the famous *affaire du képi*. When the film was about to come out, the commission in charge of censorship at the time also requested the removal of a scene that showed the *camp de rassemblement* at Pithiviers. The French *gendarme* with

his tell-tale cap was too blatant a sign of collaboration. Resnais added a dark bar that concealed the tell-tale cap, but also succeeded in conveying the mark of French censorship.

Other chapters illustrate Lindeperg's skills as a reader of literature. Chapter seven, "Suffocated Words: A Lazarian Poetry" is a beautiful reading of *Night and Fog's* script in light of Cayrol's anxious and ambivalent concentrationary or "Lazarian" writing (Lazarus's death and resurrection were key figures in Cayrol's reflections on the kind of art that would issue from the experience of the Nazi camps). Chapter twelve, "Exile from Language: Paul Celan, Translator" is particularly compelling in this regard. It traces how the great poet Paul Celan translated the script into German and shifted the film's orientation away from the ambiguities and ironies of Cayrol's text. A German Jew who lost his parents to the Holocaust and was subjected to forced labor for two years during the war, Celan's "manipulations of the German language, 'Babelized' in his poems...allowed him to turn the 'language of the Third Reich' against the executioners, all the while reappropriating German as the language of poets" (p. 184). Drawing on Celan scholarship, Lindeperg shows how the poet's translation eschewed the transferences and ironies of Cayrol's text. Unlike Serge Daney's appreciation of the film's complicitous relay of gazes ("the gaze of guilty Europe, Resnais's gaze, and consequently mine"), Celan sought to privilege a "commemorative logic that honors the victims" (p. 187). To do so, he subjected the original text to a series of swerves and resignifications. For instance, where Cayrol wrote that "the dead are crossed out in red," thereby taking on the perspective of the SS, Celan translated the sentence as "*Durchgestrichen heißt tot*" (struck out means dead), thus conveying what the striking out signifies for the victim without repeating the blow in language. The final allusion to "the old monster of the concentration camp system" was also translated as *Rassenwahn* (or racial delirium), so that the racialized nature of the Nazi genocide, muted by Cayrol's metaphoric language, was restored.

Alain Resnais's worry that *Night and Fog* would be mistaken for a testimonial "monument to the dead" rather than a *dispositif d'alerte*, or warning for the present, proved to be unfounded.[7] Lindeperg's itinerary of this mobile site of memory demonstrates that, from its first screenings during the escalation of the Algerian War to its subsequent transnational migrations, the documentary's final warning about the ongoing existence of camps was invested with ever-actual and renewable significance. Yet she also notes moments when the film's recontextualization sometimes produced unintended and paradoxical effects. In 1960, for instance, Arnee Nocks selected portions of Resnais's film, Cayrol's text, and Eisler's music—without crediting any of them—to make a documentary on the fate of European Jews. In what turned out to be a work of Cold War propaganda, Nocks's *Remember Us* wildly expanded the pertinence of Cayrol's final message for China, Hungary, South African Apartheid, to finally denounce "Communism as the product of murder" (p. 219). Ironically, this was exactly what French Communists had feared when the film was initially released amidst rumors of Stalin's purges and gulag archipelago. *Night and Fog* was also seen to be a reflection on the Algerian War; in fact, Resnais later declared that the point of the film was Algeria. Given Resnais's recollection of the film's aims, perhaps the most startling attempt to reframe *Night and Fog* was by historian Henri Michel. (Unlike Wormser, Michel does not emerge as a particularly sympathetic figure in the book). In 1965, Michel sought to integrate *Night and Fog* into school curricula and worried about the links that students might make between Nazism and colonialism in the aftermath of the Algerian War, links that would spark "tendentious and inappropriate [*sic*] accusations" (p. 234). The same year, Michel submitted an educational plan to the *Ministre de la Coopération* (formerly the colonial ministry) proposing the screening of *Night and Fog* to ex-colonies in Africa and Madagascar alongside a documentary on colonial troops during World War Two. This double bill was to remind the former colonies of their voluntary enlistment in the anti-Nazi struggle so that they would "grasp the danger from which people of color had escaped, thus allowing them to comparatively judge the French colonization more fairly" (p. 235). *Night and Fog* would thus be screened to rehabilitate French colonialism through a comparison to Nazi barbarism. As Lindeperg dryly observes, "the film was escaping its creators' grasp."

Lindeperg's approach to *Night and Fog* is intensely focused insofar as she teases out the layers that make up this palimpsestic documentary, and richly suggestive in its pursuit of the film's multiple legacies. The book is informed by central theoretical debates on the representation of catastrophe. This exemplary "history" of *Night and Fog* captures the vitality of a cultural artefact both in and of itself, and as it is renewed in its movement through different times and places.

NOTES

[1] Book length studies include Richard Raskin, *Nuit et Brouillard by Alain Resnais: On the Making, Reception and Functions of a Major Documentary Film* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1987); Ewout van der Knaap, *Uncovering the Holocaust: The International Reception of Night and Fog* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), *Poétique du témoignage: Autour du film Nuit et brouillard d'Alain Resnais* (Paris: Harmattan, 2008), Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman, *Concentrationary Cinema: Aesthetics as Political Resistance in Alain Resnais's Night and Fog* (Oxford and New York: Berghan, 2011).

[2] Serge Daney, "Le Travelling de Kapo," *Traffic* 4 (1992), http://sensesofcinema.com/2004/feature-articles/kapo_daney/.

[3] Sylvie Lindeperg, *Nuit et Brouillard: Un film dans l'histoire* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2007).

[4] For an extensive treatment of this point, see Pollock and Silverman's introduction to *Concentrationary Cinema*.

[5] Robert Michael, "A Second Look: *Night and Fog*," reprinted in Richard Raskin, *Nuit et Brouillard by Alain Resnais: On the Making, Reception and Functions of a Major Documentary Film* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1987), 159.

[6] See Debarati Sanyal, "Auschwitz as Allegory: From *Night and Fog* to Guantanamo Bay" in *Memory and Complicity, Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

[7] Alain Resnais, *Nuit et brouillard*, DVD Editions Arte, 2003.

Debarati Sanyal
University of California, Berkeley
sanyal@berkeley.edu

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