



Tourists as post-witnesses in documentary film: Sergei Loznitsa's *Austerlitz* (2016) and Rex Bloomstein's *KZ* (2006)

OÑATI SOCIO-LEGAL SERIES VOLUME 10, ISSUE 3 (2020), 642-663: PRACTICES OF MEMORIALIZATION AND THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

DOI LINK: [HTTPS://DOI.ORG/10.35295/OSLS.IISL/0000-0000-0000-1045](https://doi.org/10.35295/OSLS.IISL/0000-0000-0000-1045)

RECEIVED 03 SEPTEMBER 2018, ACCEPTED 26 FEBRUARY 2019

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Abstract

This article compares two documentary films that address an apparent crisis of post-witnessing at memorials that commemorate the victims of National Socialism. In the context of contemporary debates about appropriate behaviour for tourists at sites of “dark” or “difficult” heritage, Sergei Loznitsa's *Austerlitz* (2016) and Rex Bloomstein's *KZ* (2006) take very different approaches to observing the act of visiting concentration camp memorials. Whereas Loznitsa adopts an observational documentary mode, constructing a cultural hierarchy between the touristic observer and the cinematic observer at memorials in Germany, Bloomstein's film uses a participatory mode to prompt the viewer to consider the complexities of the affective-discursive practice of tourists engaging with the suffering of victims at the Mauthausen memorial in Austria. The article argues that Bloomstein's decision to adopt a participatory approach is more productive in allowing us to think about the significance of responses to victims' suffering at such sites.

Key words

Documentary; dark tourism; post-witnessing; Sergei Loznitsa; Rex Bloomstein; National Socialism

Resumen

Este artículo compara dos documentales que giran en torno a una aparente crisis del post-testimonio en monumentos a las víctimas del nacionalsocialismo. En el contexto del debate actual sobre cómo deben comportarse los turistas en lugares de herencia “oscura” o “difícil”, *Austerlitz* (2016), de Sergei Loznitsa, y *KZ* (2006), de Rex Bloomstein, observan de forma muy diferente el acto de visitar antiguos campos de concentración. Mientras Loznitsa adopta un modo de observación documental, construyendo una

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jerarquía cultural entre el observador turístico y el cinemático, Bloomstein opta por un modo participativo para exhortar al espectador a considerar las complejidades de las prácticas afectivo-discursivas de los turistas que se comprometen con el sufrimiento de las víctimas. El artículo argumenta que la decisión de Bloomstein de adoptar un enfoque participativo es más productivo a la hora de propiciar nuestra reflexión sobre el significado de las respuestas al sufrimiento de las víctimas en esos lugares.

Palabras clave

Documental; turismo negro; post-testimonio; Sergei Loznitsa; Rex Bloomstein; nacionalsocialismo

Table of contents

1. Introduction: Concentration Camp Memorial Tourism and the Crisis of Post-Witnessing	645
2. Sergei Loznitsa's <i>Austerlitz</i> (2016)	648
3. Rex Bloomstein's <i>KZ</i> (2006).....	653
4. Conclusion.....	659
References.....	660

1. Introduction: Concentration Camp Memorial Tourism and the Crisis of Post-Witnessing

The early twenty-first century has been characterized as the era of the “globalization” of Holocaust memory (Levy and Sznajder 2006), in which the act of remembering the victims of National Socialism has attained the status of a moral touchstone that underpins the commitment of democratic societies to human rights. What Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lauge Hansen (2016, p. 391) define as “cosmopolitan memory” emphasizes an exclusive focus on remembering the suffering of the victims of historical injustice, and paradigmatically the suffering of Holocaust victims, as a pre-requisite of the future global dominance of these values.

The importance assigned to such remembrance produces, however, an anxiety around the quality of engagement with the memory of the victims of National Socialism among generations who live at an increasing historical distance from its horrors. Although there are still living witnesses to whose testimonies these generations can themselves bear witness, forms of cultural memory, including memorial museums at former sites of atrocity such as concentration camps,¹ nevertheless increasingly take on the role of providing material testimony to the crimes of Nazism.

At the same time, such sites of “difficult” (Macdonald 2009) or “dark” heritage are acknowledged as sites of tourism and are thereby incorporated into the leisure economy (Stone 2013). This leads to the expression of further anxiety among commentators that the consumption of these sites in the context of a touristic experience may undermine their capacity to achieve the ethical goal ascribed to them, namely to allow visitors to encounter evidence of the suffering of the victims and, through empathy with that suffering, understand the importance of democratic values and human rights.

Diana I. Popescu’s notion of the “post-witness” is helpful in this context, in that it describes the witness with no direct biographical connection to the victims of National Socialism in terms of their attempt “to construct imaginative and emotional investments in the past” (Popescu 2016, p. 275), specifically during their visits to memorial sites. Rather than assuming a relatively smooth transition from engagement with such a site of commemoration to a commitment to the values it seeks to promote, as for example in Alison Landsberg’s (2004) account of “prosthetic memory”, Popescu’s presentation of “post-witnessing” allows for moments of uncertainty, disappointment and alienation, stressing that the encounter with material testimonies to the suffering of victims at former concentration camp sites does not automatically lead to the post-witness being able to experience a sense of emotional connection, or even to make sense of the events that occurred there.

If, as Popescu argues, post-witnessing only achieves (and, indeed, sometimes fails to achieve) empathy with and understanding of past suffering through effortful engagement, it is perhaps unsurprising that we can observe the expression of anxiety among a range of contemporary commentators, who perceive a lack of such engagement among tourist visitors to sites of difficult or dark heritage. Although tourism does, of

¹ I will use the term “concentration camp” throughout this article for the sake of brevity, although I am aware that the specific sites discussed have complex histories that make this generic term problematic in many respects.

course, involve effort (Macdonald 2013, 234), tourists are often perceived as achieving only a superficial or narcissistic engagement with sites associated with National Socialism. The introduction of Popescu's terminology, however, invites us to regard engagement with such sites from a non-normative perspective, paying closer attention to the plurality and unpredictability of these experiences.

Such a stance would also imply a critique of the normatively driven criticism of tourist behaviour at concentration camp memorial sites that has become prevalent in recent years. This criticism can be gently ironic and questioning, as in Roger Cremer's sequence of photographs *Auschwitz Tourist Behaviour* (Cremer 2008), which includes, for example, images of a tour guide marching ahead of her group in a distinctly military fashion through the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, and of an exhausted teenager in leisurewear taking a quick nap with his head on his knees. More problematically, such criticism can be deliberately shaming, as in Israeli artist Shahak Shapira's 2017 on-line project *Yolocaust*,² which superimposed historical images of Holocaust victims onto photographs taken by young people of themselves and their friends as they visited the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin.

One of the key reactions that Shapira noted to his project was that many of the young people who had featured in the images that he had used wrote to him to ask for their removal, expressing regret and hoping for his forgiveness. A similar strategy of shaming and subsequent absolution can be seen in the blog *Selfies at Serious Places*, which ran briefly in 2013 but garnered significant media attention (e.g. Daily Mail Reporter 2013). Although not all of the images reproduced on this site are related to National Socialism, the owner of the blog did agree to anonymize one image of a young man doing a thumbs-up sign in front of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe after he apologized for his actions. In these instances, the medium of the internet allows self-appointed individuals to set themselves up as arbiters of appropriate behaviour in relation to Holocaust remembrance, insisting on a normative response that belies the potential complexity of the condition of contemporary post-witnessing.

Such concerns about the alleged immunity of supposedly hedonic and unthinking tourists to sites associated with the Holocaust and with National Socialism more widely, whether they be concentration camp sites or other memorials, point to a number of inter-linked issues around the relationship between tourism and sites of dark or difficult heritage. Firstly, like other forms of tourism, concentration camp memorial tourism is performative, in that it brings to bear patterns of comportment, dress and physical movement that are culturally sanctioned by the role of being a tourist (Edensor 2000), but which may be viewed as inappropriate performances in the context of dark heritage.

Secondly, and in relation to this first point, we can observe that memorial sites associated with the crimes of National Socialism or with other atrocities in human history are subject to different performative expectations depending on the role taken up by the user. As Erving Goffman (1966, p. 20) notes, "multiple social realities can occur in the same place", and this can create tensions, especially where tourists share a location with others who take on different roles. Here, a single site becomes "a locus for more than one

² The "Yolo" in "Yolocaust" derives here from the popular internet acronym "YOLO", or "you only live once".

set of expectations" (Goffman 1966, p. 21), with the consequence that the different groups using the site may take offence at the apparent disrespect shown by others who do not conform to their own expectations.

Thirdly, we can note that this collision of expectations expresses itself especially in relation to the feelings that are imputed to others, who can be perceived as failing to share in the emotions that one perceives as appropriate for an encounter with such a site. As Laurajane Smith (2014, p. 125) and Patrizia Violi (2017, pp. 107-108) have both observed, visiting heritage sites may not be primarily motivated by a desire to learn about history, but rather by the desire to experience certain feelings that are associated with that site. Others present, who may not share these expectations, can disturb the visitor and can be perceived as failing to exhibit the appropriate emotions. For example, in his account of a pilgrimage of young Israelis to concentration camp sites in Poland, Jackie Feldman (2008, p. 163) notes how one Israeli group reacted angrily to Polish teenagers who did not display the same visible signs of mourning, behaving more like disinterested adolescents on a school outing than solemn witnesses. Even where tourists do appear to be moved by their visits to concentration camp memorials, there can be a suspicion, as forcefully expressed by Tim Cole (1999, p. 93) for example, that this does not amount to genuine emotion in the face of unimaginable horror, but rather represents the consumption of a pre-packaged set of more positive or uplifting feelings that meet the expectations of people fed on a diet of Hollywood movies.

Fourthly, and finally, the act of expressing disapproval of others' behaviour in the context of memorialization also serves to bolster one's own sense of identification with a particular set of values (Price and Kerr 2018). Claiming that others do not seem to care about the events that are commemorated at a site, that they care in the wrong sort of way, or that they are merely passive consumers of commodified tourist experiences, implicitly underlines the genuine nature of one's own emotional response and the values associated with it. It arguably also installs a cultural hierarchy in which the speaker insists on her own independence from the tourist industry. Failure to give the appearance of experiencing appropriate emotions at concentration camp memorial sites, or indeed at other sites of dark heritage, can seem particularly egregious in light of the "highly pathemized" nature of these sites, which are understood as exerting their power over the visitor precisely on an emotional level (Violi 2017, p. 129).

Tourism provides the context in which a significant proportion of post-witnessing activity in relation to the crimes of National Socialism takes place today. Anxieties about tourist behaviour as trivializing and superficial often focus on a perceived lack of emotional response, or on what seems to be the wrong kind of emotional response to the suffering of victims. The problem with such positions, however, is their failure to engage with visitors themselves in any meaningful way, except perhaps (as in the case of the *Yolocaust* and *Selfies at Serious Places* websites) where individual tourists dutifully express regret for their allegedly inappropriate behaviour. Here the potential complexities of tourism as a form of post-witnessing are reduced to a perceived failure to meet certain normative expectations, which allows commentators to construct a sense of crisis in relation to Holocaust remembrance.

In the remainder of this article, I will analyse two documentary films made since the turn of the millennium, which both seek to examine the phenomenon of tourism at

concentration camp memorial sites and which, in their different ways, respond to the perceived crisis of post-witnessing occasioned by such tourism. This is not a new theme for documentary cinema. Indeed, Alain Resnais' seminal *Night and Fog* (1955) was already concerned with the potential gap between the terrible events that took place at a site like Auschwitz-Birkenau and the implied superficiality of the early tourists who the narrator describes as coming to photograph the buildings there. Against this touristic practice, which is not directly depicted but only discussed in the film's narration, Resnais offers the viewer tracking shots of the site as it existed in the mid-1950s, but silent and devoid of human beings. Resnais radically questions both the supposed indexicality (Violi 2017, p. 79) of Auschwitz-Birkenau in relation to the suffering of its victims and our own act of looking at that site in search of knowledge of that suffering (Hirsch 2004, p. 58). In Resnais' documentary, as Libby Saxton (2008, p. 90) argues, Auschwitz-Birkenau is haunted by the atrocities of the Holocaust, which escape direct representation.

The two films I will analyze here explore similar concerns about the value of visiting and looking at former concentration camps, but do so in a context in which mass tourism to such sites is well established within a dominant "cosmopolitan" memory culture that affords remembrance an important role as a guarantor of democratic values and human rights, and which also invests such sites with a significant power in the service of that cause. In my analysis of Sergei Loznitsa's *Austerlitz* (2016) and Rex Bloomstein's *KZ* (2006), I will seek to understand what documentary film can contribute to the debate over the relationship between tourism and post-witnessing, exploring the formal choices of the two directors and the consequences of those choices in terms of the films' ability to productively engage in the debate over concentration camp memorial tourism today. Although Loznitsa's *Austerlitz* was produced later, I will deal with it first in order to stress the contrast between Loznitsa's approach and comparative complexity of Bloomstein's film.

2. Sergei Loznitsa's *Austerlitz* (2016)

Loznitsa's film can be attributed to the "observational mode" of documentary as defined by Bill Nichols (1991, pp. 38-44): the camera is situated in a specific time and place, and bears witness to the interactions of others in that time and place as if adopting the perspective of an on-looker or eavesdropper. It appears to do so unobtrusively, in that the human subjects of the film neither acknowledge the camera's presence, nor that of the filmmaker. In this instance, the film is composed of a series of long, static takes, sometimes lasting ten minutes or more, filmed at a succession of locations at the Sachsenhausen and Dachau memorials.

These locations form a kind of composite tour of the sites, beginning with the path towards the entrance to the memorial at Sachsenhausen, before moving on to the gate to the camp, emblazoned with the infamous slogan *Arbeit macht frei*. The camera then proceeds from location to location both at Sachsenhausen and at Dachau in the wake of groups of tourists, before returning to the main gate to watch them leave. Despite the use of locations from these two different camps, the audience is never given any clear indication of where the film is shot, or of which shots belong to which location; the audience would not be able to distinguish those locations unless they knew both sites well.

Loznitsa's use of long takes emphasizes the repetitive nature of the tourists' behaviour. We see different groups of tourists, sometimes in friendship or family groups and sometimes as organized tours, repeating similar gestures. Given the growing prevalence of portable digital technology and social media at the time of filming, it is perhaps unsurprising, although admittedly perturbing, that Loznitsa captures so many images of tourists making their own photographs, either of the site and its buildings or of themselves. For example, the scenes at the Sachsenhausen camp gate that bookend the film show individuals and small groups going to considerable effort, sometimes with the help of passers-by, to achieve the perfect shot of the gate or the perfect, smiling self-portrait of themselves in front of it.

In another particularly striking sequence, the camera frames individuals through a window from outside a building that they are exploring. This exploration takes place for many of the visitors through their own cameras, sometimes mounted on selfie-sticks that allow the user to film or photograph themselves against the background of the site. This series of shots creates a kind of *mise-en-abîme*, in which the viewer watches the tourists exploring the memorial through a film camera as the tourists watch themselves exploring the memorial through another camera. In this way, the supposed object of visual engagement, namely the concentration camp memorial itself, seems to dwindle into irrelevance, not least because the shots in this particular sequence frame the tourists in such a way that the building they are exploring appears entirely nondescript and anonymous; the audience is not provided with any further information that could help them identify the building and its former function, a move which appears to imply that such information has ceased to be relevant in the process of the touristic consumption of these sites, which transforms them into interchangeable "non-places" (Augé 2009). This effect is further emphasized for those in the audience who are able to recognize that Loznitsa has in fact combined various historical locations to create a kind of generic concentration camp site that appeals to the tourist gaze.

While the *Arbeit macht frei* slogan on the Sachsenhausen gate is clearly identifiable in terms of its association with National Socialism, the fact that Loznitsa's long takes show its repeated visual consumption by groups of tourists, who are at times queuing up for their photo opportunity, also suggests a certain interchangeability of the object of the tourist gaze, which is arguably being photographed by an endless stream of visitors more on account of its reputation as a "must-see" on the tourist trail than on account of its relationship to a specific history. The faintly ridiculous spectacle that Loznitsa's camera offers the audience here therefore tallies with Dean MacCannell's critique of modern tourism, first published in the mid-1970s, which describes the photographing of such "sights" in terms of the consumption of a series of "sacralised" or "authentic" objects that form a global network of touristic itineraries, but which become detached from their original meaning (MacCannell 1999, pp. 44-45).

This highly routinized consumption of touristic "sights" also appears to mark visitors out as lacking in individuality and self-determination. The fact that they all go through the same ritualised behaviour in taking their pictures of the gate seems to affirm John Urry's analysis of the socially constructed nature of tourist "sights" as objects of pleasurable consumption, where the nature of the objects that are suitable for such consumption has to be learned (Urry 1990, p. 101).

Many visitors seem to have learned their lesson well in this case, in that they all appear to know that the gate is something to photograph or be photographed with, just as they will presumably know what other “sights” to be photographed with in other situations. Here again, the historical specificity of the individual camps and their relationship to the suffering of the victims seems to be in question, as does, in consequence, the emotional impact ideally ascribed to such sites.

Furthermore, in these shots and others throughout the film, tourists appear often as relatively affectless, for example wandering with blank expressions or absorbed in manipulating their electronic devices; at other moments, they indulge in physical performances that suggest a frivolous or even mocking attitude to victims’ suffering, for example in one scene where a woman photographs a young man as he mimes the position of a camp inmate tied by the arms to a wooden pillar originally used for torture. In the family self-portraits produced at the camp gates towards the end of the film, the tourists are often smiling and embracing each other in a show of affection that seems to be at odds with culturally sanctioned modes of witnessing, which, as Kate Douglas (2017, p. 5) suggests, would tend to favour silence, an avoidance of photography, a slow-paced movement through the site, and other forms of demonstratively reverential behaviour.

In Loznitsa’s own statement on the motivation for making the film, he frames his work as an exploration of the motivations of visitors, which he presents as something fundamentally mysterious:

The reason that induces thousands of people to spend their summer weekends in the former concentration camp is one of the mysteries of these memorial sites. One can refer to the good will and the desire to sense compassion and mercy that Aristotle associated with tragedy. But this explanation doesn’t solve the mystery. Why a love couple or a mother with her child goes on a sunny summer day to look at the ovens in a crematorium? [*sic*, DC]. (Loznitsa 2016)

The possibility of an ethical purpose to tourism at concentration camp memorials is raised here, but immediately dismissed in favour of a “mystery” that the film sets out to resolve. However, despite the director’s proclaimed interest in visitor motivation, his preference for an observational mode limits the audience’s ability to engage with the feelings, motivations and responses of the individuals who move in front of the camera. Instead, the film presents us with an account of tourism at concentration camp memorials that, as one reviewer puts it, asserts “the disconnection between the greatest horror of the 20th century and our inability to adequately convey it to the 21st” (Sicinski 2016). In doing so, it shares many features with tourist shaming discourses that take the visible behaviour of visitors as evidence of a lack of appropriate emotional engagement with the suffering of the victims of National Socialism.

In its mode of address, the film affirms the value of looking as a means of paying attention to social phenomena and revealing their “mystery”. There is very little dialogue in the film, and where this is included, we hear only the rather superficial accounts of National Socialist oppression and its significance offered by young tour guides, whose voices are synchronized by actors, according to the film’s closing titles. It is not clear whether this measure has been taken on technical grounds because of the quality of the original recording, whether the filmmaker did not have permission to use

the recordings of these voices, or whether he held back from potentially exposing these speakers to ridicule or censure and therefore sought to partially anonymize them. Nevertheless, these accounts of the meaning of the site are presented as monologues: we see no interaction between the impassive tour groups and the guide. There is no opportunity for the viewer to engage with the tourists' own understanding of their visit and of the history of suffering that they encounter at the memorial site, which they appear to consume either passively or, at times, in a hedonic manner, taking pleasure in capturing it with their cameras or in exploring its architecture.

Here and elsewhere in the film, the use of the observational mode effectively denies the tourists who are filmed a voice as post-witnesses. Everything the audience needs to know, the film implies, can be understood by observing their behaviour. This raises the question, however, of how the audience can observe scenes that are mediated by the camera in such a way as to arrive at an understanding of the reality of this scenario, whereas the individuals observed in the film, for whom the memorial site is also frequently mediated via various kinds of digital camera, are presented as lacking in such agency and insight. Loznitsa, in fact, constructs a clear cultural hierarchy, not simply in terms of the behaviour of the tourists, from whom the audience is invited to distance itself, but also in terms of the distinction drawn between, on the one hand, a naïvely touristic gaze and, on the other, a more sophisticated gaze, the latter being imputed to the cinematic spectator.

The title of the film provides a cue for this differentiation between the naïve tourist and the sophisticated cinemagoer. The use of the title *Austerlitz* immediately recalls W.G. Sebald's Holocaust novel of the same name. Sebald is a highly respected literary author, but also has a reputation for difficulty.³ The audience member who recognizes Sebald's title is clearly attuned to a specific kind of cultural capital, and anyone familiar with Sebald's novel in detail will be aware that a piece of film plays a significant role in its narrative. In the footage described in the novel, the protagonist Jacques Austerlitz imagines he has recognized his mother, who died in the Terezin/Theresienstadt concentration camp (Sebald 2001, pp. 350-354). Austerlitz is never able to definitively identify his mother, however, which suggests an unbridgeable gap between the contemporary world and the lost world of the camps, which cannot be overcome by looking at whatever material traces of that past remain; there is nothing that Austerlitz can look at in order to understand what it was like for his mother in the camp, however much he desires it.

Through this title, then, Loznitsa signals to his audience that he is aware as a documentary filmmaker that the Holocaust "is something elusive" from which, as Brad Prager (2015, p. 20) puts it, we will always "remain removed". In doing so, he aligns himself with that tradition of thinking about the Holocaust that remains suspicious of any attempt to represent its horrors and thereby communicate that which is deemed incommunicable to post-witnesses, regarding any such attempt as potentially trivializing (Hirsch 2004, pp. 4-5; Saxton 2008, p. 267). Strictly speaking, of course, the notion of unrepresentability has been applied more narrowly to the Holocaust against

³ For instance, the British poet Joe Dunthorne has played ironically on this reputation in his poem *Sestina for my friends*, in which Sebald's *Rings of Saturn* is offered as a gift to those people the poet wants to impress with his own intellectual sophistication (Dunthorne 2014).

the Jews, and not to the concentration camp system as a whole. However, in using the title *Austerlitz*, so closely associated via Sebald's novel with the fate of the Europe's Jews, Loznitsa appears to bring Sachsenhausen and Dachau, where other groups of victims were also present in large numbers, within the purview of this wider prohibition. This suggestion is further reinforced by the fact that both Sebald's and Loznitsa's titles "look in the first fraction of a second like 'Auschwitz'", as one of the film's reviewers has pointed out (Bradshaw 2016).

The film also announces its own suspicion of the act of looking at concentration camp memorials in terms of the way it frames its images of the tourist activity. There are no shots that show us the architecture of the sites without the presence of the tourists, and, in many cases, the camera frames a shot that is primarily composed of moving tourist bodies, which obscure or draw attention away from the physical characteristics of the memorials themselves. The opening two shots of the film, which precede the titles, show very little of the Sachsenhausen memorial at all. This reticence is exemplified by the first shot, which films tourists on the approach to the memorial through a screen of trees. In the second shot, the camera looks away from the memorial and towards the approaching tourists, many of whom are using audioguides and maps. A few information boards are visible by the side of the path, but again any iconic concentration camp images are avoided. Even in the third shot of the film, when we finally see the main gate with its recognizable slogan, the director chooses a long shot, leaving the architecture of the camp largely obscured by the moving bodies of the tourists. In this way, from the beginning of the film, the director draws the audience's attention to observing the tourists as opposed to looking at the memorials themselves, denying the audience the very touristic attractions that its visitors have expressly come to see. The choice to film in black and white can be understood here as a further strategy to distance the viewer from the touristic experience that the film is so wary of.

Taken together, these representational strategies and intertextual references tend to construct the audience member as one who knows better, that is to say as one who understands that it is necessary to mistrust mediated images of the crimes of National Socialism, whether in film or in the context of memorialization, on the grounds that those crimes remain fundamentally unrepresentable and unknowable. However, the film expresses no doubts as to the representability and knowability of the interior lives of the tourists it focuses on. Scholars in the fields of heritage studies and tourism studies have invested a good deal of effort in recent years in attempting to understand the experiences and emotions of visitors to sites of difficult heritage, and to concentration camp memorials in particular, although much work remains to be done (Hodgkinson 2013, p. 25). While it is not possible to summarize the full range of this research here, its insights offer a number of salient points that are relevant to Loznitsa's documentary.

Firstly, such research challenges the notion that visitors to concentration camp memorials in particular are not aware of the gap between the site as they experience it and the historical reality of victims' suffering. Tourists are certainly capable of recognizing this gap and of recognizing the need to bridge it imaginatively as part of an active engagement with the site, while still recognizing that the experience of the victims remains fundamentally other than their own (Reynolds 2016, p. 343). Secondly, even in the context of more general touristic activity, visitors may attach a great deal of

significance to visiting concentration camp memorials, both for the enhanced understanding of historical events they seek there and for the sense of emotional engagement with the fate of victims that they believe these sites will provide (Biran *et al.* 2011, Nawijn *et al.* 2018). Thirdly and finally, the practice of photography and even of selfie-taking may be bound up with a desire to mark and, indeed, share one's visit as a significant experience (Hilmar 2016, Douglas 2017). Furthermore, tourists are capable of understanding their use of photography as a means to engage more deeply with the message that concentration camp memorials might offer to the contemporary world (Dalziel 2016, 190). This perspective calls into question the notion that the making of images at concentration camp memorials, as shown in Loznitsa's film, is automatically a superficial kind of trophy hunting, in which the standard images must be captured for their own sake. In fact, tourists may understand the capturing of those images as an important way to mark their presence at a site they consider historically and morally significant.

Whether the post-witnesses filmed by Loznitsa share such dispositions is hard to say, of course, because we are only invited to judge their behaviour at the memorial in superficial terms as failing to visibly conform to certain implied behavioural norms, which the film's audience is invited to share. Seen in this light, one recent critic's claim that "Loznitsa does not judge" (Sandomirskaja 2018) seems difficult to sustain. His approach places him perilously close to the tourist-shaming discourses discussed in relation to recent internet phenomena, thereby failing to engage with the potential complexity of individual experiences that might be taking place in the scenes that Loznitsa has filmed.

3. Rex Bloomstein's *KZ* (2006)

In contrast with Loznitsa's *Austerlitz*, Rex Bloomstein's documentary *KZ* works broadly within the "interactive mode", as defined by Nicols (1991, pp. 44-56). That is to say that the audience is witness to interaction between the people depicted in the film and the filmmaker, even though the latter remains visually out of shot and can only occasionally be heard asking questions. The filmmaker's presence is further indicated where German-speaking interviewees opt to speak in English for his benefit, sometimes slipping into German. At times we also hear the voice of a German-speaking member of the crew asking questions.

Whatever the logistics of these encounters, the audience is much more aware of a dialogic situation, as Nicols suggests for this mode of documentary filmmaking. This approach, in contrast with Loznitsa's observational style, has significant consequences for the film's relationship to the tourists it observes at the Mauthausen Concentration Camp Memorial Museum in Austria. The film is also very much concerned with the experiences of the staff who work at the site and of the local population, who are largely resistant to any critical engagement with the town's past (Hodgkinson 2015, pp. 457-460; Prager 2015, pp. 43-47). However, in my analysis, I will consider the film's focus on the visitors to the memorial, paying particular attention to the portrayal of their emotional responses to the suffering of victims.

Bloomstein's documentary addresses the perceived crisis of post-witnessing in relation to the issue of concentration camp memorial tourism from the outset. The slogan used

to advertise the film foregrounds the central question to be addressed: "When the unimaginable has been shown a thousand times, when the unspeakable has been told a thousand times, where do we go from here?" In the film's opening sequence, we see middle-aged and elderly customers eating their substantial-looking lunches aboard a gleaming ship as they cruise along the Danube, before following a smaller group into the picturesque market town of Mauthausen itself. We then see a tourist coach on its progress towards the Mauthausen memorial, as a guide commentates on the history of the camp over the public-address system. Although we may not always be seeing the same group of people, the sequence is edited in such a way that a typical tourist itinerary for well-heeled visitors to Mauthausen is suggested, in which the former concentration camp is one, but by no means the dominant attraction.

The film's advertising slogan (which is also the first thing the viewer sees when the DVD version of the film is played) combines with this initial focus on the tourist industry to suggest that there is a danger of the commodification of the Mauthausen memorial that will reduce the edifying effect of any visit. By implication then, the film asks whether such routinized touristic engagements with the concentration camp memorial are likely to promote this alleged de-sensitization to the horrors of National Socialism.

Thus far, the premise of Bloomstein's film seems to closely parallel Loznitsa's film, which also stresses the repetitious nature of the consumption of concentration camp memorial sites through the tourist gaze. As Prager has argued, Bloomstein's film does emphasize certain elements of the experience of visiting the Mauthausen memorial as "operating mechanistically" or as "automata" (Prager 2015, p. 35), in that the filmmaker ironically shows the site as a kind of well-oiled machine designed to process incoming hordes of tourists in a uniform way. This move seems to suggest that the memorial may run the risk of trivializing the experiences of those who were once subject to quite another regime in that place. Nevertheless, the film's dialogic qualities leave room for a more questioning and open-ended approach to those questions of post-witnessing in the tourist context that Loznitsa seems to want to resolve so conclusively.

After the arrival of the tourist bus shown in the opening sequence at the site of the memorial, the film cuts to a shot of the introductory film shown to visitors. We hear the narrator of this film instructing those visitors as follows:

There is no need to grasp the full extent of the tragedy which took place here. There is a safety device inside you which will protect you and that is a good thing. Otherwise there might be the danger than one might lose one's mind. But we want you to return home safely, with a sound mind, and to use it later on for the cause of freedom, justice and truth.

While this text is spoken, the camera zooms out from a rotating image, which gradually reveals itself to be the letters "KZ" (for *Konzentrationslager*, or concentration camp) in white on a black background. The filmic image functions here as a metaphor for the message conveyed in the spoken text: visitors are about to be confronted with an experience which, when seen up close, appears to be overwhelming and hard to make sense of, but which they will be able to properly contextualize with a little distance. The film therefore highlights how the experience of the memorial is prefigured for visitors as a movement away from their initial sense of being overcome by the horror that the site bears witness to and towards an acceptance of an ethical responsibility for that

horror, which implies an engagement in the world beyond the memorial for values associated with democracy and human rights, paraphrased here as “freedom, justice and truth”.

This discourse echoes the distinction that Benoît Dillet and Tara Puri (2016, pp. 62-63) have drawn between “responsibility before” the suffering of others and “responsibility for” the suffering of others. Developing these notions from the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, Dillet and Puri suggest that to be “responsible before” that suffering is to open oneself to it on an affective level, whereas taking “responsibility for” that suffering involves some sort of ethical engagement in the name of the victims. While Deleuze and Guattari take a critical view of such engagement, seeing it as a means of escaping from the affective encounter with the suffering of others by claiming to speak on their behalf, the narrator of the Mauthausen introductory film actively encourages such a shift away from emotion and towards ethical engagement as a response to the experience of the concentration camp memorial site. Bloomstein’s *KZ* equally seeks to trace this movement and to interrogate its value.

The first visitors we see taking a tour of the camp in Bloomstein’s film are a group of teenagers who arrive in buses, presumably in the context of an organized educational trip, although this is not specified. They are confronted with a young guide who, we later learn, works at the memorial as an alternative to military service, and also in response to his own grandfather’s failure to critically engage with his National Socialist past. In terms of the atmosphere created by the guide’s narration, the fact that he is a shaven-headed and skinny figure creates uncomfortable echoes of the camp’s original inmates (Hodgkinson 2015, p. 461) and perhaps even suggests an over-identification with them. Indeed, his delivery (in English) has a distinctly harsh tone, and he frowns almost aggressively while outlining in detail the brutal treatment of the prisoners on their arrival at Mauthausen.

As the guide speaks, the teenagers become increasingly subdued, in sharp contrast to their chattering and jostling as they waited to enter the memorial. The camera pans across the group and focuses in close-up on the faces of individuals who stand immobile with somber expressions, staring at the guide or sometimes at the ground. As Prager (2015, p. 40) points out in his reading of *KZ*, film is “a poor diagnostic tool” here in terms of giving us access to the feelings of the young people represented: they may be bored but too constrained by the context to express this in disruptive ways, or they may find the narrative and the place deeply affecting, but it is hard for the viewer to be sure of this.

Equally, when one young woman appears to experience an episode of fainting, the meaning of this bodily response is initially difficult to pin down. She may simply be unwell and therefore unable to cope with standing for an extended period during the tour, for example. The fact that she experiences this moment of corporeal disturbance while she is being told how prisoners would be made to stand against a wall for hours and days on end also opens up the possibility, however, that she has experienced some sort of affective opening to the suffering of others, reminiscent of the “responsibility before” identified by Dillet and Puri, even if it is only a suffering that she encounters in a “fantasy of witnessing” (Weissman 2004). Whatever the somatic or psychological

causes of this experience, it seems to recall the warning from the introductory film about the overwhelming nature of the horrors that will be encountered at the memorial site.

After this group has completed its visit, however, Bloomstein is party to a discussion with the teacher leading the group and his students, in which they reflect on the meaning of what they have just seen. This is clearly a genuine attempt to engage with that experience and to make sense of it, although the young people seem to find themselves relatively helpless when faced with the legacy of National Socialism: they are both shocked at the lessons of the memorial and unsure as to how such atrocities could be prevented in the present and future. The consensus that the group eventually seems to reach is that the lessons of history can only be properly learned “when you see something” (i.e. the memorial itself), which seems to validate both the purpose of the memorial and reaffirm the “cosmopolitan” narrative suggested by the introductory film, in which the visitor moves from being overwhelmed by the experience to a position of ethical responsibility. In this context, the young woman who experienced the fainting fit is keen to explain her reaction to the tour: “I guess that I couldn’t take the pressure any more... just hearing about it, that I just fainted (...) because it was too much and it was very torturous [*sic*, DC]”.

There is an interesting slippage here between the torture that was described by the guide and the experience of hearing about that violence as in itself akin to torture, but the important point to take away from this, I would argue, is that Bloomstein, unlike Loznitsa, gives space in the film for the visitors’ own sense-making as post-witnesses in relation to their visit. The young woman who appeared to fall ill is insistent about asserting the importance of that experience to the rest of the group, alongside their attempts to make sense of the value of their visit, so that the possibility of a relationship between her self-description as being emotionally overwhelmed and the ethical discourse developed by the other speakers is maintained. The sequence is also dialogic to the extent that the filmmaker leaves the viewer to consider the meaning of this link between emotion and ethics in context.

A comparable moment, in which the film crew intervenes more directly, concerns an older visitor who appears visibly moved during a graphic description of the operation of the gas chamber at Mauthausen as her group stands in that claustrophobic space. Using a hand-held camera at close quarters with the visitors, the film zooms in on the faces of individuals in an attempt to read their reactions. As the guide describes how children were trampled to death in the panic that ensued among victims who had been driven into the gas chamber, the camera lingers in close-up on the face of one woman who, although silent, seems to be particularly affected by this account: her eyes widen and appear to moisten, while her face seems set in an expression of strained self-control.

It is precisely to this woman that the film returns in a brief interview on board the bus that is about to take her group away from the memorial at the end of her visit. Although very brief, this scene is significant in that there are relatively few occasions when a visitor is interviewed individually; although others are asked about their interpretations of the site throughout the film, they are usually framed within the wider group in which they have made their visit. There is a sense, then, in which the filmmaker appears to seek out this one individual from among the group she is travelling with in order to discover how

she interpreted that emotional experience that could be observed during the visit to the former gas chamber.

The woman states that she was most moved by the stories about the deaths of children, as she is a grandmother herself. Secondly, she mentions the fate of pregnant women as having particularly affected her. This post-witness therefore appears to draw on an important strain of Holocaust iconography, which invokes images of “the martyrdom of mothers and the death of their children” (Jacobs 2008, p. 214) as symbols of innocent suffering. Equally, however, we can imagine that this aspect of the tour has appealed strongly to the gendered self-identification of this particular post-witness as a grandmother, and also as a mother.

The lessons she derives from the experience of this “terrible place”, as she calls it, are that one should try to be a less aggressive person and that every human being is valuable. Although not explicitly stated as such, this interpretation fits more easily with a Christian ethics of love towards one’s neighbour, humility and the value of each individual human life in the eyes of God than it does with the more “cosmopolitan” discourse that preoccupies the group of young people discussed above; the ethical outcome of the visit is experienced not so much as a commitment to resist the emergence of a similar regime in the future, but rather in terms of individual lessons about how to treat one’s fellow human beings on an inter-personal level.

The point here is not that this woman’s response is less convincing than that of the group of younger visitors; rather, it is up to the viewer to make a judgement here. Nevertheless, the fact that the filmmaker seeks out and presents the audience with her response to the visit underlines its importance within the film as a whole. Here again we see an emotional reaction to the memorial and the tour, which then passes into the discursive expression of an ethical commitment, a lesson learned from the suffering of victims that differs from lessons drawn by others. Returning to Smith’s (2014, p. 128) work on emotional experience at heritage sites, this post-witness’s discourse appears to confirm the proposition that emotional reactions to heritage are as likely to reinforce existing values as they are to challenge the visitor to re-examine those values. Despite this, the film in no sense takes a position on whether the woman’s response should be treated as a valid or useful one.

The final example I will refer to offers a further variation on this pattern, focusing as it does on a small family group visiting the memorial without a guided tour. The three individuals making up the group are a father and his young daughter, accompanied by a younger man who may be a friend or relative. They speak Turkish among themselves, but also briefly communicate with a member of the film crew behind the camera in German, which seems to mark them out as members of the Turkish-Austrian community. We join this group in the former crematorium, the mechanics of which appear to be an object of fascination for them: they discuss how the bodies would have been inserted into the ovens, who might have carried out this task, the possible disposal of the ashes, and the nature of the experience for those charged with doing this work.

Rather than drawing on printed information (they are not holding guidebooks or reading from information boards), this group are quite energetic and expressive in their attempt to work out how the ovens would have functioned: for example, the younger man moves around to observe them from different angles. Eventually, the younger man

walks away out of shot, declaring: "It's disgusting. It's an attack on your mind". Although there are different kinds of engagement visible here, with the older man noticeably cooler in his demeanour and less mobile in his comportment, it is nevertheless clear that these post-witnesses both seek understanding and react on an emotional level to the fate of victims, specifically with shock and disbelief.

Later, we join this group again as it leaves a message in the visitors' book. They are not the first group we see writing in this book. In fact, they are preceded by a couple who leave a note in Hebrew reflecting on the rise of anti-Semitism and the dangers of failing to learn from the past. This message frames the Mauthausen site primarily in terms of Jewish suffering, although the film's audience has already been witness to an explanation by one tour guide that underlines the fact that Jewish people were only sent to Mauthausen in large numbers from March 1944, arriving from Hungary and from camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau in the east (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum n.d.). Throughout its existence, the camp had predominantly incarcerated and tortured those deemed socially and politically undesirable, who were subjected to "destruction through labour" (*Vernichtung durch Arbeit*).

Although there is no indication that the Turkish-speaking group have read this other message, to which they do not refer, the older of the two men decides to leave a message that specifically thematizes Israeli policy: "Our heart is full of pain and suffering. Hey, Sons of Israel are you not ashamed of the suffering you impose on Palestinians and Kurds?" When asked by his companion who will read this message, he confidently states that its audience will be "Israelis", who he seems to suppose are the primary audience for (or perhaps even instigators of) the memorial.

What is striking about the message left by this man, which shares in the earlier message's understanding of the Mauthausen site primarily in terms of Jewish suffering, is the conflation of the Jewish victims with the contemporary Israeli state, as if holding the victims responsible for an implied failure to learn the lessons from their own past suffering in terms of their imagined later treatment of others. Needless to say, this is a highly problematic stance, which tends to cast the victims of Mauthausen in the role of later perpetrators of (unnamed) abuses. However, it is clear that the author of this statement understands this discourse as emerging from his emotional response to the memorial site ("Our heart is full of pain and suffering"), even if it remains unclear whether that emotion pertains to the fate of the camp's actual victims or to the suffering of other groups who are called to his mind by the visit. As in the previous example of the older woman visitor, who draws on aspects of Christian morality and her gendered identity as a mother and grandmother in order to make sense of her emotional experience at the memorial, so here this man brings to bear an entirely different context, shaped (it has to be assumed) by his own background.

What this example and the others from Bloomstein's film show is that the post-witnesses who visit memorials at former concentration camp sites are engaging in complex forms of what Margaret Wetherell has described as "affective-discursive practice", that is to say in meaning-making practices that are multimodal (Wetherell 2012, p. 89), drawing on embodied experiences of place, emotional responses, and discourse in order to intersubjectively construct "small worlds" of meaning in dialogue with others (Wetherell 2012, p. 84). Bloomstein's film is attentive to these processes and either

observes or helps to create such dialogic moments, where the individual's emotional reaction is given meaning in the context of the group and in relation to some form of ethical commitment or lesson that can be drawn from the experience of the site. The film's audience may take issue with the meanings that are constructed in individual cases, but it is the multiplicity of possible outcomes that Bloomstein seeks to highlight. In this way, as Sarah Hodgkinson (2015, p. 463) observes, "KZ challenges and overturns some of the oversimplistic assumptions we may make about people who visit such sites".

KZ therefore provides a counterbalance to Loznitsa's *Austerlitz*. Whereas the observational mode of the latter film tends to reinforce cultural hierarchies between an audience constructed as sophisticated and sensitive to the problems of Holocaust representation and commemoration, stressing the supposedly inappropriate responses of post-witnesses in the context of tourism, KZ seeks to take seriously the ways in which touristic experiences help individuals as post-witnesses to construct an array of meanings about the suffering of the victims of National Socialism, while also revealing how such meaning-making has an important emotional component. Bloomstein's film is interested in how individuals are affected by their visit to the Mauthausen Concentration Camp Memorial Museum, but the interactive mode he has adopted, which creates a space for dialogue both with the filmmaker and among groups of post-witnesses themselves, shows how that emotion is harnessed into processes of meaning-making that cannot be reduced to a "cosmopolitan" narrative, focused exclusively on empathy with the victims as the key to a commitment to democratic values and human rights.

4. Conclusion

In the last decade, scholars have increasingly recognized that visiting heritage sites is a "cultural process" (Smith 2006), in which individuals seek to make sense of their relationship to the past and to their communities, as opposed to simply consuming a ready-made meaning. This is not to suggest that there are not certain dominant discourses that individuals may draw upon when undertaking this sense-making activity, or that there are not certain norms of emotional expression and behaviour that may condition their experience of heritage sites. Nevertheless, in line with Wetherell's conception of "affective-discursive" practice, researchers in heritage studies and tourism now stress the importance not just of discourse, but also of the emotional and embodied experiences that are also implicated in such processes of meaning-making (e.g. Smith and Campbell 2015, Munroe 2017).

Documentary films that seek to engage with the phenomenon of post-witnessing in relation to the suffering of the victims of National Socialism potentially contribute to our understanding of the ways in which individuals make sense of that experience, not least in the tourist context. Although arguably not a replacement for the more extensive research that is required in this area, a film like Bloomstein's *KZ* nevertheless has the potential to sensitize researchers and the public to complexities of heritage processes at such sites, which is a welcome counterweight to media-driven moral panics that can incline to a tourist-shaming approach. However, where documentary filmmakers adopt more observational approaches that do not leave space for a dialogue about the experience of visiting concentration camp sites, and which do not pay attention to the

richness and variety of the affective-discursive practice of visitors as post-witnesses, then there is also a potential danger of reinforcing judgemental and shaming perspectives that do not further our understanding.

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