

## Call for Papers

### *Acts of Witnessing on Film*

The definitions, uses, policies, and norms of testimony continue to be debated, with discussions fueled by a large scientific literature; works of philosophy and aesthetics (Frosch, & Pinchewski, 2009, Goutte, 2016, El Madawi, 2020, Détue, 2022) explore the relationship between filmed oral testimonies and historical facts, the narrative processes created by this medium in the *Era of the Witness*, the contours of truly *cinematic* testimonies, and even of testimony as a new documentary form (Leimbacher, 2014, Katz, 2018). At the intersection of Trauma Studies, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and Memory and Media Studies, scholars have conducted research into audiovisual productions about the Holocaust as well as repressions in Latin America, the Middle-East, North Africa, and Asia (cf. the selected bibliography). These works are characterized by a constructivist perspective and an interest in the role of documentary filmmakers in the writing of history.

This conference reflects through a **historical perspective** on the act of witnessing on film. Beyond “testimonial” cinema (Garibotto, 2019), we hope to approach testimonies as a **practice**, shaped by the specific environments of their national cinematographic cultures. How are enunciative devices reconfigured through the **technical and institutional mediations** inherent to the production of knowledge? How can we address the social and political stakes of **archiving** at the time of creation (omissions, negotiations, political pressures...)? Which epistemological approaches can be used to analyze **testimonial functions assigned after the fact** (such as previous footage reassigned for other purposes and uses,<sup>1</sup> witness retractions regarding propaganda)?

Studies on the **historicity of individual accounts in documentaries** (most often Anglophone and Francophone) situate their emergence in the 1960s (Leimbacher, 2014). This conference also proposes to account for prior decades and to introduce a **global and comparative perspective**. We wish to shed light on sensitivities to oral expression specific to various documentary traditions (Zéau, 2020), including those that developed under authoritarian and dictatorial regimes. These elements will be put in dialogue with various approaches to conceptualizing evidence, the document, and the audio trace. In so doing, we hope to pave the way for further research into the **international circulation of ideas and expertise**.

In order to understand the **listening conditions** (Comolli, 1995) of a verbal testimony centered on personal experiences of violence, it is essential to recognize to what extent the topic is both political and conflictual. It is our wish to explore this dimension of communication in these societies that are torn apart, in particular in authoritarian regimes and police states. We also seek to question the pressures coming from **institutions and social groups** that lie behind the emergence of testimonies in cinema by comparing examples from various national cinemas. A part of the conference will be dedicated to the **dissemination** of filmed-based testimonies (their geographical circulation, infrastructure, breadth, and accompanying narratives).

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<sup>1</sup> See in particular the conference “À contretemps. Prise et reprise des images filmées en régime autoritaire”, Paris 1 University, 2022

This conference is situated at the intersection of the history of cinema and a reflection on the act of witnessing that considers the social history of mass violence and the history of the end of dictatorships. We hope that it will be multidisciplinary and will foster connections between various cultural areas of research. We welcome proposals in French or English from a diversity of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches.

The conference will take place on **June 17 and 18, 2024** at **The American University of Paris**.

**Submission criteria:**

Please send your proposals in English or French before January 8, 2024. Please indicate the argument and issues raised by the topic of your communication and do not exceed 500 words. Submissions are to be sent to the organizing Committee (schaeffercenter@aup.edu). Authors will be responded to in February 2024. The presentation should be of 20 minutes.

**Organization Committee :** Luba Jurgenson (Sorbonne Université), Constance Pâris de Bollardière (AUP), Brian Schiff (AUP), Irina Tcherneva (CNRS)

**Scientific Committee**, in alphabetical order:

Ruth Beckermann (filmmaker)  
Jennifer Cazenave (Boston University)  
Jochen Hellbeck (Rutgers University)  
Luba Jurgenson (Sorbonne)  
Sylvie Lindeperg (University Paris 1)  
Ania Szczepanska (University Paris 1)  
Irina Tcherneva (CNRS)

**Indicative bibliography**

- Paul Bernard Nouraud and Luba Jurgenson (ed.), *Témoigner par l'image*, Paris, Petra, 2015.
- Paul Bernard Nouraud, Luba Jurgenson, Irina Tcherneva (ed.), *Témoigner par l'image II*, Paris, Petra, forthcoming in 2023.
- Véronique Campan, Marie Martin, Sylvie Rollet (ed.), *Qu'est-ce qu'un geste politique au cinéma ?* Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2019.
- Catherine Coquio, *La littérature en suspens. Écritures de la Shoah : le témoignage et les œuvres*, Paris, L'Arachnéen, 2015.
- Efren Cuevas, *Filming History from Below: Microhistorical Documentaries*, Columbia University Press, Wallflower Press, 2022.
- Frédéric Détue, *Témoigner au cinéma : une action dans l'histoire*, Presses Universitaires de Paris Nanterre, 2022.
- Frédéric Détue & Charlotte Lacoste, *Témoigner en littérature*, Europe n° 1041-1042, janvier-février 2016).
- Stefanie El Madawi, *Approaching Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing*, PhD thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2020.
- Paul Frosh & Amit Pinchevski, *Media Witnessing. Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication*, Pallgrave Macmillan, 2009.

- Verónica Garibotto, *Rethinking testimonial cinema in postdictatorship Argentina: beyond memory fatigue*, Indiana University Press, 2019.
- Martin Goutte, « Le témoignage au rythme des images et des mots : accélération et accumulation », *Écrire l'histoire* [online], 16 | 2016, pp. 155-163.
- Luba Jurgenson & Alexandre Prstojevic, *Des Témoins aux héritiers*, Paris, Petra, 2012.
- Aurélia Kalisky, « *Pour une histoire culturelle du testimonial. De la notion de "témoignage" à celle de "création testimoniale"* », PHD thesis, 2013, Paris 3 University.
- Rebecka Katz Thor, *Beyond the Witness. Holocaust Representation and The Testimony Of Images. Three Films by Yael Hersonski, Harun Farocki And Eyal Sivan*, Stockholm, Art and Theory Publishing, 2018.
- Irina Leimbacher, *More than Talking Heads: Non-fiction Testimony and Cinematic Form*, PHD thesis, University of Berkley, 2014.
- Sylvie Lindeperg & Annette Wieviorka, *Univers concentrationnaire et génocide : voir, savoir, comprendre*, Paris, Mille et une nuits, 2008.
- Rory O'Bryen, *Literature, Testimony and Cinema in Contemporary Colombian Culture : Spectres of la Violencia*, Woodbridge, Rochester, NY, Tamesis, 2008.
- Bhaskar Sarkar & Janet Walker (ed.), *Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of Suffering*, New York, Routledge, 2010.
- Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2006.
- Caroline Zéau, *Le cinéma direct : un art de la mise en scène*, l'Âge d'homme, 2020.
- *Revue Images Documentaires « La Parole Filmée »*, 1995, n° 22.