Re-Enacting the Holocaust in Maryan's *Ecce Homo* (1975)

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Introduction

¶1 An artist's studio in 1970s New York, a man dressed in a white oversized shirt that shows a star of David, cradling a toy gun. Behind him, bursts of chaotic, expressive artwork dominate the scene, sharing space with an iconic Marilyn Monroe portrait. This is one of the settings of Maryan S. Maryan's *Ecce Homo* (1975), a film that upends every expectation of what a Holocaust testimony should look like, and runs against every convention we might associate with Holocaust documentaries or testimony films.[1] Rather than somber archival footage or direct-to-camera recollection, we are confronted with a space of artistic excess, performance, and unsettling juxtapositions.

¶2 While largely overlooked in critical discourse and overshadowed by later works like Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, Maryan's *Ecce Homo* represents an underexamined but crucial contribution to Holocaust testimony film. The Holocaust survivor's decision to foreground the fragmented and deeply embodied nature of memory situates the film as a radical response to the limitations of conventional documentary techniques used in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, or the juridical eyewitnesses in the context of the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem.

¶3 *Ecce Homo* remains notoriously difficult to access in full. An incomplete version—approximately 1 hour and 5 minutes in duration—is available online. Screenings of the full film occur infrequently, typically as part of curated exhibitions.[2] I will use this incomplete version as the primary basis for my analysis, complemented by the film's paratexts, such as its transcript and Maryan's typewritten preface. While this mode of analysis might seem limited at first glance, it is, in fact, appropriate given the film's legacy and the broader context of Holocaust representation. Materials that surround *Ecce Homo*, such as production stills and the transcript featured in the 2022 exhibition catalog *My Name Is Maryan*, edited by curator Alison M. Gingeras, largely shaped the awareness of the film. These materials played a significant role in making the film known, even in the absence of wide circulation. The dynamic Astrid Erll describes, that a film's memorial meaning often arises not solely from its content but from the

1— In this paper, I will refer to the artist by his chosen name, Maryan S. Maryan. His given name has also been spelled as "Pinchas" or "Pinkas," and his last name as "Burstein." The use of "Maryan" reflects the name under which he created most of his work and is widely recognized in art historical and academic discussions.

2— Maryan S. Maryan and Kenny Schneider, "Ecce Homo," *Vimeo*, accessed April 13, 2015, at https://vimeo.com/135614860. This version corresponds to pages 45–57 of the film's transcript. The editor, Alison M. Gingeras, corrected spelling mistakes. Maryan S. Maryan, "Transcript of Ecce Homo Monologue (1975)," in *My Name Is Maryan*, ed. Alison M. Gingeras (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2022), 45–61.

broader contexts it creates through media discussions, exhibitions, and public discourses, is clearly at work in the case of Maryan, whose legacy has been shaped by exhibitions and critical debates that position him as a "rediscovered" voice in Holocaust representation.[3] Moreover, the film's limited circulation mirrors the historical trajectory of early Holocaust testimonies, which often remained within smaller, Jewish circles rather than reaching mass audiences.[4] In this sense, the paratexts are not merely supplementary but central to the film's afterlife and cultural significance.

¶4 This article examines *Ecce Homo* as a vital contribution to Holocaust representation and memory film. I begin by situating Maryan's transnational biography—shaped by forced displacement across Poland, and migration to Palestine, France, and the United States—as a lens for understanding the fragmented subjectivity at the heart of his film. Then I contextualize *Ecce Homo* within the evolving tradition of Holocaust documentaries and video testimony, noting how it both aligns with and departs from canonical works. I particularly focus on the film's use of a typewritten preface as an early indicator of what scholars would later identify as characteristic of video testimony and memory film. Through close analysis, I argue that *Ecce Homo* operates not only as a site of historical remembrance but also as a bold experiment in the techniques, aesthetics, and ethics of witnessing. The film integrates re-enactment, visual artwork, archival photographs, therapeutic collages, and oral narration to approximate memory in ways that challenge conventional modes of testimony. In contrast to other canonical representations of the Holocaust, *Ecce Homo* emerges from the survivor's own initiative to confront personal trauma. The film underscores the Holocaust's singularity while simultaneously opening a space of solidarity with victims and survivors of other global histories of violence—a dynamic that I will examine below through the lens of multidirectional memory.

Maryan's Biography and Artistic Contextualization

¶5 Maryan, born Pinchas Bursztyn to Orthodox Jewish baker Abraham Schindel and his wife Gitla Bursztyn in 1927 in Nowy Sącz, in the Galician region of Poland, experienced the profound horrors of the Holocaust firsthand.[5] During the Nazi occupation, when he was only twelve years old, Maryan was separated from his family and deported. In 1942–1943, he lived in the Rzeszów Ghetto, where he was shot in the neck while delivering food to Jews in hiding. Ultimately, he was transferred to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp and worked in Gliwice, where he was also one of 22 randomly chosen Jews who were shot but survived. After the Soviet army's liberation of

3— Astrid Erll, "Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (De Gruyter, 2010), 396. For instance, in a 2021 New York Times article, Hilarie M. Sheets ("An Artist Once Reborn Is Now Rediscovered") described Maryan as a "rediscovered" artist in the context of the exhibition *My Name Is Maryan* at the Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami.

4— Daniel H. Magilow and Lisa Silverman, *Holocaust Representations in History: An Introduction* (Bloomsbury, 2015), 9.

5— On Maryan's biography, see Jeanne Marie Wasilik, "The Work of Maryan: An Injunction to See," in *Maryan: Behold a Man and His Work*, ed. Jeanne Marie Wasilik (Chicago: Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, 1996), 11–50; Katarzyna Bojarska, "Maryan, or the Life in Death," *Widok. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture,* accessed November 27, 2024, at https://www.pismowidok.org/en/archive/2013/4-ruin/maryan-or-the-life-in-death; Daniel Kupermann, "Social Trauma and Testimony: A Reading of Maryan S. Maryan's Notebooks Inspired by Sándor Ferenczi," *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 82, no. 3 (2022): 268–280; and Kathryn L. Brackney, *Surreal Geographies: A New History of Holocaust Consciousness*, (University of Wisconsin Press, 2024), 50–53, 92–94.

the Auschwitz death camp, he was the only one of his family to survive the Holocaust.

¶6 After spending two years in displaced persons camps, in 1947, Maryan immigrated to Jerusalem, Mandatory Palestine. There, he applied to the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, where he developed friendships with other Holocaust survivors, including Yehuda Bacon. He left for Paris in 1950, where he studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. It was during this period that he adopted his artist's name, Maryan. Maryan's artistic career flourished in Paris, but, after being denied French citizenship, he later relocated to New York in the early 1960s with his wife, Annette, a Holocaust survivor he had met in France. He received American citizenship in 1969 and officially changed his name to Maryan S. Maryan. Settling in the dynamic artistic milieu of the Chelsea Hotel in the 1970s, he continued to develop his distinctive expressionist style. His work was deeply introspective, as he grappled with physical health challenges and psychological stress linked to his Holocaust experiences. To confront his memories, he produced 478 autobiographical ink drawings, a process that was both therapeutic and creatively transformative. In 1975, Maryan collaborated with Kenny Schneider to produce the experimental film *Ecce Homo*, shot in his studio at the Chelsea Hotel.

¶7 Maryan passed away in 1977 from a heart attack in New York and was laid to rest at Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris. His artistic legacy has continued to resonate, with his work represented by the Maryan Estate at Mennour Gallery in Paris. Since his first solo exhibition at the YMCA Building in Jerusalem in 1949, over 50 personal exhibitions and numerous collective exhibitions, some of which center on Jewish experiences and themes of the twentieth century, have displayed Maryan's art. One of his most recent exhibitions, *My Name Is Maryan*, curated by Gingeras and Noa Rosenberg, was displayed at the Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami and the Tel Aviv Museum of Art in 2022–2023.

¶8 Art critics and art historians such as Grace Glueck have observed that Maryan's paintings reflect the influences of, among others, Franz Kafka, S. Y. Agnon, Chaim Soutine, Pablo Picasso, Jean Dubuffet and Francisco Goya.[6] While not formally affiliated with the Chicago School or the CoBrA group, scholars such as Gingeras have noted stylistic parallels between Maryan's work and that of CoBrA figures like Karel Appel, Asger Jorn, and Leon Golub. His raw, expressionist approach, untethered to specific movements, reflects a deeply personal and universal grappling with themes of suffering, memory, and the human condition.[7]

¶9 Maryan's legacy endures as a testament to his ability to translate personal trauma into an artistic language that resonates universally. His work, spanning paintings, drawings, sculptures, and film, remains a critical lens for examining the interplay of memory, identity, and creativity. As such, his practice invites us to reconsider the frameworks through which Holocaust repre-

6— Grace Glueck, "Art: Survey of Paintings by Maryan at 2 Galleries," *New York Times*, February 15, 1985, accessed November 27, 2024, at https://www.nytimes.com/1985/02/15/arts/art-survey-of-paintings-by-maryan-at-2-galleries.html?sec=&spon=&pagewanted=1.

7— Gingeras, "My Name Is Maryan." On the connection between Maryan's paintings and CoBrA, see also Wasilik, "The Work of Maryan." In contrast to affiliating Maryan to other Western modernist or avant-garde artists, Piotr Słodowski traces Jewish influences in Maryan's oeuvre that date back to his early childhood in Galicia, which in 1910 "was home to 'the most numerous Jewish diaspora in the world,' with some 871,000 members. In the interwar period, the Jewish minority continued to form a significant portion of the population of Nowy Sącz." Piotr Słodowski, "Maryan's Earliest Testimonies of the Holocaust in Geohistorical Motion: Nowy Sącz, Auschwitz, Jerusalem, Paris," in *My Name Is Maryan,* ed. Alison M. Gingeras (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2022), 65.

sentation has traditionally been mediated across visual and testimonial forms. Providing this overview establishes the context against which Maryan's experimental film *Ecce Homo* can be critically studied, highlighting its place within and departure from these established traditions.

The Tradition of Holocaust Documentaries and Video Testimony

¶10 In the immediate postwar period, the Allied Forces produced several black and white films about the Nazi atrocities in Europe, such as the 1945 documentary *Nazi Concentration Camps*.[8] In addition to photographs, maps, and diagrams, these films were shown at the Nuremberg Trial to document and accuse Nazi leaders of their crimes and atrocities, and to instruct the tribunal. Moreover, the primary purpose of early Holocaust documentaries was to arouse shock and discomfort among viewers, and to educate German perpetrators, bystanders, and war prisoners, as well as the German public. Film theorists described these documentary films as "mechanical witnesses," emphasizing their ability to testify through their "continuous succession of moving images in real time, accompanied by live recording of ambient sound"—lending them a sense of authenticity that exceeds spoken or written testimony.[9] However, critics have highlighted the absence of Jewish voices and representations in these early works.[10] Furthermore, the interplay between visual imagery and narrative voice not only complicates the role of the camera as a "mechanical witness" and the films' claims to documentary truth, but also highlights a broader, defining feature of Holocaust representation: its inescapable mediation.

¶11 It was in the context of another famous historic trial that the role of oral testimony by Jewish survivors became relevant: the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem in 1961. Unlike the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, which relied mainly on written documents and filmic documentaries, the role of survivors' oral testimonies was crucial for the Eichmann Trial to expose and verify the historical event. The trial created a widespread interest in the Holocaust: for many people, as Magilow and Silverman point out, "the trial, whether they followed it in the courtroom, on television, or in newspapers and magazines, served as their first exposure to eyewitness accounts of the atrocities visited upon the victims of Hitler's regime."[11] The Eichmann Trial had an enormous visual impact on Holocaust representations, later amplified by Eyal Sivan and Rony Brauman's 1999 film *The Spe-*

8— Helen Lennon points out that *The Nazi Plan* is "a compilation of German newsreels incorporating footage of Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens*." Other examples for early documentaries listed by Lennon are: *The Nazi Plan* (1945), *Nazi Supreme Court Trial of the Anti-Hitler Plot, Sept. 1944 – Jan. 1945*, *Nuremberg* (1945), *Death Mills* (1946), and the Russian film *Kinodokumenty o Zverstrakh Nemetsko-Fashiskh Zakhvatchikov* (translated as *Cinema Documents of the Atrocities of the German Fascist Invaders*, 1945). Helen Lennon, "A witness to atrocity: Film as evidence in International War Crimes Tribunals," in *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television since 1933*, eds. Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman (Wallflower Press, 2005), 67.

9— Lennon, "A Witness to Atrocity," 71.

10— For instance, Magilow and Silverman (*Holocaust Representations in History*, 28) note about *Nazi Concentration Camps*: "Although many of the inmates and dead bodies are Jews, the voiceover mentions Jews only once. This disjunction between images and words—and subtle manipulation of the facts, by omission—serves to downplay the genocide of the Jews and instead emphasize the Nazis' general war crimes, as per the overall intent of the International Military Tribunal's prosecution."

11— Magilow and Silverman, *Holocaust Representations in History*, 64. Furthermore, it was through these broadcasts that "the term 'Holocaust' and its events became firmly embedded in public consciousness" (see also: "Eichmann Trial," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C., accessed November 26, 2024, at https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/eichmann-trial).

cialist, which brought its footage to a broader audience and a new generation of viewers.[12]

¶12 In his iconic film *Shoah* (1985), more than two decades later, Claude Lanzmann critically questioned the way people viewed and engaged with the historic events of the Holocaust in the second half of the twentieth century. With a duration of 9 hours and 23 minutes, *Shoah* attempted, as Brad Prager notes, "to sidestep the limitation that photographs impose on the imagination."[13] Reflecting on the media specificities of photography and video testimony, Prager further states that Lanzmann "wanted to force his audience to listen to testimony, particularly about the extermination camps, and in so doing he aimed to challenge conventional approaches and supersede all prior Holocaust film."[14] In the production process of the film, Lanzmann recorded 350 hours of eyewitness testimonies in multiple languages—including English, French, German, Polish, Yiddish, and Hebrew—as well as in multiple countries in Europe, the United States, and Israel. Thus, what makes the film outstanding compared with other documentaries and feature films is Lanzmann's unique focus on oral witness testimony and his deliberate refusal to use historical or archival footage, which underscores his commitment to presence, memory, and the immediacy of spoken testimony.[15]

¶13 The evolution of visual representations of the Holocaust reflects a profound shift in how this historical trauma has been depicted and understood over time. Early Holocaust documentaries, often characterized by uncommented footage of mass graves and silent, dehumanized victims, prioritized stark documentation over narrative. The Eichmann trial marked a turning point, as television and journalism brought the Holocaust into living rooms worldwide, placing Jewish eyewitnesses at the forefront and mediating their testimonies for a global audience. This transformation found its culmination in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, focusing on the spoken testimonies of Jewish survivors, bystanders, and perpetrators, crafting an immersive narrative of memory and witness. By situating *Ecce Homo* within this lineage, we can better understand its unique contribution to the visual and narrative discourse of Holocaust memory. What makes the film particularly experimental is that Maryan—artist, survivor, and witness in one—initiated the project himself. His acute awareness of the media-specificity of memory becomes especially apparent in his typewritten

12— On Sivan and Brauman's *The Specialist*, see Darcy C. Buerkle, "Affect in the Archive: Arendt, Eichmann, and *The Specialist*," in *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, eds. David Bathrick, Brad Prager, and Michael D. Richardson, (Camden House, 2008), 211–238; Magilow and Silverman, *Holocaust Representation in History*, 70.

13— Brad Prager, *After the Fact: The Holocaust in Twenty-First Century Documentary Film* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). Similarly, Magilow and Silverman (*Holocaust Representations in History*, 103) show that *Shoah*'s legacy lies in the film's "decision not to include the film clips, still photographs, and other visual evidence usually found in Holocaust documentaries," and, as a consequence of the absence of archival representations, critics have repeatedly praised the film's strengths to demand the viewers' active 'imaginary participation' in the process of understanding and constructing meaning while watching the film (see, for instance, Michael D'Arcy, "Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* and the Intentionality of the Image," in *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, ed. David Bathrick, Brad Prager, and Michael D. Richardson (Rochester: Camden House, 2008), 141; Henry W. Pickford, *The Sense of Semblance: Philosophical Analyses of Holocaust Art* (Fordham University Press, 2013), 180).

14— Prager, *After the Fact*, 7.

15— Magilow and Silverman, *Holocaust Representations in History*, 105. Lanzmann's Shoah initiated an interest in oral testimony which, for instance, was accompanied by the foundation of Archives such as the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies. Until today, *Shoah* continues to be the visual representation of the Holocaust "against which subsequent Holocaust films were measured" (Magilow and Silverman, 108).

preface, where he reflects on the role of his art as a form of memory storage and mediation.

Maryan's Typewritten Preface

¶14 Maryan's typewritten preface to *Ecce Homo* immediately establishes the film's experimental and documentary nature.[16] Opening with the words, "You are about to witness a human document: It is a document for all time - - for all men - -," Maryan emphasizes the dual purpose of his work: its universality and its innovative approach. He declares the film to be "'something new' 'A first' 'A real original,'" underscoring its groundbreaking qualities. The use of a 16mm sound camera—popular in documentary filmmaking since the 1960s—is highlighted as crucial for capturing "sight as well as sound" and preserving the recorded material "for all time," transforming it into an enduring object of cultural memory.

¶15 Unlike feature films, Maryan insists, *Ecce Homo* involves no acting; it presents "a real man, telling a real story - - his own story," amplifying the film's immediacy and authenticity through re-enactment. While acting typically involves adopting a role, empathizing with a character, and following a scripted text, re-enactment in *Ecce Homo* becomes an act of lived repetition and approximation—Maryan does not perform someone else's experience but rather places himself back into a real, historical event, confronting his own past through embodied memory. This process is inherently experimental, as he cannot predict how his body and mind will react to reliving traumatic events. The authenticity of *Ecce Homo* thus emerges not only from Maryan's personal history but also from the unpredictability of his recorded bodily and emotional responses—moments of rupture that reveal the limits of control and the raw immediacy of trauma.

¶16 In separate paragraphs, Maryan situates his film within a broader history of human suffering, evoking religious and historic figures such as Jesus at his crucifixion, the victims of Napoleon's invasion of Russia, and the pain endured by an enslaved man.[17] His attention consistently centers on the afflicted, not the perpetrators or historical leaders. Maryan imagines how a camera could have recorded oral testimonies of these events, preserving how, for instance, a slave "survived, what he is left with - - his thoughts - - his feelings," underscoring the therapeutic function of filmmaking as a means of witnessing and preserving memory.[18] Yet he contrasts this imagined archive with the absence of such records in earlier eras, lamenting that their histories are reduced to "hearsay," filtered through second-hand accounts, conflicting opinions, and abstract interpretations, ultimately becoming "grist for fiction."

¶17 The dashes in Maryan's typewritten preface mimic the rhythms and hesitations of sound recorded spoken language, creating a form of scripted orality—an attempt to capture the cadence of

16— A facsimile of the typewritten preface is published in Gingeras, *My Name Is Maryan*, 62–63. Notably, this preface is not included in the incomplete version of the film available online via Vimeo.

17— The film's title "Ecce Homo" (Behold the man) has mostly been understood as a reference to Pontius Pilate's biblical declaration, but it could also be interpreted as an intertextual reference to Primo Levi's memoir *Se questo è un uomo* (1947, first published in the United States under the title *If This Is a Man*). This invites for a further analysis and comparison between Maryan's film and his paintings published under the same title, the unanticipated suffering of Holocaust victims, and other meanings of the phrase. For a list of other potential meanings and intermedial references see also Wasilik, "The Work of Maryan," 47–48.

18— Similarly, Aleida Assmann notes that, unlike oral testimony in a public-juridical context, the video testimony can also serve as a private-therapeutical approach for the disturbing experience "in which the trauma of the survivor is reenacted." Aleida Assmann, "History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony," *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (2006): 265.

speech in written form. However, this construced orality remains fundamentally different from the raw immediacy of filmed testimony. While the preface suggests a deliberate shaping of language, the film ultimately derives its authenticity from the unpredictability of spontaneous memory: the unguarded moments of silence, the search for words, the sudden emotional breaks. In doing so, Maryan critiques the limits of oral testimony, which can lose its connection to truth over time, while celebrating the technological possibilities of his era, which not only preserve testimony but also enhance its impact—capturing the hesitations, emotions, and unfiltered immediacy of memory in a way that the spoken word alone cannot. This, he argues, enables "a unique, stark, unrelenting truth. A painting on film that speaks and moves."

¶18 Maryan's typewritten preface and his *Ecce Homo*—filmed in 1975, long before the institutionalization of Holocaust video testimony archives—anticipates later theoretical insights about the medium-specific qualities of filmed survivor accounts. As early as the mid-1990s, scholars such as James E. Young and Aleida Assmann emphasized that video testimony not only records memory but also captures the act of remembering: its faltering nature, its silences, and the often-visible struggle to articulate trauma. Unlike literary testimonies, Young writes that "video testimonies can also represent *not* telling a story, the point at which memory will not enter speech," while also preserving the "visible groping for terms and language."[19] Assmann similarly highlights the uniqueness of the recorded human voice—its tonal shifts, hesitations, and affective texture—as well as the visual aspects of testimony, including the witness's face, gestures, and moments of self-awareness as they respond to the sound of their own words.[20] Although partly staged—through the use of costumes or photographic material at hand—Maryan's film powerfully anticipates what later scholars would come to identify as central to the testimonial process on film: its visual fragmentation, emotional rawness, and embodied memory.

Approximating Memory: Techniques, Aesthetics, and Ethics of Witnessing the Holocaust in *Ecce Homo* (1975)

¶19 Maryan's *Ecce Homo* opens with a visually and auditory charged montage that immediately immerses the viewer in a dense network of historical and symbolic references. On the visual level, there are close-up shots of Maryan's face, costumed to evoke both a Jewish figure and a concentration camp prisoner, and at one point he is spitting blood.[21] These images are juxtaposed with a haunting array of images: his own Personnage paintings, Nazi cutouts, Christian iconography, and war and genocide photographs, many of which originate from the Black Star Photo Agency. These photographs portray the brutalities of Fascism (e.g., Hitler, Mussolini, crematoria, corpses), racial violence in the United States (e.g., Ku Klux Klan members), and massacres in the Middle East and Asia.[22] On the auditory level, the

19— James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Indiana University Press, 1998), 161.

20— Assmann, "History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony," 265; Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, 161.

21— Young (*Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, 164) argues that testimony films showing living human beings, "however scarred they are, [...] rehumanize the survivors, and in so doing rehumanize the murdered victims as well." In doing so, Young believes "the tapes might return just a fraction of the dignity and humanity the Nazis attempted to destroy; and as this dignity is returned to the survivors in their testimonies, it is also returned to those still stripped of it in the footage of the camps' liberation."

22— Gingeras ("On *Ecce Homo*," 42) identifies and lists "Adolf Hitler, Yasser Arafat, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk,

mournful voice of Pierre Pinchik, a cantor from Leningrad, singing "Rozo d'Shabbos," is juxtaposed with harsh sound of a firing machine gun, underscoring the violence and fragmentation that define both the film and the history it seeks to confront.[23]

¶20 The use of agency-sourced photographs highlights the mediated and transmitted nature of these visual records. While they resonate with Maryan's testimony, they also underscore the indirectness of representation, as the images are filtered through the lens of other photographers, contexts, and moments in time. Notably, the Black Star agency was founded by German Jews who fled Nazi Germany and resettled in New York in the 1930s—an experience that mirrors Maryan's own trajectory of displacement and migration. This parallel reinforces a shared fate and destination, embedding *Ecce Homo* within a broader history of exile and survival. By incorporating these images, Maryan not only blurs the boundaries between personal and collective memory but also stages an activist performance: by drawing on the widely recognized visual language of Black Star's archive, he situates his testimony within a global and historical framework that acknowledges the Holocaust's singularity while confronting the continuing realities of violence and persecution worldwide.[24] Similarly to the acts of violence mentioned in the typewritten prologue, some of these photographs—such as those depicting racial violence in the United States—might predate the Holocaust, while others, like scenes from the Vietnam War, postdate it, emphasizing the continuity of human suffering across different temporal and historical contexts.

¶21 What follows is Maryan's narration of his experiences under Nazism, told in English in a non-chronological order, beginning in September 1939, after the Nazis invaded Poland. He narrates his time in Rzeszów, which would later become the ghetto where Maryan survived an execution in 1942. Throughout the film, Maryan returns to this event repeatedly to point out the meaninglessness of the Nazi murders and atrocities. He remembers experiences of forced labor in Biesiadka, Dębica, Huta Komorowska, and Pustków during the years of 1940–1942, his time in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, his work at an ammunition factory in the Gliwice camp, the death marches, the liberation, and the amputation of his leg after being shot. Throughout his narration, he reflects on survival strategies, his feeling of survivor guilt, and the meaning of uniforms. It ends with Maryan asserting his motivation for making the film in 1975 and expressing his inability to seek revenge.

¶22 *Ecce Homo* is both a testimony of survival and a product of translingual, transnational experi-

Mao Zedong, Moshe Dayan, Benito Mussolini with Pope Pius XII, Black American protestors being attacked by police dogs, members of the KKK, and victims of the the Mỹ Lai massacre in Vietnam." Ephemeras from *Ecce Homo* (1975) became public through the exhibition *My Name Is Maryan*, and were published in Gingeras, *My Name Is Maryan*, 43–44.

23— Maryan, "Transcript," 45; Maryan, *Ecce Homo* 0:00-00–0:05:05.

24— This experimental practice of juxtaposing photographs of atrocities and violence from different contexts anticipates later curatorial and scholarly approaches. As Pippa Oldfield (*War and Photography*, (Reaktion Books Ltd, 2019), 8) observes, anthologies of war photography often present conflicts in chronological order or concentrate on a limited number of wars and photographers. Other projects, such as *War/Photography: Images of Armed Conflict and its Aftermath* and her own monograph, have instead turned to a thematic structure that brings together images across wars and eras. Maryan's montage, by contrast, points in this direction already in the 1970s, though further research is needed to determine how the specific photographs he employs might be considered "representative" of phases of war, atrocity, or genocide. Anne Wilkes Tucker and Will Michels (eds.), *War/Photography: Images of Armed Conflicts and Its Aftermath* (Houston Museum of Fine Arts, 2012).

ence. Shot in the United States and performed in English—Maryan's third or fourth language—the film navigates fractured identities and linguistic displacement. At the same time, Maryan's linguistic distance from the events he describes—testifying in English rather than his native Polish or Yiddish—creates another layer of remove. His English is reportedly far from perfect; he searches for words in front of the camera, hesitating and correcting himself. This struggle with language underscores both the temporal and geographical distance from the Holocaust and the challenge of articulating trauma in a non-native tongue. Yet, rather than diminishing the film's authenticity, these linguistic ruptures highlight the fragility of testimony and the inescapable gap between experience and its articulation.

¶23 To better understand Maryan's use of re-enactment as an experimental form of engaging with the past from his present reality—filming in his New York studio, wearing costumes, and interacting with cut-outs—Stella Bruzzi's theory of "approximation" provides a valuable framework. In documentary practices or testimony films, her concept of approximation acknowledges that historical events cannot be captured through a singular, direct representation but must instead be approached through a multiplicity of perspectives, versions, and creative interventions. Defined as "a term adopted to signal works whose aim is to approximate reality and all its ramifications, rather than more straightforwardly to represent it," approximation shifts the focus from mimetic reproduction to a dynamic process of evocation.[25] Emphasizing the procedural nature, it operates by assembling contrasting viewpoints and expressive modes to suggest, rather than depict, a subject, event, or action. Rather than collapsing fact into fiction, approximation generates a mise-en-scène of fact and history—a space where what is known about an event or person collides with narrative framing and artistic intervention. These works remain deliberately fragmentary, disrupting surface-level representation to expose the instability of any singular truth and to foreground the ongoing, interpretive nature of historical understanding.[26]

¶24 A key feature of approximation is its reliance on re-enactment—not as a tool for faithful reconstruction, but as a means of creatively restaging fragments of evidence and lived experience.[27] Re-enactment serves as a primary mechanism through which approximation takes shape, embodying its logic of interpretation, layering, and affective engagement. It enables filmmakers, historians, and audiences alike to grapple with the past in ways that merge archival traces, subjective memory, and the demands of the present.[28]

25— Stella Bruzzi, "Approximation: Documentary, history and the staging of reality," *Moving Image Review & Art Journal* 2, no. 1 (2013): 44. Bruzzi expands upon these ideas in her 2020 monograph *Approximation*, which, while echoing key formulations from the 2013 article of the same title, offers a more extensive and nuanced articulation of the concept, enriched by a broader range of examples: Stella Bruzzi, *Approximation: Documentary, History and the Staging of Reality* (Routledge, 2020).

26— Bruzzi, "Approximation," 44.

27— 'Re-enactment,' as theorized by Bill Nichols (72), refers to the "more or less authentic re-creation of prior events," which foregrounds the filmmaker's perspective rather than offering a singular historical truth (77). By distinguishing the re-enactment from the original event, Nichols argues, documentary films can prompt a deeper, more reflective understanding of tragedy (87). Especially in the context of trauma, re-enactment becomes part of a 'fantasmatic project'—a means of affective engagement and working through loss, rather than direct historical recovery (74). This perspective helps to frame the stylized re-enactments in *Ecce Homo* as approximations of emotional truth rather than factual replication of Maryan's Holocaust experience. Bill Nichols, "Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject." *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (2008): 72–89.

28— Bruzzi, "Approximation," 44.

Bruzzi developed her theory of approximation primarily through the analysis of visual media surrounding events like the Kennedy assassination and 9/11; yet, in *Ecce Homo*, Maryan—working from the specific historical experience of the Holocaust—appears to anticipate this theoretical framework through his artistic practice, using performative strategies such as the re-enactments to approximate his trauma and memory.

¶25 Re-enactment takes multiple forms in Ecce Homo. One example is Maryan's use of costumes, as he wears a prison uniform, symbolically stepping into his former self while simultaneously maintaining a present-day distance from the past. Additionally, physical staging and interaction with photographs of other historic moments and objects play a crucial role in the film. In two scenes, he is tied up by filmmaker Kenny Schneider, enacting power dynamics that recall his former victimization.[29] He also contemplates revenge, and production stills show Maryan holding a toy gun and interacting with Nazi cutouts—introducing elements of absurdity that unsettle traditional representations of Holocaust testimon.[30] These cutouts also highlight Maryan's engagement with indexicality: though they are enlarged, painted over, and alienated through the artist's intervention, they remain photographic traces of the actual perpetrators—visual remnants of those responsible for the atrocities Maryan describes. While these scenes do not appear in the incomplete film itself, production stills featuring the Nazi cutouts and Maryan's reflection on revenge are published in the exhibition catalog *My Name Is Maryan*. Unlike archival footage, which derives its authority from direct historical indexicality, Maryan's site-specific, experimental re-enactments and artworks engage audiences affectively and viscerally, blurring the lines between past and present. The layering of performance, personal recollection, and abstract imagery disrupts binary distinctions between fact and interpretation, history and artistic expression—ultimately approximating the Holocaust in ways that foreground its emotional and representational complexity, as articulated by Bruzzi's concept of approximation.

¶26 Maryan's testimony is deeply self-aware, oscillating between controlled narration and raw emotional outbursts. His difficulties in recounting certain events are reflected in his verbal hesitations: "I can't anymore. I am not getting crazy. I think. It hurts too much, you know. I am not getting crazy."[31] Sentences like these foreground the psychic burden of testimony, revealing the ongoing struggle of survival rather than merely documenting past events. His narrative also includes moments where he seeks to rationalize past behaviors that may appear irrational to those unfamiliar with Holocaust survival strategies. One such example is his reaction to learning about his father's deportation to an extermination camp. The then-teenage boy first felt unable to eat; some hours later, he returned to his barrack where his father had used to hide pieces of bread. However, he found the bread eaten by another guy and yelled at him for hours. In the film, Maryan retrospectively interprets his emotional response: "I think I converted, transferred the fact that my father was dead to hunger, and I was crying often over that piece of bread, until I got tired."[32] This example illustrates the interplay between the historical event and its present interpretation in Ecce Homo, reinforcing the distinction between

29— Maryan, *Ecce Homo*, 0:26:22–0:34:10, and 0:54:59–1:05:24; Regarding Kenny Schneider's role, he is rather a listener than an interviewer who in the film mostly remains silent.

30— Printed with the transcript; Maryan, "Transcript," 51, 55–56.

31— Maryan, "Transcript," 45; Maryan, *Ecce Homo*, 0:06:45–0:07:01

32— Maryan, "Transcript," 49; Maryan, *Ecce Homo*, 0:29:17–0:29:47.

past suffering and Maryan's act of remembering in the 1970s.

¶27 Maryan's narration does more than recall past events; it also reflects on how memory functions in the aftermath of trauma. His testimony is marked by moments of precise recollection such as remembering the names of two guards at the Rzeszów camp. Thus, by identifying the guards by name, Maryan gives his experimental film the character of a court testimony, without there being any form of legal enforcement. At the same time, his narrative also acknowledges the limitations of memory, revealing the inherent gaps and distortions that shape recollection over time. This inability to fully access the past underscores the involuntary nature of trauma, where crucial details slip beyond conscious control. In Ecce Homo, statements like "For years, I couldn't look at my own food. Could never see somebody having false teeth because it's, actually, it is sometimes visible" reveal the persistent intrusion of past trauma into daily life, demonstrating that Holocaust memory is not confined to explicit recollection but also manifests in involuntary reactions and sensory associations.[33]

¶28 Based on the transcript, the final moments of Ecce Homo shift towards Maryan's contemporary psychological struggles when making the film—a scene that, notably, is not included in the incomplete version currently accessible online. In the 1970s, when Maryan, who experienced "increasingly serious physical health problems and psychological stress" asked whether his therapist had similar cases, he responded: "Of course. I got patients of the Korean war telling me stories."[34] Maryan seems to experience this as a minimization of his own story, and one could even interpret it as a form of victim blaming, as the therapist places the suffering of a Holocaust survivor on the same level as the trauma of American soldiers.[35] What this response overlooks is the fact that soldiers' experiences of war—marked by combat and participation in armed violence—are not identical to the traumas of civilians who are targeted, displaced, or victimized. While both form of suffering are legitimate, the therapist's remark fails to acknowledge the distinct historical and ethical dimensions of the Holocaust. This moment thus reveals Maryan's frustration with an institutionalized therapeutic discourse, which tends to universalize trauma, equating the victim's experience with that of the perpetrator or soldier, and thereby erasing the specificity of different histories of violence.

¶29 At the same time, Maryan's film does not retreat into an exclusive understanding of Holocaust memory. Rather, his work gestures toward what Michael Rothberg has later theorized as "multidirectional memory"—a mode of remembrance that resists competition between histories of suffering and instead sees them as dialogically entangled. Rothberg conceptualizes memory "as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing: as productive and not privative."[36] In this sense, the emergence of Holocaust memory can enable the articulation of other histories of oppression—some predating it, such as slavery, and others following it, such as the Algerian War of Independence or the genocide in Bosnia, which are explicitly mentioned by Roth-

33— Maryan, "Transcript," 50.
34— Brackney, *Surreal Geographies*, 92; Maryan, "Transcript," 60.

35— In his 1947 reviewing essay, Theodor W. Adorno is one of the first to theorize the idea of 'victim blaming' when he points to the antisemitic argument stating, "that the 'Jews bring it upon themselves' by their feelings of inferiority, their oversensitivity supposedly provoking the very same reactions they are afraid of." Theodor W. Adorno, "Wagner, Nietzsche and Hitler," *The Kenyon Review* 9, no. 1 (1947): 158.
36— Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford University Press, 2009), 3.

berg.[37] Maryan's own visual practice, especially his incorporation of photographs depicting racial violence, colonial violence, and the Vietnam War, seems to make this point: through his montage of images, he visualizes the interconnectedness of historical suffering and positions the Holocaust within a broader, ethically charged constellation of global trauma. Seen through this lens, Ecce Homo can be read as an artistic exploration of multidirectional memory: it acknowledges the Holocaust's singularity while also creating space for empathy and solidarity with other victims and survivors of violence.

Conclusion

¶30 Kathryn L. Brackney aptly describes Maryan's *Ecce Homo* as a "pioneering work in the emerging genre of filmed testimony," a characterization that captures its innovative and enduring impact.[38] I have argued that *Ecce Homo* functions not only as a site of historical remembrance but also as a bold experiment in the techniques, aesthetics, and ethics of witnessing. Compared to other milestones of visual representations of the Holocaust, introduced in the third section of this article, three major characteristic make *Ecce Homo* an experimental film, highlighting its relevance as it offers a unique, intersectional lens on the visual memory of the Holocaust. First, the filmic testimony was initiated by a Holocaust survivor himself; second, by weaving together re-enactment, visual art, archival photographs, and oral narration, the film approximates memory through a fragmented and affective form; third, it situates the Holocaust in its historical uniqueness while at the same time creating connections to other histories of violence. In doing so, *Ecce Homo* anticipates what Michael Rothberg has later termed "multidirectional memory"—an approach that refuses to see memories of suffering as competitive, instead fostering solidarity and awareness across different experiences of trauma.

¶31 Unlike in early Holocaust documentaries by the allied forces, the TV broadcasts of oral witnesses at the Eichmann Trial, or Claude Lanzmann's interview style in *Shoah*, in *Ecce Homo* it is a survivor who initiates the film project. Echoing surrealist forms of literature, Maryan seeks treatment for his psychic state of mind, through experimenting with filmmaking as a form of uncovering his subconscious memories, associations, and trauma. Thus, Maryan is not only bearing witness but also revealing what it is like to live with his experiences and the inability to forget forty years after the Holocaust. His film emphasizes, as Aleida Assmann observes with a broader regard to testimony films that share an interview format, "the terror of the survivors' trauma in the actual situation of the interview, thus confronting the viewer with the Holocaust as something that is not past but still very present."[39]

¶32 Maryan's artist studio in the Chelsea Hotel may initially seem at odds with expectations of a conventional Holocaust representations. In contrast to other milestones of Holocaust representation, *Ecce Homo* offers a unique, unscripted space of testimony and makes the production of authenticity visible through its experimental form. Mediating his testimony, for instance, via re-enactment, wearing costumes, and reflecting on photographs, Maryan constructs a vivid narrative of survival while simultaneously, in Stella Bruzzi's term, "approximating" the historic events of the Holocaust. His approach demonstrates that Holocaust witnessing is not a passive recounting of facts but an active, evolving procedural engagement with trauma, identity, and history—one that resists closure and remains open to reassessment.

37— Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 6.
38— Brackney, *Surreal Geographies*, 92.
39— Assmann, "History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony," 266.

¶33 Lastly, unlike early Holocaust documentaries, the Eichmann Trial testimonies, and Lanzmann's *Shoah*, Maryan's *Ecce Homo* transforms the singularity of Holocaust memory into an intermedial activist document that reflects on the persistence of violence worldwide. For instance, Maryan begins his narration with his arrival at a concentration camp and draws a resonant connection between the Holocaust and photographs of victims from the Mỹ Lai massacre in Vietnam.[40] Through this montage, the film not only bears witness to the Holocaust victims but also gestures toward the suffering of those silenced by other atrocities. Rather than creating a hierarchy of competition of memories, *Ecce Homo* reflects what Michael Rothberg later conceptualized as "multidirectional memory": a dynamic process through which memories of distinct historical traumas—each retaining its own singularity—can illuminate and strengthen one another. Maryan's experimental aesthetics thus turn testimony into an act of solidarity that honors the Holocaust's uniqueness while extending empathy to victims and survivors of violence across time and place. Towards the end of the film, Maryan reflects on the idea of Jewish revenge, yet his film channels that motif into a deeper, more philosophical plea for peace and humanity—rather than endorsing the trope of violent resistance popularized in contemporary film.[41] In doing so, *Ecce Homo* disrupts traditional documentary aesthetics, confronts the fragmentary nature of memory, and affirms the possibility of ethical witnessing through approximation and creative experimentation.

40— Gingeras, "On *Ecce Homo*," 42. With regard to the question whether or not Maryan should be received as a Holocaust artist, Brackney (*Surreal Geographies*, 94) indicates that "Maryan long resisted the label of Holocaust artist, and his complex body of work is irreducible to any single part of his biography; in this film, though, he stages an extraordinary and deeply painful confrontation with the past, explicitly linking his artistic iconography to the Holocaust, the anti-war movement, racism in America, and the nature of man." Thus, as Brackney (*Surreal Geographies*, 94) claims, Maryan's *Ecce Homo* also becomes "a transitional document that uses the gamut of representational techniques at Maryan's disposal to portray his own psychic torment as a reverberation of ongoing world-historical crimes" (see also Gingeras, "Rock and Roll after Auschwitz," 32).

41— On the motif of 'Jewish Revenge Fantasies,' see Daniel H. Magilow, "Jewish Revenge Fantasies in Contemporary Film," in *Jewish Cultural Aspirations: The Jewish Role in American Life*, ed. Ruth Weisberg (Purdue University Press, 2013), 101–103.

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