

# Answerability as Bearing Witness: Mikhail M. Bakhtin on *Shoah*

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This paper addresses the question of Communication ethics by problematizing the nature of representation. Communication ethics have to do with the way a relationship between the self and the Other is formulated in representation. The author believes that the discipline of communication studies has not adequately dealt with representation, and that communication studies would benefit from following the path of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, a film on the Holocaust which elaborates ethical questions. This paper takes *Shoah* as a case study in order to see how Lanzmann challenges the nature of representation and attempts to recuperate the Other. The author also finds dialogism, the perspective of Mikhail Bakhtin, useful to foreground Lanzmann's work, and so this paper incorporates Bakhtin's dialogism into its analysis of *Shoah*. The first part of the paper addresses the problem of representation in which the voice of the Other is effaced into the economy of representation. The paper's second part takes up how the voice of the Other can be insinuated into the economy of representation.

**Keywords:** Communication ethics, the self, the Other, Claude Lanzmann, Shoah, Mikhail Bakhtin, dialogism, the Holocaust, witness, answerability

An encounter with the Other has been one of the primary themes of communication studies, as the term, communication, inherently presupposes those with whom the self has contact with. We, communication scholars, have been preoccupied with various representations in which we believe we can find the way the self can encounter with the Other. For example, those

representations include primarily historical materials and statistical result. With historical materials, we believe we can restore the oppressed people's voice, the Other, as documented in those materials. With statistics, we believe we can find some objective differences of culture in which the Other appears. However, we have not yet problematized the way we believe the self can encounter with the Other in those representations, that is, the economy of representation by which the way we encounter the Other is structured. In other words, we tend to have faith in what is represented as, for example, historical materials, and statistics, without questioning the way the Other is represented in them. The Other is believed to be located in representations, but the way the Other is located in representation is never questioned. For example, the focus of inquiry in intercultural communication has been on an encounter with the Other, but it has never questioned the way the Other is mediated in representation. This tendency is conspicuous when we turn to the way an ethical command for an encounter with the Other is suggested and idealized in intercultural communication research. Martin and Nakayama (1997) suggest ethical commands for intercultural communication that: "Learn to listen to the voice of others. . . . Learn to respect the Other. . . . Strive for empathy" (p. 272). Also, the naive celebration of multiculturalism as an ideal paradigm gives up inquiry of communication studies, because the ethical solution, which intercultural researchers desire, is only to wait for a multicultural society to come<sup>1)</sup>. Furthermore, ethics, conceived in intercultural communication research, presuppose the Other as an independent entity being separate from a relationship between the Other and representation<sup>2)</sup>.

In this paper, I would like to offer an exemplary case study in which the economy of representation is at issue, and in which an encounter with the Other is brought into ethical question by

using *Shoah*, a film of the Holocaust. *Shoah* concerns the memory of the Other and attempts to recuperate the Other in cinematic representation. I hope to address the significant question of an encounter with the Other by shedding light on the economy of representation as a primary theme for ethics of communication.

Claude Lanzmann's film, *Shoah*, is perhaps one of the best documentaries, not only because of the ranges and scopes of testimonies that the film presents, but also its provocation of the audience. When *Shoah* was first shown in Paris in 1985, it caused a uproar. In fact, it still provokes our emotion. This provocation is associated with the film's title, *Shoah*. *Shoah*, which means "annihilation" in Hebrew, calls forth something in the mind of the audience, for this strange name lacking a definite article resists translation into the familiar word, the Holocaust. By detaching itself from the familiar totality of the name, the Holocaust, it attempts to make us recognize that we do not know at all what happened in the so called Holocaust, no matter how much we think we knew it. Accordingly, this assumption of knowledge is transformed into something unknown by this film title, *Shoah*. This title tells that the Event is not yet situated in our understanding of it, and rather, the film title demands the audience to understand the Event from the angle of *Shoah* by detaching itself from its ordinary understanding of the Holocaust. In other words, the title is the first clue we will approach the Event, and the term, "Holocaust," would mislead us that we recognize the Event.

*Shoah* consists of testimonies of Jews who survived from the Holocaust, of Poles who watched them taken away by Nazis, of Germans who carried out the Final Solution, and others who were drawn in to it. It brings in several perspectives through these testimonies and points to the place where gaps among these

perspectives emerge. Thus, *Shoah* is not a film that celebrates victory over Nazism by recovering the history of the Holocaust, but rather is a film that resists the nature of the discourse called “representation,” by problematizing the way the memory of the Holocaust is recuperated in memory<sup>3)</sup>. It makes us think of the Event; how might we incorporate the faces of the Other—those who were murdered—in bringing the Event in our memory; how can we recognize the Other’s voice in our memory; is our ordinary understanding of the Event so called the Holocaust, ethical; how can we recuperate the Other—those who were once obliterated in our memory? *Shoah*, thus, excavates representation by letting the gaps emerge between testimonies.

Representation, for Lanzmann, is the way in which the Holocaust is banalized, trivialized, and expelled from our history. This is because representation provides resolution by becoming a terminal point of history. So resolution entails a decision, that decision excludes and kills other possibilities which were once included by being represented (Lanzmann, 1991, p. 82). Rhetorically, representation is defined as “synecdoche” within which a part represents a whole. Other parts, which are not selected under the rubric of representation, can be elided in synecdochic representation thereby generalizing historical materials into a single version of the history of the Holocaust. In this way, Lanzmann (1991) says that “I prefer that we avoid, if possible, generalities and I think that *Shoah* is a fight against generalities” (p. 82)<sup>4)</sup>.

Ethical discourse in *Shoah* shows us how discourse practice needs to resist generalities, which, by nature, eradicate the specificity or uniqueness, the irreducibility of the Other,—those who were murdered (and they were primarily Jews)<sup>5)</sup>. The irreducibility of the Other in *Shoah* powerfully persists: it unveils the Other with its specific voices that inaugurate themselves. In the

representation in which a specific Other is eradicated, one fails to interact with the Other as subject because the representation generalizes itself thereby obliterating the specific Other. It is a process of symbolic death of the Other in brining the Other into the economy of representation. What Lanzmann attempts in *Shoah* is to expose this economy of representation in which the Other is obliterated and eradicated in memory practice, and to recuperate the death of the Other into resurrection. Thus, I would like to shed light on, in the first section, how Lanzmann exposes the economy of representation as unethical practice in which the annihilation of the Other recurs at the symbolic level. And, in the second section, I will explicate how the resurrection of the Other is made possible in *Shoah*. In both sections, I will use Mikhail Bakhtin's perspective to clarify Lanzmann's *Shoah*, as I find it productive to combine both Lanzmann's *Shoah* and Bakhtin's dialogism into a synthetic ethics of communication.

## **I Representation of the Other as Being-with**

One of *Shoah*'s important tasks is to make us witness how the Jews have been symbolically eradicated and obliterated in memory. According to Lanzmann, such obliteration and eradication are inherent in representation. It is a way of banalizing, trivializing, and expelling the Other (Lanzmann, 1979–1980, 1995). Forgetting is a process of un-doing a specific context to the extent that the authentic self is made possible by expelling something which prevents the self from attaining the purity and authenticity. For example, by making a general statement that the Holocaust cannot take place here in a democratic state, we can sustain our belief that our democracy will not fall into Fascism, and at the same time, we put on liberal identity by expelling from ourselves the possibility of being racist perpetrators. Lanzmann (1979–80) says that one “rejects the Holocaust either by banaliz-

ing and trivializing it or by expelling it from history under the pretext that it is precisely an aberration of history” (p. 138). *Shoah* shows us various perspectives about this process of obliteration and eradication.

However, Lanzmann shows us almost no simple solutions of dealing with the Other. We despair that bearing testimony on the Holocaust is virtually impossible. The film shows that even those who in fact witnessed those murders are not able to talk about them, even avoid talking about them. Then, the following questions become relevant to us as the audience; do we want hypocritically pretend that we know what passed there, given that we did not suffer the Event; does *Shoah* demand that we expel Nazism from our psyche by demonizing those SS men and Polish villagers in order to hail the memory of the Holocaust? Lanzmann would say “No” to these, because he attempts to show the trap in the economy of representation which absorbs the Other. When we pretend we know the Other, we banalize what we think we know, and eventually, obliterate it. In other words, we risk ourselves by demonizing Fascism because we take on certain state of knowledge in representation that the Holocaust occurred. This knowledge fails to contact the Other that we can never encounter, thereby placing the Other into the representation by which we become liberal hypocrites, through demonizing Nazism. The discourse as such avoids confronting the Event, and tends to open a distance between us and the Event, and then, forgets the presence of this absence. *Shoah* is a film about the obliteration of the absent Other. Without recognizing how this absence constitutes our memory, the way we remember the Event will obliterate the Other. Lanzmann shows this process in the film from multiple perspectives.

*Shoah* presents banalization of the Other, which persists through the Holocaust. Banalization is a process of representa-

tion in which the self's direct contact with the Other is bracketed, and in which the self can perpetuate itself without proximity to the Other. For example, in the death camp at Chelmno, Germans ordered the Jews to use the term "Figüren" or "figures" to refer to the Jews' deads in the mass graves when Germans needed to move these bodies to the cremation site. When Lanzmann interviewed Motke Zaidl and Itzhak Dugin, survivors who had moved the bodies, they testify that:

The Germans even forbade us to use the words "corpse" or "victim." The dead were blocks of wood, shit, with absolutely no importance. Anyone who uttered the words "corpse" or "victim" was beaten. The Germans made us refer to the bodies as *Figüren*, what is, as puppets, as dolls, as *Schmattes* which means "rags."

*Were they told at the start how many Figüren were in all the graves?*

The head of the Vilna Gestapo told us: "There are ninety thousand people lying there, and absolutely no trace must be left of them" (Lanzmann 1995, p. 9).

It is important to recognize that the corpses were reduced to representation or figure, and that eventually the Germans avoided confronting the reality of their murdering of the Other through transposing the Other into figure and representation. Felman (1991) notes that "the essence of the Nazi scheme is to make itself—and to make the Jews—essentially invisible. . . . The dead bodies are thus verbally rendered invisible, and voided both of substance and of specificity by being treated in Nazi jargon" (p. 45). The Other is made invisible to the self in its representation as a "puppet," or "rag." Thus, the self can replicate itself through banalization of "Figüren."

Here is another example in which the Other is represented as Figüren, and thus, concealed to something else. It is gas cham-

ber that is referred to as “infirmary.” Thus, what is the meaning of Figüren coming out of the infirmary? Richard Glazar, a survivor of Treblinka, notes:

The “infirmary” was a narrow site, very close to the ramp, to which the aged were led. I had to do this too. This execution site wasn’t covered, just an open place with no roof, but screened by a fence so no one could see in. The way in was a narrow passage, very short, but somewhat similar to the “funnel.” A sort of tiny labyrinth. In the middle of it was a pit, and to the left as one came in, there was a little booth with a kind of wooden plank in it, like a springboard. If people were too weak to stand it, they’d have to sit on it, and then, as the saying in Treblinka jargon, SS man Miete would “cure each one with a single pill”: a shot in the neck. In the peak periods that happened daily. In those days the pit—and it was at least ten to twelve feet deep—was full of corpses.

There were also cases of children who for some reason arrived alone, or got separated from their parents. These children were led to the “infirmary” and shot there. The “infirmary” was also for us, the Treblinka slaves, the last stop. Not the gas chamber. We always ended up in the “infirmary” (Lanzmann, 1995, pp. 111–112).

The Other is reduced in “infirmary” where Germans didn’t have to face that the Other was destined for extermination. The “infirmary” represents a “cure” with “a single pill.” When the infirmary represents this function to cure, it represents one of its functions through forgetting the real part of the representation. And it keeps perpetuating itself without touching another real function—to kill. Once representation is used, it exercises its power to represent its function by forgetting another real function, which expels the Other. The result is obliteration of what is not represented. It is a process of representation that *Shoah*

attempts to capture as one of its themes. Once represented with intentionally obliterating the Other, representation persists as a lie. Franz Suchomel, the former SS, says that “If you lie enough, you believe your own lies” (Lanzmann, 1995, p. 136). Representation simply persists by eradicating the Other.

The economy of representation is at stake here. Bakhtin’s notion of authoritative discourse clarifies why representation forgets and obliterates the Other. Bakhtin says that representation is made possible by authoritative discourse. For representation to be true, it functions as true prior to any surrounding contexts without interacting with those contexts. In case of the “infirmary,” the SS men who used the term failed to contact with the real function—the infirmary’s “forgotten” function, which was to kill. Because it is forgotten, another context, to cure, could reproduce itself without coming across the fatal function. It is the role of the authoritative discourse that made this possible. Thus, authoritative discourse is referred to as self-referential discourse that justifies itself without facing the Other. Bakhtin defines it as “an internally persuasive discourse” (1981, p. 342). This internally persuasive discourse naturalizes itself and binds the self as if it is prior to anything. “[I]t demands our unconditional allegiance. Therefore, authoritative discourse permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders. . . .” (1981, p. 343). Since it naturalizes itself as if it demands no context, it naturalizes the Other into something non-resistant. Gardiner (1992) concurs that “[t]he authoritative word. . . refuses any such dialogizing contact; it recoils in horror from the alien word” (p. 91). Through authoritative discourse, a reciprocal dialogue between the self and the Other becomes monologic. The self that is impaired by the Other is effaced in it, as Bakhtin concludes that this self “is by its nature incapable of being double-voiced” (1981, p. 344).

So far as the reciprocity of the Other with the self is taken into consideration, it needs to be understood as a power relation. “[O]ne or another of a discourse’s actors can take authorial control of the discourse and objectify, regulate, or otherwise dominate the other actors. . . . [I]t is a power relation” (Lynch, 1993, p. 109). So, what kind of power hinders the reciprocity of the self and the Other functioning as authoritative discourse? Or what makes a particular discourse function as authoritative over others? In order to answer these questions, Bakhtin’s authoritative discourse needs to be supplemented by the explanation of the mode of Being through which the self becomes itself. Thus, in what follows, in order to focus on the mode of Being, or identity, Heidegger’s concepts, Being-with and authenticity, will be explained, and echoed with an analysis of *Shoah*.

Heidegger’s philosophy is relevant to the Holocaust because of his alleged involvement in Nazism<sup>6</sup>. Among many concepts that underlie his thinking is the notion of Being-with, which is ubiquitous in his entire philosophy from *Being and Time* to the later philosophy. Being-with is a problem, articulated as an integral part of the way the self acquires its identity, that takes place in the economy of representation. The problem associated with Being-with is well articulated in Lyotard’s work, *Heidegger and “the jews,”* in which he problematizes Heidegger’s notion of “Being-with,” or *Mitsein*, for its philosophical commitment to “the Final Solution.” Being-with is a communal component of Heideggerian Dasein<sup>7</sup>. Being is already immersed in a community, and thus, Being’s identity is already informed by its immersion in the community. Thus, Being-with is about the relation of Being with a community in which Being dwells. What is problematic with Being-with is derived from the way it establishes its relation with a community, which enables Dasein to emerge as the ontological entity. Being-with is ontological in the sense that it

finds a relation with a community within which Dasein is manifest. That is to say, the concept, Being-with, never addresses what makes Dasein's relation with a community possible as the condition of possibility for Dasein's relation. In other words, what is missing in Being-with is the conditionality which makes it possible as Being-with. One of the important contexts, which is an integral part of itself, is bracketted as constitutive of Being-with, thereby failing to dialogize itself.

Being-with is a mediational component of Dasein, and thus, has to do with the way one's identity in a community is represented, because the articulation of one's Being-with involves that of one's relation with a community. Thus, representation under the mode of Being-with necessarily de-politicizes its own identity. Recalling the way Nazi officials referred to the corpses as "Figüren," and to the gas chamber as an "infirmary," what makes those representations possible is that the Nazis' failure to acknowledge their real relationship to the world—one that constitutes oneself. Because they did not fashion their identity in the scene in relation with the corpses before them, the way they constituted their identity denies their relationship with the massive corpse, and to become noble Aryans. Furthermore, the racial supremacy of the Aryans, legitimized in the Nuremberg Decree of 1935, enables them to disregard the corpses as something other than humans. In other words, what makes them the Aryans is what makes them disregard what they saw as "Figüren." This very context, anti-Semitism, is forgotten in those representation in which the bodies were referred to as "Figüren." Thus, the series of representations in the mode of Being-with enables Nazis to un-question one's relationship with anti-Semitism in which the Jews were defined as sub-humans. Because they un-question one's relation to the Other, they are "pre-political 'people'" (Lyotard, 1990, p. 77). Lyotard (1990)

says, drawing upon the Aristotle's saying that people are political animal, they are not people, because they refuse "to fashion themselves into a 'people,' or to project themselves according to what is proper to them alone. . . . Since it is the Forgotten that holds the "people" hostage whatever their 'fashion' of being-together" (p. 80)<sup>8</sup>). Thus, what is forgotten in Being-with is Being's relationship with the Forgotten, which Lyotard calls "the jews." Lyotard's contention needs to be understood as not that Nazis ignored the Jews, but that Nazis forgot their relationship with the way they looked at them through representation. What is put into amnesia is Being's relationship with that which conditions their identity—the Forgotten, or "the jews." This is why he uses the term, "the jews" in order not to confuse with the real people, "the Jews" by indicating that the failure of Being-with is the oblivion of one's relation to "the jews"—the condition of possibility for the Aryans to emerge as the supreme race which establishes its relation with the Jews. In this deconstructive protocol, what makes Being-with possible is "the jews"—the forgetfulness of one's condition of possibility. Being-with, as characterized in un-doing relational proximity with the Other, naturalizes itself into the pre-political arena wherein the voice of "the unrepresentable itself 'represented' by 'the jews' is forgotten" (Caroll, 1990, p. xi).

Along with Being-with, Heidegger's notion of authenticity clarifies Bakhtin's notion of authoritative discourse, because it concerns the way identity is established, that is, the economy of representation by which identity is shaped. Authenticity functions as an authoritative discourse that de-politicizes representation. Authenticity is a mode of Dasein through which Being becomes capable of projecting its own most possible future by way of understanding its temporality until its death (Heidegger, 1962). I would like to question the notion of coupling authentic-

ity with “Being-with,” or *Mitsein*, that functions as “authoritative discourse” itself in the context of the Holocaust. Authenticity, for Heidegger, functions as an antecedent for the ontological constitution of one’s identity<sup>9</sup>. It is consistent with the way Bakhtin’s authoritative discourse operates. For authenticity to function as antecedent for one’s identity, one needs to transpose one’s identity into the ontological origin as the Being of Being. Heidegger says:

[I]t is only on the basis of an *antecedent* “transposition” that we can, after all, come back to ourselves from the direction of things. The question is only how to understand this “transposition” and how the ontological constitution of Dasein makes it possible (1982, p. 161).

This antecedence of identity as the ontological origin corresponds to the way racial identity was formed in the Third Reich with Nature, as the ontological origin of the race, determining the racial hierarchy with Aryans at the top and Jews the bottom<sup>10</sup>. The authenticity ascribed to Aryans as the fruit of racial hierarchy, functions to bracket their relation to the corpses that they produced in the Holocaust, because the Jews were already regarded as marginal to the natural hierarchy of race and their corpses were insignificant to them.

Dasein exists only in its authentic ontological constitution of Being-with, which makes Heidegger’s philosophy problematic. This is because Dasein’s choice is already implicated “with” the others, because of its ontological nature. In other words, the Heideggerian Other is already assimilated into the ontological constitution of Dasein. Heidegger says:

Being with Others belongs to the being of Dasein, which is an issue for Dasein in its very Being. Thus, as Being-with, *Dasein “is” essentially for the sake of Others*. . . In Being-

with, as the existential “for-the-sake-of” of Others, these have already been disclosed in their Dasein (1962, p. 160).

Thus, the choice of Being is already with the Others, and this choice already implicates the Others within the self. Accordingly, the Others in the mode of Being-with are transparent for ontological and thus solitary fulfillment of Dasein assimilating the Other into itself. Birmingham (1992) precisely points out that this is “the moment of emancipatory solitude wherein authentic Dasein lets the other be in the sense of allowing its potentiality-for-being to become transparent” (p. 115). Thus, Heidegger achieves his political ideal through naturalizing the political, and by obliterating the Others for his own fulfillment. So, Heidegger’s representation, manifested in “authenticity,” transposes its own subjectivity into the pre-political, thereby constituting the community that forgets the Others for its own political fulfillment (Birmingham, 1992; Caputo, 1992; Richardson, 1992: cf. Baumann, 1991)<sup>11</sup>.

Accordingly, in the context of *Shoah*, “Figüren,” “rags,” “infirmary,” and “cure each one with a single pill” are all representations by which the self’s contact with the Other is obliterated in the mode of Being-with. This is because the authenticity of Aryans, who elude their relationship with the Other or the Jews, attempted to achieve their self-fulfillment. In the death camps, the self-fulfillment of Aryans stands for efficient achievement of the extermination of people without recognizing their own relationship with the murdered. Nazi myths, or their representation, had been constituted in the mode of Being-with by privileging their racial supremacy, and by forgetting “the jews.”

One of the most distinctive sequence that shows the domination of authoritative discourse that banalizes, trivializes, and expels the Holocaust through representation is the interview with

the Polish villagers of Chelmno. Lanzmann asks the villagers to testify to what they saw, when the Jews were put into the wagon to be gassed.

The Jews there were gathered in a square. The rabbi asked an SS man: "Can I talk to them?" The SS man said yes. So the rabbi said that around two thousand years ago the Jews condemned the innocent Christ to death. And when they did that, they cried out: "Let his blood fall on our heads and on our sons' heads." Then the rabbi told them: "Perhaps the time has come for that, so let us do nothing, let us go, let us go as we're asked."

*He thinks the Jews expiated the death of Christ?*

He doesn't think so, or even that Christ sought revenge. He didn't say that. The rabbi said it. It was God's will, that's all! So Pilate washed his hands and said: "Christ is innocent," and he sent Barrabas. But the Jews cried out: "Let his blood fall on our heads!" (Lanzmann, 1995, pp. 89-90)

I would like to use the term, mythological catharsis, for explaining this passage. Catharsis is the way one's relation with the Other is excluded and made invisible by cleansing the self of the unclean Other. Consequently, one's relation with the Other is obliterated. In this sense, the person who tells the story uses the mythological representation of anti-Semitic story of Crucifixion (Felman, 1991, p. 67). And the speakers here purges their own crime through the anti-Semitic fable and ascribed it to the order of God. This mythological representation allows the Poles to deny their responsibility to confront the murdered. The silenced voices of the Jews are assimilated into the mythological representation, even through the voice of the rabbi. This is another symbolic death, as they are incorporated into the Chris-

tian myth. In this representation, it is their rabbi who deprived the Jews of their words about their life. Again, authenticity as authoritative discourse plays a decisive role here. As it refuses to dialogize contact with the Other thereby becoming internally persuasive, the representation of anti-Semitism enables the Poles to legitimize their action, and refuse to talk about the Jews, or to testify about the Holocaust. In other words, it fulfills two functions. First, it enables the Poles to obliterate their relationship with the Jews. Second, it allows the Poles to disavow their responsibility to testify to their relationship with the Jews. Poles fulfill their authenticity.

What is most important in this passage is not to indict the Poles and their anti-Semitism, but to recognize that we, as the audience of *Shoah*, have actually witnessed the Holocaust at the level of the representation—the symbolic murder. The Jews are killed in front of the audience by being cast into the massive black hole of mythological representation, and deprived of their voices, that is, their own voice to attest to the Holocaust. *Shoah*, in fact, makes the audience witness the Holocaust at the symbolic level. *Shoah* challenges the audience to bear testimony to the symbolic murder in the sense that the audience witnesses the moment in which the Jews are put into oblivion in the economy of representation.

### III Excavating Representation as Being-for

As we, as the audience of *Shoah*, have witnessed the Jews being symbolically murdered, the very problem of Holocaust remembrance lies in economy of representation. The possibility for bearing witness depends on the rehabilitation of the Other from the economy of representation in which the Other has been obliterated. Bakhtin offers a theoretical account for recuperating the Other. As Paterson (1989) says, the Bakhtinian approach

to the Holocaust is to let the Other speak from within obliteration.

A real ethical problem of the Holocaust lies in the economy of representation in which the Other is treated as a mere object for the self. Bakhtin's dialogism includes the Other as that which counterposes itself against the self. Also, Bakhtin insists on the singularity of each encounter with the Other at every moment. In his essay, "Toward a Philosophy of the Act," Bakhtin argues that the attuned acknowledgment of the Other by the self is articulated as "my non-alibi in Being" in which neither the self nor the Other dominates, and is an excess in which the acknowledgment of the Other is attuned to by the self. Being becomes excessive because the way Being is related with the Other is integrated into one's existence, which makes one's alibi different from the self-same alibi of Being. Thus, Bakhtin's version of the self, Being, allows itself to recognize its relationship with the Other, which he believes makes the self unique and singular, because it can be recognized by the Other and vice versa. He says that "[t]his fact of *my non-alibi in Being*. . . is something I acknowledge and affirm in a unique or once-occurrent manner" (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 40). The non-alibi of Being attunes itself to a particular spatio-temporal situation through participation in it. And consequently, participation makes Being eventful. What saturates an event is Being's participation. When Being acknowledges an event as eventful in which Being is shaped by its relation with the Other, its experience becomes "unique," "once-occurrent," and "never-repeatable" (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 40). Because of Being's acknowledgment of each experience with the Other as unique, the alibi of Being becomes a "non"-alibi in Being, the eventful Being is no longer itself by itself, and its alibi becomes other than itself.

Thus, a non-alibi in Being is derived from an act of Being. It

is only by its act that Being becomes unique, once-occurrent, and never-repeatable, because the act impels Being's recognition of its relation to the Other in its excess, which is eventful. Bakhtin says (1993):

Actual act-performing thinking is *an emotional-volitional thinking, a thinking that intonates, and this intonation permeates in an essential manner all moments of thought's content.* The emotional-volitional tone *circumfuses the whole content/sense of a thought in the actually performed act and relates it to once-occurrent Being-as-event* (p. 34).

As Bakhtin characterizes emotional-volitional thinking as self's immersion in a lived experience, the act as participation emotionally and volitionally acknowledges its relation to the world within which it acts. Through its emotional and volitional acknowledgment, Being is rendered as once-occurrent and as event.

A non-alibi of Being acknowledges that one's identity is necessarily divided within itself. For it hovers on a border—that which makes possible the relationship between the self and the Other. It is informed by its relation with the Other at the border or liminal space wherein the self is conditioned by its relation with the Other. To that extent, as far as the self is bound up with the border, it is recognized by the Other and vice versa. Bakhtin (1993) explains:

My active deed affirms *implicite* its own singularity and irreplaceability within the whole of Being, and in this sense it is set, from within itself, into immediate proximity to the borders of that whole and is oriented within it as in a whole. This is not simply an affirmation of myself or simply an affirmation of actual Being, but a non-fused yet undivided affirmation of myself in Being (p. 41).

Being's recognition of its relational proximity to the border

makes Being eventful specific to each spatio-temporal situation, and it is the border in which Being is related with the Other. Thus, a non-alibi in Being articulates its Being on the border, as “I exist in it” (p. 41)<sup>12</sup>.

The Other is the integral part of a non-alibi in Being. It is the Other that makes Being once-occurrent, or a non-alibi. This is because Being’s act is impaired by the Other, which takes place at the border as the unique, once-occurrent, and irreplaceable spatio-temporal situation. Bakhtin says, “My uniqueness, as compelling non-coinciding with anything that is not I, always makes possible my own unique and irreplaceable deed in relation to everything that is not I” (p. 42). Being does not look for a condition that is identical to itself, but rather that is conditioned by its relationship with the Other. And it is on the border in which Being is conditioned by the Other. Therefore, on the border Being never forgets, or obliterates the Other in this relational proximity with the Other by suspending the inscription of its own alibi, which assures the uniqueness of existence for both Being and the Other as articulated in the non-alibi of Being.

Acting compels the self to recognize that it is not able to retain the self-same identity, because the self acts on the Other. Thus, it is crucial to recognize that there is a location in which the self’s act takes place where the self is constrained by its relation with the Other. And, it is a liminal space—the border—where the self is not able to eliminate its bond with the Other, even if it tries. This is because a trace always remains, because the elimination of a relation inescapably takes place at the border. An act of eliminating a relationship must take place on the border, because it necessarily involves the way the self is related, or de-related, to the Other. In other words, the location where the self’s act takes place is right on the border which makes the self other than itself—a non-alibi of Being—and which the self’s

relation to the Other inevitably occurs regardless of the self's action toward the Other. Bakhtin calls this compulsion to engage within the Other “answerability” (1993, p. 42)<sup>13</sup>.

Answerability is the act by which the self is compelled to attune to the Other, and by which the self becomes eventful and unique—a non-alibi of Being. By engaging oneself with the border, the self deprives itself of its own alibi, and consequently, becomes a “non-alibi” in Being. Any return to the self that inscribes its own alibi is a regression through authentication of its own existence. This regression is what Lanzmann shows in these sequences I mentioned. The Polish bystanders and the Nazi perpetrators invent their own representation in which they fail, by seeking their self-same alibi, to recognize their moment of answerability, but at the same time, Lanzmann shows their excess—their acts of eliminating their self's relation to the bodies which were murdered and have become ashes. When the Polish villagers and the SS officers talk about Jews, Jews are put into the rubric of representation in such a way that the Polish villagers and the SS officers attempt to eliminate their relational proximity to the border where they are related to the Jews. In order to talk about them, they necessarily have to deal with this border. One's relation with this space cannot be escaped, because the very attempt to eliminate already becomes a part of dealing with this space. Thus, the symbolic murder of the Jews inherently covers their act of eliminating the border, which makes their putative self-identity a non-alibi of Being through being excessive. To that extent, the way they talk about Jews inscribes their non-alibi, and the way they obliterate the Jews is already answerable by their very act of pretending that they are not responsible for the murder of the Jews. Thus, their self-same identity is already constituted by the way they deal with the border, and consequently they way they expel their relation with the Other by

representing the Other as “Figüren,” and “rug” in the “infirmity,” is excavated by the Other. A return to oneself, for Bakhtin, is only possible when the return is for the Other. Therefore, answerability, as manifest in a non-alibi of Being, is “I-for-the-Other,” or “Being-for.” For Bakhtin, Being-for is an inherent and primordial mode of communication. He says:

The most important acts . . . are determined by their relation to another consciousness (a “thou”). Cutting oneself off, isolating oneself, closing oneself off, those are the basic reason for loss of self. . . It turns out that every internal experience occurs on the border, it comes across another, and this essence resides in this in tense encounter. . . The very being of man (both internal and external) is a *profound communication*. *To be means to communicate*. . . To be means to be for the Other, and through him, for oneself (1984, p. 311).

The contraposition between the self and the Other resides in communication, or “Being-for-the-Other,” which is characterized by an excess of self—a non-alibi of Being<sup>14</sup>).

The ethics of dialogism, manifest in the Bakhtinian mode of communication, lie in the interdependence of Being and the Other in the excess of Being or a non-alibi of Being in such a way that the act of Being inherently exceeds its own state of Being just because of its act of either recognizing or obliterating its relation with the Other. Thus, the act of Being necessarily inscribes the reciprocity in the very excess in which Being establishes its relation, or non-relation, with the Other. It is the way Being encounters the Other by recognizing the Other which makes Being loom up as an excess, or a non-Being. By acknowledging the gap between what Being is and what Being does, the self can become responsible to its relation to the Other. Holquist (1993) says:

The act is a deed, and not a mere happening, only if the subject of such a *postupok* (sensibility), from within his own radical uniqueness, weaves a relation *to* it in his accounting *for* it. Responsibility, then, is the ground for moral action, the way in which we overcome the guilt of the gap between our words and deeds, even though we do not have an alibi in existence in fact, because we lack such an alibi (pp. xii–xiii).

Various testimonies in Lanzmann's film pinpoint the place where the gap emerges. However eagerly the former Nazi officials attempt to eliminate their memory of the dead and the corpses, they fail to efface their speaking which gives the victims a symbolic death. Their statement that they were not involved in mass murder fails to correspond to their spoken symbolic murder. This is the gap that *Shoah* attests. This is the gap in which the Other, physically murdered, is able to speak, and in which the Other still is able to resist its symbolic murder. Lanzmann shows us only the gap. He never displays the gruesome scenes of the actual murder. What he shows is the gap, which remains un-eliminated in the memory of those who attempt to symbolically obliterate and eradicate the Other.

When we view *Shoah*, we are compelled to fill in this gap, as a consequence of the excavation of the representation being exposed. At the same time, there is another place in which the gap is exposed in *Shoah*. The audience is exposed to the absence of the Other which emerges out of a gap between what the Nazi perpetrators say and what the Jewish survivors say. It is another gap that substantiates the theme of *Shoah*. The first gap that I have shown is internal to the economy of representation that the perpetrators and bystanders use, while the second gap is between various kinds of testimonial perspectives. Those different perspectives between the Nazi officers, Polish villagers, and Jewish survivors talking about the absent differ, for they all differently

locate the absence. It is this difference through which another gap emerges.

This gap is also a place in which the Other is able to speak and becomes recognizable. This is because, given that all people involved in the Holocaust seek their alibi of Being to achieve the self-same identity, they need this gap that they need to cover it, otherwise it will appear that their testimonies are false. In other words, this is the gap that can dominate their testimonies, because they will be compelled to fill it in. At the same time and importantly, the reason why this gap emerges is that the Jews were all gone, and thus, it is their absence that governs the gap. Thus, it is the gap where the absence of the Other is recognized. Put it another way, all testimonies are already an effect of locating the absence of the Other. Because they are physically absent, the perpetrators and bystanders are compelled to fill in the absence by putting them into representation, it is the very excess by which their representation can be excavated.

Lanzmann demands that audience attest to the absence of the Other so that he can locate the absence as the kernel—by which the gap, or difference, among testimonies can emerge. Thus, he shows the absence of the Other so that the audience can recognize the gap. For example, while the Nazi officials assert that they didn't know anything about the mass extermination of people, the absence of the Jews that those survivors talk about demands something from the audience. It demands the gap in which the audience's relationship with the Other is established.

Let us observe how *Shoah* brings the gap into the self of the audience. *Shoah* makes us recognize the physical absence of the Jews. The absence is an indication that they no longer exist in the world. But, this absence functions by inaugurating the absent, the Other, because the absence compels people to talk about it. Abraham Bomba, a survivor of Treblinka, remembers

its station:

The trip lasted from Czestochowa to Treblinka about twenty-four hours with interruption, waiting at Warsaw and also waiting at Treblinka to go into Treblinka camp. At the last train we went in over there, but like I mentioned before, I saw many trains coming back but the trains were without the people. So I said to myself: “What happened to the people? We don’t see any people, just trains coming back” (Lanzmann, 1995, p. 26).

People were transported to Treblinka, but never came back. What was returned was the absence of the people. Then, where is the absence? Lanzmann traces the absence, and attempts to resurrect the Other as the absent, and this is the theme of *Shoah*.

Abraham Bomba was a barber in a gas chamber in Treblinka. The Nazis chose him as a barber who cut off the hair of Jewish women in the gas chamber just before they were killed. He says:

As a matter of fact, I want to tell you something that happened. At the gas chamber, when I was chosen to work there as a barber, some of the women that came in on a transport from town of Czestochowa, I knew them; I lived with them in my home town. I lived with them in my street, and some of them were my close friends. And when they saw me, they started asking me, Abe this Abe that—“What’s going to happen to us?” What could you tell them? What could you tell? A friend of mine worked as a barber—he was a good barber in my hometown—when his wife and his sister came into the gas chamber . . .

*Go on, Abe. You must go on. You have to.*

I can’t. It’s too horrible. Please.

*You have to do it. You know it.*

I won't be able to do it.

*You have to do it. I know it's very hard. I know and I apologize.*

Don't make me go on.

I told you today it's going to be very hard. They were taking that in bags and transporting it to Germany.

Okay, go ahead.

*Yes. What was his answer when his wife and sister came?*

They tried to talk to him and the husband of his sister. They could not tell them this was the last time they stay alive, because behind them was the German Nazis, SS men, and they knew that if they said a word, not only the wife and the women, who were dead already, but also they would share the same thing with them. But in a way, they tried to do the best for them, with a second longer, a minute longer, just to hug them and kiss them, because they know they would never see them again (Lanzmann, 1995, pp. 107-108).

Bomba painfully brings the victim's voice into his own memory. But, he brings them near, and then talks about them. They were first those whom he knew well. Then, it appeared they were the family members of his friend and he needed to offer haircut for them, knowing that they would not be back from the gas chamber. He was not able to continue talking. It was too painful. He continues to describe his friends' last meeting with his family. He said, "But in a way, they tried to do the best for them, with a second longer, a minute longer, just to hug them and kiss them, because they know they would never see them again." Then, they entered the gas chamber. There would not be any vivid, concrete, irreplaceable, and irreducible experience than this scene. What makes Bomba's testimony powerful is that the

people he recalls are nowhere to be seen now, and his painful testimony proves that they were all made absent. The absence lets the Other appear in the mind of not only Bomba but also us.

*Shoah* is a film about memory, according to Lanzmann. As shown, the memory of the absent takes place in the mind of the audience. The image projected into the mind of the audience is derived from the gap by which the absent shows the contour of its bodies. The absent bodies, which have been symbolically obliterated in the memory of the former Nazi officials and the Polish villagers, collide with the absent Other in the form of flame, bones, ashes, corpses discovered in the graves, and those Bomba witnessed on the way to the gas chambers. The collision of various ways of describing the absence is where the gap opens up in our images. We as the audience are compelled to fill in the gap. In Bakhtin's words, this is the answerable moment in which the self is informed by the Other, thereby becoming a non-alibi of Being. The answerable moment for the audience is a moment of decision if one dares to confront the gap. Although we can easily sympathize with the suffering of other people, what this gap demands from us is more than sympathy. *Shoah* does not demand the audience witness how the victims were suffered, how the former Nazi officers lied, and how the bystanders lied. It demands the audience attest to this gap as a consequence of being exposed to various testimonies. It is up to us if we, as the audience of *Shoah*, assimilate this gap into the economy of representation by which we can pretend to know what the Holocaust was about; or if we keep the gap alive by recognizing the fact that we can attend to this gap and expose it to the public. What it implies is that this gap prevents the dead from symbolic elimination of the victims, and helps it to keep its absence, which is only able to prove that they were murdered. Thus, *Shoah* demands that we attest to this gap. This gap points to our

relationship with those who were murdered, although this attestation is uncomfortable because we are blocked by the indecision that keeps us from proclaiming that the Holocaust was horrifying. The real horror is that the memory of the dead would be effaced into oblivion—the symbolic death—through the economy of representation. Attesting to the gap is what makes us answerable to the dead, and we become a non-alibi of Being. This is how we become responsible to the Other, which is the lesson from both Bakhtin and Lanzmann.

Also, this is the moment that the Holocaust becomes *Shoah*. The purpose of calling the Holocaust “*Shoah*” rests on the argument that the term, “Holocaust,” is the representation that has not yet been resurrected by the absent Other. As the representation is subject to banalization and obliteration, *Shoah* resists the resolution being represented. The awkward name, “*Shoah*,” embodies exactly the commitment to resurrect *Shoah* by attending to the gap, hence the Other. Thus, *Shoah* is “a film of incarnation” (Lanzmann, 1986). The representation called “the Holocaust” is incarnated into *Shoah* through resurrection of the absence with the emergence of the gap. It is the audience’s responsibility to attest to the gap.

### Notes

- 1) See, for example, Rogers, Everett M. and Steinfatt, Thomas M. (1999) *Intercultural Communication*. (Illinois: Weaver Press). Especially their account of multiculturalism as an ideal paradigm ends up with idealizing Brazil culture, an exemplar of multiculturalism, without analyzing the way the Other is put into the economy of representation and how practice of representation would be ethical in multiculturalism (pp. 238–234).
- 2) See, for example, Samovar, Larry A. and Porter, Richard E. (1993) *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*. (CA: Wadsworth Publishing). Their suggestions on ethics presuppose that the Other exists independent of representation, and hence, communica-

tion becomes irrelevant for intercultural communication. The problems involved in communication have to be the way the Other is mediated in communication, and it seems to me that the ethical question has to pay attention to that process. Their suggestions on ethics fail to take into a consideration of the way the Other is represented. See their suggestions in page 438-440.

- 3) Among numerous commentaries on *Shoah* from various disciplines, the position that regards *Shoah* as the film of the victory of memory with its historical accuracy is very problematic. The historical viewpoint, based on positivistic empiricism, would lapse into the economy of representation that *Shoah* indicts, which is the topic of this paper. For example, Kurluk (1985) says that “[p]resented as a concrete past, the Holocaust is regained in *Shoah*, through the remembrance of the survivors and through images of the landscape in which all it took place” (p. 20). Also, Kock (1991) says that, drawing upon Sartre’s existential psychoanalysis, he believes that the film’s theme is that “physical materiality must be present before the symbolic formation of language, or signs can take place on its basis” (p. 131). Furthermore, Kellman (1988) says that, referring to Glazer’s testimony, “bearing witness is a matter of justice, faith, and memory. . . [and] we are summoned to sustain history” (p. 28). In fact, the position taken by those who take positivistic empiricism in order to historicize the Holocaust is very vulnerable to the Holocaust denialists’ claim, for example, that the gas chamber didn’t exit. The very premise for their claim is sometime derived from positivistic empiricism, and that is why the denialists and the historians end up with competing for the historical truth by resorting to presumed facts within representation. However, insofar as those allegedly historical facts are put into the economy of representation, there might be a situation that nobody can win, and the result as such will be really an offence to those who were involved in the Event. A Holocaust historian, Raul Hilberg, whose work on the Holocaust is the master piece, *the Destruction of European Jews*, indeed is aware of the fact that the historical materiality, as historians conceive, is subject to the denialists’ interpretation. He (1988) notes that:

Now I have been told that I have indeed succeeded. And that is a cause for some worry, for we historians usurp history precisely when we are successful in our work, and that is to say that nowadays some people might read what I have written in

the mistaken belief that here, on my printed pages, they will find the true ultimate Holocaust as it really happens. (p. 25)

For more detailed information on how the Holocaust denials use historical evidence, see Lipstadt, D. (1994) *Denying the Holocaust*. (NY: A Plume Book): especially, pp. 157–182.

- 4) The film title, *Shoah*, needs further explanation. According to Lanzmann, the term, the Holocaust, is not a representation that has been used by people who were murdered, because they were already dead. In other words, the very bottom of the Holocaust is unknowable, as those who know it were murdered. Because the Holocaust is the Event that needs to be rehabilitated from the perspective of the victims, Lanzmann opted for the term, *Shoah*. *Shoah* also has an intent to resist the current popular culture's tendency that Auschwitz has been primarily represented as the Holocaust, and the way the Holocaust is represented as "Auschwitz" tends to forget the other sites of the death camps, for example, Chelmo, Treblinka, and so on. Thus, the title resists the way the Holocaust has generalized into the single aggregate, "the Holocaust," too.
- 5) There were numerous non-Jewish victims in the hands of Nazis. However, Lanzmann is committed to the recuperation of the Jewish memory of annihilation. Also, the inclusion of non-Jewish victims in the memory of the Holocaust has yielded a controversy when US Holocaust Memorial Museum was launched in the US. For more detail information on this topic, see Edward Linenthal, T. (1995) *Preserving Memory*. (NY: Penguin).
- 6) There are a number of literature on this topic. See, for example, Sluga, H. (1993) *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).
- 7) This attribution of Dasein to a community has been much discussed by scholars of both philosophy and rhetoric. See particularly Ernesto Grassi's work. To name a few, *Heidegger and the Question of Renaissance Humanism: Four Studies*. 1983 (NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies), "Rhetoric and Philosophy," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. 9 (1976): 200–215., "Remarks on German Idealism, Humanism, and the Philosophical Function of Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. 19 (1986): 125–137., "The Originary Quality of the Poetic and Rhetorical Word: Heidegger, Ungaretti, and Neruda," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. 20 (1987): 248–260., "Italian Humanism and Heidegger's Thesis of the End of Philosophy," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. 13 (1980): 79–98

- 8) Being-with here is translated into being-together, instead of “Being-with.” Both being-with and being-together refer to “*mitsein*.”
- 9) Dasein’s choice to be authentic in the face of the absolute termination of one’s existence, that is death, is pre-existed for Heidegger, because the Dasein’s choice to be authentic is already implicated in its ontological constitution of one’s identity. He says:

To this being belongs purposiveness, more precisely, self-purposiveness. Its way of being is to be the end or purpose of its own self. This determination, to be the end of its own self, belongs indisputably to the ontological constitution of the human Dasein (1982, p. 141).
- 10) See Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. (Trans. Ralph Manheim.) 1971 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company). He situates Nature or Race as the origin of ontological constitution for determining the racial hierarchy. See, especially, pp. 284–329,
- 11) In a different context other than the Holocaust and Nazism, Lentricchia (1983) points out that the act of representing naturalizes the political, because the part only synecdochically represents the whole in which the relationship with the Other is forgotten:

The political . . . must be embedded in a kind of synecdoche as part of a larger cultural whole from which it cannot be extricated without violating the character of the whole, without also carrying out all the desirable features of the whole associated with it by necessity. That is the textual magic of synecdoche, and that is what Burke is getting at when he says that one’s political alignment must be “fused” with “broader” cultural elements. To “represent” the larger cultural whole as fused with a radical political alignment that functions as a synecdoche, a “representation” of the whole text itself, is to naturalize the political, make it seem irresistible (p. 35).
- 12) It is misleading to equate Bakhtin’s notion of immersion in the world with Heidegger’s notion of Being-in-the-world, which, too, means Dasein’s immersion in the world. Bakhtin’s notion of immersion is referred to the subject’s care to the liminal space—the border—that makes the subject possible. On the other hand, Heidegger’s immersion in the world is the subject’s care to the internal, ontological, world of subject, as I have argued elsewhere.
- 13) Here is the passage that he specifically mentions “answerability.” He says:

To understand an object is to understand my ought relation to

it (the attitude or position I ought to take in relation to it), that is, to understand it in relation to me myself in once-occurrent Being-as-event, and that presupposes my answerable participation, and not an abstracting from myself. It is only from within my participation that Being can be understood as an event, but this moment of once-occurrent participation does not exist inside the content seen in abstraction from an act qua answerable deed (1993, p. 18).

- 14) The reciprocity between the self and the Other here is germane to that which is emphasized in Lyotard's criticism of Heidegger's philosophy and *Shoah*. What is put forth in both works is the notion of Being-for. Being-for here means "debt to the Other," and "obligation to the Other" (Carroll 1990, p. xxiii). The acknowledgment of the Other by the self inscribes the presence of the Other in the self, which, in turn, causes the self feel obligated to care for the Other. That is to say, the focus by the self on the Other gives the Other the power in the relationship to dictate the action of the self. When the relationship focuses on the need of the Other, the self is given the power to demand that the self fulfill one's responsibilities to the Other. In maintaining this sense of responsibility, the self is obligated to retain its relational proximity to the Other, "waiting for the Other to exercise her right to command, the right which no commands already given and obeyed can diminish" (Bauman 1993, p. 88). In other words, what it says is that the self cannot look to existing rules that state the limits of its relationship with the Other; it can only wait to continue a "responsibility never completed, never exhausted, never past" (Bauman 1993, p. 88). Lyotard's notion of "the jews" is a sort of hinge, which functions to establish a relation between the self and the Other, and thus, it resists the subjugation of being assimilated into the self, and which calls its attention to the self. Being-for as such is the ethical action in which the Other is attuned by the acknowledgment of the self. Therefore, Bakhtin's notion of the Other is appropriate to explicate "the jews" as the Other for ethical consideration.

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