

RETHINKING HOLOCAUST REPRESENTATION: REFLECTIONS ON REX BLOOMSTEIN'S *KZ*

Abstract

In 2005 filmmaker Rex Bloomstein released *KZ*, which aimed to find a new way to represent the Holocaust for future generations who face a world with no living survivors, yet a mediated world oversaturated with images of global atrocity. Despite much critical acclaim *KZ* received little academic attention. Ten years later this paper provides a reflective analysis of the film, exploring the emergent themes, and their criminological significance. Focus is given to bystanders of atrocity who bear witness to the past. The moral dilemmas of Holocaust representation, such as its commodification for both entertainment and tourism, are additionally discussed.

Introduction

Criminology has been relatively disinterested in the Holocaust and other genocides. Grounded in an illusion of science, and dependent upon the state's social construction of crime, criminology 'treats genocide with silence' (Morrison, 2004: 343), despite the significant questions incidences of mass atrocity raise about human nature and the extremes of criminality. Cultural criminology may offer a more flexible and reflective epistemological framework to explore the representation and cultural consumption of genocide and other crimes against humanity. As an approach that emphasises the 'spectacle' of crime and punishment in an increasingly mediated society, and focuses on our role as voyeurs of crime via the mass media, cultural criminology aims to understand how we consume, imagine and represent crime within modern popular culture (Carrabine, 2008). With its emphasis on the power of the image, it recognises the diversity of experiences and perspectives, encouraging a critically reflective and pluralistic approach to criminological research (Jewkes, 2011). From within cultural criminology, the emergence of 'visual criminology' (e.g. Hayward and Presdee, 2010) has led to scholarly interest in images of atrocity, including genocide. The relationship between viewer and image is foregrounded; how the image is perceived, felt, and interpreted, how we react to such images and the moral consequences associated with viewing (Carrabine, 2011, 2012). By viewing images of atrocity we 'bear witness' to history, which invests us as viewers with an ethical responsibility in terms of how we interpret what we see (Young, 2007). Furthermore, there is a sense of complicity, and ambivalence

(whereby we feel excitement *and* pleasure), which in turn raises an ethical discomfort within ourselves (Young, 2009).

Carrabine's (2011, 2012) work on the iconography of torture, public executions and suffering analyses the power of the image within the broader contemporary political, cultural and moral landscape. Morrison's (2004, 2009, 2010) research has focused more specifically on the image of genocide, and how the viewer reacts to such images. Of particular interest are how such representations, rather than invoking a compassionate response in the viewer, often perpetuate the process whereby we see the events, the perpetrators, and even the victims as something quite alien to our lives. Others' suffering, often graphically described or depicted, therefore becomes almost pornographic; 'turning the other into a commodification of viewing' (Morrison, 2004: 351). This work reminds us that the public fascination with such images, and our concern about their impact, reoccurs throughout human history. Carrabine (2008, 2011) emphasises that rather than assuming that this fascination is somehow pathological or distasteful, we need to understand this 'dramatisation' of life and death, crime and punishment, and the way it helps us to reflect upon morality. Also prominent within cultural and visual criminology is the view that we should not only understand how representations of atrocity are interpreted and responded to, but promote critical reflection and social change. Cultural and visual criminology are, then, interventionalist (Hayward, 2009). Morrison's (2010: 193) rhetorical question - 'Could an analysis of images of atrocity put the 'visual human' into the concept of human rights, helping to produce a moral obligation to act, to counter abuse and social harm?' - is effectively answered by Brown and Rafter (2013) who suggest that critical, reflective analyses offer a nuanced interpretation of the Holocaust, that challenges rather than reinforces stereotypes about history and counters moral indifference towards the distant suffering of others.

Documentary filmmaker Rex Bloomstein has been making innovative yet understated films about the criminal justice system, the Holocaust and Human Rights for almost four decades. Although best known for his influential films focusing on prisoners, including *Strangeways* (1980), *Lifers* (1984) and *Kids Behind Bars* (2005), he has also been making films about the Holocaust and other abuses of human rights since the late 1970s (e.g. *Traitors to Hitler*, 1979; *The Gathering*, 1982; *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 1982; *Liberation*, 1995). Of Jewish origin himself, the Holocaust and the broader context of anti-Semitism has

been an ongoing theme in Bloomstein's films. He has sought to document and question the darkest aspects of human nature, recognising the human capacity for evil (*Roots of Evil*, 1997) and the uncomfortable truth that tyrants, torturers, and murderers are all too human (*Torture*, 1985; *Lifers*, 1984). He has also channelled this passion into social activism using his films to campaign for 'justice' for the persecuted (e.g. *Prisoners of Conscience*, 1988-1993; *Human Rights, Human Wrongs*, 1993-2000), and becoming involved in humanitarianism more widely.

In 2005 Bloomstein released *KZ* (based on an abbreviation of the German word for 'concentration camp'), which explored the former Austrian concentration camp of Mauthausen. Ignoring all the traditions of Holocaust documentary, Bloomstein used no archive footage, no expert historical commentary and no survivor testimony, focusing instead on talking to those who lived in the town during World War II, those who live there now, those who work at the camp (now a memorial site and museum), and those who visit. This is interspersed with breathtaking footage of the surrounding Austrian countryside and shots of the empty camp. It has been described as a refreshingly 'post-modern' Holocaust documentary (Stone, 2007), but despite great critical acclaim it received little academic attention. Bloomstein's work as a whole is relatively underexplored, which is somewhat surprising given its considerable relevance to criminology, as it draws upon themes of the potential within us all for 'evil', the scale of human suffering, and the protection of human rights. Both Bennett (2005, 2006) and Jewkes (2011) have highlighted the significance of Bloomstein's work in terms of challenging prevalent pejorative stereotypes of offenders, revealing the dehumanising processes inherent in the prison system, and giving the audience space to reflect on the individuality and humanity of offenders. There is, however, no academic literature to date looking at the full spectrum of Bloomstein's work. His Holocaust and human rights films (and *KZ* in particular) challenge morally simplistic, stereotyped, and sensationalised representations of history. They are particularly consistent with the emerging, relatively unconventional approaches of cultural and visual criminology.

Ten years on from its release, this paper highlights the issues *KZ* raises for criminology and, in particular how, 70 years on, we continue to represent the Holocaust and maintain its relevance in the collective memories of future generations. This reflective analysis of the film, explores some of the themes from the film, within the context of criminology, and draws on the recent contributions from cultural, visual and public

criminology (e.g. Brown and Rafter, 2013), that facilitate a more nuanced critical reflection of the Holocaust film, and its consumption by a mediated culture saturated with images and information about atrocity.

Holocaust Films and KZ

The media play a vital role in our construction and understanding of the Holocaust, as most of us will have no first hand experience or personal connection to the events. Since the 1961 Eichmann trial, however, interest in the Holocaust has grown among the general population. High profile Hollywood cinematic representations from the 1990s onwards have divided critics, politicians and Jewish commentators, but have nevertheless significantly heightened public consciousness of the Holocaust (Saxton, 2008). The most notable impact came from Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* in 1995, which quickly became an iconic film among the viewing public, yet met with fierce criticism in terms of reconstructing the Holocaust as sensationalist 'feel-good entertainment' with the obligatory 'happy ending' (Hansen, 2001). Fictional dramatisations of the Holocaust have a tendency to present the Holocaust as a universal experience, and both romanticise and morally simplify 'history'. Langar (1995) argued that we construct the Holocaust as a 'discourse of consolation' rather than one of ruin and destruction, with almost all mediated representations focused on sentimentalising how the human spirit overcomes atrocities. Young (2007) notes the redemptive representation of disaster and atrocity following the event and suggests that it is a way for society to deal with quite recent traumas. But 70 years later, the redemptive Holocaust narrative still dominates.

Holocaust documentaries are viewed by the public as more 'truthful' than fictionalised dramatisations, and how we understand the past - our collective identity and public memory - is hugely influenced by these mediated narratives of history (Ebbrecht, 2007). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that documentaries are a conscious construction of the historical past. As with fictional film there are those that present a sensationalised and/or sentimentalised narrative, and others that present a more nuanced representation. Both documentary and fictional films can therefore serve to universalise the Holocaust, oversimplifying the complexity of this period of history for easy public consumption, and failing to recognise the dissonance that exists in historical narratives. Brown and Rafter (2013), drawing on Lacan, discuss genocide films that either 'act out' or

‘work through’ history. The former use traditional tools of cinematic narrative (easily distinguished ‘heroes’ and ‘villains’, recovery and closure) and favour ‘voyeuristic engagement’ for the duration of the film, whereupon we ‘forget’. Those that ‘work through’ history are open-ended and ‘ambivalent about the possibility of justice’ (1019).

Reliance on archive film and images is a common technique within Holocaust documentaries. Iterative, iconic images of skeletal prisoners and piles of human corpses have been fiercely criticised for an almost pornographic level of voyeurism (Saxton, 2008). This demand for graphic and voyeuristic images of atrocity is by no means a new phenomenon, and should really be seen as socially normative rather than pathological (Carrabine, 2008, 2011). Our fascination with the horror and spectacle of the Holocaust can be seen as just another indication of the ‘wound culture’ (Seltzer, 1997) in which we live. Furthermore, Lowenstein (2005) suggests that film may have an important part to play in the aftermath of historical traumas (including World War II) to relieve social anxieties. Critics, however, have argued that such graphic visual images of human torture transform the concentration camp into ‘a spectacle’ for mass public consumption (Saxton, 2008), where the victim is ‘othered’ for a ‘commodification of viewing’ (Morrison, 2004: 351). So whilst our fascination with the spectacle of suffering may be normative, some images and their overuse can serve to emotionally distance the viewer from the victim, dehumanising them and denying empathy. It can be argued that it is essential to force the spectator to face the true horror of the Holocaust in order to ‘bear witness’ (Hirsch, 2004), but the image itself, the context in which it is used, our interpretation and response (emotional and ethical) is central for cultural criminology (Carrabine, 2011, 2012; Brown and Rafter, 2013).

The ethics of Holocaust representation has become an enormously contentious issue (Saxton, 2008). At one extreme, critics argue that we should not try to represent the Holocaust, and that it can only be understood or ‘witnessed’ by the survivors. At the other extreme, the viewer is recognised as a ‘metaphorical’ bystander (Cohen, 1993), important for the cultural transmission of ‘trauma’, and commemoration through collective memories (Hirsch, 2004). ‘Bearing witness’ subsequently acquires a moral responsibility – to remembering past victims, and preventing similar genocides. Carrabine (2011, 2012) discusses the ethics of displaying images of atrocity and ‘the moral consequences of looking’ (2012: 464). Whilst some images and films cater to voyeuristic desires to be ‘entertained’ by

images of violence, criminality and punishment, others raise more complex issues about the moral demands of bearing witness and the contested politics of remembering.

Brown and Rafter (2013) analyse the documentary *Shoah* (1985) as a prime example of a critically reflective Holocaust film. Director Claude Lanzmann made a conscious moral decision when filming to exclude all images of the past (real or reconstructed), insisting on 'discovering the past in and through the present alone – through testimonies or acts of witnessing' (LaCapra, 1997: 235). *Shoah* showed the sites of destruction in their present (often picturesque) state and interweaved this with powerful testimonies. Bloomstein also focuses on the power of the human story and testimony in many of his documentaries. He eschews fancy cinematic techniques for a more minimalist approach. In *KZ* there is no narration, no historical commentary, no archive images or footage, and no actor reconstructions. Topographical landscape is also important to connect the 'here and now', and Bloomstein shows a commitment to understanding the past as it matters and is remembered in the present. Like Lanzmann, Bloomstein's documentaries give the audience the reflective space to make their own interpretations of what they see on screen. But in a dramatic departure from previous Holocaust documentaries, (including his own previous Holocaust films), *KZ* additionally abandons the use of survivor testimony.

As time passes and the Holocaust recedes in personal memory, becoming firmly part of 'history', there will be no survivors to continue to bear witness; presenting Holocaust representation with a 'crisis in witnessing' (Marshman, 2005). Bloomstein therefore conceived *KZ* to be relevant to successive future generations; the viewer becomes the 'mediated witness' (Peelo, 2006) to the past. He also felt that a fresh approach to the genre was necessary given the proliferation of Holocaust representation. Images of atrocity can both 'transfix' and anesthetise (Sontag, 1977). This has raised concern over a diminishing audience impact and de-sensitisation to crime. Cohen (2001) discusses 'states of denial', where over-exposure to images of human suffering can buffer our ability to empathise with the misery of others, and prevent us from feeling and reacting. Holocaust films intended to arouse compassion, seen too often in our increasingly mediated culture, can serve to normalise the situation, and 'numb' us to atrocity. Baudrillard (1993) calls this a 'new amnesia' to human evil, caused by relentless representation. This is especially pertinent to the Holocaust where, 70 years on, new generations of 'witnesses' have less personal involvement to the events. Bloomstein recognised a need for new representations that,

rather than reproducing the same images and testimonies, the same morally simplified and redemptive narratives, show the interface between the historical past and the 'here and now'.

Rex Bloomstein's *KZ*

KZ is a documentary set in and around the former concentration camp in the town of Mauthausen in Upper Austria. About two kilometres from the town is the stark granite fortress of Mauthausen concentration camp, built in 1938 for incarcerating 'criminal' and 'political' prisoners. It was the largest camp in Austria, at the heart of a large camp complex, and one of the most brutal. Estimates suggest that approximately 200,000 people were deported to the camp between its construction and its liberation in May 1945, with an estimated 100,000 – 120,000 deaths. Whilst (controversially) most of the nearby sub-camps were destroyed and the land redeveloped, Mauthausen was opened as a public memorial as early as 1949, with a permanent public exhibition installed in 1970. Due to the international inmate composition of the wartime camp, it has become an important site for many nationalities to visit and remember the dead. When *KZ* was filmed in 2004 the site received around 200,000 visitors a year, a figure now likely to be significantly higher.

Figure 1. Tour group of schoolchildren laughing outside Mauthausen¹.

(INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE)

KZ is a film about the juxtaposition of the past and the present, in a given place with a terrible past. It is about how different people, with different perspectives, experience the camp and its surroundings. These different perspectives include those who lived there during World War II, those who live there now, those who work in the former concentration camp, and those who visit. No narration or explanation accompanies these perspectives; in Bloomstein's minimalist documentary approach we see interviews with the residents, visitors and guides, and we observe others experiencing the camp, or going about their daily life in the nearby town. Although there are many themes which emerge from *KZ*, this paper focuses on the bystander or witness to atrocity – which is represented within the film in various ways, from the literal bystander, to those living closely with this past via physical

locality, nationality and collective memories, to the more distant bystander with no personal connection to the events – but drawn to them by voyeuristic desires nonetheless. This ‘metaphorical’ bystander (Cohen, 1993) or ‘tertiary witness’ (Seedman, 2006) includes both the visitor to the camp (‘the dark tourist’), and the viewer of the film itself – the ‘mediated’ witness (Peelo, 2006). The film raises interesting questions for criminology, and cultural criminology provides a particularly useful lens through which to critically reflect on Holocaust representation, the voyeurism involved in our fascination, and the moral responsibilities of witnesses to atrocity.

Bystanders to Atrocity

Among those who lived in the town of Mauthausen during the War we hear from three now quite elderly women who were young adults when the camp was in operation. Initially, they sit and reminisce about their youth. All have quite divergent memories of the camp and show different ways of living with the past. One of them married an SS officer who worked at Mauthausen. She talks with joy about the times, her wedding held at the camp, and her handsome SS husband. She stresses that she knew nothing of what actually went on in the camp, and there is a sense that she refuses to believe it even today. This perspective contrasts quite starkly with the second woman who remembers the awful things she witnessed, which have obviously continued to haunt her to the present day:

We stared death in the face with the KZ too. The smell, the smell. When they were burning them the whole of Mauthausen stank.... The ovens were going all day... It was dreadful when I saw them [the bodies] piled up like logs... I had to work all day with that picture in my head.

Her narrative suggests that they all knew what was happening at the camp, even if they did not actually witness the killings. But the other two women remember things differently, either through a conscious decision to deny their awareness of the murders at the time, or as a way in the present of coming to terms with the past. What ordinary people who lived near the camps knew of the atrocities committed there remains one of the most important questions for historians, but of particular interest for psychologists and criminologists are the wider issues of how ordinary people react to such an extraordinary criminological event. Horwitz (1991) interviewed bystanders from the town of Mauthausen and found that the abuses and murders were quite public to the residents. Most were unwilling to talk about the past, and downplayed their knowledge or involvement. Some were openly anti-Semitic,

some were horrified and protested despite the risk of their own persecution and death, but many were merely indifferent. These perspectives are well illustrated in *KZ* with the contrasting recollections of these women. The ambivalence about the times is also apparent in an interview with an elderly male resident who knew the camp commandant ('Off duty he was a wonderful person'), seemed to still admire many aspects of Nazism ('a beautiful time') and talks fondly of Hitler Youth, but also remembers the horrors of seeing children shot in front of him.

KZ highlights the complex and conflicting emotions regarding these times; the pre-war hardships, the stability Nazi occupation offered, and dawning recognition of the abuses. The bystander is faced with a choice about how to deal with that knowledge – a choice that may be severely constrained by fear of Nazi retribution. As Horwitz (1991) found, many bystanders retreat into a state of denial – easier for some who ascribed to Nazi ideology and saw the inmates as 'enemies of the state', but more conflicted for others, who had to find ways to cope with the guilt and the shame. The denial appears to be quite psychologically complex, and resonates with Cohen's (2001) suggestion that, for some, it is a conscious choice not to allow yourself to absorb the horrific 'truths', but for others it is a more ambivalent and unconscious state of denial whereby 'you know, but don't know' at the same time.

Whilst these interviews are not as haunting as survivor testimony typically portrayed in Holocaust documentaries, they are powerful in building up an impression about what life was like for ordinary people living through extraordinary times. Whilst traditionally the focus is on victims and perpetrators, here we see the ordinary contemporaneous bystander to atrocity. Although it is sometimes difficult to identify with the perpetrator or even the victim (Morrison, 2010), here we are compelled to consider the moral dilemma of the bystander and to reflect on what we would do in the same circumstances; would we rationalise and retreat into a state of denial, or would we try to act and confront the situation? Staub (1992) distinguishes between the active and passive bystander, applying classic social psychological research on bystander inertia (an inability or unwillingness to react) to the inaction of bystanders of genocide. *KZ* brings to light issues about responsibility for the Holocaust, and the tolerance and complicity of the ordinary bystander. But it is more complex than this – we feel anger at the denial and the seeming complacency of some about the fate of the victims – but simultaneously we feel the dilemma of those appalled by what

they see but unable to act and haunted by the shame and the guilt. Seeing these bystanders' conflicted memories in the present day one further reflects upon how the witness to atrocity lives with their past. These complex states of denial, action or inaction on the part of the contemporary bystander are also reflected in the way a nation state constructs a collective narrative of history, which in turn impacts on the national identity of successive generations (Rolston, 2010; Hirsch, 2008).

Everyday Life in the Shadow of the Past

KZ also represents the views of people who currently live near the camp and work there; the present-day bystanders who are connected to the Holocaust by both their national history and physical locality. They too reveal a complex set of emotions, and the contrasting perspectives allow us to reflect on how we live with the past in the present, and come to terms with the 'difficult heritage' of our ancestors. As criminologists we arguably should be interested in how crimes on this scale impact on individuals and society long after the event, and ultimately become part of our identity and culture. Hirsch (2008) discusses this 'post memory' whereby significant events before an individual's birth are culturally transmitted, form part of collective memory, and personal and national identity.

Bloomstein talks to the current residents of Mauthausen and reveals their ambivalence about living so close to the site of atrocity, and the necessary adaptation to live with this on a day-to-day basis. In one scene we see a middle-aged woman defending Mauthausen to the camera:

I've been in situations when I've been asked where I'm from and I say 'Mauthausen', there was just a shudder... I'm not ashamed of being from Mauthausen.

She relates how when she visited Yad Vashem in Israel, the guide warned her not to tell the other visitors where she came from. But she said she was proud to see the name of Mauthausen on a list of concentration camps in a Holocaust museum. The camera stays with her after her claims, and we see her discomposure. She has obviously been affected by her association with the place, but adapts to other people's reactions by defending her town and her decision to live there. In order to do so one is struck with the process of distancing that she must have gone through – if she empathised with the victims would she be able to live with the daily reminder? We also see a young couple that moved to the town and live in

one of the former SS officer houses. When asked if it is a burden to live there, they laugh it off and relate the tasteless jokes their friends made when they moved in. They seem almost indifferent to the history of their own house and the town, and again there must be an emotional distance maintained between themselves and the victims.

Cohen (2001) talks about the moral indifference bystanders may feel after crime, but here we see elements of that apathy long after the events themselves, in Hirsch's 'post-memory'. Arguably, in order to maintain our 'states of denial' and live in a world where we are flooded with information on atrocity, there are limitations on our empathy (Cohen, 2001; Sontag, 2003). This may be particularly pertinent for societies where historically there has been the stigma of complicity for those crimes, but successive generations feel sufficiently disconnected from their ancestor's complicity. Therefore, for the younger generation this ambivalence and complacency appears to be a rejection of the burden of guilt of past generations. They are not just bystanders in the sense that they live in the shadow of their town's dark past, but as Austrians who bear some of the stigma of their ancestors' involvement or inactivity. This is still a hugely contentious political issue in Austria (Berg, 2008).

The burdens of difficult heritage and the impact on German culture and the construction of 'German Identity' in post-war generations have been quite well documented. Since the reunification of Germany in 1993 there has been increasing recognition that without 'memory works' and coming to terms with the crimes of the past, Germany could not move on as a modern national state (Langenbacher, 2010). Austrians, however, have been much slower to recognise the part their nation played in the Holocaust. For a long period of time the Austrian government chose to identify themselves as a 'victim-state' of National Socialist aggression, and have faced much criticism about their failure to sufficiently recognise Austria's more complex role as 'victim', 'bystander', and 'perpetrator' (Rathkolb, 2009). *KZ* highlights the complexities of living in a 'collaborator state' even in the present day. Again these raise significant criminological questions - how do post-genocidal societies reconcile past events in their national identity and collective memories? What are the consequences of contested narratives about the past for future generations? How can societies overcome the burdens of past history without recognising and reconciling past complicities and crimes? In present-day Austria for example, there are still concerns about anti-Semitism, right-wing political sensibilities (Berg, 2008), and a lack of empathy for victims

of the Holocaust, especially Jewish victims (Kovacs, 2008). Although Austria now seems to be acknowledging a more nuanced interpretation of its role in the Holocaust, unfavourable comparisons are made with a more progressive German state that has more fully embraced remembering and compensating for past wrongs.

The 'Tertiary' Witnesses

In KZ we can also reflect on the position of the Holocaust in present-day life by observing, without narration, the visitors to Mauthausen and their tour guides. We are reminded that today the camp is a busy memorial site and museum, and firmly part of the Austrian tourist trail. As time passes, we are faced with the 'diminishing survivor' crisis, as those who were literal witnesses to the Holocaust disappear (Marshman, 2005). Remembering also goes beyond those who live and work near the sites, or even have a professional interest. It even goes beyond connection via ancestors and national collective memories; the Holocaust has become so embedded in public consciousness it resonates with everyone (Stier, 2003). Bloomstein anticipated this situation with KZ, where the visitor to the site, with no personal connection, bears witness to the past. Seedman (2006) terms this causal visitor or tourist the 'tertiary witness', which is reminiscent of Cohen's (1993) distinction between 'literal-' and 'metaphorical-bystanders'. In KZ we follow the tourists around Mauthausen, experiencing the camp ourselves vicariously through *their* experiences, thereby we 'the viewer' also bear witness as a 'metaphorical bystander', at a mediated distance (Cohen, 1993).

In contrast to the townspeople, we see the emotional investment of the camp's main tour guide. He talks throughout the film about the relevance of the Holocaust today, and we focus on him conducting a tour to a group of teenagers. He wants the visitors to make a personal, emotional connection to the events, which is evident in his approach as a tour guide, and his passion to make 'history' resonate with the younger generations who visit. These teenagers are all modern-day witnesses to the Holocaust, who have learnt about the Holocaust at school, and grown up with a proliferation of images and information about it (and other atrocities) via the media. He encourages the visitors to put themselves in the place of the prisoners and imagine what life was like; you see him trying to instil victim identification and empathy. How to get people to empathise with victims of crime is a key question for criminologists – especially if our core experience of crime is vicarious, through

the media or tourism (Carrabine, 2008; Lennon, 2010). It is also of great significance to those of us who teach about the Holocaust and other acts of atrocity.

For those who choose to visit a camp this tour becomes a prominent source of 'knowledge' about these events, and will heavily influence the construction of their narratives about the Holocaust. Peelo (2006) notes how long after an extreme criminological event we continue to construct within society shared / collective memories, which gain cultural significance as we try to understand and emotionally connect with crimes outside our own experiences.

Figure 2. Publicity shot of a Mauthausen tour guide.

(INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE)

The tour itself is a 'performance', a form of 'theatre', and it plays on our expectations and demands for an 'authentic', emotionally powerful experience. We see contrasting styles of performance; whilst the main guide tries to facilitate identification with, and empathy for, the victim; the other tour guides use different techniques. Figure 2 shows a young temporary tour guide whose striking shaven head and slightly emaciated appearance is instantly iconic and purposefully reminiscent of the camp's former inmates. His style is quite cold and brutal, and it makes an observable powerful impact on his tour group of teenagers. They start the tour laughing and joking (as seen in Figure 1.), but soon after entering the gates of the camp the laughter stops, and we follow them around witnessing their reactions. We see their silence, their shock and revulsion. A few are seen holding back tears, and one girl faints as she hears the graphic details of prisoners' treatment and torture. The film also shows some sensationalist and emotionally provocative tactics by the one of the other temporary tour guides who takes around a group of elderly Austrian visitors, with the footage focusing on his grisly graphic descriptions of torture and death.

KZ raises some important issues about the ethics of representation of extreme crimes. Looking at the tour and exhibitions as a form of Holocaust representation, questions are raised about the morality of such graphic, haunting images and descriptions – such as the SS photos of 'suicides' and 'escapees', the liberation photographs of piles of bodies, and the survivor testimonies detailing torture and brutality². How do we react to such

representations, and how do they contribute to our understanding and construction of the Holocaust? In one sense the tactics of some of the tour guides and the dominance of graphic information and images is catering to the voyeuristic demands of the audience, but one wonders if this results in a simplified and 'titillating' version of history, which endangers a further 'othering' and emotional distance from those involved (Morrison, 2010). It has elements of turning the Holocaust into a spectacle for public consumption (Saxton, 2008; Carrabine, 2012; see also Kerner, 2011). It all depends on how the individual experiences, interprets and responds, and we can reflect in *KZ* on the considerable variations of this reaction.

The film is structured to take us through 'a day in the life of the camp'. It begins with the quiet camp, the tour buses arriving, and the groups of tourists descending on the site (and later we see the closure of the empty camp). Watching the tourists' different experiences and reactions brings up issues about how we respond to visits to sites of atrocity, as well as the ethics of this form of representation. On occasion the visitors voyeurism borders on obscenity, at other times visitor's reactions are both touching and sad. Their behaviour is ambivalent - whilst there is evidently compassion felt at times, and shock at the realities of genocide, there is again this process of 'othering' the victim, whereby in our voyeurism we distance ourselves from the suffering (Morrison, 2009, 2010). This is most powerfully highlighted in watching the behaviour of the couple pictured in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Posing for a photograph next to one of Mauthausen's crematoriums.

(INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE)

Here we see a young couple posing for photographs beside the 'landmarks' of the camp. They pose together in front of the barracks, and she takes her partner's picture in front of one of the crematorium ovens. As she takes the camera she reproaches him because his trousers are not straight, with the inference that he needs to look his best for the picture. They seem rather nonchalant in their 'consumption' of the site:

"They gassed them there, shot them there, put them in the fridge there, and burnt them there."

But later as they are shown reading the museum material you can see from their expressions that they are shocked by what they read, and find it hard to comprehend. For me *KZ* challenges and overturns some of the over-simplistic assumptions we may make about people who visit such sites. As a viewer it highlights the irony of judging others so easily for their voyeurism whilst yourself watching their reactions and emotions.

Lennon (2010) suggests that our fascination with visitation of crime sites derives from our mediated experience of high-profile crimes. The media raise our awareness of atrocity, but leaves us de-sensitised to it all the same (Cohen, 2001). Therefore we seek a more authentic experience, an emotional and empathetic connection to the past (Hodgkinson, 2013a and b). 'Holocaust tourism', or more broadly 'dark tourism' (Stone, 2007; Lennon, 2010), seems a way to achieve this. Dalton (2015) writes about his own need to 'bear witness' by visiting Auschwitz, inspired by its cinematic representation. Like many of the visitors we see in *KZ*, he has no personal connection to the events or the places, but is another 'tertiary witness'. Keil (2005) similarly notes the desire of the 'tourist' to commemorate, and become a 'modern-day pilgrim'. He, however, also notes the uncomfortable and distasteful mixture of 'witnessing' and 'pleasure-seeking' whilst 'sightseeing in the mansions of the dead' (482). Lennon (2010) notes the growing demand and supply of crime-related tourism in modern popular culture, making this once quite 'niche' experience a very mainstream way of 'experiencing' crime.

Although the packaging and commercialisation of Holocaust sites have been discussed quite extensively in recent years within tourism studies, there are important parallels here with cultural criminology. As most of us have no first-hand knowledge and experience of crime, especially more extreme crimes, we are fascinated nonetheless and increasingly draw upon vicarious experiences such as tourism. There is therefore great value in looking at tourism through the lens of cultural criminology, to seek to understand further our popular consumption of crime – it is another way in which the majority of us 'consume' the Holocaust and atrocity. Our reactions and responses are therefore of significance, as the tourist experience will inevitably shape our collective memories of both history and crime. Cultural criminology recognises that there is no objective past, but such reconstructions of past events tell us about our current social needs and desires (Rolston, 2010), and shape our collective identities. Furthermore, the tourist as 'tertiary witness' is involved in the process of the cultural transmission of trauma so that past atrocities continue to feel part of public

consciousness, and continue to matter (Hirsch, 2004). Sontag (1977) described this as a 'negative epiphany' in which we are forced to confront the worst of humanity. Bearing witness in this way can therefore become psychologically useful as a 'safe' cathartic way to 'touch death' (Hodgkinson, 2013a).

In a way, tourism is the ultimate voyeuristic experience – to stand where the victims stood, to see the actual place where atrocity occurred. The Lacanian distinction applied by Brown and Rafter (2013) in their study of Holocaust films – 'acting out' v. 'working through' the trauma – can equally be applied to tourism representation, which is equally contentious. Holocaust tourism is necessarily a commodification for public consumption (Beech, 2000), raising important questions about whether we actually get the authentic and empathetic experience we are seeking. Can tourism dispel the apathy that images and films often instil in the viewer? Can they counter Baudrillard's (1993) 'new amnesia' caused by over-representations of human evil?

As with Holocaust film, it depends on the way it is represented. Along with opportunities to learn from the experience and empathise with individual stories, Holocaust tourism also presents dangers of over-sensationalism, moral simplification, and de-sensitisation, and *KZ* touches on this in its portrayal of visitors' different motivations, expectations and experiences. The natural voyeur within us all draws us to the iconic images of corpses, the graphic descriptions of brutality, and the tour guides cater for these expectations. But we can only cope with so much human suffering, and like many Holocaust films, the tours often end with tales of redemption through survival. The tour and exhibitions, as with other popular constructions of the Holocaust, follow familiar narrative patterns. Furthermore, the messages at Holocaust sites can be quite heavily controlled and highly politicised, resulting in sanitisation and simplistic understandings (Marcuse, 2005). They actively discourage pluralistic interpretations; for example, any identification with perpetrators who are positioned as fundamentally alien to our experience (Morrison, 2010)³. Cohen (1993, 2001) notes that representations of atrocity often place the events and experiences firmly outside our moral universe, resulting in wholesale moral indifference. *KZ* raises important questions about how we as 'tertiary witnesses' relate to, identify and empathise with past victims of crime, and how we can strive to create more reflective and pluralised narratives that facilitate both victim empathy, and (ultimately) a social response to atrocity.

With no commentary throughout the film we are ‘the voyeurs’ watching the Holocaust tourist fulfil *their* morbid voyeuristic tendencies. We learn about the Holocaust through their experience. Hence ‘the viewer’ becomes the ‘tertiary witness’ as consumers of media crime (Knudsen, 2011). Peelo discusses the ‘mediated witness’ to crime in her study of high profile homicides, and this fusion we see in *KZ* of the social significance of crime, and the vicarious thrills. She notes how ‘grotesque’ this must seem to those personally affected by crime, but one could argue that our mediated consumption of crime performs an important social function, allowing us to ‘work through’ our thoughts, feelings and reactions to atrocity, and discouraging passive spectatorship (Brown and Rafter, 2013). One of the central aims of Bloomstein’s work, is to overcome the emotional numbing, or ‘distancing’ we feel caused by a proliferation of repetitive and conventional representations within the genre.

Conclusion

KZ, like Bloomstein’s work more broadly, speaks to Brown and Rafter’s critically reflective approaches to genocide representation. It recognises multiple constructions and perspectives, and shows us sometimes conflicting viewpoints to challenge the morally simplistic, sensationalist, and overly redemptive commercial films within the genre. The film works on different levels – revealing the voyeurism and ambivalence of different ‘bystanders/witnesses’ – whilst also fulfilling our own voyeuristic desires and highlighting our moral ambivalence. It raises important issues about how we react to atrocity, and how we consume the Holocaust. It shows us the growing trade in ‘dark tourism’ (Stone, 2006, 2007) and the commercialisation of atrocity to meet the voyeuristic demands of popular culture. But it also raises important questions about the ethics of representation, the moral consequences of consuming crime, and the impact both the media and tourism can have on our collective narratives of crime.

KZ it is not easy viewing; it has few ‘answers’, instead raising more questions and uncertainties for the interested and reflective viewer. It highlights the process of ‘othering’ evident in our conceptions of perpetrators, but also shows the ‘distancing’ we develop for victims of crime and atrocity (seen powerfully in the complacency and at times disrespect for Mauthausen’s past). It recognises the potential within all of us to contribute towards

atrocities via our own passivity in the face of 'evil'. We see the minimalisation, denial and moral indifference of the literal bystander to atrocities (Cohen, 1993, 2001). We see the adaptation of those who are confronted on a daily basis with the crimes of their ancestors. Most importantly, we reflect on our role in witnessing the Holocaust as 'tertiary witnesses' not personally connected to the places and events, but compelled to be a 'mediated witness' (Peelo, 2006). This, for Bloomstein, represents the future of Holocaust film, representation and commemoration. He is heavily influenced by the literature on how we react to images of atrocities, believing in a 'numbing' or passive response caused by the sheer volume of conventional representations, reliant upon the repetition of iconic images and survivor testimony. Whilst we inevitably retreat into 'complex states of denial' to cope with the saturation of global information about the distant suffering of others (Cohen, 2001), *KZ* highlights the variation of responses and reactions, and the ambivalence of thoughts and feelings within the individual. What is important is the type of representation, the response it inspires, and the social, moral and political context in which the representation is interpreted (Carrabine, 2011).

Bloomstein's work aims to 'undermine the simplicities' (Bennett, 2005), to make us question entrenched and stereotyped narratives about the Holocaust, criminality and human 'evil'. In *KZ* we can identify with the ordinary bystander to atrocities, at different levels of abstraction, until ultimately we are faced with our own role as 'witness' and 'tourist' to crime. Atrocities and genocide continue to be commodified and commercialised in popular culture, and therefore it is important to better understand our own reactions and responses to them. Critically reflective representations such as *KZ* allow the viewer to 'work through' the ethical and moral dilemmas raised and foster more complex and pluralistic public narratives of atrocities.

Notes

1. All images are taken from *KZ*, and are reproduced with Director Rex Bloomstein's permission. *KZ (2006)* is available on DVD for both Region 1 and Region 2.
2. *KZ* itself shows none of these, but we do hear the tour guide, and we see the visitor's reactions to the images and information contained in the exhibition but not shown on screen. Instead as viewers we witness *their* 'act of witnessing'.
3. Although genocide representations and films generally discourage identification with the perpetrator, Joshua Oppenheimer's (2012) *The Act of Killing* is a notable exception.

It documents the 1965-66 killings in Indonesia, using the testimony of Anwar Congo, himself personally responsible for killing up to 1,000 people. In this documentary we hear him recount his emotions and memories of the murders.

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Figure 1. Tour group of schoolchildren laughing outside Mauthausen¹.



Figure 2. Publicity shot of a Mauthausen tour guide.



Figure 3. Posing for a photograph next to one of Mauthausen's crematoriums.

