

MEDIATION AND REMEDIATION: *LA PAROLE FILMÉE* IN RITHY PANH'S *THE MISSING PICTURE (L'IMAGE MANQUANTE)*

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The Missing Picture, where any production of memory can both preserve and veil lives.

In *L'image manquante* (The Missing Picture, 2013), Rithy Panh continues his exploration of the Cambodian genocide in a manner that is both harrowing and lyrical, carrying on the innovations he brought to his earlier films on the subject. Combining Khmer Rouge propaganda films, contemporary

video footage, and painted clay figurines in stunningly crafted—often multimedia—dioramas, the documentary integrates Panh's personal story with ruminations on mediation, trauma, and history. Furthermore, the film reaches beyond individual narrative and reflection, functioning as cinematic witness as it counters silences, fills historical gaps, and provides a testimony that is polyphonic and collective. Through his deployment of clips from his earlier films, Panh creates a sedimented text, suggestive of a past that refuses to remain passed and of the magnitude of history,

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where any production of memory can both preserve and veil the lives of others.

Panh begins his story with the words, “In the middle of life, childhood returns,” as a camera bobs in the crashing waves, submerging and resurfacing. This opening is a fitting parallel to the epigraph in Primo Levi’s crucial book on the challenges and necessity of bearing witness to the Holocaust, *The Drowned and the Saved*. Taken from Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” it reads:

Since then, at an uncertain hour
That Agony returns
And till my ghastly tale is told
This heart within me burns

Panh’s childhood is not simply invoked as a time of innocence, a time fondly recalled in middle age, for it is also a ghastly tale that must be shared, a traumatic memory that comes unbidden. *The Missing Picture* becomes a testimony of suffering, his own, his family’s, and Cambodia’s, which he imparts to the viewer. This urgency for telling also finds a resonance in Levi’s book, wherein he cites Simon Wiesenthal’s recollection of the concentration camp guards and their taunts to the prisoners:

However this war may end, we have won the war against you; none of you will be left to bear witness, but even if someone were to survive, the world will not believe him . . . we will destroy the evidence together with you. . . . We will be the ones to dictate the history of the Lagers [concentration camps].¹

This threat was practically realized in the case of the Cambodian genocide, where indifference and silence have dominated. Despite the existence of the Genocide Convention, there was no intervention into the Khmer Rouge’s brutal regime. Vietnam’s invasion (which put an end to the camps) had more to do with tactical maneuvers than commitment to human rights; the Khmer Rouge were allied with the Vietnam People’s Army of North Vietnam. Delay in due process resulted in impunity for the perpetrators, many of whom lived side by side with victims in the years to come. In the aftermath the Vietnamese occupiers held some trials, but these were designed more to impugn the United States and China than to achieve justice or restore the historical record to the Cambodian survivors. Indeed, Cambodia’s UN seat remained the purview of the Khmer Rouge for years afterward.

It was only in 1997 that Pol Pot received a trial in absentia (and not even for genocide) after twenty years of inaction.² Since then, a joint process of the Cambodian government and the UN has brought a handful of the remaining Khmer

Rouge leaders to trial. Kaing Guek Eav, the commander of the S-21 prison, who was a subject of Panh’s film *Duch, le maître des forges de l’enfer* (Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell, 2011), was sentenced in 2010. And in August 2014, Khmer Rouge leaders Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan were found guilty of being part of a “joint criminal enterprise” responsible for a “widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population of Cambodia.” The charges of genocide are yet to be tried.³

Meanwhile, the international community was slow to recognize genocide, not only then, but in the aftermath, right up until the 1990s. The Khmer Rouge’s social reform policies deployed forced labor, incarceration, torture, and executions, but the nature of its victim groups seemed to confuse many. The murderous campaign targeted Vietnamese and Chinese minorities as well as religious minorities: Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists. However, their ideology also dictated a purge along social and class axes, meaning teachers, students, artists, intellectuals, and the professional classes of doctors and lawyers. Its basis in political ideology as much as (if not more than) ethnic difference has led some to term this an “autogenocide,” as if not all genocides were, in essence, just that, and as if such distinctions don’t risk reifying ethnic differences.⁴

Although measures of transitional justice and international criminal tribunals can be constrained, they nonetheless function as means for redressing histories and giving voices to victims. Arthur and Joan Kleinman have observed that official silences around suffering contribute to a culture of terror, and that in such contexts, “public witnessing . . . forges . . . an act of political resistance through keeping alive the memory of things denied.”⁵

On an official level, public processes forge official memory through the use of testimony, that first-person narration of suffering which harbors transformative potential. Often associated with the courtroom, where one bears witness to the truth of an event in order to bring about justice, the term has been extended to additional venues and possibilities. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub have advanced testimony as a speech act that both facilitates the recovery of an experience and a personal narrative and fosters an ethical community of responsibility between speaker and listener.⁶ Its political implications have been elaborated in the Latin American genre of *testimonio* where injustice is recorded and expressed in order to restore a history that has been denied or buried, as well as in numerous human rights films which rely on practices and tropes of witnessing and bearing witness.⁷ In such contexts, testimony offers a means of uniting and rebuilding communities, reinforcing their relationship to the past and to their lands, while trials that include testimony can provide public



Silences and suffering are remediated in *The Missing Picture*.

performances that wrest control over history from the perpetrators and restore it to the victims.

In the absence of such processes, or in conjunction with them, film assumes that testimonial function. *The Missing Picture* is based in great part on Rithy Panh's own experiences as a teenager during the genocide, during which he lost his family and was put to work in a labor camp. This is not a story related through an easy flashback of voiceover and archival footage. It is told more as recollection and struggle—as pursuit of a missing image. The voiceover (and the promotional materials) describe this image as a photograph taken by the Khmer Rouge sometime between 1975 and 1979 that could act as proof of this heinous crime.⁸ However, the broader aims seem to be the recollection of all missing images: the Cambodia that once was, the stories of the victim, and the childhood of Panh himself. The opening images of the film suggest this to be a daunting if not insurmountable task as stacks of film canisters, rusted and piled haphazardly, appear on screen. Film spills out of these and also lies in curled heaps on the floor, dusty and

seemingly forgotten. Fingers manipulate one of the strips, as if to try to animate the dancers on the celluloid. A cut to footage of a dancer—albeit not the one on the strip—points to Panh's cinematic efforts at recuperation and reconstruction, as he acknowledges and integrates the multiple losses of culture, human life, and all their material traces.

Other strategies bolster the film's function as storyteller of compounded absences and persistent damage. Panh deploys Khmer Rouge propaganda footage in the exposition of a past, but does not give it authority as the voiceover scans for evidence of the harm not seen, and tells stories of what took place offscreen and behind the camera. For his personal story, there are few, if any, photographic images. Clay figurines are arranged in elaborate dioramas that remind the viewer of what can no longer be accessed but which must be recreated if its story is to be told. These scenes move back and forth between life before the camps and life in the camps, both medium and shifting temporalities gesturing to the elusiveness of memory and the necessity of its preservation and transmission. The



Clay figurines recreate events from Panh's past in *The Missing Picture*.

close of the film returns to the surf, where the voiceover explains that with nothing left of the events, Panh has made this film to hold, and now he gives it to us, the audience.

In these ways, *The Missing Picture* bears witness to and combats the multiple erasures of the Khmer Rouge—its killing of people and their voice. The film functions as testimony, particularly as Panh's personal experience is positioned within a collective process. At the same time, through its form, content, and reflections, it foregrounds the challenges of bearing witness and more broadly calls attention to the processes of memory and the construction of history.

The role of voice is crucial. "The Khmer Rouge began," Panh has explained, "by killing words." (This is a direct translation from the French, which reads, "*Les Khmers Rouges ont commencé par assassiner les mots*").⁹ Religion, foreign languages, music, and radio were among the first to be banned under the regime of Angkar.¹⁰ Fantasy, individualism, and modes of expression beyond those issued by the state were all rendered illegal. Slogans and propaganda commandeered the descriptive terrain, veiling the violence that was covertly being encouraged

by the same words. "To spare you is no profit; to destroy you is no loss" reads one popular refrain.¹¹ Dubious reports and forced false confessions constitute the documentation of the period, and even today, the portraits of prisoners from S-21, the notorious detention center, taken by the guards themselves, are shown and circulated, a reminder of whose language reigned, and whose language continues to threaten to dictate this history.¹²

Given the silence, denial, and surfeit of pernicious documentation, it is hardly surprising that Panh has described the state of memory in Cambodia as profoundly damaged.¹³ Nor is it surprising that he has dedicated much of his documentary work to the recovery of Cambodian histories and conditions, often with a focus on that which falls outside the domain of official documentation. Panh deploys what he has called *la parole filmée*, the everyday speech of ordinary people, a characteristic observed by both Annette Hamilton and Deirdre Boyle.¹⁴ At its most basic, this term refers to the testimonies onscreen as well as to Panh's privileging of subject voice and observation over an expository approach.

Panh's *la parole filmée* is a form of speech that privileges the vernacular and the incomplete in order to counter the violent, artificial, and totalizing language (and language systems) of the Khmer Rouge.¹⁵ This speech is collective and polyphonic in opposition to the purity that characterized the cultural dictates of Angkar. The linguistic underpinnings of the term reverberate here, as this *parole* negotiates the language system, functioning as a speech act or "performative utterance" that aims to transform the conditions it describes. These strategies confer a testimonial function on Panh's films, enabling them to confront the authorial voices that marginalized and rendered absent both the people and their experience. At the same time, cinema's cultural expression offers a secondary form of resistance against a regime that claimed the lives of artists and outlawed forms of traditional and creative culture.¹⁶

Panh's earlier *Site 2* (1989) offers the most straightforward interpretation of his *parole filmée*. In that documentary, Panh returns to the Mairut refugee camp in Thailand, where he had lived ten years earlier in the aftermath of the war. Through the use of extensive observation and testimony, focusing particularly on resident Yim Om, Panh shows the life of those living in precarity, fearful of being forgotten and never returning to Cambodia. Panivong Norindr argues that Panh's strategy of eschewing voiceover in favor of the voices of the refugees is part of a larger project of restitution "of the people rarely heard before and the memory of the dead Cambodians who haunt the nation."¹⁷

This project of restitution is made explicit in *Bophana: A Cambodian Tragedy* (1996), in which Panh reconstructs the story of Hout Bophana, imprisoned and executed in the notorious Khmer Rouge detention center, S-21. The film begins with the driest of facts: name, age, nationality, and position, spoken over the image of a box of documents. Before long, family recollections and Bophana's own letters take over, joining and overwhelming the official records as a new portrait is drawn of a woman, her tragic fate, and the painful losses experienced by all those left behind to testify.

Despite the need to turn to Khmer Rouge records for specific details, Panh always privileges the vernacular over the official. A photograph of Bophana hangs on the wall of the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, which stands on the former site of S-21. She is one of the many whose photographs were taken by their captors as a part of their record-keeping. Ultimately, however, it is her letters and her fantasies that can grant access to the woman. These letters, read aloud on the soundtrack, chronicle not only Bophana's suffering, but also her fantasies, which became mechanisms of self-preservation as well as articulations of her profound love for her husband, Ly Sitha. Writing to him, Bophana imagined herself a character from

the Ramayana, specifically, Rama's wife Sita. Captured by a demon who wants to marry her, Sita refuses, staying true to her husband and thinking only of him. Signing each one of these letters "as Ly's Sita," Bophana adopts fantasy as an expression of devotion. For Panh, it is more: this language of romantic (and even religious) devotion becomes a language of resistance. Her speech gives expression to the will, beauty, and spirit destroyed and silenced by the Khmer Rouge.

This attention to popular speech emerges elsewhere in the film, when painter and former inmate Vann Nath, one of the handful of survivors of S-21, encounters Him Houy, the former deputy head of security and one of the prison's executioners. They walk together through the detention center, now a museum. On the walls hang Nath's paintings of torture, beatings, children torn from mothers' arms, and shackled prisoners. Nath guides Houy to various canvases, and asks for corroboration. At times, Nath points out that the scenario depicted is not one that he witnessed, but one to which someone else bore witness, and which he, Nath, has painted. Not only do these paintings provide Nath's own accounts, but they also offer up the stories of fellow prisoners recounted during their internment, as well as the stories of friends and strangers recounted after the war, testimonies given, received, and retransmitted.

As they stand before each painting, Nath asks Houy to confirm its veracity. "Did this happen?" he asks, later prodding, "Then this picture is not a lie?" As Annette Hamilton has observed, "Vann Nath's palpable desire for confirmation from Him Houy of the paintings' fidelity implicitly draws attention to the lack of photographic or filmic images."¹⁸ Nath seeks verification for these paintings, which serve as a visible record to combat the documentation produced by the Khmer Rouge, such as the photographic portraits of the prisoners, which also hang on the walls of the same museum. Through Panh's film and these dialogues, Nath's paintings bear witness to the challenges of accessing a past that has undergone a process of erasure whereby restoration comes to rely in part on perpetrator documentation, a charged necessity in many historiographical processes.

Such confrontations with history and mediation continue in *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003), perhaps Panh's best known film to date, in which former prisoners and their guards engage with one another and the past through reenactments staged at the site for the camera.

As a body of work, these films function as testimony to the truth of the Cambodian genocide and to the conditions precipitated and yet veiled by the Khmer Rouge. In their process, they favor the vernacular and the dialogic, the performative and the multiply mediated. As such, the films call attention to

and reflect on the social interactions and negotiations demanded in the rebuilding of a nation and in the recovery of a past.

Panh's films develop their own distinctive testimonial voice. This *parole* negotiates Bill Nichols's "discourses of sobriety," those official languages that "regard their relationship to the real as direct, immediate, and transparent" and through which "power exerts itself . . . [for in the] 'traditional essay or documentary . . . the authorial 'I' speaks to and on behalf of a universalized collectivity."¹⁹ However, Panh's idiom incorporates and counters the totalizing systems of the Khmer Rouge, and as such engages the shared "I" of testimonials that Nichols describes elsewhere as embodying "social affinities and collectives . . . acutely aware of hegemonic discourse and social difference, historical conjecture, material practice, and marginality."²⁰ Moreover, as his practice locates the vernacular voices of Cambodia, it actively remaps the landscape and its people through the production of discursive space that is dialogic and polyphonic, engaging interaction much like the ground wars described in Patricia R. Zimmermann's *States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies*.²¹

This testimonial function is intensified and amplified in his new, highly personal film, *The Missing Picture*, in which Panh bears witness to his own experience of the genocide and the labor camps. Once again, he advances an alternative idiom to represent both the past and the challenges of its representation. His testimonial *parole* interrogates the claims of those who have dictated the past and presents individual experience that resonates with collective concerns and histories.

It is impossible to talk about *The Missing Picture* without discussing its clay figurines. Crafted from the sediment of Cambodia, they are multiply evocative. They come from the earth of a place that holds the bones of the lost and from which many of the survivors were exiled, living in Thai refugee camps such as those chronicled in *Site 2*. Their connections with childhood are almost self-evident, for that is the time when dolls are used to tell a story. Their material composition furthers this link. "When we were young," Panh told The Voice of America, "we went to the river and we got some clay and we produced animal figurines and tried to tell a story with that."²² For Panh, the medium is significant: his choice of clay is not random.

These figures also embody the trauma that resounds for Panh individually and for the community he has represented in so many of his films. Their use evokes Janet Walker's theory of the traumatic paradox, which suggests that the truth of the psychic trauma is manifested through an antirealist mode that is "striated with fantasy constructions."²³ The potential for a departure from the realist and the sober extends beyond

the traumatic, since, as she writes, "empirically based realist historiography may not . . . take into sufficient account the vicissitudes of historical representation and memory."²⁴ The clay figures embody two challenges of representation: the one that occurs when the magnitude of history (and its horrors) defies contained expression and the one that addresses a still-current experience of trauma that requires integration into a personal narrative. Panh rejects documentary naturalism as a style that requires the posture of complete revelation and the production of a spectacle that risks producing a more complacent viewer. Such a viewer would enjoy the certitude of knowledge and emotional satisfaction, rather than experience the distance and difficulties embedded in a project of reclamation that is more process than statement.²⁵

Figurines are not *The Missing Picture*'s only method for conveying this expression of history and trauma's magnitude. The less than linear narrative structure of the film enacts the ways in which trauma itself is not readily managed or contained. Sometimes the recollection is orderly, while at other times memory upon memory rush in, overwhelming the story of loss. Meanwhile, the use of actor Randal Douc to deliver the voiceover as first-person testimony forces a gap at the aural register: this is Panh's story, and his voice, but not his voiceover. Such strategies intervene to refute common claims of complete and unfettered access to a traumatic experience, and more generally, the past.

Such deployment of fantasy and experimentation resists the representational regime of the Khmer Rouge, whose realist representations and discourses of sobriety abetted the widespread destruction of a people and their culture. As these two are placed in relation to one another, they emphasize the chasm between the personal recollections and experiences of a people, reclaimed in the wake of the systems of representation that sought to eliminate them.

At times, film, as a medium of record, becomes suspect. Both in the aforementioned opening shots and in interstitial video, stacks of film cans in varying states of decay and decomposition are visible, encrusted with detritus. These literalize the status of the missing pictures, pictures that may have once existed, but now persist only in fragments, faded links to the world they once represented. It is not always made clear what footage lies in these canisters. In some cases, it might suggest those fragments of a Cambodia before the war, clips of 1960s pop *jouissance* or traditional Apsara dance. Embedded in colorful dioramas, recalling a musical older brother or a filmmaker whose studio the young Panh graced, these recovered strips of film express profound loss. They cannot be as colorful or as "complete" as the figurines Panh arranges around them.



The clay figures searching through strips of film embody two challenges of representation in *The Missing Picture*.

Such juxtapositions as well as the physical deterioration of the photographic image begin to level a presumed hierarchy of a representational regime. Whether as point of resistance or lament, these sequences reveal the limited authority and power of the photograph. Although Panh cannot find the photo he seeks—the evidence produced by the Khmer Rouge—this is not because there is no Khmer Rouge footage available. The propaganda exists still, and is incorporated in the film, although Panh troubles any claims of truthful representation affixed to the medium’s indexicality with a voiceover that interrogates the evidentiary status of the propaganda footage, noting in one sequence that the cameras fail to capture the hunger and pain of the workers. Also hidden are the staging of events and the tragic histories of cinematographers who failed to produce the perfect picture.

“A Khmer Rouge film is always a slogan,” the voiceover states as a clay cameraman crouches with his camera as footage of the camps plays behind him. The effect is one of simultaneous concealment and revelation. The clay figure blocks out part of this documentary record, but is equally restored as the human

purpose behind the film comes to the fore. At another point, this footage is shown in its full materiality, as filmstrips examined by the narrator. The voiceover notes, “Pol Pot forges a reality conformant with his desire.” The voice takes over the position of authority, reminding the viewer that the photographic image is not neutral: it can be an instrument of destruction and pernicious fantasy. The manifest contamination of these “sober” forms ensures that the alternative testimonial idioms, Panh’s *parole*, will not be dismissed as insufficient.

Innovative and profoundly moving, these aesthetic strategies for bearing witness to a horrifying history both hew to and exceed the conventional wisdom of Holocaust and trauma scholarship. The best of those works frequently uphold an aesthetic of the fragmented, discontinuous, oblique, or fantastical—tactics that embody the effects of the trauma as well as the historical shock of the horrific event, both of which precipitate a crisis in witnessing.²⁶ The informal prohibition of images arises not only from the demand to recognize the magnitude of the horror—one that defies ready containment—but from a belief that a coherent representation

would confer legibility, transmissibility, and logic on the event (and the fantasies of the perpetrator). Such reasoning lay behind Claude Lanzmann's refusal of archival images in *Shoah* (1985), which addresses the resonance of the past on the present while keeping the past obscene.²⁷

Panh, however, explicitly embraces the value of images and the demand for their creation. This is hardly surprising given the dearth of representation and recognition the case of the Cambodian genocide faces. One might find a parallel in Atom Egoyan and his relationship to the Armenian genocide, which, although widely reported at the time, suffers today from political and social amnesia. According to Marie-Aude Baronian, this absence has inspired him to recreate as many images as possible.²⁸ Such is certainly the case with Panh, who has dedicated his filmmaking to the topic of the Cambodian genocide, and who has established the Bophana audiovisual center that collects archival materials and trains young cineastes, all in the service of reconstituting national memory and culture.²⁹

This commitment to the visual and the role of mediation manifests in *The Missing Picture* in the form of a robust and yet ironically invisible (or unremarked upon) intertextuality as Panh incorporates references to or audiovisual elements of his other films. This tactic deepens his autobiographical elements even as it enhances the work of testimony that aims to use personal narration to address the wider historical injustice and experience of the collective. At all times, his cinematic quotations enhance the reflections on what it means to mediate a history that has been missing for so long.

At one point, *Bophana* appears as an oblique reference when the camera lingers on an S-21 portrait as a voiceover declares that we can know little of the woman. In some ways, this is true: this photographic portrait is one of many taken in S-21; it is the document of a perpetrator, which, when combined with their others, tells us little about this woman save for what serves the Khmer Rouge narrative. However, the choice of this particular woman gestures to Panh's earlier film, and even to other works. Elizabeth Becker initially published Bophana's story after recovering her files from the interrogation center—files that included Bophana's own letters and stories. It was this book that inspired Panh to make his film, which now plays daily in the museum that stands on the notorious torture site.³⁰ And it is this woman who gives the Cambodian film archive and training center its name. That Bophana has been referred to as the "Anne Frank of Cambodia" heightens this radical mediation, as she is now herself constructed by another mediation (a diary), which has itself been multiply mediated. As deployed in *The Missing Picture*, Bophana's image resonates

with meaning and gestures toward compounding mediations. As such, it suggests the magnitude of a history that leaves its traces on the image, as well as to the overdetermined nature of the image itself.

At another point in the film, the voiceover recalls the rice farming within the labor camps as a clip from *Les Gens de la rizière* (The Rice People, 1994) graces the screen. One of Panh's forays into fiction, this is a neorealist drama of a family, whose matriarch takes her name from Yim Om, the star subject of *Site 2*. The family attempts to cultivate rice, but meets with challenge upon challenge, all leading to tragedy. Although not explicitly about the genocide, the preoccupation with rice speaks both to the Khmer Rouge's agricultural devastation (the famine they brought about when they minimized the varieties of rice grown) and to the Cambodians' own disconnection from their land. They were exiled in the immediate aftermath and the period of Angkar forced a loss of traditional practices. As the film (and its attending promotion recalled), when asked where rice comes from, the Cambodian children in refugee camps answered, "from UN lorries."

Where no image of an experience exists, Panh uses something available (or imagined) and thus gestures to the gaps produced through traumatic experience and a compromised historiography. And in this case, by using images from a contemporary fiction set after the genocide to tell the story of the genocide, the sequence fuses past, present, and future, gesturing to the resonance of trauma across time and to the dynamic processes of rebuilding and remediating history.

The persistence of this history and its effect on the present is invoked in another cinematic quotation. Onscreen, a row of men dig at the side of the road as the voiceover remarks on the continued injustice and poverty in Cambodia. Although it fits the narration well, this clip actually is taken from *La terre des âmes errantes* (The Land of Wandering Souls, 2000). Set in present-day Cambodia, the film explores the hardships faced by those who dig trenches to lay fiber optic cable—a communications technology that will link Cambodia to the rest of the world. Although part of a media technology, these are the people rendered invisible, marginalized completely. However, in Panh's film, their resourcefulness and their strength are brought to the fore. But soon it becomes clear that the lives of workers are not the only things that are hidden. As they dig the trench, the workers excavate a killing field, unleashing discussions of the past, and for some, the actual souls of the dead. The haunting of the present takes on both material and supernatural dimensions. Much as in Panh's earlier *The Rice People*, the past returns to both disrupt and cast into relief the troubled relationship of Cambodians to their land, undergirding this rupture from the past that reverberates in the present. The

stories of these individuals are never far from the stories of their nation, its people, and its past.

This shot of laborers holds an overabundance of significations in *The Missing Picture*. It refers explicitly to the injustice of poverty and the struggles of present-day Cambodians. It is suggestive of the clay earth, excavated for the figurines that animate Panh's past, the lost and hidden history. As a quotation, it references a literal excavation of the dead—a project enmeshed with media technologies. And it reminds the audience how the larger past returns unbidden, much like Panh's childhood, which, as the voiceover explained at the beginning of the film, returns. ("In the middle of life, childhood returns.")

The credit sequence of *The Missing Picture* includes footage of the crew (and Panh) preparing the dioramas, but this is not the only backstage moment. At another point, there is a shot of Panh holding a camera, filming Vann Nath and another man as they pore over documents of the past. This scene is not new to this documentary, however: it originates in another, most likely *S-21*, and its appearance here explicitly embodies the *parole filmée*, the exchanges and encounters filmed to produce histories that can contest those of the record. Here, the testimonial exchanges come together, turning in on and reflecting one another. The film has offered up Panh's testimony delivered by proxy: Randal Douc's voiceover, clay figurines, and clips from Panh's other films (which incorporate their own testimonial encounters). The credit sequence provides glimpses backstage into the production of this film, and notably, the production of another film—albeit one not necessarily excerpted for *The Missing Picture*. It gestures to the production of all the testimonial encounters that have been part of Panh's oeuvre. This choice does not appear to be reflexive, nor engaging a postmodern relativism. Rather it positions all these projects as deeply enmeshed. The individual testimony is part of a collective testimony: Panh's personal history imbued these projects, just as these projects now form a part of Panh's autobiographical account. The *parole filmée* is more than the filmed speech of everyday people: it is Panh's own speech as rendered through film, this one and all his others.

The performance of mediation and remediation points to the magnitude of history, where there are so many stories that need to be told. Through the quotations, the film presents the sedimented layers of Cambodian history that have been able to retain their polyphony and polysemy in the face of the totalizing narratives of the Khmer Rouge and the forced erasures brought on by the genocide and its aftermath. Rather than impose a narrative of history that organizes experiences and events in a meaningful trajectory of past, present, and

future, this embedding suggests the complicated processes of reconstituting and rebuilding the narrative. Each fragment gestures to multiple possible stories and trajectories, of individuals and collectives; each fragment gestures to the magnitude of history that exceeds ready containment in any form. And each, in its remediation, performs the work of reaching back, in which one both struggles to retrieve the lost and to reinvest both the past and the present with new meaning.

Notes

1. Cited in Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Vintage Reprint 1989), 10–11.
2. Sydney Schanberg, "Cambodia," in *Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know*, ed. Roy Gutman and David Rieff (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1999), 58–65.
3. Thomas Fuller and Julia Wallace, "Decades after Khmer Rouge's Rule, 2 Senior Leaders Are Convicted in Cambodia," *New York Times*, August 6, 2014, www.nytimes.com/2014/08/08/world/asia/decades-after-khmer-rouges-rule-2-senior-leaders-are-convicted-in-cambodia.html?_r=0.
4. Schanberg, "Cambodia."
5. Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, "The Appeal of Experience; The Dismay of Images: Cultural Appropriations of Suffering in Our Times," in *Social Suffering*, ed. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret M. Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 17.
6. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London: Routledge, 1992), 204.
7. Leshu Torchin, *Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide on Film, Video, and the Internet* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 5–6.
8. For instance, see "The Missing Picture," *Films Distribution*, www.filmsdistribution.com/Film.aspx?ID=2058.
9. Rithy Panh, "La Parole Filmée: Pour vaincre la terreur," *Communications* 17 (2001): 385.
10. Angkar was the Communist Party of Kampuchea that led the Khmer Rouge.
11. Schanberg, "Cambodia."
12. The Photo Archive Group printed twenty portraits from the negatives found in *S-21* and these were exhibited in a range of venues, including the New York Museum of Modern Art. With little information provided alongside the images, the perpetrator gaze was both privileged and veiled, leaving the photos and faces as screens on which visitors and reviewers projected their interpretations, little of which incorporated Cambodian testimony. Reviewer Michael Kimmelman chose a distinctly Christian framework for reading: "The wrenching detail is the number safety-pinned straight into his bare chest: he is like St. Sebastian" ("Poignant Faces of the Soon-to-be Dead," *New York Times*, June 20, 1997, C1). Lindsay French has written about this exhibition in "Exhibiting Terror" in *Truth Claims: Representation and Human Rights*, ed. Mark

- Bradley and Patrice Petro (Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 131–55.
13. Panh, “La Parole Filmée,” 373.
 14. Ibid., 374; see also Deirdre Boyle, “Trauma, Memory, Documentary: Re-enactment in Two Films by Rithy Panh (Cambodia) and Garin Nugroho (Indonesia),” in *Documentary Testimonies: Archives of Suffering*, ed. Janet Walker and Bhaskar Sarkar (New York: Routledge, 2010), 155–72; Annette Hamilton, “Cambodian Genocide: Ethics and Aesthetics in the Cinema of Rithy Panh,” in *Holocaust Intersections: Genocide and Visual Culture at the New Millennium*, ed. Axel Bangert, Robert S.C. Gordon, and Libby Saxton (Leeds, UK and Philadelphia, PA: Maney 2013), 175.
 15. See also Hamilton, “Cambodian Genocide,” 175.
 16. SamSam-Ang, “Preserving a Cultural Tradition: Ten Years after the Khmer Rouge,” *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1990), www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/143-fall-1990-cambodia.
 17. Panivong Norindr, “The Sounds of Everyday Life in Rithy Panh’s Documentaries,” *French Forum* 35, nos. 2–3 (Spring/Fall 2010): 184.
 18. Hamilton, “Cambodian Genocide,” 183.
 19. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Indianapolis and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 3.
 20. Bill Nichols, “The Ethnographer’s Tale,” in *Visualizing Theory: Selected Essays from V.A.R. 1990–1994*, ed. Lucien Taylor (New York: Routledge, 1994), 76.
 21. Patricia R. Zimmermann, *States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
 22. Sarah Williams, “Cambodian Oscar Contender Aims to Convey History Lesson,” *Voice of America*, January 31, 2014, www.voanews.com/content/cambodian-oscar-contender-aims-to-convey-history-lesson/1842089.html.
 23. Janet Walker, “The Traumatic Paradox: Documentary Films, Historical Fictions, and Cataclysmic Past Events,” *Signs* 22, no. 4 (Summer 1997): 803–25.
 24. Ibid., 806.
 25. Panh, “La Parole Filmée,” 377.
 26. For instance, see Miriam Bratu Hansen, “Schindler’s List Is Not Shoah: Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory,” in *Spielberg’s Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler’s List*, ed. Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 77–103; Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimony: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991); Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
 27. Claude Lanzmann, “The Obscenity of Understanding: An Evening with Claude Lanzmann,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. and intro. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 200–20. Similar reasoning informs projects not as austere as Lanzmann’s. Such is the case with *Silence* (Sylvie Bringas and Orly Yadin, 2000), the testimony of a young girl’s experience in the Theresienstadt concentration camp and her subsequent upbringing where she was told to forget her past. Here animation not only aims to forge identification with a child’s experience of the Holocaust, but also its shifting and unstable imagery provides a subjective dimension, communicating a trauma not yet shared. These creative imaginings provide means for expressing the psychic and material inaccessibility of the event, and for the silences that followed. Panh’s experimentation furthers these traditions. See Orly Yadin, “But Is It Documentary?” in *Holocaust and the Moving Image*, ed. Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2005), 168–72.
 28. Marie-Aude Baronian, *Cinéma et mémoire. Sur Atom Egoyan* (Brussels: Académie Royale de Belgique and Liège: L’aurore, 2012), e-book.
 29. Bophana Center, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, <http://bophana.org/>.
 30. Elizabeth Becker, “Minor Characters,” *New York Times*, August 28, 2005, www.nytimes.com/2005/08/28/books/review/28BECKERL.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.