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The Recontextualization of History in Anatoly Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar: A Novel-Document* (1966) and Sergei Loznitsa's Film *Babi Yar: Context* (2021)

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Abstract: In several presentations of his latest documentary "Babi Yar. Context" (2021), the Ukrainian director Sergei Loznitsa has emphasized that reading Anatoly Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar* (1966) in his Soviet youth had a tremendous effect on his understanding of the Soviet oblivion regarding the Holocaust in Kyiv. In my paper, I examine the uses and misuses of history in Loznitsa's documentary film on the tragedy of Babyn Yar. The "context" — archival documentary footage of the preceding explosions of the administrative quarter in Ukraine's capital organized by the NKVD in September of 1941 and of the welcoming reception by Western Ukrainians of the German army's occupation of Lviv during the summer of 1941 — provide an important yet inconvenient historical framework for understanding the collective responsibility in mass execution of Kyivan Jews. However, when viewed within Loznitsa's cinematographic aesthetics, it becomes clear that Kuznetsov's literary representation of the unspeakable brutality of the Babyn Yar massacre served as a model for the director's film. Both — Kuznetsov in the 1960s and Loznitsa in the 2020s — used a wide array of artistic tools to communicate the long-lasting effect of the silenced tragedy on the human soul.

Keywords: Babyn Yar + documentary genre + memory, Kuznetsov + Loznitsa + Babyn Yar, Holocaust

In his interview at the 2021 Chicago International Film Festival, Sergei Loznitsa commented on his role in presenting the history of Babyn Yar to the Ukrainian audience:

> I feel myself like Herodotus, the very first historian of Western civilization. In Soviet times, the history of Babyn Yar was either forbidden or strictly censored. So, this page of history was missing from Soviet historiography and textbooks. Now, thirty years after the disintegration of

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> the Soviet Union, the situation has changed a little, but still there is not enough research and public discussion of Babyn Yar in Ukraine. … Therefore, I've decided to repair the historical record and present it in the film (Loznitsa 2021b).

The mission to uncover the historical truth for the post-war generation was precisely the task of Loznitsa's main literary influence – the Soviet writer Anatoly Kuznetsov, who in 1966 published his documentary novel *Babi Yar: A Novel-Document*. Both Kuznetsov's novel and Loznitsa's film about the Babyn Yar massacre have been at the forefront of debates about the meaning and significance of the Holocaust in Ukraine, exposing the Soviet and post-Soviet societies' lack of interest in the suffering of others. Both artists claimed that they used the impartial documentary mode to publicize the truth, but they also manipulated what the audience was to perceive as historical reality, and shaped it according to their ideological agendas.

This paper examines the recontextualization of the history of the Babyn Yar tragedy in Kuznetsov's documentary novel and Loznitsa's documentary film. Both works stress the ethical responsibility of the artist in prompting their contemporaries to ponder the contested history of the past. At the same time, Kuznetsov, in his undifferentiated use of the "document" form, and Loznitsa, in his selective use of the "context," challenge the very concept of historical memory and the documentary genre's reliance on it. Kuznetsov's literary representation of the unspeakable brutality of the Babyn Yar massacre provided Loznitsa with a method for incorporating historical documents in the film, which he repurposes and reassembles to address Ukrainians' collective responsibility in the Holocaust. Kuznetsov employs historical documents to attest the silencing of the tragedy of Babyn Yar in the Soviet Union, while Loznitsa uses "context" to challenge the homogenization of national memory in contemporary Ukrainian society. Despite the difference in medium, Kuznetsov's and Loznitsa's approaches to narrating historical events share many features. Both make us aware of the subjective, polemical, and ideological dimensions of their work. So, the questions arise: how does the creative license in arranging the documentary material in Kuznetsov's novel and the archival footage in Loznitsa's film affect the way we perceive the tragedy of Babyn Yar? Does Loznitsa's film have a greater objectivity compared to the literary representation of the historical facts in Kuznetsov's "novel-document"? How does the knowledge of the context – i.e., Ukrainians' welcoming of the Nazis – affect the perception of the Babyn Yar as a national tragedy?

When Kuznetsov's novel came out in 1966, the Soviet audience was already familiar with the massacre of Kyivan Jews in Babyn Yar, in 1941. Yevgeny Yevtushenko's poem "Babi Yar" (1961) was the most resonant public recognition of the Jewish tragedy and the loudest condemnation of its absence from collective memory as

reflected in the official Soviet discourse. Another target of Yevtushenko's criticism was the covert anti-Semitism of the Soviet system.[1] Kuznetsov attributed the inspiration of Yevtushenko's poem to himself, noting in a letter to his Israeli translator, Shlomo Even-Shoshan, that it was he who had brought the poet to the ravine in Babyn Yar in 1961 and told him about the massacre.[2] In another letter, Kuznetsov asserted his intention to create the novel to show the multiethnic character of the tragedy.[3] Thus, the first publication of Kuznetsov's novel in serialized installments in *Iunost* passed Soviet censorship because it was in part perceived as a more objective account of Babyn Yar, as a tragedy of the Soviet people. However, the later, uncensored publication of the novel in 1970 was an indictment of the Soviet system itself for (among other things) the atrocities of collectivization and Stalin's terror, lack of preparedness for the war, and the disastrous episode of the Kurenivka dam.[4] Kuznetsov restored the censored text and added new material about the cases of collaborationism of Ukrainians with the Nazis, and about Kyivan residents' profiteering from the death of their Jewish neighbors.[5] This paradoxical combination of anti-Soviet and anti-Ukrainian attitudes in the new publication of the novel problematized the use of the "documentary" method.

The documentary narrative in Kuznetsov's novel is an expressly ideological mode of discourse in its means and ends. The dual focus on the individual fate of the author-eyewitness and on the collective fate of Kyivan Jews allows Kuznetsov to pass judgment (in the later version of the novel) and shape the ethical response of the contemporary reader. From the very beginning of the novel, the author identifies himself as a witness and calls his book a testimony: "**I am writing it as**

1 As Amir Weiner justly noted, "the mass murder of Jews was never denied in Soviet representations of the war, but in the official accounts and artistic representations, memory of the Jewish catastrophe was submerged within the universal Soviet tragedy, erasing the very distinction at the core of the Nazi pursuit of racial purity" (2001: 231–32).

2 "You've heard about Yevtushenko's poem 'Babi Yar'? We studied together, he and I, and one day when we were in Kiev, I took him to that beastly ravine. There wasn't anything left, apart from the ash which was still visible in unctuous layers from under the sand. The Germans had incinerated the corpses in furnaces made out of the tombstones from a beautiful Jewish cemetery in Luk'ianovka which they destroyed. That's when Yevtushenko wrote his poem" (Kuznetsov 2009).

3 "In the ensuing two years, Russians, Ukrainians, Gypsies, and people of all nationalities were executed in Babi Yar. The belief that the Babyn Yar is an exclusively Jewish grave is incorrect, and Yevtushenko gave only one aspect of the Babyn Yar in his poem. It is an international grave" (ibid.).

4 The Kurenivka dam was constructed in 1950 to prevent spring mudslides on the hill where the ravine Babyn Yar is located. In 1961, it led to the Kurenivka tragedy when the dam collapsed, and the liquid mud it had been holding back all those years was unleashed, destroying everything in its path.

5 There is conflicting evidence as to the role of the Ukrainian forces in Babyn Yar: in particular, scholars have debated their participation in the actual shootings of Jews, and argued that Ukrainian police only assisted with taking Jews to the site and digging the graves at Babyn Yar. On the other hand, see Victoria Khiterer's article in this issue (Khiterer 2023).

though I were giving evidence under oath in the very highest court and I am ready to answer for every single word. This book records only the truth – AS IT REALLY HAPPENED" (Anatoli 1970, 14). However, the pursuit of factuality and the incorporation of authentic documents pertaining to the Nazi occupation are not sufficient to call Kuznetsov's novel "documentary." Documentary fiction became one of the most popular literary genres for the post-Second World War generation, both in the Soviet Union and in the West. But unlike the objective, impersonal narration developed in such works as John Hersey's *Hiroshima* (1946) and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1966), the documentary prose of Soviet writers such as Ales' Adamovich, Daniil Granin, Lidia Ginzburg, and Anatoly Kuznetsov himself, prioritized documenting the war and its atrocities through the voices of their contemporaries, which created a feeling of collective responsibility. Raising questions of historical truth and its representability, these writers sought to establish themselves as moral and narrative authorities on the traumatic past of the war. As Leona Toker has shown, in the documentary prose of the Thaw period (mid 1950s to mid-1960s) testimonial discourse dominates over that of documentary, since the authors do not just record or document historical facts but testify to what they have witnessed: "what in realistic fiction would be perceived as aesthetic flaws are in documentary prose perceived as signs of the author's uncompromising pursuit of factual or moral truth" (Toker 1997, 196).

Thus, in his attempt to convey the objective representation of the historical past, Kuznetsov specifies the genre of his work – "a document in the form of the novel" – and reflects on the documentary method in his authorial digressions. In the opening chapter, "Ashes," he defines "documentary" as the counter-discourse to fiction: "So the word 'Document' which appears in the sub-title of this novel means that I have included in it only facts and documents, and that it contains not the slightest element of literary invention – of what 'might have been' or what 'ought to have been'" (Anatoli 1970, 17). Kuznetsov here alludes to the Aristotelian distinction between history and poetry and denies poetic license in order to emphasize his narrative's historical validity. The emphasis on factuality stems from the writer's concern that literary discourse inevitably entails a certain fictionalization of the historical account. Already in the 1970s, literary critics questioned the authenticity of Kuznetsov's documentary account (see Vatnikova-Prizel 1976). As a 12-year-old boy, Kuznetsov did not have full comprehension of the Babyn Yar tragedy and relied on the survivors', family members', and neighbors' recollections. He writes that he kept a personal journal during the war, but the sophistication and complexity of the first-person discourse in the novel reveals a

mature mind evaluating the historical event from an adult's perspective.[6] Thus, in reproducing the first months of the occupation he relied on the recollections of his mother, neighbors, and survivors, as well as on popular legends, which were later disputed by historians.[7] By combining documentary sources (newspapers, announcements, leaflets, Nazi official orders) with narrativized accounts of the Jewish survivors and prisoners of war, Kuznetsov strove to achieve historical accuracy. But what he arrived at was an artistic construction of eyewitness authority, conditioned by traditional aesthetic and dramatic concerns rather than documentary facts. Overall, documentary authority is constructed in Kuznetsov's novel rhetorically, as a narrative strategy; he treats historical facts and their interpretation subjectively, from the position of a post-witness. Moreover, the parts which he restored or added to the 1970 edition of his novel (marked graphically in the book) display his critical attitude to the Soviet system.[8]

Kuznetsov's story of what had preceded the tragedy in Babyn Yar belongs to the second-hand domain. It is based on Kuznetsov family's history of surviving Soviet collectivization and terror. The author-narrator recounts his father's horrifying stories about collectivization, famine, and cannibalism in Ukrainian villages during the early 1930s; about the repressive activities of Stalin's "Ukrainian hangman" Pavel Postyshev, who eventually fell victim to the Great Purge in 1937; about his father's perception of the friendship between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939. He also mentions the Soviet occupation of Poland and the losses of the Red Army during the first months of the war. Collective memory based on urban legends and rumors is sometimes framed as a documentary account. For

6 This is especially apparent in the passages where Kuznetsov speaks in plural "we" on behalf of Kyivan residents: "And we didn't know where we were: **still under Stalin, already under Hitler, or were we in a narrow strip in between?**" (Anatoli 1970, 22).

7 Karel C. Berkhoff (2008), 31–34 has summarized the book's errors in his paper "Dina Pronicheva's Story of Surviving the Babi Yar Massacre." Among them are the following: that the Nazis murdered 70,000 Jews at Babi Yar in September 1941; that the NKVD blew up the Dormition Cathedral of the Monastery of the Caves; and that the Ukrainian soccer team "Start" played its last game on August 9, 1942 (see Anatoli 1970, 119, 195–202, and 294).

8 In the following episodes, he depicts some of the residents of Kyiv (the population of which was 850,000 in the beginning of the war and only 150,000 by the end) as stupidly rejoicing when Germans took Kyiv: "Ha, so they've blown up the bridge after all, **the bloody wastrels** [NKVD agents – Yu.I]**!**' said Grandpa, coming across to the fence and poking his nose over the top so that he also could have a look at the first German. 'My goodness, what a sight! God Almighty, what hope **has Stalin got** of fighting them! That's a real army! **Not like our poor devils, hungry and barefoot**. Just look at the way he's dressed!'" (26) A neighbor admires a German soldier: "Yelena Pavlovna was gasping for breath, waving her hands about, and saying **tenderly and happily**: 'So young, such a young lad standing there! My windows look out on to the street. The truck drove off, but he stayed there, this young one, **a good-looking** boy!" (25).

example, Kuznetsov argues that the Germans developed a plan to exterminate Kyivan Jews only after the explosions organized by the NKVD on Khreshchatyk Street on September 24 (historians dispute the connection between the two events[9]). One of the chapters, "The Dynamo Team: A Legend and the Truth," lays bare the way a popular legend may shape collective memory. In this chapter, Kuznetsov acknowledges that the famous death match of Dynamo Kyiv against the unbeaten Luftwaffe team of Flakelf on August 6, 1942 "became a legend, which was so well told and so complete in itself that I want to reproduce it in full" (Anatoli 1970, 289). He then presents his own account: "Here it is," but he never clarifies whether he attended the game or recorded the Dynamo fans' recollections after the war. Instead, he acts as if he were an eyewitness to the match. In Kuznetsov's book, the legends and short sections entitled "A Word from the Author" constitute the "context," whereas the two chapters titled "Original Documents," with leaflets and news reports of the occupation, belong to the "Documents." The historical documents embedded in the narrative serve to reinforce Kuznetsov's historical authority. Given the ratio of documentary to subjective parts of the novel, Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar* has more in common with the contemporary genre of "docufiction." In docufiction, the author typically reenacts, or recreates, actual events from documentary sources (be they printed materials, or oral testimonies), combining fact and fiction; the author presents the facts in such a way that the audience can easily identify with the characters.

In addition to historical documents, Kuznetsov reproduces the testimony of a survivor (Dina Pronicheva) and witnesses to the Nazi crimes (Davydov, Svinchenko, and Vasili) trying to impart historical objectivity to his narrative and to complete the picture of the war-time atrocities with the stories of other witnesses. All these accounts are narrated in the third person from the perspective of the post-witness. Before presenting Dina Pronicheva's testimony, the writer notes: "I am now going to tell her story, as I wrote it down from her own words, without adding anything of my own" (Anatoli 1970, 98). Pronicheva never authorized Kuznetsov's recording, and Kuznetsov later admitted that he had "tremendous difficulty" in convincing her to tell her story, hence, it is clear that he had summarized Pronicheva's story in his own words. That is why he did not keep the first person in narrating the events of the Babyn Yar massacre. By invoking Pronicheva's testimony, Kuznetsov novelistically reconstructs her account, in a second-hand rendering of her memories. By re-presenting the eyewitnesses' accounts from his own perspective, Kuznetsov achieves greater distance from the horrific events of Babyn Yar, and endows the historical past with a sense of urgency that speaks to

9 See Berkhoff et al. (2018): "Bazovy istorychnyi naratyv memorial'noho tsentru Holokostu 'Babyn Yar'," October 2018, https://babynyar.org/ua/historical-narrative.

later generations. In the absence of full evidence, the author had to rely on the ability of readers to distinguish between history and its cultural representation, and to recognize the latter as a form of translation that does not entirely include or exclude history. By appealing to the shared destiny of first- and second-generation audiences, Kuznetsov invites the latter to be active witnesses of his version of history:

> You could have been me; you could have been born in Kiev, in Kurenyovka, and I could now have been you, reading this page.
> So here is my invitation: enter into my fate, imagine that you are living in my shell, that you have no other, and that you are twelve, that the world is at war and that nobody knows what is going to happen next. You were just holding a newspaper in your hands with an announcement about people who refused to work. Just now. Right now.
> Let us go out on the street. The German military flag is flying over the citadel. The Soviet system is finished. It is a warm autumn day. (Anatoli 1970, 65)

In Holocaust documentary narratives, the "rhetoric of facts" either generates an emotional response to the past, reinforces a work's supposed factuality, or establishes the authentic link among the writer, the text, and the events. The documentary discourse in Kuznetsov's novel, organically interwoven with the fictionalized narrative, authenticates the historical interpretation of the events. As Pavel Balditsyn has observed, Kuznetsov's novel is "not only a hybrid of a memoir and a novel, but also a synthesis of different speech genres and narrative forms" (2018, 140; *translation of the author*). It is precisely the shifting border between subject and object, where "the 'I' swims along in the transience of things," that endows Kuznetsov's documentary method with a distinctive lyrical mode (see Steiger 1991, 181). In documentary fiction, the author may differentiate between the self and reality, and be less involved in the expression of subjective feelings. However, in a work of literature, such as Kuznetsov's "document in the form of a novel," blending features of historical narrative, eyewitness diary and survivor's account, the author strives to fashion his own image: a survivor who witnessed horrific events but managed to survive. "While this is not always the case in documentary novels, in Kuznetsov's novel this pursuit of the reader's attention is stretched to the extreme: the author narrates the plot in the first person singular; the main character is himself a youngster; and, lastly, the narrator relentlessly repeats his opening statement in the novel that 'it all really happened'" (Pilnik 2013, 113). In this synthesis of his own wartime tribulations and the Jewish people's tragedy, the writer appeals to universal human experience and summons us to commemorate the victims of the war. Regardless of Kuznetsov's attempt to fix history in the form of a document, the effect of his subjective, multi-sourced narrative is the opposite: the history of occupied Kyiv and the tragedy of Babyn Yar are rethought, reevaluated, and recontextualized for the new generation of readers.

Kuznetsov's book in many ways informed Loznitsa's method of reconstructing archival footage and editing it to compel the contemporary audience to contemplate Ukraine's collective responsibility for war crimes and for atrocities committed during the Great Terror. It is no surprise that his first two found-footage documentaries – *The Trial* (2018) and *State Funeral* (2019) – have been criticized for lack of the authorial commentary clarifying the historical context. As Masha Gessen put it, the "absence of explanation creates a peculiarly powerful effect of both immediacy and estrangement. It is as though the director is saying, 'I am not going to pretend to help you comprehend the incomprehensible.' … In addition to not knowing what they are seeing, viewers cannot know what they are not seeing" (Gessen 2019). The two-hour long *State Funeral* shows the viewing in state of Stalin, but fails to show the fatal stampede at the end of his funeral. Loznitsa only provides unsourced data on the number of Stalin's victims in the closing credits, which unambiguously ascribes collective responsibility of the Soviet people for state-organized terror and state-manufactured famines. As if responding to Gessen's criticism, in the film *Babi Yar: Context* (2021), Loznitsa focuses almost exclusively on presenting the context. The director not only includes documentary evidence (photographs, leaflets, a lengthy quote from Vasily Grossman's essay "Ukraine without Jews," eyewitness and survivor testimony from the Kyiv Trial of 1946, plus recently found footage), but also laces this material with intertitles presenting historical information and quotes from original documents.

Commenting on the origin of his interest in Babyn Yar, the director specifically cited Kuznetsov's novel. Like Kuznetsov, Loznitsa grew up very close to Babyn Yar and used to cross the ravine every day to get to the swimming pool. He recalled the erection of the first Soviet monument in 1976 with the dedication to the "Soviet People" that concealed the Jewish nature of the tragedy. The deliberate silence surrounding the mass extermination of Jews made an impression on him, and, when he became a film director, the idea of making a film about the event began to develop. On the eve of the Euromaidan protests, in late November 2013, Loznitsa and his crew arrived in Kyiv to scout locations for a film on Babyn Yar. As preparation, Loznitsa worked on a series of short documentary films incorporating archival findings from several institutions and private archives. These included footage of the Kyiv Trial from Krasnogorsk Archive's film collection; footage of the Lviv pogrom from the archive of Karl Höffkes; and video material of the explosion on Khreshchatyk in September of 1941 from the Pshenychnyi Central State Cinema, Photo and Audio Archives of Ukraine.

The first episodes of Loznitsa's documentary were commissioned by the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center (BYHMC), which had been funded by Russian oligarchs and supervised by the provocative Russian director, Ilya Khrzhanovsky. Loznitsa readily accepted the offer to participate in creating a video-component for the new

center. In the spring of 2021, before the official release of the full *Babi Yar: Context* at Cannes Festival, he uploaded several episodes out of the twenty-four finished parts onto the BYHMC website, which he later assembled into the film. He arranged the episodes in chronological order, from the occupation of Ukraine and the Lviv pogroms of June-July of 1941, to the construction of the dam in Kurenivka in 1952.

The goal of the BYHMC was to overcome the competitive framework of Ukrainian national memory based on the rivalry between specifically Ukrainian traumas and those of other peoples of Ukraine, particularly of the Jews. This rivalry is evident in the discourse of "our Great Famine" and "the others' Holocaust" in Ukrainian public discussion. The BYHMC projects, including Loznitsa's documentary, stirred fierce debates about the appropriation of Ukrainian historical memory by Russian agents, an idea applied to Loznitsa's allegedly pro-Russian position.[10] The role of Loznitsa's film in fueling debates about the BYHMC's memorialization of Babyn Yar is hard to overestimate. Although known to professional historians, the documented facts of Ukrainians' welcoming reception of the German army and their collaboration in the special auxiliary police groups that took part in the killing of Jews had not been familiar to the wider audience until Loznitsa's *Babi Yar: Context* was aired on national television to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the tragedy in October of 2021. During the discussion of the film, Loznitsa emphasized his main goal in presenting archival footage: "our civilization is not immune from repeating massacres such as Babyn Yar." He stated that the most frightening thing about Babyn Yar was that it had happened, in Loznitsa's words, "without any resistance from the local population" (Loznitsa 2021a).

Loznitsa brought moral complicity and collective guilt for the Holocaust in Kyiv into the film and the commentary, which resonate with the problem of "shield memory" of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, and in Ukraine in particular (see Chebotarova 2020, 184–85). Between 1941 and 1943, 1.5 million Jews perished in Ukraine, not in concentration camps but in Nazi arranged killings, and in pogroms organized by local people, yet a full understanding of these events has been suppressed by nationalist ideology and interpretations of history that minimize or ignore what happened. In Soviet times, admitting the existence of the Holocaust, it was alleged, would undermine the very concept of a "Soviet people." A similar logic of oneness has also been applied in the ideology that helped form independent Ukraine. During the first decade, or so, after 1991, proper memorialization of the

10 Many Ukrainian intellectuals have criticized Khrzhanovsky's concept of building a punitive theme park in Babyn Yar, where the visitors would have a virtual experience of the tragedy assuming a role: a Jewish victim, a policeman, a perpetrator, or a passerby. After the appointment of Khrzhanovsky as the director of BYHMC, the previous directors – historian Karel Berkhoff and art historian Dieter Bogner resigned from their positions calling Khrzhanovsky's project the "Disneyland of the Shoah."

Jewish tragedy at Babyn Yar was actively, if not always supportively, debated. In his speech at the fiftieth anniversary of the massacre at Babyn Yar, the first president, Leonid Kravchuk, apologized for the Ukrainians' collaboration with the Nazis. On the other hand, during President Viktor Yushchenko's tenure, the idea of "one Ukrainian people" was officially buttressed by a new interpretation of history in which twentieth-century Ukraine experienced a decades-long battle for liberation from Communism.

Attention to the vanishing memory of the Jews murdered during the Second World War on Ukrainian territory was revived after the Euromaidan revolution in 2014, when Ukrainian society began to ponder a more inclusive memory of its past. Various forms of official commemoration of the Holocaust, as well as recognition of local participation in it have become a kind of precondition for Ukraine's entry into the European Union. Loznitsa understood his artistic task precisely in these terms – to point to the lack of appropriate memorialization of the complex history of the Holocaust in Ukraine. He called society's lack of interest in the history of Babyn Yar "a conspiracy of silence," suppressing the memory of the tragedy and the role of local collaborators in it. Thus, the subtitle of Loznitsa's film, "Context," shifts attention from understanding the primary causes of the tragedy to the idea of collective responsibility and the failure to remember it. At first glance, the "Context" – the archival documentary footages of the explosions in the administrative quarter in Kyiv organized by the NKVD in September of 1941, and of the Ukrainians' welcoming the Nazi occupation of Lviv during the summer of 1941 – provides an important yet problematic historical background for understanding the participation of the Ukrainian auxiliary police in the mass execution of Kyivan Jews. However, considering Loznitsa's cinematographic aesthetics, which prioritizes the image's power to reveal previously unspoken truth about the past, it becomes clear that the concern to represent historical reality is only secondary. Already in his early article "The End of 'Documentary' Cinema" (2005), Loznitsa stated that he does not believe in film's ability to present "objective reality." He explains this phenomenon by the fact that a director always makes mistakes in reproducing historical events, and that "in this sense a documentary film does not differ in any way from a fictional film or animation" (Loznitsa 2005). Rejecting the "reality" of the documentary medium, Loznitsa thinks that a documentary film cannot be separated from its author's historical position. Hence, his own documentary films, including the ones based on archival footage, may be his personal position vis-à-vis history. Loznitsa's intention in making documentary films out of original archival footage can be seen as an appropriation and recontextualization of this documentary material in order to expose the brutality of war, the victims' complicity with totalitarian regimes, and the covert antisemitism of the Soviet people, for example. However, in each of his found-footage documentary films, *The*

Blockade, *Babi Yar: Context*, or *The State Funeral*, the historical truth of where lies the greates blame for the events remains undeclared.

Like his other archival documentaries, *Babi Yar: Context* has no narrator's voiceover, but the director's position on the controversial subject can be comprehended through the intertitles and the selection of material for the "Context." Historians and film critics have criticized these for adherence to the Soviet historical narrative on the war and the Ukrainians' collaboration in the pogroms in Lviv and the execution of Jews in Babyn Yar and in Lubny. An insight into the director's engagement with the official narrative may be provided by the structure of the film, which is centered on the Babyn Yar tragedy, with the parts preceding and following the massacre mirroring each other.

Although titled "Babi Yar," the main event, the execution of Jews in the ravine, is limited to 4 minutes of the two-hour film, beginning at the fifty-fifth minute. Since no one filmed the Nazi crime on September 29-30, 1941, the only way to reconstruct the massacre for the screen was to present a series of photographs showing what had happened before ("a photo session" of another Jewish massacre, not at Babyn Yar but in Lubny) and after the executions (the famous "landscape" photos by Nazi commander Hölle that captured the ravine of Babyn Yar full of dead bodies). These photos appear as silent *tableaux* with black screens in-between, signifying lacunas in the collective remembrance of the killings. Loznitsa uses several types of non-cinematographic factual material to satisfy the need for documentary evidence: leaflets (copied from Kuznetsov's novel), official Nazi orders, posters, and a long quote from Vasily Grosmann's "Ukraine without Jews," following the massacre. Facts presented in the film provide information, but do not necessarily serve as evidence; in order to become evidence these facts should be enlisted into a narrative or argument.

In Loznitsa's film, the documented facts are placed at the center, organizing the rest of the archival footage as parallel, mirroring parts. Part One starts with a rupture in the daily life of Kyiv in late June of 1941. We hear birds chirping, feet scuffing, and people murmuring as they move around. These sounds, however, are not as loud as the approaching rumble of motor engines or the roiling fire as it engulfs nearby buildings. What is the effect of these vivid, realistic sounds on interpreting the past? Do they humanize the past by making the everyday texture of life a meticulously re-arranged time capsule? This revived past is an overdetermined collection of singular details. Viewers are overwhelmed by this enhanced sequence, but never really encouraged to consider the meaning of what they are watching. The effect of such augmented footage in Loznitsa's film can only be compared to Peter Jackson's provocative use of color and sound in *They Shall Not Grow Old*, released in 2018. Jackson colorized archival footage of the First World War and added sound effects, intensifying its immediacy and impact. Loznitsa did

not colorize the original archival footage but added sound and even conversations among the perpetrators. These he supplied with the assistance of professional actors, arguing that he had reconstructed the filmed conversations by lip-reading. The effect of such audio simulation is astounding and controversial.

Preceding the Babyn Yar massacre, an episode of the film shows two banners greeting the German army's entrance into Lviv, including one that reads "Long live the leader of the German people, Adolf Hitler." In Loznitsa's film, the Second World War begins on June 22, 1941, with Operation Barbarossa, and ends with the liberation of Lviv in 1944, placing the tragedy of Babyn Yar into the context of Soviet Ukraine. Events preceding the German occupation that also offer "context," such as the Red Army's entry into Lviv in the fall of 1939, the subsequent arrests of Ukrainian nationalists, and the deportations of Poles and Ukrainians from Western Ukraine to Siberia – which may partially account for Western Ukrainians' attitude toward Jews – are missing. When the pogrom in Lviv – orchestrated and filmed by the Nazis – is shown in slow motion, it accentuates the faces of the Ukrainian mob, leaving the real organizers of the pogrom unobserved. This places exclusive responsibility onto Ukrainians and their "century-long" antisemitism, and not onto Nazi ideology and politics regarding Eastern European Jews. Similarly, the footage of the welcoming reception that the Nazi army allegedly received all over Ukraine had been staged by German directors for the purpose of screening in propaganda newsreels. The fact that Loznitsa has chosen to show Ukrainians greeting Nazis in Lviv, and not in Kyiv or other cities, reinforces the popular belief that the police units (*Ukrainische Hilfspolizei*) assisting the SS in the massacre of Babyn Yar came from Galician Ukraine and represented the OUN UPA-Melnyk fraction (see Khiterer 2023, Section 1.3). This obfuscates the fact that auxiliary policemen were recruited from many ethnic groups representing the demographics of Western Ukraine and included not only Ukrainians but also Russians from among Soviet POWs, Poles drafted from the local population, and various *Volksdeutsche*.[11] Another example of the misuse of historical documents appears in the episode following the massacre in Babyn Yar, when the director inserts an intertitle taken from a Volhynian propaganda newspaper celebrating the violence; it declares: "Kiev, liberated from oriental barbarians, breathes freely and begins a new life." Presenting this piece of nationalist propaganda without a commentary exposes Loznitsa's selective approach to the Babyn Yar tragedy and shows that framing a "context" facilitates a subjective view of history.

11 Although an urgent question in contemporary historiography of the Holocaust in Ukraine, the documentation on ethnic Ukrainians' collaborationism in the auxiliary police is relatively small; and despite Ukraine's State Committee on Archives' publications of the occupation files, it remains understudied. See Pohl 2008, and Pohl 2014, 199.

One of the contexts placing the collective responsibility for collaborating with the Nazis on Western Ukrainians, is Loznitsa's adherence to the Soviet historical narrative of the war. His attempt to maintain historical objectivity is evident in the deliberate structural parallelism between the welcoming reception of the German army in 1941, in the first part of the film, and the similarly welcoming reception of the Soviet army in 1943–1944, in the second. Then, Loznitsa moves to German Governor-General Hans Frank's arrival in Ivano-Frankivs'k just days after the killings at Babyn Yar in Kyiv. Frank's celebratory reception by Galician Ukrainians is presented tendentiously, as indication of their aspiring to reach a pact with the Nazis. Another antithesis – between the spectacle of the mass grave at Babyn Yar in the middle of the film and the final scene of the execution of German perpetrators, when thousands of Ukrainians cheer at the sight of German soldiers twitching and choking to death on the scaffold – stirs an emotional response in contemporary viewers and demonstrates the director's wish to show that the war-inflicted violence was every bit as psychological as it was physical. The latter scene adds dramatic tension to subsequent episodes, highlighting the selective remembrance, self-absorption, and canned catharsis of the political theater surrounding the Babyn Yar massacre. By adding preceding and following events associated with the Holocaust in Ukraine, Loznitsa has extended approximation that is not merely focused on a central tragic event but dramatically combines multiple events and textual layers into a single image of Babyn Yar. Loznitsa provokes a continual process of narrativization of the past, critiquing the ethical and emotional void in the public memory.

In this loaded ideological context, the murder of 33,771 Jews in Babyn Yar seems to prove what everyone knows all too well: the Nazis could not be trusted, and Ukrainian nationalists were foolish to collaborate with them. Without explicitly condemning the OUN, Loznitsa encourages viewers to wallow in residual guilt through counter-mythmaking. What Loznitsa is trying to do in *Babi Yar: Context*, as well as in *The Natural History of Destruction* (2022), is to relativize the horrifying effect of the Nazi regime by comparing it to Bolshevism (in the former film) or to the war crimes committed by the Allies in 1945 Germany (in the latter). Beyond the obvious commonplace that "war is hell for all civilian populations," Loznitsa's point about society's collective responsibility for war crimes feels too slippery to grasp. Using one geographic location of Babyn Yar at least removes one obstacle in examining the impact of the two totalitarian regimes. The two regimes had different policies toward the Jewish population, but the barbarity of the war as well as its erasure from collective memory was similar on all sides, according to Loznitsa.

Ukrainian historians and film critics have noted Loznitsa's omission of important events leading up to the welcoming reception of the German army in

1941.[12] The images of Ukrainians welcoming Nazi soldiers with flowers, for example, fails to account for the deep resentment these local citizens may have had of the Soviet Union. The portrayal of Ukrainian crowds cheering at the parades organized by the Nazis, without offering a backstory into their suffering during the Holodomor and Soviet occupation, manipulates if not completely distorting historical truth. The director of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, Drobovych (2021), took issue with the accusation that there was no "resistance from the local population." He justly asks why Loznitsa emphasized the Ukrainian collaborators rather than the 144 Ukrainian "righteous of nations" who helped to save Jews in Kyiv. Drobovych also criticizes Loznitsa's frequent assertion that Babyn Yar was a Jewish tragedy and not a Ukrainian one.

Despite the overly suggestive cuts between the Kyiv and the Lviv events, and the artistic license in diegetic sound, Loznitsa's film is a testament to an important evolution of Ukrainian memory politics regarding the Holocaust. The "context" in the film is not so much an explanation of the event as a detailed visual narrative with a missing center. It lays out the building blocks of evil, with the director as a bricklayer of history at a modern editing table, looking into content and extracting a kind of symphony from it. The case of Loznitsa's *Babi Yar: Context* shows that the original purpose behind producing a documentary from archival footage – "to repair the historical record" – and the way in which this documentary material is appropriated and recontextualized may be at odds with each other. This disparity also has epistemological consequences. In contrast to documents produced specifically for a given film, documents that are recontextualized in "appropriation" films present evidence beyond the filmmaker's intentions. In other words, they carry traces of other intentions and may resist those that the filmmaker, by argument and design, tries to impose. Historian and theorist Carolyn Steedman points out that, like the reader of a letter sent to someone else, the historian who uncovers an object in an archive will always, in some sense, steal or "misuse" it. She writes: "The Historian who goes to the Archive must always be an unintended reader, will always read that which was never intended for his or her eyes. Like Michelet in the 1820s, the Historian always reads the fragmented traces of something else… an unintended, purloined letter" (Steedman 1998, 72). Like the historian, the appropriation filmmaker who draws on found documents is always an unintended reader and user confronted by the "something else" that eludes his or her own uses and strategies of containment. This "something else" undermines the attempt to assign a final or definitive meaning to the sounds and images from the past. Indeed, it is a document's resistance to such definitive comprehension – its own, often hidden intentionality – that gives it evidentiary authority. Archival

12 See Nakhmanovych 2021; Drobovych 2021; and Kasianov 2021.

documents and their appropriation in Loznitsa's film generate a sense of multiple contexts that make possible multiple interpretations, but, despite its promise to repair the historical record, the film leaves too many open questions regarding ethnic violence, perpetration, collaboration, justice, and retribution. The dual nature of Loznitsa's *Babi Yar: Context* as an artistic work and a pieced-together historical narrative fuels the tension between proper memorialization and tendentious interpretations of the complex history of the Holocaust in Ukraine. At the same time its recontextualization of history also contributes to the development of "multidirectional" (multi-ethnic) national memory in post-Soviet Ukraine.

The comparative analysis of the documentary methods employed in Kuznetsov's novel and Loznitsa's film illustrates the role of the "document" as an intermediary form between the fact and its fictionalized representation. As we have seen, the inclusion of documents within literary or cinematographic work adds layers of intention and multiple temporalities and creates a gap in enunciation – an orientation toward the present moment in history. In Kuznetsov's and in Loznitsa's works, documents appear not so much as objects of a historical archive but as a form of *actualité* – a way of understanding the present society's memory process. In Loznitsa's cinematographic vision, however, the emphasis is shifted from documenting the tragedy through the perspective of eye-witnesses and survivors to understanding the tragedy from the position of the "implicated subject" (Rothberg 2019), who gathers a range of subject positions making the contemporary viewer feel uncomfortable in a familiar conceptual space of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders during the Holocaust. In this way, Loznitsa shows how contemporary viewers, despite not seeing themselves in the categories "perpetrators/victims," become implicated in problematic attitudes to collaborationism, and perhaps in blocking the tragedy from the national memory.

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