

INTERVIEWS WITH THE DIRECTORS

Children of the Holocaust

Editor's note: The following are excerpts from an interview with Irene Lilienheim Angelico, director of *Dark Lullabies*, which will be shown at the Rivertown Film Festival. Angelico's film, her first feature length documentary, explores the impact of the Holocaust on the children of Jewish survivors and the children of former Nazis. Harald Lüders, a young German filmmaker who worked with Angelico, expressed the dilemma of these generations by noting that "Young Jews, especially children of survivors, can look into the past and feel closer to their people. For Germans, it's exactly the other way around."

Question: When did you first conceive the idea for this film, and what made you go ahead with it?

Angelico: ... my parents are both survivors of the concentration camps. A year after they were liberated and finally reunited, my father wrote a manuscript about his experience. That was the year that I was born... What I read amazed me. This was not only a story of horror and grief, as I had expected, but a powerful story of love and hope as well.

May 7, 7:00 p.m., World Theater.

I then read *Anna* by Susan Fromberg Schaeffer and began to imagine what my mother's experience had been like, from before the war in Warsaw to the beginning of a new life in the new world. It was still too difficult for me to discuss with her, but I began to understand her tremendous courage and commitment to life, and the effort she made to protect me from the pain she had experienced herself.

Question: What was the sequence of events once you decided to go ahead with the film? What was your parents' reaction to your decision?

Angelico: After a long period of soul searching on whether or not I should make a film on this subject, I began to imagine and plan what the

film would be. I knew I did not have a meaningful contribution to make in terms of understanding the Holocaust. I had neither the experience nor the wisdom to do that.

What I *did* understand was how the Holocaust affected the children of survivors... Very soon, I realized that it was not only the children of survivors that had grown up in the shadow of the Holocaust but also the children of Nazis themselves, and my vision of the film grew to encompass their experience as well.



Affiche from *Dark Lullabies*

The functions of 'Shoah'

Editor's note: The following are excerpts from a press conference in West Berlin given by Claude Lanzmann, director of *Shoah*, after a screening of the film this winter.

Question: What was your reaction to the screening?

Lanzmann: A profound silence takes place after the showing of the film—everywhere. It is difficult to talk about *Shoah* immediately after seeing the film. A certain interval is necessary. At least a day, perhaps; a day may not even be sufficient. The film works in people for a long time—that's classical. That is to say, that is the reaction I've always had. It's been the case everywhere.

Question: I have a question about a point of information. Several times in the film you asked a question of people who didn't want to talk, not that you really forced them, but I'd like to know how you really convinced them.

Lanzmann: I would like to ask you to specify what you mean when you said I forced people to talk. I said different things to each person to get them to talk. There are different categories of people in the film. For example, for the Jewish survivors of the special commando teams, the Jews in the film, these are not simply any deported person. These were people who were active at the very last stages of the death camps, who were witness to the death of their people. These people are thus victims in a real double sense. They have, on the one hand, an obligation to recount, to transmit what they know, and yet they know at the same time that in order to do this they have to pay the highest price they can—that is, they have to relive their experiences to transmit this information. I'd like to repeat, they feel on the one hand they have the obligation to talk and of course this is very painful for them. For the Germans in the film, it is a completely different story.

Question: You said ... you shot about 350 hours of film. I'd like to know what you are going to do with this material because it is particularly

When the film was sketched out on paper, I went to speak to my parents. My mother supported the project from the beginning, and, after many intense discussions, I won my father's support as well. The issues that came out of these discussions came up again and again... how were [the children of survivors] different from anyone else? Even most children of survivors did not realize the common bond that exists until

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Helen Epstein's book, *Children of the Holocaust*, was published and the phenomena began to be discussed. The survivors who had tried to create a new life for their children after the Holocaust did not want to know that some of that horror had been passed on to their children.

Question: What was your experience while shooting, particularly in Germany?

Angelico: Montreal and Israel were filmed on a shoestring, but the experience was extraordinarily rich. We met survivors whose stories were painful to hear but who had built new lives that were vibrant and rich.

Going to Germany was, of course, a much greater mystery for us. It is ironic that Germany, which had been the most controversial aspect of our project and our fundraising efforts, turned out to be the place where we had the most time and money to research and shoot. Everyone warned us that we could never find children of Nazis who would agree to be interviewed. . . . We had many contacts in Germany but no one seemed right, yet we were sure that the key . . . was to find just the right person to work with. When time was running out, I happened to be in New York where I saw a film called *Now, After All These Years* by Harald Lüders and decided that he was the person we were looking for. We contacted Harald and . . . got our schedules to work together. Harald helped us with the preliminary research in Germany and . . . choosing subjects and locations.

Question: Who do you hope to reach with this film?

Angelico: I hope the film will reach everyone because its issues are universal. They involve everyone who is concerned about prejudice and human dignity and, even more so, those who are not.

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important as documentation. The second question: did you shoot at all in the Soviet Union, in the Ukraine, for example, since the first massacres took place at Baba Yar.

Lanzmann: I would like to say this 350 hours of material which I shot—not all of it is good,

but I would say at least 200 hours of it is important. And I hope to be able to find a place to keep it. Perhaps I would make other films using this material. There might be research institutes or universities in Germany or in the United States which might store this material, but on the condition they pay for the cost of developing their own copies because this is quite expensive.

No, I didn't shoot in the Soviet Union . . . or in any of the Baltic countries. . . . I was not allowed. I didn't get the authorization to shoot there. But I was very concerned, interested nonetheless in these *Einsatzcommandos*. I think I spoke with all the heads of these special commandos who are alive in Germany today. Most of the time I simply met them; I didn't film them; I took no notes during these first exploratory interviews I carried out in Germany. These are men who categorically refused to talk.

You have to understand that every one of the Nazis who appears in the film is, in fact, a miracle. Those people since 1945, even if they've appeared in court in trials, none of them have ever talked . . . at any trial. The heads of these special commandos refused to say anything at all. As a matter of principle, they don't talk. It's a question of . . . lie and deny. I would have liked for people to ask me questions about what sort of relationship I must have had with these people for them to open themselves to me to talk.

Whenever I asked one of the people at Treblinka, for example . . . technical questions, he always answered with personal reflections. He refused to answer; he ducked; he tried to excuse himself, or was looking to find alibis. . . . But I find that this is another way of remaining silent. I don't think, however, there is any reason to maintain this silence. For example, when [former Unterscharführer Franz] Suchomel describes the beginning of the extermination in Treblinka, he says that they had to improvise everything, that they didn't know how to go about it, that they invented their own method: there were too many dead people; there were too many living people they weren't able to kill. There were so many they couldn't kill them all. I think that's important. I think it's in fact essential. I'd like to ask *you* a question. Did you know all this?

Question: Who did they think they were talking to at the time?

Lanzmann: Well, it depends. There was no general rule. Each time it was completely different with each person I interviewed. Take for example the bierstube in Munich with Mr. Oberhauser. This was a man I had been searching for for a long time. I tried to approach him, but he would have nothing to do with it; he is there exactly to show that if we do these things openly, people refuse to talk. I spent 48 hours in the Munich cafe. I was trying to convince people that I was trying to do a show about beer, about Bavaria. I spent two days in the kitchen, for example, shooting sauerkraut, just to convince them, so that Oberhauser would be used to seeing me around. It was all planned and prepared like a military operation. Everyone in the brasserie knew who I was, that is, thought they knew who I was.

Just to repeat one central point: he who was willing to talk had nothing to say, and anyone who had anything to say at all refused to talk. This was an iron rule. . . . there was always a great sense of tension during this work.

Question: I'd like to ask Mr. Lanzmann what personal motives he had to invest so much time and energy to make this film. A second question: how did the film begin? What was the original intention? How did the film structure develop?

Lanzmann: I didn't have a concept or idea of precise structure at the beginning. That was quite fortunate because if I had had the film would have . . . become too abstract and, for that reason, bad. . . . Even today I ask myself questions about my own personal motivation, my own personal behavior in the film. . . . The film is a sort of reactivation. First, of the past through the present and vice versa. The truth is that I made this film in a state, in an absolute hallucinatory state. . . . The separation of past and present was absolutely abolished for myself when making this film. For example, when I was shooting Treblinka. Nothing was left. There were these symbolic stones. I filmed these stones, these monuments, in every weather condition possible, in every season. I shot them as a sort of madman because this was all that was left for me to film. If I think of this forest of stones in the film today . . . I think the spectators experience a response to this material exactly as I experienced it in real life when I was shooting it.

I myself refused to have emotions while shooting, to be completely unemotional. Because I would have been drowned, submerged by my own emotions. But I think the spectator, too, without emotions, should be cold while seeing the film, should ask himself questions.

Question: How do you see or how would you like to see this film used by the German public?

Lanzmann: It is, in fact, an interesting question how the film should be used by the Germans, utilized by the Germans. . . . It is my opinion that *Sboab* can play a special role, a very important role, for Germans today. It is a liberating film. It can play a liberating role for the Germans. I think there was collective guilt for the German nation during the Nazi period. What occurred was not the work of a handful of gangsters. It could not have taken place if there had not been a general consensus on the part of the German nation, without the collaboration of the huge administrative network. In fact, it was quite a complicated task to kill 6 million people, much more complicated than people might think.

Thus the extermination would have not been possible without the collaboration of people at every level of life. But in terms of . . . collective guilt, I don't think that we can suggest that someone who is 50 years old today might be in some way collectively responsible. There's no retroactive effect of guilt. The people are younger. . . . there's no sense to suggest that they are somehow guilty—retroactively.

But something else that's at least just as important is not the question . . . of historical responsibility of the Germans, of Germans today. I think historical responsibility might not be the right term, but they must be able to integrate the experience of Nazi Germany into their lives, into their intellectual lives. They cannot simply consider the Nazi period as . . . some madness, as an aberration. I think that's a very difficult task . . . but I think it's absolutely necessary. To the extent that *Sboab* is not a film with a moral that doesn't try to judge people but is simply a film that goes from detail to detail, we create what went on, what truly went on. I think to that extent, the film can be liberating for German spectators. . . . If the people would be informed about the facts, Bitburg last year wouldn't have happened.