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Testimony and the Failure of Communication
(Best Paper - Philosophy, Theory, and Critique Division)

Abstract:

This paper examines the Romani Holocaust experiences by mapping out the silences that haunt this question and bringing the repression of the Romani Holocaust remembrance to the contemporary political level. As a case in point, the paper utilizes the testimonial documentary Porraimos: Europe’s Gypsies in the Holocaust (Alexandra Isles 2002), which is discussed in a comparative thread with the landmarks of the Jewish Holocaust commemoration—Claude Lanzmann’s testimonial documentary Shoah, the Eichmann trial, and the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. At the heart of the often-ignored Romani Holocaust question, this paper argues, is a type of a moral discourse called for in Jean-Francois Lyotard’s Le Differend. Bearing witness to the differend can give new insights into the understanding of the Holocaust at large, the conceptualization of Romani identity, and the framing of media witnessing. The paper concludes with a discussion of the face and its relation to witnessing.