This is a short note on the difference in the way stories are told in *Night and Fog* (1954, Alain Resnais) and *Shoah* (1981, Claude Lanzmann). We will first consider *Night and Fog*, and then *Shoah*, and then compare and contrast them. We then examine a specific scene from each work in light of the points made.

*Night and Fog* starts out with images of an almost idyllic countryside, with accompanying voice-of-God narration and nothing to give a suggestion of the subsequent horrors. It slowly and subtly descends into remembrance, talking about the fates of people and showing images of barbed wire and furnaces. Here, we see some of the only non-contemporary video footage – of the Wehrmacht and Hitler, showing soldiers marching in unison and carrying the Nazi banner. The narration has an indirect, almost poetic tone, which it preserves throughout the film, which embellishes the nature of the horrors, but in a way that is almost abstract. For example, the brevity of a description like "an orphanage, short-lived but constantly restarted" is no less effectual in making the viewer shudder, but does not give them a complete picture or an in-depth description of the conditions in such a place. In some ways, it takes away from the human aspect of the experience, making it almost a museum exhibit. We are also completely unaware of where the footage is from, seeing only nondescript buildings and signs with Nazi slogans.

We see a number of still images of prisoners, each one having a screen time of just a few seconds before the next, each showing multitudes of mutilated, emaciated bodies, and we hear from the narrator aspects of society in the camp. The camp is described to us as a world unto itself – mad, but "still less mad than the SS." He refers to "the deportee" as a kind of archetypal figure, collapsing the experiences of all the victims of the Holocaust into one, listing out places with concentration camps without a pause. He speaks also of the economy of the camp (the bartering of spoons, cigarettes and food), the prevalence of crime, the attitude towards death, the resistance groups, the power struggles, the handicrafts – all the while not showing a single video featuring a live prisoner. We also see the various industrial products that the victims formed raw material for – cloth, manure, soap, and so on.

All the above points go to show that *Night and Fog* takes, in general, an impersonal, unindividualistic, almost detached perspective of the events, treating the viewer as simply an agent who would passively consume this media.

*Shoah* approaches the matter of storytelling in a completely different way. There is no archival footage – only interviews and some contemporary shots. Interviewees come from all walks of life, none of them aware of any other, each giving their own unique perspective – we see interviews of survivors, bystanders, helpful onlookers, and participants, each of them uniquely reacting to the experience of telling their story. The viewer is immediately drawn into the sheer humanness of the story, seeing it from the point of view of each of these people. We hear, at around 1:05:30, a witness (upon being asked if he thought the Jews were cold in the cattle cars) saying "they were packed in [almost a hundred to a wagon], so maybe they weren't cold;" on the other hand, we hear Polish farmers just a few minutes before proudly declaring that "it was dangerous [but] we gave [the Jews] water."

The director is also an active participant in the interviews, using his questions to draw attention to certain parts of the narrative and emphasize them in the viewer's mind. He asks (around 1:10:40) Mr. Borowi, who described the speech of the Jewish prisoners as "rararara," what language he thought that was, why he described it so, and whether he understood it, subtly underscoring the attitude of the interviewee towards Judaism. He also interviews several survivors, asking them to remember small details – clothes, the weather, locations, songs, and so on. He takes almost a cold, logistical view of the entire situation – by way of scrutinizing the minutest of details, he forces the viewer to consider everything that happened, without ever actually using any archival footage. For instance, he (around 1:33:00) walks around Sobibor station with Mr. Jan Piwonski, identifying places and mapping out the entire camp around the area, and finds that this camp differed from the one at Treblinka in that the station was part of the camp itself.

The interviews are edited and spliced together in a fashion that retells the same story over and over, from several points of view, possibly even in several places. The director speaks French, English or German, and the translator stands by him in all other cases, measuredly and conscientiously translating each sentence of the interviewee. This creates a kind of "chain" of understanding, where the interviewee, translator and director each form links. The viewer is simply one more link in this chain, and is forced to sit through the subtitled question, the unintelligible answer, the subtitled translation of the answer, and so on. It is, in fact, an invitation to the viewer to put effort into understanding and imagining the circumstances under description.

Considering both these pieces of media in juxtaposition, our first impression is that the story *Shoah* tells is a union of several deeply personal, deeply individual experiences. The interviewees – among whom the film rapidly switches, sometimes several per minute – are in countries as diverse as the US, Israel, Poland and Ukraine; they are interviewed in places ranging from a park in New York to a barn in Treblinka; and they speak languages like English, Yiddish, Polish, and so on. *Night and Fog*, on the other hand, preserves no such human touch – the only footage featuring living people is that of the Wehrmacht marching and holding banners. We hear no audio from these characters either.

Furthermore, *Night and Fog* uses a background score of slightly up-tempo music, giving the impression of a narrative in progress, moving from 1942 to 1945 in a neat line, describing the prisoners' lives from incarceration to execution to their fate after death, in a clear progression. *Shoah*'s use of ambient noise – people talking in the background, the translator's voice overlapping with the interviewee's, sounds of trains and birds – strongly contrasts with this particular choice.

One of the most apparent distinctions between the two works is the narration – taken on by a voice of God in *Night and Fog*, but nonexistent in *Shoah*. The former, unconstrained by the physical narrator, uses the narration as an aural guide to the viewer (or the footage as a visual guide to the narration), describing the scenes they see in real time, at every instant showing evidence of what is being said. This synchronization reinforces the mechanical, impersonal touch that is a hallmark of this film's storytelling style. *Shoah*, by contrast, uses only the voices of people who are on- or just offscreen, including the director and translator, and so shows footage of places being described after their mention in conversation. This footage is not always accompanied by a voice.

Being, as we have noted, mostly unconstrained by the presence of live actors, *Night and Fog* relies on elaborate camera setups and lighting, the polar opposite of which is *Shoah*'s handheld camera, capturing unevenly bobbing footage as the videographer walks along with the personae on screen.

We now examine the scene in *Night and Fog* that starts at the 24:10 and continues for the next 45 seconds. The camera moves – slowly and steadily – across the length of the wall, showing oven holes and assorted debris, with an almost ominous, eerie score in the background. The lighting and the play of shadows make it seem like the shot is artificially lit, and narrator describes how the ovens were filled with "thousands of new bodies" every day. All these are aspects of the style of this film that we have noted above.

In *Shoah*, the scene starting at 1:29:08, that goes on until 1:30:02, where the director draws on a piece of paper to understand the exact mechanics of how locomotives pulled wagons full of prisoners into the camp. Although he and the interviewee are right next to each other, they both address only the translator, and there is some confusion as to the relative positions of the locomotive and the carriages. The scene takes place in the interviewee's house, surrounded by his personal effects, and seems like a normal discussion between two people – there are small, human gestures throughout, like the interviewee stubbing out his cigarette and gesturing to indicate pushing – that just happens to have been caught on camera. This exchange is concluded by a closeup of the interviewee, immediately followed by a shot of a train, from the front, where the viewer simply watches the engine get closer and closer for thirty seconds, driving home the scene in the mind of the viewer.

In conclusion, we claim that the two works undertake fundamentally opposed objectives in their storytelling – one tells the story of the dead and the killers, while the other tells the story of the survivors. Furthermore, *Night and Fog* is a short, bird's-eye view of the entire happening, from 1942 to 1945, and its use of rapidly changing shots gives us an impression of breadth of storytelling, informing us of all aspects of the Holocaust, but more as a quick list of facts than as a story of people who suffered. *Shoah*, conversely, focuses on depth – each individual's interview is long-drawn-out and sometimes painful, going into the absolute minutiae of their experience, and each shot is usually at least half a minute long. The viewer is a participant in the latter, and a consumer in the former.