

## **Reflections on the Life of a Story:** **Engaging, Creating and Dialoguing with Holocaust Testimony** (Abstract)

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Holocaust testimony has often been subject to redemptive memory practices on the part of communal or mass-mediated oral history projects. Such projects and practices invest testimonies with a standardized, hopeful trajectory that conforms to the "lessons" various constituencies want to teach to new generations about "the" Holocaust experience. Yet despite their increasing collection and dissemination, we fear that testimonies are increasingly met with a static response. Especially as such testimonies travel outside of the Jewish community, they meet with *self-conscious* witnesses, afraid to engage with the material out of fear that the questions they have may offend or challenge established narratives. As students we argue that, on the contrary, engaging with testimony personally, with the authentic questions that arise for each of us, would give rise to a more productive, ethical, future oriented *self-aware* witnessing. After watching 210 minutes of wartime testimony by Berel Bokser (a Polish Jew currently residing in Montreal), we decided to transcribe, debate, and finally draw our way into active dialogue and engagement with the story. Our choice of artistic medium, the graphic novel, proved to be a unique way for us to engage with the material, and in turn to transform it in ways that we hope will provide new points of access for future generations and audiences. Our presentation will discuss the task we confronted, our process of dialogue with and creation around the testimony, and finally our theoretical intervention around the notion of "self-conscious" vs. "self-aware" witnessing.

### **Group Biography**

"*Reflections on the Life of a Story*" is a result of the combined efforts of three recent Concordia University B.A. graduates, Yesica Macias (History), Alex Wilson and Vaimoana Heyman (Anthropology), along with the assistance of Humanities and Philosophy Doctoral student Joanne Hui. "*Reflections*" is based on the graphic novel published by this group entitled, "Drawing from What Berel Bokser Said". After watching the video testimony of Holocaust survivor Berel Bokser in their Curating Difficult Knowledge seminar, these four young women came together in an effort to re-envision remembrance through the publication of the graphic novel and the writing of "*Reflections*".