

The Special Individualized Programs of the School of Graduate Studies
in association with the Centre for Sensory Studies and the
Department of Sociology and Anthropology present

The Role of Eye-Witnesses in the Memory Industry

with Jean-Sebastien Marcoux
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H-1120, Henry F. Hall Building
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Eye-witnesses have received a great deal of attention in history, philosophy, and anthropology during the twentieth century, especially since the Eichman trial after the Second World War. Eye-witnesses of tragedies play an important role in the transmission of memory. Many of them feel a strong need to tell their own stories. They are often driven by a sense of moral obligation—a memory duty, as Primo Levy would call it – to fight oblivion in the name of those who did not survive. While memory tourism gains in popularity across the world, and eye-witnesses assert themselves as instrumental in the promotional strategies of many of the museums, memorials, and memory sites visited by tourists, few researchers have actually examined the place of eye-witnesses in the memory industry. More importantly, few researchers have reflected on what happens to the figure of the eye-witness and to the testimony once it is appropriated by cultural institutions that are also tourist institutions, not to say attractions. This research is an ongoing project. It consists in a multi-sited ethnography in Hiroshima, Phenom Penh, Seoul, Berlin, and New York City. The project seeks to explore the tensions and the contradictions in the work of eye-witnesses, the relationships that these people have with the visitors to memory sites, and the place of eye-witnesses in the strategies of museums and memorials.

Jean-Sébastien Marcoux is an anthropologist who specializes in contemporary material culture studies with a particular interest in consumption. He currently holds a position in the department of marketing at HEC Montréal. His research deals with gift giving behaviour, the construction of collective memory, and the phenomenon of memory tourism. His work has been published in such journals as *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Material Culture*, and *Anthropologie et société*.

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