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The Politics of Holocaust Representations on Film – From the Peaceful Landscape to the Death Gaze: Resnais, Lanzmann, and Farocki

Abstract

This paper explores the politics of Holocaust representations without dealing with the problem of the ethics of the representation itself, but rather indirectly: by asking what the strengths and limitations of film media representation are, it deals with the problem of the politic/politics of the Holocaust cinema. Furthermore, it looks at the heteronomies of a certain number of movies in relation to the autonomous field of art which also sets limitations of the media, especially by taking into account the dominant social contexts, politics, and the approved representational ethics. By applying the case study method to three documentary films – Night and Fog (1995) by Alain Resnais, Shoah (1985) by Claude Lanzmann, and Respite (2007) by Harun Farocki, what is being presented is the discrepancy between the concepts of politics and ethics of Holocaust representation. The chosen films represent three different points in time and three different dominant and avant-garde discourses of Holocaust representations. The author's thesis is not to deal primarily with the theme of the ethics of Holocaust representations, but to use the chosen films as case studies for representation of the politics and (de)construction of the memories of the Holocaust, which correlate with the dominant politics of the context that creates them. In that way, each interpretation of these films here is also a study of the dominant political discourse, and a study of the politics transgressing the discourse into the avant-garde practices of Holocaust representation suggested by these films.

Keywords: Holocaust representation, genocide studies, testimony, politics of art, Shoah, Godard, Resnais, Lanzmann, Spielberg, Farocki

1. Introduction: Cinema after Auschwitz

Did you see the gas vans?
No… Yes, from the outside. They shuttled back and forth. I never looked inside; I didn't see Jews in them. I only saw things from the outside.
(Shoah)

According to Adorno's thesis that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, cinema in the sense of fiction cannot move beyond such poetry, but the question of discourse in the post-genocidal society can only be answered by political means. Adorno's post-war setting suggests poetry that is dialectically juxtaposed to barbarism, and the concept of Auschwitz overweighs barbarism at every level in such a way that it is impossible to ever again maintain a dialectical relationship with poetry as it used to be possible before the war (Adorno, “Cultural Criticism”).

Following the same logic from 1968 onwards, Jean-Luc Goddard has actively questioned the very media of cinema, the film from within, and its potential to become political. He asked: What can cinema do? (Goddard and Ishaghpour), and in what ways and to what extent the illusion of cinema could be morally utilized. He asks himself whether it is possible to make films after Auschwitz and what kind of films should be made after this turning point according to Adorno. Godard also states that history (of reality and cinema) with the capital ‘H’ is set on the axis of dominant political discourses of Stalin-Hitler-Henry Ford-Hiroshima. By mapping the twentieth century, the century of cinema, Goddard is critically positioning the filmmaker in the position of the artist whose task is to transform the media of cinema from the sanctuary found in the autonomy of art to a strategy of political action that reaches beyond the world of art.

Deeply rooted in the media, according to Godard, cinema produces the impossibility of the author to contradict his very commodity of existence in art as a more or less autonomous sphere, which prevents him to step out of his privileged position of "speaking of" and/or "speaking in the name

of". Confronting this problem begins with looking at the mediated image and its relationship to the reality outside of the art of cinema and it is the logical result found by utilizing the very mediated frame that transmits a political message, which Daney calls Godardian pedagogy (“Theorize”). Namely, Daney juxtaposes pedagogy to education by explaining their fundamental difference is found in the nature of knowledge transmission because in the case of education the content dominates over the media, i.e., what dominates is the very storytelling aspect of the film.

The relationship between the voice of the author and the voice of the Other becomes a more important ethical problem than the ethics of representation itself. This problem is possible to solve, according to Godard, only by politicizing the media of cinema, whereby the author co-opts the right to the voice of the other by giving up the fiction, which on the other hand legitimizes the representation of the other. This theoretical ground helps Godard and Daney to circumvent the trap of educational, politically correct, or politically responsible cinema, as media representations of (one of the possible versions) of reality. The relation and reciprocity in the relationship between cinema and real life is the fundamental ethical problem that Goddard maps in the film Histoire(s) du cinéma (1998), which he solves by introducing the concept of mechanical reproduction, calling it pejoratively the exploitation of the reality in film.

He goes beyond the interpretation of the very nature of cinema as an art product of mechanical reproduction by accentuating the idea of cinema that affects the trajectory of reality. The question of (ab)using the content-reality of cinema Goddard answers by returning the "value" of the author as "beneficiary of filmic surplus-value" in the name of those whose perspective is being represented, by "restitution, or better, reparation" (Daney, “Theorize” 123). His thesis on governing, i.e., (re)directing the surplus value produced by cinema, reconciles the exploitative character of cinema as a media and the question of the artist's position and, namely, his responsibility in society. By focusing on the ethical problem of film as a language (and not its content), it seems that not to make a film is to refuse one's own voice, to de-subjectivize oneself as an author.

What the films considered for this analysis have in common is the attempt at overcoming the problem via use of certain strategies offered by the film media, the problem being the very limitation of the Holocaust representation. More precisely, the films under analysis refer to the attempt of political reestablishing of the genocide victim subject, the dissolution of the myth of

Nazism, and the representation of seeing Nazi evil as banal and not as metaphysical evil. In these films, the evil behind the Holocaust is seen as a deed, an effect, and the origin of institutional, and of a thoroughly and bureaucratically exercised politics at all possible levels.

2. Spielberg: The Limitations of the Ethics

Perhaps one cannot – what is more, one must not – understand what happened, because to understand is almost to justify. … If understanding is impossible, however, knowledge is imperative, because what happened could happen again. (Primo Levi 395-96)

Who does know anything? The reality of these camps, despised by those who built them, and unfathomable to those who endured them – what hope do we have of truly capturing this reality? (Night and Fog)

Through the spectrum of different personifications of Evil, the concentration camp is positioned at the very top of the pyramid. The scene of the smoking chimney (Schindler's List, 1993) is the gaze of defenselessness against the horrifying, unnamed threat of Evil. The showering scene from the same film, which turns out to be only that what we see – the showering and not death, represents the impossibility of the human mind to perceive the limits of that evil because the human victim is not in the position of understanding reality and differentiating life from death. Aren't we faced with the 'crisis of witnessing' at this point? The problem bears the same weight to the victim's testimony, the bystander and the perpetrator. In those hazy visions, the possibility of knowing the truth about Evil escapes us, and thus Evil triumphs.

That is exactly why Schindler's List is not problematized in this work, as a film about the Holocaust, by the questioning on the ethics of representation. What is essentially wrong is the very supposition about the idea of raising the individual act to the level of the collective.[2] It is wrong for two reasons: firstly, because the Holocaust is represented as a tragedy while the evil of the politics which stands behind that tragedy is left unquestioned, and it is monumentalized; and secondly, the problem is found in the aestheticization of that politics as such. Both of those problems lean onto a much bigger problem which is the question of ethics of every discourse, even a politically correct one, that stands in the name of the absent, the unspoken, the disappeared, or the murdered ones.

The question of genocide in Schindler's List is represented as politically correct in a completely asymmetrical way, whereby the Nazi perspective, whether seen through the eye of the Nazi or the victim, is higher and superior and is the one which escapes classification and births the hierarchy. We start from the position of inequality, the position founded on Nazism, and in that inequality, we question the individual act as a superior humane act, based on Schindler's rescue of the minority of Jews capable of work along with their families. His act is, on the one hand, undoubtedly a humane act but on the other, it is a singular act and it does not necessarily deserve a generalization and a biblical reference to the salvaging of the whole nation. Also, the film does not have the element of political defiance to the Nazi agenda, i.e., the politics of evil which it speaks about. From the beginning, the idea of rescuing the Jew worker is a capitalistic idea about the interest in gaining wealth which gradually acquires a dimension of compassion, and through the catharsis leads to humaneness parallel to Schindler's bankruptcy, which additionally identifies him as the victim of the Nazi regime/evil. It begs the question of what the results of Schindler's actions would be if it was not for the Nazi decision that Jewish labor was unpaid and consequentially affirmative to a capitalist. Contemporary empires – such as Steyer, Krupp, Heinckel, IG Farben, Siemens[3] – were recruiting Jewish slave labor. Also, if we follow the same axis, the film can be seen as an attempt to universalize and normalize the Nazi regime, because alongside the legal frame of discrimination it enabled the possibility of self-subversion. But is not every law the same, and can we, based on the idea of the sameness of all regimes, find a fundamental difference between what is politically and/or ethically good and what is evil? The film does not allow the possibility of escaping the matrix of asymmetry of the human and the inhuman because its movement is limited by the boundaries of the Nazi political idea on one and by the frame of the politically correct post-war discourse about the Holocaust, which by demonizing Nazism repeats the pattern of its grandiosity, and thus the emancipatory value of the film is being lost. The fundamental question in the critique of Schindler's List is about the nature and possibilities to overcome the basic consensus on genocide – the acceptance that genocide happened and admittance that it was wrong. This film does not negate the evil of Nazism, but it underscores it and the process of underscoring dislocates it from the realm of conceptualization to the level of that which cannot be deconstructed. The only effectiveness of Schindler's List is the subversion within

the system of Evil which is raised to the level of an act, an unrelenting and undeniable fact about which we do not know how it came to be and whether it can happen again, and under what circumstances.

The Ethical code, i.e., the post-genocidal international consensus on the Holocaust knowledge would read: we know that there used to be Jews and there are none anymore, and that is wrong. That is due to Nazism. Besides all the trials, all the educations, every circumstance under which the Holocaust happened is dimmed and subjected to denial in societies around the world. Did they die in the gas chamber or were they shot; did they suffocate or kill each other while fighting for survival; did they slit their wrists and those of their children fearing a more horrible death; did they die if their bodies had been burnt and the ashes scattered, or is there a hope that they simply left and are now at someplace else? Besides, the ethics of the representation of death in general or death through genocide cannot be discussed, nor can the ethics of stating the facts that can be underpinned by no reliable witnesses (although there are proofs of death in the sense of bodily remains, for every survivor is an unreliable witness of death in the sense of their adequate representation/testimony) because the very politics of "a society [that] gradually takes form, sculpted by terror and fear" (Night and Fog), having caused a genocide, has consequentially lead to the contemporary state where there are no testimonies about it. That is not a question of ethics because the catch of the Holocaust is set in a way that, as Primo Levi states, if we try to understand it at all we are entering the matrix of productive destruction (Night and Fog) in which the gas chamber is the logical sequence in the need for effective extermination of the Other group of people, and the discourse about the perfect crime which has been created becomes futile and afterward materialized as unspeakable because there is no one who could speak it exactly and truthfully.

Shoshana Felman draws our attention to the notion that the term Shoah is used without a definite article, which is a definition of catastrophe because, from the position of a Holocaust victim, it can indeed represent a catastrophe, a causeless pogrom on an epic scale. But the thesis about the Holocaust-catastrophe is only valid from the position of the victim because Felman further states that “[t]he Jews see, but they do not understand the purpose and the destination of what they see: overwhelmed by loss and by deception, they are blind to the significance of what they witness.”

(Felman 208). Furthermore, every media representation that, in the manner of the 1968 slogan "We are all German Jews," is more or less internationally gravitating toward the position of the victim, can be seen as an act of the deepest empathy, if such an identification could be possible at all. But we are not all German Jews, even not all Jews are German Jews, and every intent for such an identification with somebody who is executed on the basis of being identified as the unwanted Other in That time and at That place is impossible. In other words, German Jews would not be exterminated during the Holocaust if they had not previously been identified as German Jews by the Nazis in the time when the Nazis were capable of committing the act of genocide, and no self-identification with Jews is possible after the process of genocide. What is also important as Lanzmann states is that self-identification was not possible even during the genocide, because the gist of the Nazi confrontation with Jews was exactly the abolition of self-identification, the forceful outlining of the boundaries of a national identity, the resignification into the Other followed by the complete annihilation of the Other, i.e., the complete de-subjectivization. All the operations during the Holocaust: the legal regulation of the restrictions on movement, the forceful self-identification (followed by stigmatization), the ghettoization, the dislocation, the deprivation of property and personal belongings, the forced labor, the torture, and killings are only actions leading to de-subjectivization and to imposing the complete regulation of human life practices, the political authority over death – the ultimate dominion, as well as the (bio) power over life to all its extents (Foucault, “Right”).

In the case of the Holocaust film, the opposite pole of the same process which had started in the Third Reich would be the politically correct discourse of the winning side and an agreement on the dual-polarization, where both sides represent a construct of absolute good, i.e., of absolute evil. That discourse is found almost in its original shape in Spielberg, because by polarization between Good and Evil in Schindler's List he skillfully circumvents the possibility of any identification of the audience with the Nazi politics which, while it does fulfill the Ethical code, a priori deprives the viewers of the right to any kind of judgment that escapes the frames of the correct politics.

The ethics of Holocaust representation is dealing with the issue of properly distinguishing between Good and Evil, but as stressed earlier, it is also the only all-encompassing consensus on the discourse about the Holocaust. By depicting Holocaust as an absolute, but also a transcendent

Evil, we can follow the ethical code but we can neither see through the phenomenon of the Holocaust nor can we grasp the politics that produced it. This is why in the context of modes of representation and on the axis of ignorance-knowing the ethical debate is not adequate in obtaining the knowledge. The ethical dimension can only be a foundation for the production of politics which according to its proactive character contains the potential of dealing with the subject of the Holocaust. The ethical act of standing up for the victim, i.e., siding with Good – against Evil, contains an oversight about (self)victimization as a consequence of the de-subjectivization process because otherwise the victim of the Holocaust does not contain the status of a victim. Accordingly, whether we speak from the position of the victim or in the name of the victim, the pattern of the politics of Evil which led to the Holocaust repeats two-sidedly, i.e., we either accept the de-subjectivized, passive position of the victim wherefrom it is not possible to step forward and speak, or we de-subjectivize the same subject once more by depriving her of a voice in a new way where individual speaks in the name of masses. The complexity of the Holocaust and the politics of its representation, which can take the place of the ethics of representation, is comprised in a two-sided attempt of stepping-out both from the identification with the victim and/or speaking in their name and from the almost perfect matrix of the crime, where we revolve around the thesis that the Holocaust is an undeniable crime, but is invisible at the same time.

3. Resnais: The Peaceful Landscape

I am not responsible, says the Kapo.
I am not responsible, says the officer.
I am not responsible.
Who is responsible then?
(Night and Fog)

The invisibility of the Holocaust, i.e., the representation of the invisibility through the presence of the void that the genocide left behind, built the foundations of the politics of a different kind of films that escape the aforementioned perpetual matrix of the crime. According to the comparison between the death gaze and the head of Gorgona in the context of the Holocaust (Žižek 106), the

strategy of mirror/shield which the Theseus used while confronting the epical beast was a step forward in the documentary film genre, based on the concept of cinema-truth. The first film interpreted with these concepts of the Holocaust representation in mind is Night and Fog by Alain Resnais, from 1955.

By opening the film with the sentence: “Even a peaceful landscape … can lead to a concentration camp,” Resnais is accepting this thesis that Evil does not have an inherent shape of appearance, which Hannah Arendt will later formulate by explaining the notion – ‘banality of evil’ on the factual level.[4] To paraphrase Arendt, we see at the very beginning that the crime of Holocaust proportions can happen in "every landscape," even in a peaceful one, but it also "did not happen in any landscape,"[5] and consequently, at the very beginning, the author is intentionally rejecting the idea of Evil as an absolute category and chooses the unstable ground for looking at Evil through its factual composition.

Working with facts in case of the film Night and Fog is composed of Resnais's archaeological practice of discovering so-called responsibility or Truth, and what he calls the blood that has dried up, or as Foucault adds – "the blood that has dried in the codes"[6] (Foucault, “Society” 56). By capturing the peaceful landscape here and now, Resnais is introducing the kino-eye as a visitor, the objective eye of the cinematic apparatus which with wonder and without emotion, and unburdened by the absent truth about the Holocaust, moves through the landscape with the sound of pastoral music. The next scene introduces the flashback frame from 1933, positioned in a way that connects the rise of Fascism and the work done on creating and maintaining the Third Reich with the work on/construction of the concentration camps, which is underlining the similarity of the economy of such labor with the work done on building hotels and stadiums. The depicted pluralism of the architectural styles in building the watchtowers underlies the idea that the concentration camp is not a specific architectural shape, just like planning the death of a people is not a job which is different from the job of a merchant, a student, or a worker. The work on genocide is not a job that requires extraordinary preparations, a particular mindset, a special kind of secrecy, but only a businesslike dedication and discretion in order to, suddenly, bring about certain actions that in the eyes of the whole world get symbolized to the level of the absolute Evil, and although those

actions were constantly present in an absurd way, similar to the way that Hemingway's character Mike from The Sun Also Rises explained his own bankruptcy – "gradually, then suddenly" (136).

Resnais poses the question of how to recognize an executioner today – "Are their faces really different from ours?" – and at the same time, he clearly positions himself toward the impossibility of finding the testimony, for neither the Proof nor the Truth is found in plain sight, and the materiality of Truth belongs to the field that is drifting away, to the night and fog. Furthermore, he does not approach the concepts of night and fog in a symbolical sense but by juxtaposing them to the post-genocidal, sun-bathed landscape, and he refers them to the Nazi politics NN (Nacht und Nebel), which was a marker of the perfect crime at the time, as well as to Himler's directions from December 1941, on strategy for the Final solution to the Jewish question. Resnais, therefore, sees the Holocaust, i.e., the issue of the absence of Holocaust from film truth, in the sense of Zizekian definition of the Musselman – "The Real without its symbolic Truth"; the real state devoid of a way to "symbolize", i.e., to organize itself in a meaningful,[7] lifelike narration (Žižek 103). The dangers of such a perspective are accentuated by Žižek further in the text when he speaks about a dehumanized victim and the importance of insisting on reinstating their corporeality and subjectivity, for otherwise, even though accident, the Nazi politics that birthed the crime gets perpetuated. In order to evade the trap of the impossible symbolization, Resnais uses Vertov's strategy of editing – ‘kontrapunkt’, where the image is dialectically juxtaposed to the sound, namely the voice. Only together are the cinematic image and the off-screen narrator’s voice capable of creating the purpose in the viewers by establishing the relationship between the signified (the image) and the signifier (the sound). The discrepancy between what is heard and what is seen, the swift transition between the two realities, the one of the image and the other of the sound, represents the regression of the film’s evolution as a media – returning to the logic of the silent cinema. The very discrepancy between the "peaceful landscape" and the narrative of the crime is the effect of the editing process – a political act (an attempt) of stepping out of the boundaries of representation determined by Nazism.

In the used archival footage, the eye of the camera is the eye of the murderer and the eye misses out everything outside of the established ethics of the Third Reich. The frames of the red, pink, and green triangles and the yellow stars show an arbitrary and incomprehensible classification, similar

to one of officers, maids and chimneysweepers (Dolar), but it spreads further and branches onto the new divisions amongst the prisoners, the guards and their ranks, endlessly inside a perfect bureaucratic structure in which the chain of responsibility is entangled and the matrix of the crime is perpetuated, which presents the absurdity of the atrocity as a morally perverted (i.e., Kantian) categorical imperative of bare respect for the moral law![8] The spectator sees the prisoners and assumes that there is a reason why they are clothed in striped uniforms and why their personal hygiene has to be insisted upon; the spectator assumes the Law, but also the banality of that Law, and the hierarchy which stems from it unravels through the absurdity which we are witnessing as viewers, and in that cynical trap of the Nazi imagery which tells us that the victim should be experienced as a convict, because we see him as a convict, although we do not know that he has been convicted by the highest level, an evasive level that classifies but is beyond the Law of classification. The Law is personified neither within the hierarchy, nor within the structure of a concentration camp, and those who perform it are not responsible for it. As Eichmann claimed during the trial, following the Law and acting accordingly is a kind of moral imperative. There is no mechanism within the political image which is backed by the politics of the Law that could prove that victims are not rightfully in prison where they would be "liberated" by forced labor; but before that happens, they have to be hygienically adequate, stripped to bare skin and skin-headed. Thus, everything comes together and becomes clear, and so the Law is spiteful while it presents its content, and the politics of a perfect crime is set as an obstacle to a discussion about ethics while we speak about the Holocaust, because in the matrix of the politics of genocide there is no representation of Truth which the post-genocidal society expects to find.

By making the first look a "forensic eye," which comes after the committed crime, the eye that sees the victim as unidentified human material at the end of a completely logical process, Resnais is exactly accomplishing the effect of her re-subjectivization but not through or within the process of making the film, because he is taking the radical stance that victim does not exist in the post-genocidal landscape and as such it escapes the other look, i.e., the kino-eye. The subjectivization is found in the third, parallax view – in the eye of the viewer which is juxtaposed to the economy of the excavator machine that is pushing the bodies in the mass grave, and it defies the Real while it looks at a hair without a head, a skin without a body and a body without an identity/Figuren;[9] by

way of its own politics that arrives from outside of the matrix of the crime. Upon confronting the scene of the finalization of the job that began in 1933, it is impossible to go back to the peaceful landscape while knowing that in the present moment "the icy water of the ponds and ruins fills the hollows of the mass graves" (Night and Fog), and the victims are already revealed to the eye of the viewer and their blood has flown once more. Shoshana Felman describes such an incarnation as a resurrection of the victim so that he bears witness to his own death, a resurrection that neither negates or cancels out the death, but on the contrary, presents the arrival and intervention of "the living voice of a dead man" (Felman 216), the Voice from the grave into the silence which ensues and lasts after his death.

4. Lanzmann: Absence of the End

When does the Holocaust really end? Did it end the last day of the war? Did it end with the creation of the State of Israel? No. It still goes on. These events are of such magnitude, of such scope that they have never stopped developing their consequences … When I really had to conclude I decided that I did not have the right to do it … And I decided that the last image of the film would be a rolling train, an endlessly rolling … train. Claude Lanzmann] (qtd. in Felman 242)[1] te>

Shoah is a nine-hour long film by Claude Lanzmann which begins thirty-four years after Resnais's Night and Fog. The opening scene in this film, as in Resnais's, shows the landscape of the present, but what Lanzmann does differently is using a completely different strategy in searching for the Truth of the Holocaust. Shoah is a film within the boundaries of the documentary sub-genre which excludes the use of historical material in the process of editing and insists on the unity of space and time (here and now), the unity of image and sound, with active use of camera so that it provokes the speaking subjects. The film is comprised of the series of in-depth interviews whose action takes place exclusively in the present, during which the storyline of the film never goes back to the past visually, but only with narration because Lanzmann wants the interviewees to feel active, i.e., to reconstruct the past in front of the camera. In the text "The Return of the Voice," Shoshana Felman analyses in detail the problems with the testimonies of the witnesses which the film indexes (the testimonies in the film and also, according to Felman, every other testimony about the Holocaust). One of the key problems is that the crime of Holocaust proportions does not leave

any (eye)witnesses behind, anyone that sees the whole picture and is capable of representing the master narrative about the crime, because the survivors can directly testify only about its dimension that is speakable, particular (micro-narrational), and trauma-free.

The film Shoah is conceptualized as a series of testimonies of people who were directly involved in the Holocaust, and from whom three groups of (eye)witnesses can be selected: the victims, the bystanders, and the perpetrators, who in certain moments find themselves on the premises of the crime, or at dislocated settings that possess strong references to the place where the crime/action in question happened. Sorting the interviewees into three groups, according to Felman, the film presents three different perspectives, and the Spectator is, therefore, given a heterogeneous perspective. At the same time, he identifies as the one who sees that he moves but does not know where before he hears the voice (the Victim); he identifies with the look that sees but it refuses to look, i.e., it refuses to believe that what it faces is the evil in its banality (the Bystander); and the hardest identification is the one where he faces the depth of that evil by lifting the veil of its discretion, with the eye of the professional (the Perpetrator), a business-like identification devoid of emotional investment. Although he feels empathy, aversion, and abjection toward what he sees, the spectator is allowed neither to internalize the speech or to identify with one or more participants, because they only keep their own voice, the voice of the first-person singular. Thus, even when they speak in plural, in front of the unnamed group they belong to (whether they are Jews, policemen, Poles, hairdressers, or men), Lanzmann's interrogation is persistent in directing them back to the first person and their singular position outside of a group.

One of the strongest themes of this film is silence, because although the film is conceptualized on the interviews, sometimes even on aggressive questioning, Lanzmann himself noticed that silence dominates over the words. In the artistic context, the lack of words could be interpreted as an absence of death from language, the unspeakable nature of the Holocaust, or as a pure image, an image without its connotative determination. The content of that image is a landscape, the peaceful landscape of genocide, which fails to establish a meaning. The spectator sees the landscape, he sees the movement but there is no poetry (as in Resnais's film), there is no kontrapunkt in the narration which would imagine that landscape. Therefore, Lanzmann insists on speech act, on questions, and he deconstructs the silence which ensued after the genocide. Some have died, some have returned home, some have stayed home and some are in asylum – Lanzmann gathers

them all, he looks for them, and he directs them to the places where it is crucial that the silence which they exist in be disturbed and disintegrated, so that the topographic elements could be reconnected outside of fiction. However, at this point, the analysis is not concerned with the symbolic signification (pasture = death, lake = blood) but specifically with the materialistic practice of signification (pasture = mass grave, lake = ashes). The speech act in Shoah is not important only because of its signifying function, or because it realistically or symbolically abolishes the silence, but mainly because of its performative character. In the moment of the act the participants are performing their narration by speaking, thus making their (hi)stories come alive, and take place "here and now," and therefore (re)actualize themselves. The acts such as Srebnik and Suchomel singing, Bomba cutting hair, Gawkowski driving the train, are strategies of reenactment which, similar to the therapeutic one, evoke a trauma, not in the attempt to overcome the trauma as a stage in the process of healing, but in the sense of a self-sufficient transgression of the speech limitation imprinted by the trauma. On the other hand, Lanzmann's statements (“go on,” “you have to,” “please,” “we have to do it,” etc.) remind us undoubtedly of the role of authority in Milgram's experiment. It is fascinating that although at no point he is stating the reason for his perseverance (which thus, as in the Experiment, presents itself as self-sufficient, self-evident), all interviewees do what they are being asked to do - they continue to decanonize the silence (Felman xix).

In transgression of speech Felman recognizes the Speech as valuable in itself and accentuates the role of a transgressor and a breaker in the very process of transgression of the silence (Felman 218), and it could be seen as a practice of deconstruction and/or overcoming the limitations of representation in the case of the master-5narrative on the Holocaust. At another instance, when she speaks about Lanzmann's strategies of transgression, Felman calls them particular details and obvious trivialities which gradually lead to the disintegration of the canonized descriptions/depictions of the Holocaust and redirect the genocide from the position of its semantic point of the murder of a genome (an abstract homogeneous category) back to the collective murder (the congregation of a humongous number of particular cases). By leaning onto this practice, we can reconstruct the politics which shapes this film, i.e., an attempt of such a politics to deal with the formed master-narrative of the Holocaust and further media reproduction, and even further exploitation of such a perspective of its representation.

The concept of representation is essentially leaning onto the finality of what needs to be shown,

and since Lanzmann sees Holocaust as an actuality, he films it in that manner: he shoots it in the present, but he does not project it – he performs it while keeping the foundation of his interpretation of the concept of the Holocaust as a product of a large number of different, but not necessarily special humans whose success is based on a huge apparatus of shared responsibility, which was successfully restrained, but which can also, in any moment, be set in motion because it absolutely coincides with the human everyday actions. What Shoah shows is that the question of meaning, when we talk about the Holocaust, surfaces at the end, and only after certain work on the conceptualization of practices that had been brought to it has been done. As an author Lanzmann is completely giving up that work and instead, he insists on development and reenactment of the mechanism of trivial human practices which under certain conditions and in a certain way consequentially lead to the Holocaust. By using reenactment, he discovers how simple it is to induce actions that are outside of the boundaries of meaningful actions or, on the contrary, he does not problematize the frame of the barely hinted reason or aim at all. The act of murder as the act of singing in such an interpretation becomes only one of the activities whose expected Meaning (that the master-narrative of the Holocaust constructs and retroactively uses it to explain a causal connection between action and effect contained in the crime) is completely absent on the one side, and in that absence, it is mistaken for trivialities. Activities that are described in detail, such as the dedicated hairdressing of a woman before her death, drinking vodka while driving a train toward the murder site, moving into the apartment of executed Jews, fixing a crematorium furnace, or closing the door of a gas chamber and the other described activities - deconstruct the elements of crime to the sum of simple actions, which coincide with themselves in the context in which they came to be, and which at the same time reproduce the context ad infinitum. The basic political decision which stands behind Lanzmann's film is the claim that the Holocaust is not over and that is why it is impossible to make a film with a happy ending. Resnais calls that state a "war nods" whose presence with "one eye always open" is exactly seen as its biggest threat and its biggest consequence. Therefore, it is impossible to speak of the end of the Holocaust as an epic victory over Evil when the end came as a nod off to sleep and was marked only by ending the aforementioned trivial activities, but not with the final transformation of the context which made their accomplishment possible. The simultaneous obscenity and the danger of the presence of the Holocaust are not based on the (im)possibility to conceptualize the transcendence of Evil, but on

the factually founded thesis that Shoah brings up and proves by a radical experiment – that a crime of those proportions is much harder to represent with dignity than it is to induce and/or reproduce in the same manner.

5. Farocki: The Dead Gaze

Architects calmly design the gates meant to be passed through only once. Meanwhile, Burger, a German worker, Stern, a Jewish student in Amsterdam, Schmulski, a merchant in Krakow, and Annette, a schoolgirl in Bordeaux, go about their daily lives, not knowing a place is being prepared, for them hundreds of miles away. (Night and Fog)

Twenty-five years after Lanzmann's Shoah in Serbia in 2010, a short documentary film Respite (2007) by the Czech-German director Harun Farocki was screened for the first time. The film is in the form of a silent film essay "against the cinema and against the television" (cf. Ehmann and Eshun),[11] and it is composed of segments of a Nazi propaganda film made in the Jewish refugee/transit concentration camp Westerbork in the Netherlands, accompanied by the author's intertexts. The author asks the question of how, when and under what conditions a public remembrance of the Holocaust was formed and what the matter of that memory is, as well as of the nature of the artistic strategies of implementation of the newly-discovered/available documentary material that could fit into the body of the memory. Does the resurrection of testimony contribute to forming a broader discourse of the Holocaust?

The footage used in the film Respite was filmed by Rudolph Breslauer, one of the prisoners, who was following the orders of the camp manager, and the initial purpose of the film was a propagandist action against the termination of this concentration camp in 1944, and the dislocation of the prisoners to the camps of death. What is interesting is that some of Breslauer's shots are from the same archival footage that was used by Resnais in the film Night and Fog (the frame which shows the NN sign, the scene of the girl in the train, of the old woman in a wheelchair, the frame of an SS officer with the dog on the station, but also the shots of the Westerbork ambulance, the orchestra or the scenes from the factory). The context in which Farocki is using the shots is the mediatized society of the first decade of the twenty-first century, and the film is conceptualized as an absurdity of the media representation – the completed process of editing of a marketing film for

a concentration camp with a visual identity (the logo, the illustrations, and the ads), which should affirm the usage of cheap Jewish workforce, a "self-sufficiency" which relies on the concept of the usability of Jews/slaves.

The primary film text is not finished and all its authors/prisoners, including Breslauer, ended their lives in the camps of death during the following several months of 1944.

Farocki is for the first time exhibiting the materials on concentration-camps-which-actually-are-not-concentration-camps that show scenes of real dental ambulances, factories, and orchestras without any ironic or lyrical remarks, which Resnais also used to accompany the same film shots. In Farocki's film, there are no cross-cuttings with gas chambers which did not exist in Westerbork – the dental ambulances are truly ambulances that perform dental work, and the factories do not recycle hair, but cables and old car batteries. Besides using the obvious similarity with Spielberg's scene of a gas chamber which turns out to be a bathroom, in what other way does Farocki succeed in evading a similar controversy? There are two methods that he applies: the first method is cinematic because through the procedure of editing Farocki is unintentionally creating dramatic tension, but he still succeeds in dealing with the cliche of the ethical code of the concentration camp representation (emblemizing the gas chamber as a universal signifier of the Holocaust [concentration camp = gas chamber]); and the other method is artistic/conceptual because it succeeds in overcoming the trap of diminishing the consequences of the Holocaust by the intertextual implementation, which contextualizes the silent image. The image in Farocki is silent so that the media character of an empty signifier could be accentuated, which in the context of the Žižek-Lacanian interpretation of S-I-R could represent the document of the Real (concentration camp), whose symbolical connection to the viewers' Imaginary (concentration camp = gas chamber) has to be deconstructed (concentration camp ≠ gas chamber) by the obstructing intervention of screening the intertext of a new Imaginary (concentration camp = forceful imprisonment), which establishes a new symbolic order trough the new signification process (although concentration camp ≠ gas chamber / concentration camp = forceful labor and imprisonment), and it enables its comprehension (concentration camp = war crime) and not its rejection (concentration camp ≠ war crime).

By focusing onto the scenes of variety entertainment, theatre nights, ambulances, or gymnastic classes, and by showing the prisoners in their clothes or work uniforms, where only the yellow

bands are witnessing their deprival of freedom, Farocki deals with the problem of the cliche depictions of concentration camps and questions the potential of transmission but also the reception of the newly established truths by the film media. Even sixty years after the end of the war, these materials still represent the subjugated knowledge that was waiting in the bunker for the moment when the real danger of the Holocaust denial would end. So, what does Farocki's representation of the Holocaust consist of, what knowledge or truth does he offers to the viewer different from the revisionist practice of softening the post-genocidal responsibility?

Although from the other side of death there is no testimony, Farocki spotted the death gaze[12] in the train shot, which was also used by Resnais, but Farocki held it much longer. In Shoah, Lanzmann has in many instances accentuated the position of the Victim, the one who experiences Evil but cannot comprehend it, because she is not presented with its bigger picture. The Victim, according to the Nazi scenario has gone through a segment of or the whole process of dehumanization and was stopped at the crossroads to the gas chamber, the Musselman, or the salvation. Neither in the case of the gas chamber nor the Musselman is there a semantic component of trauma representation, in the former case because the testimony got thwarted by the physical, and in the latter the psychological death of the subject, because in both of these cases the process is irreversible. In the case of salvation, there is no material component of the survivor's testimony because the very material of memory does not exist, i.e., death is not memorable, and accordingly, it is not possible both to describe it as a direct personal experience and bear witness to it at the same time. Breslauer and his crew have by mere chance caught the lucid gaze from the other side of death on camera, in the eyes of a female prisoner who is taking off on a one-way train track. This phenomenon probably happened because of the precedent that in Westerbork the cinema-eye is a possible eye of the Victim and because mass executions might have been discussed in 1944. The horror in the eyes of the girl who is peeking from the train (which is the content of the entire shot) is the only discrepancy in the film which would completely serve the purpose of proving to the Third Reich and the whole world that Westerbork should be preserved (and not dismissed) as the basis of the new German economy and the New World Order. Although probably it would be scrapped in the editing process for the German war propaganda production, this shot circumstantially ended up in the archives. The interesting thing is that the connotation of the same shot was changed in the case of Night and Fog, where next to the shots of the piles of

bodies and hair not only is it not the most horrific one, but it also illustrates the thesis of Lanzmann's interviewee on the particular truth of the witness and the absence of the awareness of the prisoner about the nature of the last destination while being transported by the train. In Farocki, the gaze of the girl is the gaze of death, a death that is certain at the moment although it is happening in the future. The girl is not a witness in Lanzmann's sense of the Voice, because Respite is conceptually a silent film, and she is not the Musselman who is faced with the trauma of death and extinction; her experience does not contain the experience of the forthcoming death;[13] but she does certainly possess the knowledge which Lanzmann's characters lacked in organizing the undefined trauma of uncertainty in the concrete horror of the certain and horrific imminent death, which usually took place far away from the kino eye, but against the walls of the camp of death or in the dark of the gas chamber. That fear was dispersed by a hope, an internal "lie repeated often enough and it becomes the truth,"[14] but even that hope is not visible in this shot of the girl from the train. Her distraught gaze is equivalent to the Voice of the resurrected dead witness from the Warsaw ghetto that Felman wrote about. Respite is in that sense summarizing Holocaust in only one shot, by an auto-critical and estranged representation of the lucid moments in the sea of absurdity and media-induced/mediated acts and their cinematic images.

6. A Few Final Thoughts: The (Im)Possibility of Fiction

… Those who take hope again as the image fades,
as though there were a cure for the scourge of the camps ...
Those who pretend all this happened only once,
at a certain time and in a certain place.
Those who refuse to look around them...
(Night and Fog)[15]

Lanzmann said in one of the interviews (Felman 242-53) that in spite of the fact he was born a Jew, initially, he felt as a French citizen, and only during the war he faced his Jewishness. Namely, he met his Otherness, so until the first time he visited Israel in 1962 he repeatedly experienced the concept of Jewishness (in Sartreian terms) as an anti-semitic construct of identity, based on the concept of Otherness, and then gradually he reached his own identification and political

subjectivization (Felman 242-48). This biblio-geographical tone is crucial to understanding the weight of the process, which is almost impossible to accomplish through a film, and which refers to the giving-back of the subjectivity to the victims because most of the films are satisfied by a clear definition of the identity of the victim and by its placement in the formed, mainly politically correct discourse. Film Kapò (1959) by Gillo Pontecorvo is among the films with flaws in the aforementioned initial stages because of the attempts to universalize a particular victim's right upon establishing her identity. The problematic scene of the suicide of a Jewish woman on the electric fence is wrong because neither she nor any other individual could be a unique signifier of genocide. Her death can both be and not be tragic, but the camera in motion and the close-up of death, which her act and the decision to take her own life lift to the level of sacrifice and the metaphor for the whole nation, are the barbarian poetry in terms of Adorno. In the domain of the Holocaust representations where art and politics meet, it could mean that all practices using fiction and the strategy of aestheticization in the traditional way (the tracking shot in Kapò, color correction in Schindler's List[16]) are nothing else but Benjaminian 'aestheticization of politics' of Nazism.

On the contrary, Rancières's concept of 'the politics of aesthetics' introduces a possibility for art as a representational practice to escape the culturally defined symbolic frame and get closer to the truth, and therefore to fulfill the ethical imperative when dealing with the Holocaust. Rancière anticipates the next stage which would be the politicization of aesthetics as a process that subjectivizes art and restores it to the antique concept of the art of inherent narrational truth (poiesis), contrary to the author's theatrical lie (mimesis). Based on such differentiation of concepts, Rancière reaches the issue of the difference between the documentary and the feature film, where the political truth (not being the abstract truth itself) of a documentary film should follow poiesis while the feature film stays in the domain of the author's ethics and the happiness of a performative![17] While discussing the politicization of aesthetics, Rancière introduces the concept of 'subjectivization', i.e., of the becoming of a political subject as one of the key concepts, and as a moment when the individual frees herself from the imposed identities and ceases to represent any of the dominant political discourses.

The topography of the Holocaust crime is spread all over Europe — and that fact escapes the ethical question of establishing responsibility on the level of the individual participant or the level of

a nation. Hannah Arendt, in the context of the Eichmann trial in Israel, states the Jaspers' thesis that we should relate to the Holocaust, due to its inherent banality and smooth performance, as to the case that "concerns all of humanity," and that it is in the interest of the whole world to accept the responsibility for not preventing the Holocaust, and not to treat it as an isolated act limited only to the extermination of a single nation. For Arendt, it is exactly the admittance of collective worldwide responsibility that is the key in foreseeing and preventing any possibility that the Holocaust could become a model of the perfect crime and the foundation of another genocide (Arendt 126).

Presently, after the war in Bosnia, these words sound like a testimony to the self-fulfilling prophecy, which we can sadly identify as completely true and useless at the same time (see: Pavle Levi).[18] The aforementioned studies of films related to the historical axis of Germany, and thus the global moral shift on relation Hitler-Adenauer-Brandt. The interpretations of films in this work are examples of politics that have emerged despite the consensuses that were in effect at the time, and also anticipated their shifts, and they could be identified as the social actions of subjugated politics of artistic practices. Resnais's film was made in the era of Adenauer, though in France, because in Germany at the time it was not possible to make such a film.[19] His politics relates to the urgency of the exhumation of the crime and anti-war actions in the moment of the French-Algerian war, whereby he goes beyond the dominant political discourse of post-war reconciliation which excludes discovery of the crime's nature and acceptance of the responsibility. Lanzmann's Shoah from 1985 was made in the era after the trials of Nazi crimes, after Brandt's historical act of honoring the victims of Auschwitz and the acknowledgment of the Holocaust, which in a way ended the process of accepting the responsibility. The political act of contradicting the dominant discourse in the media that Shoah initiates is an introduction of the concept of Holocaust perpetuity. His theses about the inadequate happy-ending, a resolution in which life goes on, answers the question Who was the film addressed to? by revealing that even if it contains the truth of the survivors, it returns to the dead by using the thesis on the impossibility of continuation and irreparability of the damage caused by the pogrom.

In the end, it is impossible not to ask oneself in what way we are approaching the concept of genocide and how we represent it to ourselves and others. Instead of summarizing the politics that Farocki introduced in Respite, this could be presented by my impression from one of the

continuous screenings during the exhibition at the October Salon[20] in Belgrade. Namely, the curator walked into the exhibition room with a group of visitors whom she addressed only with a few sentences: "This is a film by Harun Farocki about the Nazi concentration camp for Jews in Westerbork, in the Netherlands. Here you see the prisoners recycling human hair and teeth. Horrible. We don't have to stay here any longer unless you want to ruin your day." So, everybody left. Except for being only partially correct, this statement fits exactly the global post-war consensus about the discourse on the Holocaust, and it performs the ethical duties with a few phrases/universalized facts and examples of the scandalous Evil which the Holocaust materializes — initially, mourning is expressed, and then everybody goes about their own business and forgets about it all. The reason might be found in the fact that the evil of genocide is truly unbearable and difficult to comprehend for a human being, but, in Resnais's words, it is not more perverse than the fact that those words were spoken in Serbia, a country which at the time (2010), fifteen years after the war in Bosnia ended, was with several active charges of genocide. "However, in order to speak about Normality that should cure all the abnormal Serbian antagonisms, the very area of the national thing had to be mapped out and outlined, i.e., the line between the Serbian and non-Serbian had to be drawn. That line, in contemporary history, is drawn by the methods summarized in the well-known chant "Nož-Žica-Srebrenica" (Knife-Wire-Srebrenica), i.e., by the genocide that was planned and executed by the political elites that called upon the ideology of Greater Serbia. Therefore, the genocide is not simply one of the Serbian problems, a result of the antagonisms that are possible to suppress by Normality. The genocide is a peculiar "original sin," that which is excluded so that the field of Serbhood could reveal itself as something that can and should be normalized. Within that frame, the genocide is deemed unspeakable. That is one of the reasons why the question of genocide cannot be articulated in an either-or format. It leaves us no choice. (Jovanović 4)

Unfortunately, the only conclusion is that Respite was neither a film nor an essay that could be possible to comprehend in Serbia in the 2010s, not even in the semi-autonomous sphere of projections inside an art exhibition. The local social and political context was and still is similar to that of Adenauer's post-war Germany while it awaits its new Night and Fog stuck in the era of silence and oblivion, denial and re-counting the victims, and not even close to the general consensus beyond the statement Genocide is wrong.

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[2] “Whoever saves one life saves the world entire” is a quote from Talmud paraphrased in Schindler's List, which in its original English translation is worded as follows: “Whosoever preserves a single soul of Israel, Scripture ascribes to him as if he had preserved a complete

world" (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 37a).

[3] see Night and Fog.

[4] In the epilogue of the book Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil, Arendt clarifies the subtitle itself: "For when I speak of the banality of evil, I do so only on the strictly factual level, pointing to a phenomenon which stared one in the face at the trial. Eichmann was not Iago and not Macbeth, and nothing would have been farther from his mind than to determine with Richard III 'to prove a villain.' Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all…" (Arendt 136).

[5] Politically speaking, it is that under conditions of terror most people will comply but some people will not, just as the lesson of the countries to which the Final Solution was proposed is that "it could happen" in most places but it did not happen everywhere. (Arendt 233)

[6] "It is interested in rediscovering the blood that has dried in the codes, and not, therefore, the absolute right that lies beneath the transience of history; it is interested not in referring the relativity of history to the absolute of the law, but in discovering, beneath the stability of the law or the truth, the indefiniteness of history" (Foucault, "Society" 56).

[7] The Musselman (Muslim) is, for Žižek, the outcome of dehumanization process. It is ironic that the Musselman is actually resisting the system that made him, i.e., the very purpose of imprisonment at the concentration camps was based on the concept of segregation and dehumanization of a certain group of people. However, in the camps it was expected from prisoners not to accept that concept, but to be used for labor and finally murdered, in spite of it. What happened during the process of one's becoming the Musselman is completely opposite from the expected position of a prisoner; the Musselman is not afraid, he neither pulls back nor screams while beaten; the Musselman is not willing to collaborate in order to survive, and moreover he is not willing to do anything, which makes him completely absent from the system that feeds on the logic of surveillance and punishment, and paradoxically the Musselman is usually the one who survives in the camp. Of course, that kind of survival is not a life, but what Agamben calls an apotheosis of the concept of Bare life – a life without the transcendental Truth or any established values/attributes added to the human existence through the process of civilization and symbolization, which is the reason why life does not exist in its pure form (the Real) anywhere else but through the Musselman. Hence, Žižek calls it "zero level of humanity" (Žižek 104, translated by

D.P.)

[8] Arendt relays Eichmann's relatively correct verbalization of the Kantian categorical imperative: "What I had in mind was that the principle of my will always has to be such that it can become a principle of law in general." To this he adds the remark of a robbery or murder which the robber or the murderer can not purposefully wish upon a system which would allow others to rob or murder them; however, while citing Hans Frank, Arendt mentions the Law that Eichmann talks of as "the categorical imperative in the Third Reich" according to which the individual should "[a]ct in such a way that if the Führer knew of your actions, he would condone them" (Arendt 136).

[9] As explained in Shoah: “The Germans even forbade us to use the words ‘corpse’ or ‘victim.’ The dead were blocks of wood, shit. The Germans made us refer to the bodies as Figuren, that is, as puppets, as dolls, or as Schmattes, which means ‘rags.’“

[1]

[11] See also what Volker Pantenburg describes as polemical comments on the film and television business in: Farocki.

[12] The proof of entrance into the field of an inexplicable terror is represented by another feature noted by all witnesses: the dead gaze, a kind of de-subjectivized, stiff gaze in which a passive indifference (a dimmed spark of life, of the engaged existence) coincides with the horribly intense focus as if the gaze has been frozen forever because it sees too much, because it sees what must not be seen. (Žižek 106, translated by D.P.)

[13] Because it is not possible to state with certainty, but it is in the context of knowledge that there was no corporal punishment in Westerbork, and that the logic of a death camp is founded on what Resnais calls the Nazis' cunning. (Night and Fog)

[14] The law of propaganda often attributed to the Joseph Goebbels.

[15] To refer to the subtitle: “The truth kills the possibility of fiction,” said Lanzmann in a journalistic interview. But the truth does not kill the possibility of art – on the contrary, it requires it for its transmission, for its realization in our consciousness as witnesses (Felman 206)

[16] In the critique of Schindler's List Goddard calls it "Max Factor" (Smith), by comparing the unnecessary aesthetics of the image with the irrelevance of the makeup in a concentration camp. See also: Daney, “Le travelling”; Wheeler; Rivette.

[17] According to J.L. Austin, performative utterances – performatives are truth-evaluable; instead

performatives could be “happy" or "unhappy."

[18] Pavle Levi was the first to draw a parallel with Serge Daney's critique of Kapò to emphasize the problems of the 2000s film production politics in Serbia.

[19] For detailed criticism of the Adenauer era, see: Adorno, “What Does.”

[20] In Serbia for the occasion of the October Salon screening, the title Respite is translated as „predah,“ which is closer to the meaning of ‘rest or relief from something difficult or unpleasant’, although the word also can be translated as „odgoda,“ which could be closer to the concept of the delay of the work and consequently death of the prisoners, since the German word Aufschub, means ‘postponement’ as much as it is a ‘respite‘. According to Thomas Elsaesser, “Aufgeschoben ist nicht aufgehoben,” goes a familiar phrase, to indicate that if I defer a promise or an action, it does not mean that it is cancelled. One of the pivots of the film is the idea that those who are making the film and those who perform in it are engaged in ‘delaying tactics’: the more they dismantle airplane parts, recycle batteries, strip electric wires and till the land (and, as Farocki was pleased to discover, the more Breslauer can film them doing so in ‘slow-motion’), the more they can demonstrate their usefulness.“ (Elsaesser 9)



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