

# **rites of recuperation**

## **Film and the Holocaust in Germany and the Balkans**

Dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## PREFATORY DECLARATION

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text.

The dissertation is formatted in accordance with the Modern Humanities Research Association Style Guide. Titles are given in full in the first citation.

The body of the text amounts to 79,972 words and, as such, does not exceed the word limit set by the Modern and Medieval Languages Degree Committee.

Excerpts from this dissertation and related material appeared in the following publications:

‘The Optimists’, *Kinokultura*, 22 November 2006, ed. Dina Iordanova,  
<http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/5/optimists.shtml>

‘The Cinema of the Balkans’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*,  
Vol 27, Issue 2 (June 2007), pp. 299-301.

‘An Inner Exodus: The Many Diasporas of Balkan Cinema’, *Cineaste*, Vol. XXX11,  
No. 3 (Summer 2007), Balkan Supplement, ed. Dina Iordanova.

‘Sarajevo – Trauma Revisited’, in the proceedings of *Beyond Camps and Forced Labour – Current International Research on Survivors of Nazi Persecution* (London, 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> January 2006), ed. Johannes-Dieter Steinert and Inge Weber-Newth (Osnabrück: Secolo, 2007), pp. 759-770.

‘Future Imperfect’, *European Cinema in Motion: Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Daniela Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 275-292.

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## ABSTRACT

Precisely because the workings of trauma are delayed and occulted, its belated release occasions complex questions of ownership asserted by opposing confessional or ideological camps. This thesis argues that these fraught questions are in evidence in ritual enactments and heightened film language in cinematic treatments of genocide and of the Holocaust in particular. Thus the title counterpoints, firstly, rites as religious invocation and worship, with rights in the legal and political sense; secondly, recuperation in its Freudian sense of recovery, healing or convalescence, with the opposite, Situationist application as usurpation and disempowerment.

The Holocaust has been described as a unique, unrepeatable event. While testing this claim on the filmic output of Germany in the post-war years, the thesis exposes it to further scrutiny through films of more recent genocide in a region which also suffered from the Holocaust, namely the Balkans. Filmic references from Poland serve as a cultural and geographical hinge between the two main parts of the corpus. While Claude Lanzmann and *Shoah* provide the map and compass here, and other canonical filmic treatments of the Holocaust provide key reference points, the thesis aims to cast light on the significance of less familiar material. Principal German works include several forgotten films brought to light from the Bundesfilmarchiv, and the Balkan corpus, acquired from the author's experience in that region as a film consultant, introduces many films unknown to scholarship. His own filmmaking in this field is referred to in passing.

The central enquiry concerns the role of film in the restitution of past wrongs and the healing of trauma. Tracing the genesis and progress of historical trauma through the disruptions and ellipses of filmic dramaturgy and techniques of montage, each chapter is constructed under the heading of a key psychoanalytical concept, such as latency, transference, acting-out or working-through.

The Introduction establishes a frame of reference drawn in particular from theories of trauma and representability. Chapter One outlines the dangers inherent in screen representation of the Holocaust through three contrasting types of film, fiction, documentary and archive, and proposes that more tangential approaches to extreme events tend to be the most persuasive. Chapter Two considers Germany's reaction to its perpetration of genocide in the immediate aftermath, by comparing the documentary output of the East and West German states. Chapter Three addresses the fictional rendering of the concentration camps through the experience of the victims; while Chapter Four extends this enquiry to include the contested concept of 'perpetrator trauma'. Chapters Five and Six examine the varied filmic responses of traumatized survivors: Chapter Five, through the repetition compulsion of 'acting-out', applied in this context to performative and carnivalesque responses to catastrophe; Chapter Six, through the therapeutic processes of 'working-through', associated here with the sobriety of personal testimony.

The Conclusion considers the role of film in the avoidance of genocidal repetition and the Epilogue briefly views cinema as post-genocidal diplomacy in the Balkans today.

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This study would not have been possible without the financial support of the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) and the responsibility which that entails. Project funding from CRASSH (Centre for Research in the Arts, Sciences and Humanities) enabled me to invite to Cambridge my colleague filmmakers from Germany, Albania and Macedonia to screen and discuss their films.

I should take this opportunity to thank the Newton Trust for its generous support of the European Union's International Screenplay Workshop held at Trinity Hall College in collaboration with the Cambridge University Screen Media Group; the Electors to the Tiarks German Scholarship Fund for a conference grant; and the European Commission for their invitation to give the inaugural address 'Screenplay Writing in a Multilingual Context' at the Prix Europa's 'Languages through Lenses' in Berlin; also my colleagues of the Conference of University Teachers of German for their much appreciated invitation to address them under the heading 'Film and Memory: Working with Germany's Filmmakers'.

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This thesis is dedicated to my father, Ivor Jones, BBC Foreign Correspondent and Broadcaster (1916-1990) and my mother, Jane Ann Jones (née Sterndale Bennett), Poet and Translator, with regrets that it was not undertaken sooner.

# CONTENTS

PREFATORY DECLARATION.....	2
ABSTRACT .....	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	4
CONTENTS .....	6
 INTRODUCTION: Traumata and Transmission .....	 10
An Evening with Claude Lanzmann .....	10
Conspiracies of Silence .....	12
Retrieving the Irretrievable .....	13
Provocation and Possession .....	14
Chain of Title .....	16
Rites of Recuperation .....	17
Past myths, future memories .....	20
Trauma Theory and the Holocaust .....	21
Collective Trauma .....	26
The German and Balkan Genocides .....	28
 1. PERSEUS’S MIRROR: Tangential Approaches to Traumatic Recall .....	 31
The Ghost of Stills Photography .....	31
Redeeming an Icon .....	33
The Perpetrating Camera .....	39
Slaying the Gorgon .....	41
The Jewish Witness .....	45
Archive and Witness .....	49
Film as Ritual .....	51
Therapy and Propaganda .....	53
Holocaust as Spectacle .....	55
 2. REPRESSION: A Strange Case of Traumatic Amnesia .....	 59
Rites of Mourning .....	59
Evidence and Avoidance .....	61

A Cinema of Sackcloth .....	62
Documentaries from the East .....	63
<i>Majdanek</i> .....	63
<i>Memento</i> .....	66
<i>Mahnung und Verpflichtung</i> .....	68
<i>Exkursion</i> .....	69
<i>Der Mann an der Rampe</i> .....	70
<i>Spuren</i> .....	71
Documentaries from the West .....	72
<i>Der Prozeß</i> .....	73
<i>Der gelbe Stern</i> .....	77
<i>Das neue Hamburg</i> .....	79
The Holocaust and the Balkans .....	80
<i>The Optimists</i> .....	81
An Albanian Reposte .....	84
<i>I dashur armik/Dear Enemy</i> .....	85
3. LATENCY: The Trauma Of The Victim.	
Concentration Camp as Traumatic Self-discovery .....	87
L'univers concentrationnaire .....	87
Out of the Rubble .....	88
<i>Die Mörder sind unter uns</i> .....	89
Countercurrents .....	91
<i>Ehe im Schatten</i> .....	92
<i>Nackt unter Wölfen</i> .....	94
<i>Ein Tag</i> .....	102
<i>Jakob der Lügner</i> .....	107
<i>Sterne/Zvezdi</i> .....	111
Auschwitz and Absence .....	118

4. TRANSFERENCE: The Trauma Of The Perpetrator.	
Concentration Camp as Self-Inflicted Trauma .....	120
Retrieval and Responsibility .....	120
<i>Aus einem deutschen Leben</i> .....	122
<i>Pasażerka/Die Passagierin</i> .....	134
<i>Der Vorleser/The Reader</i> .....	138
<i>Der Untergang</i> .....	141
<i>Kolonel Bunker</i> .....	145
Transference and Transmission .....	151
5. ACTING OUT: The Trauma Of The Survivor (1)	
Performative Repetition and the Return of the Repressed .....	153
Surviving .....	154
<i>Lang ist der Weg</i> .....	155
<i>Der Passagier – Welcome to Germany</i> .....	158
<i>Die Fälscher</i> .....	165
Carnival and carnage .....	170
The Return of Film as History .....	177
6. WORKING THROUGH: The Trauma of the Survivor (2)	
Concentration Camp as Testimony .....	179
Teaching Film, Teaching Trauma .....	180
Sarajevo – the scandal of the double survivor .....	183
<i>Rikica</i> .....	184
<i>Greta</i> .....	187
Trauma, Justice and Therapy .....	192
Janus and Future History .....	193
<i>Magic Eye</i> or ‘Lying Eye’? .....	194
Orphans and Outlaws .....	196
CONCLUSION	
Film as Trauma .....	201
Traumata Past and Future .....	203



EPILOGUE	
Cinema as Traumatic Diplomacy .....	207
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	209
FILMOGRAPHY .....	218

# INTRODUCTION

## Traumata and Transmission

Wir müssen vielmehr behaupten, dass das psychische Trauma, respektive die Erinnerung an dasselbe, nach Art eines Fremdkörpers wirkt, welcher noch lange Zeit nach seinem Eindringen als gegenwärtig wirkendes Agens gelten muss.<sup>1</sup>

Hölderlin's statement that "what remains is what the poets found" ("Was bleibt, stiften die Dichter")[...] means that the poetic word is the one that is always situated in the position of a remnant and that can, therefore, bear witness [...] as what actually survives the possibility, or impossibility, of speaking.<sup>2</sup>

## An Evening with Claude Lanzmann

The maker of *Shoah* (1985), the longest and arguably the definitive film of the Holocaust, famously refused to inquire into the psyche of the perpetrator, insisting on 'the obscenity of understanding' in a provocative, even spectacular intervention during an event that Cathy Caruth, with mild humour, styles 'An Evening with Claude Lanzmann',<sup>3</sup> an evening in April 1990 that did not go to plan. Invited to America to analyse Rolf Orthel's film on the Dutch Nazi doctor Eduard Wirths, together with an invited audience of New England psychoanalysts, Lanzmann previews the film alone and, appalled at its apparent rehabilitation by stealth of a Nazi criminal, refuses to allow the screening to take place or to have it discussed. Introducing Lanzmann to his baffled audience, a clearly embarrassed Shoshana Felman quotes critics on *Shoah* as being 'the film event of the century' and comments on 'the amazing psychoanalytic presence of Claude Lanzmann on screen', adding 'both the film and psychoanalysis institute a quest of memory' and 'both work at the limit of understanding'. She then cites Lanzmann's 'compatriot' Jacques Lacan:

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<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Über den psychischen Mechanismus hysterischer Phänomene: Vorläufige Mitteilung', (Breuer und Freud, aus dem 'Neurologischen Zentralblatt', 1893), *Gesammelte Werke*, I, ed. Anna Freud et al (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999), pp. 81-98, here p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> Cathy Caruth, 'The Obscenity of Understanding: An Evening with Claude Lanzmann', *Trauma, Explorations in Memory*, ed. Caruth (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 200-220.

Interpreting is an altogether different thing from having the fancy of understanding. One is the opposite of the other. I will even say that it is on the basis of a certain refusal of understanding that we open the door onto psychoanalytic understanding.<sup>4</sup>

And finally, Lanzmann himself:

It is enough to formulate the question in simplistic terms – Why have the Jews been killed? – for the question to reveal right away its obscenity.... Not to understand was my iron law during all the eleven years of the production of *Shoah* [...] Because the act of transmitting is the only thing that matters, and no intelligibility, that is to say no true knowledge, pre-exists the process of transmission.<sup>5</sup>

With passionate gallic wit Lanzmann lambasts the offending film and clearly takes his audience by storm, as he inveighs against the *canaileries* which trivialize the Holocaust, in this case the attempt to ‘understand’ the development of a Nazi criminal by means of a film psychogram. (“How was he?” and they say “Oh, he was a very good man, a very nice man,” and so on and so forth. And the viewer has to become complacent with these Nazi women with mater dolorosa faces...’). His tone then hardens to reject Wirths’ suicide as a recognition of guilt (‘Hitler, Goebbels, Himmler...they just wanted to escape, to *escape justice* and *escape execution*, and to *escape the truth*, and to *escape history*...They knew perfectly what was the magnitude of the event, they knew perfectly the horror of the crime.’) Having raised these crucial issues of justice, he then counterpoints Wirths’ suicide with that of his own sister, as incommensurate facts incapable of comparison, his English clearly buckling under the ‘impossibility of speaking’,<sup>6</sup> but not before the crucial:

We are all victims of this conspiracy of silence. There are many ways of being silent. There are some good ways, and there are some very bad ways as well.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 203-204.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See Agamben above.

To talk too much about the Holocaust is a way of being silent, and a bad way of being silent. This happens in this country (USA) too often, to my taste.<sup>7</sup>

### Conspiracies of Silence

*Mutatis mutandis*, we are to varying degrees victims of, and accomplices in, many other conspiracies of silence beside that of the Holocaust. Regardless of the virtues or otherwise of *Shoah*, one can respect Lanzmann's insistence on 'transmission' before 'understanding', especially in an age where Holocaust denial and amnesia are becoming routine along with compassion fatigue for more recent genocide. The passionate *parti pris* with which Lanzmann tells his startled audience how vital (in the sense of life-or-death) this moral-aesthetic question must remain, clearly shook them from an unquestioning acceptance of an offering they had anticipated in the spirit of intellectual enquiry and enlightened tolerance that Lanzmann so abhors.

Amongst many pitfalls awaiting the Holocaust scholar, the uses of empathy show signs of displacing earlier concerns for trivialization of the 'unsayable'. The *fascinosum* of absolute evil risks endowing this terrible event with near-mystical overtones of not just the 'unheimlich'<sup>8</sup> but the numinous, and extreme sensitivity can entail a correlative loss of objectivity. 'Our duty is *not* to appropriate others' trauma,' runs the counter argument, '*not* to participate in or partake of the past, only to listen with respect.'<sup>9</sup>

The Holocaust has been treated as a *locus dei* by Jewish theologians and its sites are considered shrines by many.<sup>10</sup> It was possibly an atavistic, unconscious fear of sacrilege,<sup>11</sup> and an observation of the *Bilderverbot* arising from Adorno's apothegm on poetry after Auschwitz, with its echoes of the Second Commandment taboo on all graven images, that led Lanzmann to the self-imposition of massive stylistic constraints in his masterpiece, such as the avoidance of archive footage or dramatic reconstruction of the voiceless victims, additions which he felt could only

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<sup>7</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 208.

<sup>8</sup> Freud, 'Das Unheimliche', *Gesammelte Werke*, XII, p. 227-268.

<sup>9</sup> Professor Colin Davis, (UL: Royal Holloway), 'Trauma and Ethics: Telling the Other's Story', *Other People's Pain, Narratives of Trauma and the Question of Ethics*, University of Cambridge (CRASSH), 19-20 March 2010.

<sup>10</sup> 'I view Auschwitz, as a Rabbi, to be a very holy place.' Rabbi Avi Weiss, Riverdale, The Bronx, on camera in C4/TF1 documentary, *Au Nom du même père* (Gareth Jones, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> See Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, 'The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma', *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, pp. 158-182, here p. 179. 'The question arises whether it is not a sacrilege of the traumatic experience to play with the reality of the past?'

have failed to communicate the uncommunicable. No betrayal of trauma would be allowed, no dilution of memory could be permitted. The moment had to be *relived* by those involved and not just reported, in order that the testimony reach its secondary witnesses intact and undefiled by compromise, revision, apology or evasion.

### **Retrieving the Irretrievable**

Lanzmann's interview technique, though often criticized, is broadly in line with the psychoanalytic approach to sufferers of trauma. Janet reported that his patients needed to be brought back to the state in which a memory was first laid down so that dissociated memory could be reintegrated,<sup>12</sup> and Freud echoes this closely in the 'Preliminary Communication' of his early work with Josef Breuer:

Wir fanden nämlich, anfangs zu unserer größten Überraschung, *daß die einzelnen hysterischen Symptome sogleich und ohne Wiederkehr verschwanden, wenn es gelungen war, die Erinnerung an den veranlassenden Vorgang zu voller Helligkeit zu erwecken, damit auch den begleitenden Affekt wachzurufen, und wenn dann der Kranke den Vorgang in möglichst ausführlicher Weise schilderte und dem Affekt Worte gab.* Affektloses Erinnern ist fast immer völlig wirkungslos; der psychische Prozess, der ursprünglich abgelaufen war, muss so lebhaft als möglich wiederholt, in *statum nascendi* gebracht und dann „ausgesprochen“ werden.<sup>13</sup>

By this criterion Lanzmann was applying psychoanalytical procedures to the interviewing of Holocaust survivors and may have legitimately expected them not just to transmit, but thereby to be cured. This is a process fraught with biblical echoes, betraying the gradual accretion of often unconscious religious associations around the impenetrability of evil, the ubiquity of suffering and the mystery of wrongdoing. If this, and the violence of Lanzmann's interview technique, leaves the viewer doubly uncomfortable, it was meant to; for Lanzmann believes that testimony is ineffective, counter-productive or even mendacious (in other words it will not touch the recipient) without the transmission of horror through a full affective restitution of presence ('the

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<sup>12</sup> Pierre Marie Félix Janet, *L'état mental des hystériques*, 1894.

<sup>13</sup> Freud, 'Über den psychischen Mechanismus', p. 85.

film is the abolition of all distance between the past and the present'),<sup>14</sup> though he would also (paradoxically) warn against the illusion of *direct contact* with 'the irretrievable past'.<sup>15</sup> Empathy, and not understanding, is the key. Objectivity is by definition excluded. However, whilst indispensable, perhaps, empathy brings identification, projection, transference and a host of other psychological processes that complicate modes of reception in manners very often associated with suppressed, or not so suppressed, religious yearnings, which film is dangerously well placed to tap.

### Provocation and Possession

Amidst the psychoanalytical rumblings it has been overlooked that Lanzmann's spectacular *démarche* that evening was also entirely consistent with the *épatiste* tactics of the Situationist International, who derived their name from the *Situations* series on literature, colonialism and Marxism by Lanzmann's mentor Jean-Paul Sartre.<sup>16</sup> Developing the theses of Sartre's 'Pour un théâtre de situations',<sup>17</sup> the Situationists believed that new realities can be brought about by acts of theatrical provocation (for instance the public declaration during Mass at Notre Dame that 'God is Dead').<sup>18</sup>

One of the Situationists' most valuable intellectual bequests was Guy Debord's early perception that authentic human exchange has been replaced by its representation ('Tout ce qui était directement vécu s'est éloigné dans une représentation.');

<sup>19</sup> that the workers of late capitalist society are appeased and subjugated by empty spectacle; and that, to forestall our awakening from this drugged state, all innovative or creative rebellion will be appropriated (as travesty) by the capitalist mass media and the consumerist machine in order to neutralize and exploit it.<sup>20</sup> This is a process that gives rise to the French term 'récupération', which has been

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<sup>14</sup> Lanzmann, 'Le Lieu et la parole', in Deguy, *Au sujet de Shoah*, pp. 293-305, here 301.

<sup>15</sup> Brad Prager, 'On the Liberation of Perpetrator Photographs in Holocaust Narratives', *Visualizing the Holocaust, Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, ed. David Bathrick, Brad Prager and Michael D. Richardson (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008), pp. 19-37, here p. 26.

<sup>16</sup> For Claire Gilman, Sartre was a 'father figure' for the Situationist International. See Tom McDonough, ed. *Guy Debord and the Situationist International* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 20 and 210 (note 18).

<sup>17</sup> Sartre, *Pour un théâtre de situations*, La Rue, 12 (November 1947), p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Easter Sunday, April 9 1950, live on national television.

<sup>19</sup> Guy Debord, *La Société du Spectacle*, (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1967), p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> 'To survive, the Spectacle must have social control. It can recuperate a potentially threatening situation by shifting ground, creating dazzling alternatives - or by embracing the threat, making it safe and then *selling* it back to us.' Larry Law, *The Spectacle: The Skeleton Keys*, a 'Spectacular Times'

recuperated into English with virtually identical connotations. Advanced capitalism - thus the Situationists, from Marx - can be thwarted only by ever-renewed provocation amounting to permanent revolution.<sup>21</sup> In this spirit, one might read Lanzmann's behaviour as a warning that the Holocaust is in permanent danger of recuperation by or on behalf of false instances in an unedifying reduction of genuine suffering to media spectacle, and that nothing less than eternal vigilance will keep the truth alive. It has not often been remarked that Lanzmann's very French and highly rhetorical 'refusal to understand' is of course nothing of the sort in such an intellectual but an existential and Situationist refusal to be recuperated by the perpetrator at the expense of his victim.

Lanzmann's action that evening was not his only recourse to scandal in the battle against Holocaust revisionism.<sup>22</sup> His emotional pyrotechnics are above all a defense of poetry, in his own case film poetry, as the ultimate and only available witness (as Agamben notes in the epigraph above), a salutary challenge to fading memory and jaded sensibilities.<sup>23</sup> But his spectacular self-positioning as the prophet of Holocaust film, his denial of the right to view or to judge, and the collapse of reason and resistance amongst his audience (down to one brave heckler), raise questions of legitimacy and reception almost more worrying than the banalization he is resisting. 'Objectivity is the biggest lie', seems to be his message, or alternatively 'psychoanalysis is worthless without political engagement and onward action'. But one might equally ask whether his posturing, and the huge pressure he exerts, compound the extreme vulnerability of the Holocaust, as a *lieu de mémoire*, to appropriation by vested interest well intentioned or otherwise, in other words to recuperation.

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pocket book (London: Spectacular, 1983), p. 14. ISBN 0-907837-06-9. This Orwellian insight is more pertinent than ever as audiovisual stimulæ proliferate.

<sup>21</sup> This line led to the events of May '68 and accounts in part for the Situationist flirtation with Maoism.

<sup>22</sup> Lanzmann reportedly hurled the excommunicatory 'You do not know how evil this is!', as he walked out of the Cannes première of Andrzej Wajda's *Korczak* in 1990. See Lawrence Baron, *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), p. 81.

<sup>23</sup> See Dominick LaCapra, 'Lanzmann's Shoah: "Here There is No Why"', *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 95-138, here p. 109. 'Trauma is precisely the gap, the open wound, in the past that resists being entirely filled in, healed, or harmonized in the present.' LaCapra coins the expression 'Lanzmann's absolutist turn' (p. 111), concerning the director's interview technique and *mise en scène*, which provoke the reactivation of trauma to recover memory.

## Chain of Title

The title of this thesis thus counterpoints, firstly, rites as religious invocation and worship, as already hinted above, with rights in the legal and political sense, reflected for instance in the expression ‘the ownership of suffering’ (a trope of Holocaust discourse that I shall extend here to ‘the ownership of perpetration’); secondly, recuperation in its Freudian, psychoanalytical sense of recovery, healing or convalescence with the opposite, Situationist application as usurpation and disempowerment. The balance between political and psychoanalytical concerns is deliberate, as film generally and films individually can be seen to occupy either, or simultaneously both, of these discursive roles. Indeed it is worth asking whether recovery – in the sense of the restoration or restitution urged by Lanzmann with its concomitant associations of recording, reminding, memorializing and warning – can take place to any effect *without* a right to ownership implicitly being asserted.

Film is itself an appropriation of reality and ideally placed to flatter the redemptionist yearnings implicit in the word ‘rites’, whose connotation of sacrifice and absolution are indivisible from (and at the origins of) the workings of tragedy as codified by Aristotle in the term catharsis. Catharsis is, in turn, a word (replacing ‘abreaction’) that Freud applied to his clinical work on sufferers of traumatic neurosis. The overlap suggests that film and trauma might have something in common. But can Holocaust film recreate ancient forms of tragedy, when, as George Steiner reminds us, ‘rites have become ceremonies empty of belief’,<sup>24</sup> and ‘corresponding mythology goes dead or spurious’?<sup>25</sup> If ‘tragedy is that form of art that requires the intolerable burden of God’s presence’,<sup>26</sup> then trauma must surely find some new dramaturgy with different rites, for God deserted the camps, as Steiner and others have observed, and secular ideologies no longer supply alternative mythologies.

If the title of the thesis has a faintly ludic ring, this is perhaps because film, with its poetic disrespect for the continuities of life, is a form of play (whether tragic or comic, poetic or prosaic) and almost *de facto* a Situationist provocation, thus amenable perhaps to Dominick LaCapra’s tentative encouragement of the ‘invocation

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<sup>24</sup> George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber, 1963), p. 331.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 353.



of carnivalesque humour in one's own voice' for the historian of the Shoah,<sup>27</sup> as a possible reflection of the way that 'gallows humor was one way in which the oppressed in ghettos and camps were able to confront an impossible situation and not be totally crushed by it'.<sup>28</sup> 'Der Humor ist nicht resigniert, er ist trotzig,' Freud noted in his analysis of Galgenhumor,<sup>29</sup> and David Rousset confirms in his apocalyptic *L'Univers concentrationnaire* that black humour enabled many to survive.<sup>30</sup> Solemnity should not be mistaken for reverence, nor levity for superficiality. Faced with the linguistic aporiae into which Holocaust studies have hedged themselves, any provocation, Situationist or psychoanalytical, may help unblock the long-stored trauma of scholarship.

### **Rites of Recuperation**

The Holocaust has become the *locus classicus* of trauma in our time and it offers the sharpest scalpel for the dissection of film theory and practice, for its filmic representation is fraught with danger,<sup>31</sup> and its cause contested passionately in rites of recuperation that extend to (or degenerate into) competing claims to the possession of suffering, sometimes of the *same* suffering.

While individual trauma therapy generally works with ideas of 'letting-go', of 'losing', or 'transcending', the political approach to trauma all too often revolves around 'preserving', 'appropriating' and 'embedding', motivated by a fear of amnesia and anonymity, of the loss of the moral claims that suffering is deemed to confer. This is exemplified most spectacularly by the long-running controversy over the 'ownership of Auschwitz' unleashed by the founding in 1984 of a Carmelite Convent, complete with monumental Cross, just outside the perimeter fence of the former camp – a rite to which Christians had no right, as many Jews believed.

While Catholics drew attention to the fact that Auschwitz was the site of the Catholic Polish calvary that preceded the Jewish genocide, Jewish authorities

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<sup>27</sup> On carnival ('the borderline between art and life') see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolski (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 222.

<sup>29</sup> Freud, 'Der Humor', *Gesammelte Werke*, XIV, pp. 383-389, here p. 385.

<sup>30</sup> David Rousset, *L'Univers concentrationnaire* (Paris: Editions du Pavois, 1946), p. 185.

<sup>31</sup> See Ilan Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust, Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).

responded that Auschwitz was an inalienable symbol of the Jewish Shoah, and that any Christian presence might convey to future generations that ‘the Holocaust was either a Christian tragedy or that the Vatican had protected Jews’.<sup>32</sup> The word Auschwitz has become so highly charged that few commentators distinguished between the early Auschwitz 1 (the site of the Cross), where predominantly Catholic Poles had been worked to death and executed as part of the early Nazi strategy to liquidate Poland’s leading classes, and the later Auschwitz 2 (or Birkenau), an Extermination Camp designed for the mass murder of Europe’s Jews decreed at Wannsee in January 1942. The desperate statistics bandied to and fro turn on the interpretation of the figure six million, a lament to vanished Jewry that Christian sources answered with the competing litany that six million Poles perished at Auschwitz - three million Christian Poles and three million Jewish Poles.<sup>33</sup> This Catholic inclusivity provokes further outrage, the attempt to claim three million Jews as Polish victims taken as further evidence of Catholic recuperation of Jewish grief: did the innocent die because they were Poles, or because they were Jews, runs the retort, how come Christendom claims them dead when they were dispensable alive?<sup>34</sup>

The responsibility of two millennia of Christian anti-Semitism for creating the conditions in which Jews were identified as scapegoats; the collaboration of Christian countries – and Christian Churches – under Nazi occupation;<sup>35</sup> the isolated but not exceptional acts of heroism which led Christians – especially Polish Christians – to shelter Jews at risk to their own lives;<sup>36</sup> these valid and contradictory objects of historical enquiry are lost, as the dialectic of competing claims to possession descends into unseemly vituperation which does nothing to recover or heal the suffering. While admitting historical guilt, both Protestant and Catholic Churches have dealt with the issue as a matter of collective atonement not of personal responsibility, let alone punishment, and have never accepted, for instance, ‘the precise, grave, and documented omissions of Pope Pius XII in respect to the persecution and

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<sup>32</sup> Avi Weiss, in *Au Nom du même père*. See also *Memory Offended: The Auschwitz Convent Controversy*, ed. Carol Rittner and John K. Roth (NY: Praeger Publications, 1991).

<sup>33</sup> Jarek Wozniakowski, Mayor of Cracow. *Au Nom du même père*.

<sup>34</sup> See Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, ‘Reclaiming Auschwitz’, *Holocaust Remembrance – the Shapes of Memory*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartmann (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

<sup>35</sup> Contrast Freud’s reluctance to publish *Moses and Monotheism* ‘in a Catholic country under the protection of that Church’ (*Prefatory Note 1, (Vienna, before March 1938), Complete Works, XXIII, p. 55*) with his frankness from London a few months later: ‘Catholicism proved, to use the words of the Bible, a broken reed.’ *Prefatory Note 2, (London, June 1938), Complete Works, XXIII, p. 57*.

<sup>36</sup> Note the recent plethora of Christian rescue films recorded by Baron in *Projecting the Holocaust*, including *Bonhoeffer - die letzte Stufe* (Eric Till, 1999, screenplay Gareth Jones), which he slates.

extermination of the Jews',<sup>37</sup> and particularly the deportation of Roman Jews that formed the basis of Rolf Hochhuth's play *Der Stellvertreter*, recently filmed under the sardonic title *Amen* by the Greek director Costa-Gavras.<sup>38</sup> It is worth noting, however, that the Situationists' mentor Sartre (scarcely a Catholic) dismissed 'the Jew' as an 'effect of anti-Semitism', while being entirely ignorant of Jewish history and culture,<sup>39</sup> as he later inadvertently admitted,<sup>40</sup> and remained silent on the Holocaust for decades in line with prevailing Communist currents of denial.<sup>41</sup> Anti-Semitism is the preserve of no nation or belief, an active agent with its own traumatic agenda (Freud's 'Fremdkörper'),<sup>42</sup> even when repressed.

The very word Holocaust is controversial, as Agamben explains through its tortured etymology. Initially employed by the Church Fathers 'as a polemical weapon against the Jews, to condemn the uselessness of bloody sacrifices', it was 'extended as a metaphor to include Christian martyrs, such that their torture is equated with sacrifice' (including Christ's sacrifice on the cross).<sup>43</sup> The invocation of Holocaust martyrology, let alone a Christian martyrology, is doubly dolourous and offensive, as the Jews of Europe had no choice in their fate.<sup>44</sup> They were victims of racism, not martyrs to their faith, and this creates an enormous problem for film dramaturgy in any attempt at dramatic reconstruction.

While renouncing all use of the recuperative Christian epithet 'Holocaust', Agamben acknowledges that the Jewish euphemism *so'ah* (Shoa – 'devastation, catastrophe') is also flawed as it 'implies the idea of a divine punishment', which arguably plays into the hands of the anti-Semitic deicide rhetoric of Church history. Instead, he relies (already in his title) on the synecdoche 'Auschwitz' as a holy, even liturgical invocation of the genocide as a whole, in other words what the Nazis with their bureaucratic efficiency called the 'Endlösung'. Though compelling, and essential to Agamben's semantic and ethical concerns, the choice of 'Auschwitz' obscures both

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<sup>37</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 95.

<sup>38</sup> *Amen* (Costa-Gavras, 2002). See also *Au Nom du même père*, Saul Friedlander, 'Vatican documents show knowledge of the Shoah in progress [...] ultimately the Vicar of Christ cannot say nothing.'

<sup>39</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (NY: Harcourt Brace, 1976), p. xv. Also Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

<sup>40</sup> 'I wrote *La question juive* without any documentation, without reading a Jewish book'. Sartre and Benny Levy, *Les entretiens de 1980* (Paris: Verdier, 1991, p. 74).

<sup>41</sup> Enzo Traverso, 'The Blindness of the Intellectuals, Historicising Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew*', *Understanding the Nazi Genocide, Marxism after Auschwitz*, trans. Stuart Liebman (London, Sterling Virginia: Pluto Press), pp. 26-41.

<sup>42</sup> See epigraph above.

<sup>43</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>44</sup> 'The doctrine of martyrdom justifies the scandal of a meaningless death.' *Ibid.*, p. 27.

the complexity of the event and the shared appartenance of the place itself. Whilst recognizing the profound difficulties of attribution involved in all the available nomenclature, this thesis will nonetheless use Holocaust and Shoah (not always interchangeably), precisely because their martyrological and sacrificial overtones touch most closely on its theme.

### **Past myths, future memories**

‘The clash of martyrological memories: Morally, affectively, this is the most painful of all kinds of collective disputes,’ writes Eva Hoffmann. However, to achieve detachment from ‘the myths and memories ...[one]...grew up with can be felt as a form of betrayal, a deferred disloyalty to what has become a sacrosanct version of the past, a memory of great suffering’.<sup>45</sup> The cathartic laying to rest of founding myths and their attendant prejudices proves elusive in many parts of the world, for instance in Eastern Europe, where Poland was bequeathed an ambiguous Holocaust legacy and the Balkans experienced resistance and collaboration in equal measure.

While Poland has a distinctive film culture of its own, South East Europe (despite the abuse of ‘Balkanization’ as a synonym for fragmentation) ‘reveals an astonishing thematic and stylistic consistency’ in its little-known filmic output, as Dina Iordanova has recorded.<sup>46</sup> These related cultures, seen through their representation of genocidal trauma (both historical and more recent), provide the secondary corpus for this study and with it some sense of perspective to the key issue, namely Germany’s film interpretation of the genocide it variously instigated and suffered.

Through this strategically comparative framework, the fundamental questions the thesis asks are: What role, if any, can or should film play in the restitution of past wrongs or the healing of trauma? Can amnesia be reversed and injustice defied through filmic representation? Should such suffering ever be healed?

It is left to Lanzmann’s mortified host at the aforementioned evening, Dr Micheels, himself an Auschwitz survivor, to add the modest footnote:

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<sup>45</sup> Eva Hoffmann, *After Such Knowledge, Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (London: Secker and Warburg, 2004), p. 141. She also writes of ‘the Yugoslav wars of the 1990’s, in which allusions to long-ago battles and defeats were relentlessly conjured up by the Serbian leadership to drum up militant antagonism to Bosnian Muslims’ (ibid., p. 166).

<sup>46</sup> Dina Iordanova, ‘Connecting the Disconnected Space’, *The Cinema of the Balkans*, ed. Iordanova (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), p. 1.

Without an attempt, no matter how difficult and complex, at understanding, (the civilized) world, where truth is most important, could be lost again.<sup>47</sup>

This study will take that thought as its watchword, even as it attempts to avoid adding to the ‘academic frivolities’ that Lanzmann despises. Agamben might have been musing on that evening’s debate, when he writes, in the preface to *Remnants of Auschwitz*:

Some want to understand too much and too quickly; they have explanations for everything. Others refuse to understand; they offer only cheap mystifications. The only way forward lies in investigating the space between these two options.<sup>48</sup>

Whether Agamben found that space in his lengthy disquisition on testimony and particularly on the witness of the ‘living dead’ of Auschwitz, and, if so, whether such a space is available to film interpretation, will be a further preoccupation here. The lessons of the Holocaust must be neither lost, nor recuperated by one interest or another; they are too important to a world condemned, it seems, to repetition.

### **Trauma Theory and the Holocaust**

I do not take it for granted that psychoanalytic trauma theory, as derived from Freud, can be applied at will to non-clinical objects, particularly to social or artistic phenomena, and it is worth tracing the pedigree of such a methodology. Following the pioneering work of Charcot and Janet at the Salpêtrière, which noted the disruptive effects of traumatic experience on the formation of memory and its later impact on consciousness, Freud modified the view that traumatic neurosis could be generally accounted for by childhood traumatism after observing the ‘shell shock’ phenomenon of the First World War:

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<sup>47</sup> Caruth, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 220.

<sup>48</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 13.

Ich glaube, man darf den Versuch wagen, die gemeine traumatische Neurose als die Folge eines ausgiebigen Durchbruchs des Reizschutzes aufzufassen.<sup>49</sup>

He ascribed special importance to the absence of warning, therefore of fright, and saw traumatic neurosis as being caused by ‘das Fehlen der Angstbereitschaft’ and of the associated hypercathexis of the protective shield, with the proviso that ‘von einer gewissen Stärke des Traumas an’, the distinction between readiness and unreadiness will cease to carry weight.<sup>50</sup>

He then notes, with reference to ‘Unfallsneurotiker’, that the dreams of patients suffering from traumatic neuroses regularly lead them back to the situation in which the trauma occurred, a fact which obliges him to allow an exception to his ‘pleasure principle’, by which dreams are otherwise exclusively fulfilments of wishes. Here, by contrast, he believes that ‘Diese Träume suchen die Reizbewältigung unter Angstentwicklung nachzuholen, deren Unterlassung die Ursache der traumatischen Neurose geworden ist,’ and accepts that, acting contrary to the pleasure principle, they may give an impression of uncanny, demonic compulsion. Later he draws an analogy with children’s repetition compulsion in the *fort-da* pattern of play, which attempts to master ‘actively’ a fear of mother-loss that would otherwise haunt them ‘passively’.

In *Der Mann Moses* (1939), Freud offers the classic example of the train crash, which clearly corresponds to his ‘out of the blue’ scenario resulting in delayed shock (‘Nachträglichkeit’), whose symptoms were at first dismissed by clinicians as ‘railway spine’ or even hysterical simulation:

Es ereignet sich, daß ein Mensch scheinbar unbeschädigt die Stätte verläßt, an der er einen schreckhaften Unfall, z.B. einen Eisenbahnzusammenstoß, erlebt hat. Im Laufe der nächsten Wochen entwickelt er aber eine Reihe schwerer psychischer und motorischer Symptome, die man nur seinem Schock, jener Erschütterung oder was sonst damals gewirkt hat, ableiten kann. Er hat jetzt eine “traumatische Neurose”.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Freud, ‘Jenseits des Lustprinzips’, (1920), *Gesammelte Werke*, VIII, pp. 3-69, here p. 31. See also Caruth, ‘An Interview with Robert Jay Lifton’, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, pp. 128-150, here p. 129. ‘The impact of WW1 on Freud and his movement has hardly been recorded. The war’s traumas to the movement must have been perceived as a struggle for survival.’

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>51</sup> Freud, ‘Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion’, *Gesammelte Werke*, XVI, pp. 101-246, here p. 171.

The ‘train crash’ pattern of unforeseeable shock, leading to amnesia followed by incubation of repressed memories accompanied by compulsive dream or day-dream repetition through a period of latency, finally to find release either through a recapitulation of the traumatic accident itself or more benignly through therapy, is one that has been taken as the model of trauma theory by later thinkers. It has been adopted, for instance, by Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), which defines traumatic neurosis as ‘the unwitting re-enactment of an event one cannot simply leave behind’.<sup>52</sup> But while ‘Nachträglichkeit’ is Caruth’s common denominator for all trauma (eloquently parsed as ‘the wound that cries out’ in her analysis of *Moses and Monotheism* and her telling interpretation of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*),<sup>53</sup> the contributors to her own *Trauma, Explorations in Memory* expand this strict definition to the point of breaking it. As Kai Erikson observes, the First World War sufferers of ‘shell shock’ (and concentration camp inmates) were traumatized in the main by the psychic stress of continuous exposure to inhuman conditions over a period of months or even years, in which no particular threat or outrage can be identified as the ‘traumatic trigger’, rather than by fright at the explosion of a single (and broadly anticipated) ‘shell’ in their vicinity.<sup>54</sup> This could be what Freud had in the back of his mind when he wrote that the factor of ‘Angstbereitschaft’ would cease to carry weight in the extremity of trauma. Freud’s caveat suggests he was not wholly convinced of his own logic of ‘surprise and deferment’ but wished to cover his back, as it were, with a broader, more inclusive interpretation.

This exception points to potential flaws in the structure of trauma theory, which may lure the unsuspecting into confusions of classification and nomenclature via such elisions of the traumatic with, amongst various possible epithets, stressful, upsetting, disturbing, uncanny or even unjust. Popular recuperation of the word trauma as the defining concept in our modern experience of hurt, suffering, disjunction, even of history itself, must leave us mindful of its clinical origins and wary of its metaphorical abuses.<sup>55</sup> Just how far will the word stretch before it breaks?

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<sup>52</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience, Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> Caruth, Introduction, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, pp. 3-12, here p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> See Kai Erikson, ‘Notes on Trauma and Community’, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, pp. 183-199.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185. ‘...in order to serve as a generally useful concept, “trauma” has to be understood as resulting from a *constellation of life experiences* as well as from a discrete happening, from a *persisting condition* as well as from an acute event’.

Having usefully distinguished between the ‘accident’ model and the ‘Auschwitz model’, Erikson destroys all conceptual harmony with the sentence: ‘The effects are the same, and that, after all, should be our focus.’<sup>56</sup> Leaving aside the question of whether the suffering of the Auschwitz survivor has anything in common with that of a train disaster victim, apart from its traumatic repression and compulsive repetition later in life, one is obliged to ask whether the ‘effects’ (even of the same experience on different individuals) are sufficiently homogenous to identify the genus ‘trauma’. The symptoms (at the very least) can differ, as noted by Primo Levi: ‘Some of my friends...never speak of Auschwitz. Others... speak of it incessantly, and I am one of them.’<sup>57</sup> Having drafted medical reports for the Soviets on the renamed ‘Monowicz’ as early as 1946, Levi describes how, on returning from the concentration camp, he ‘felt an unrestrainable need to tell my story to anyone and everyone!’ An Ancient Mariner, ‘Every night I would write, and this was considered even crazier.’<sup>58</sup>

Throughout his ordeal, Levi appears to have remained conscious, to have undergone no repression, followed by no amnesia, no period of latency, no problems with recall, no hesitation in bearing witness. None of the classic symptoms of traumatic neurosis seem to apply. If one judges by clinical ‘effects’, Levi is clearly not a trauma victim, while Höss, the camp commandant (who ‘became a living corpse from the time he entered Auschwitz’),<sup>59</sup> is arguably a victim of the trauma he inflicted. This is not to suggest either that Levi suffered less than others; or that his suffering was successfully overcome, which his suicide alone might call into question; nor that there is any kind of moral equivalence between victims and perpetrators, an imputation this study will fiercely resist. One can argue that Levi’s trauma was simply repressed much longer and more effectively, that his articulacy disguised depths of repression that were to haunt him more dramatically much later; one can equally argue that perpetrators experience something different from trauma, even if related; or simply deny that they ever experience any such thing, pointing to the almost universal

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 15. See also Friedlander, ‘Trauma, Memory and Transference’, *Holocaust Remembrance – the Shapes of Memory*, ed. Hartmann, re. Primo Levi: ‘...survivors of traumatic events are divided into two well-defined groups: those who repress their past *en bloc*... and those whose memory of the offence persists, as though carved in stone, prevailing over all previous or subsequent experiences’.

<sup>58</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 16.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 57.



lack of remorse evinced by Nazis after the war,<sup>60</sup> though this might equally be seen as a sign of terminally repressed trauma.<sup>61</sup> ‘We do not have enough psychological studies of such figures’, writes Hoffmann (referring to ‘such world-class villains as Slobodan Milosevic’). ‘Tyrants and torturers go into therapy much less frequently than their victims, and don’t often leave behind soul-searching testimonies.’<sup>62</sup> This ‘silence of the wolves’ is just one source of the huge imbalance afflicting traumatic enquiry. But silence, or repression, is one of the many symptoms of trauma.

Why remorse, or lack of it, should have anything to do with a clinical condition in which consciousness is suppressed, or why trauma should be different at its inception for the guilty than for the innocent, is not clear. The imperceptible accretion of sympathy and even of approval around the term ‘trauma’ is possibly misplaced. Above all, ‘trauma’, as a psychoanalytical concept, should not allow of its own semantic recuperation for the purpose of rehabilitation by stealth (as with Wirths) of the perpetrator.

It is vital to distinguish between ‘passive’ and ‘active’ sufferers of trauma, for instance between victims of child sex abuse and Vietnam veterans, whose trauma may have as much to do with what they did as what they suffered.<sup>63</sup> Perpetration would seem to carry its own trauma, but therapy must confront questions of personal responsibility that cannot be wished away with the plea of ‘traumatic neurosis’, however justified by clinical diagnosis.

The very word ‘trauma’ loses strength when applied to too many categories: earthquake, flood, child abuse, rape, work stress, warfare and genocide are experiences marked variously by our response to the force of nature, to random but man-made disaster, and to the deliberate inhumanity of man to man. If the clinical symptoms initially appear similar, the nature of the subject’s suffering and therefore of the therapy required will surely diverge. For example: the Tsunami survivor is not confronted with the same truths about the origins of her suffering as the Auschwitz survivor; the very fact of survival acquires a very different meaning and entails

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<sup>60</sup> See Hoffmann, *After Such Knowledge*, p. 113. ‘It is one of the added injustices [...] that the burden of brutality is carried, not only in its occurrence but in its aftermath not by the abuser but by the abused; that the bitterness of the contamination penetrates most of all the hearts of those who are subjected to it, leaving the perpetrators for the most part remorseless and guilt free.’ This echoes the observations of clinicians such as Judith Lewis Herman.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.: ‘Possibly (one wants to hope) the calcification of the soul is somewhere – in the depth of the unconscious, or in the realms of poetic or a heavenly justice – its own punishment’.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> The fact that they were young conscripts does not absolve them from acts of extreme violence.

different psychological processes. The victim of natural disaster is unlikely to feel the same degree of shame, or survivor guilt,<sup>64</sup> as the victim of brutality,<sup>65</sup> and the consequent repression or denial will be commensurately lightened. The pernicious victim-perpetrator complicity, which hampers so much therapy of genocide victims,<sup>66</sup> will be replaced by a howl of outrage against ‘an act of God’.<sup>67</sup> Forgiveness is a perspective scarcely applicable to a Tsunami (other than learning to forgive the world’s flawed or malevolent creation); forgiveness for crimes against humanity, on the other hand, is an issue fraught with problems at once legal, moral and emotional.<sup>68</sup>

I would therefore suggest that current uses of the word ‘trauma’ risk diminishing the usefulness of the concept by too wide an application. Particularly in its relationship to survivors and perpetrators of extreme persecution the word is liable to a surfeit of emotional transference and a deficit of moral objectivity, and this blurs the clinical contours of the diagnosis. In this I would follow LaCapra, when he pleads that the ethical dimension should not be buried in the shifting sands of trauma theory. However, we should also remember that psychoanalysis ‘individuated out of both science and religion’,<sup>69</sup> and is, in Wittgenstein’s assessment, a ‘powerful mythology’; or, to quote Harold Bloom, ‘Freudian speculation may or may not be scientific or philosophical; what counts about it is its interpretative power. [...] Freud, short of no one, is the dominant mythologist of our time’.<sup>70</sup>

## Collective Trauma

Whether or not an accommodation can be reached between the clinical and the mythical, there exists a critical consensus amongst psychoanalysts of all practices that ‘social trauma’ does exist. It is seen in the spiritual kinship shared by survivors well after the event, a social trauma now understood to be inherited by second and third

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<sup>64</sup> See Agamben, ‘Shame, or On the Subject’, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 87.

<sup>65</sup> See Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 7. ‘Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?’

<sup>66</sup> See Henry Krystal, ‘Trauma and Aging: A Thirty-Year Follow-Up’, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, pp. 76-99, here p. 94: ‘...this transference phenomenon is just one example of the survivors’ identification with the opposite pole in the victim-oppressor polarization, the most difficult wound to heal.’ See also Dori Laub, ‘Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle’, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, pp. 61-75.

<sup>67</sup> Erikson, ‘Notes on Trauma and Community’, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 190.

<sup>68</sup> See Krystal, ‘Trauma and Aging’, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 83.

<sup>69</sup> Peter Homans, *The Ability to Mourn, Disillusionment and the Social Origins of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 343-6.

<sup>70</sup> See Harold Bloom, ‘Freud: Frontier Concepts, Jewishness, and Interpretation’, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, pp. 113-127, here p. 113.

generations<sup>71</sup> and passed on laterally to civil society at large,<sup>72</sup> maybe even mediated in tertiary form by the ubiquity of screen reporting. This social trauma is analysed by LaCapra under the separate categories ‘institutional trauma’ and ‘historical trauma’, and expressed in its operation by Erikson:

By *collective trauma*, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of the community. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with “trauma”.<sup>73</sup>

LaCapra skilfully refuses dichotomy altogether, effectively recuperating sociology and history itself for psychoanalysis:

My basic premise...is that the fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis (such as transference, resistance, denial, repression, acting-out and working through) undercut the binary opposition between the individual and society, and their application to individual or collective phenomena is a matter of informed argument and research. Freud developed these concepts in a clinical context, and thought they applied to collective processes only through analogy; a recurrent concern is how it is possible to extend them to collectivities. I believe that this concern, both in Freud and in others, is based on mistaken individualistic ideological assumptions and gives rise to misguided questions [...] These concepts refer to processes that always involve modes of interaction, mutual reinforcement, conflict, censorship, orientation towards others, and so forth, and their relative individual or collective status should not be prejudged.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> See Hoffmann, *After Such Knowledge*.

<sup>72</sup> See Laura S. Brown, ‘Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma’, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, pp. 100-112, on ‘cultural toxicity’ and ‘the immanence of trauma in our lives’. Her title derives from the US legal ruling that rape, incest and abuse, being common, are ‘not outside the range of human experience’ and therefore cannot be qualified as ‘traumatic’. The US legal definition has now shifted to allow for ‘social trauma’.

<sup>73</sup> Erikson, ‘Notes on Trauma and Community’, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 187.

<sup>74</sup> LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, p. 43.

This litany of psychological processes provides an excellent guide to the reception of film, itself a medium whose ‘relative individual or collective status’ is hard to judge. Despite undercurrents of denial, film is increasingly being considered as a medium for the reflection and diffusion of trauma (serving to dislodge the ‘foreign body’ or ‘Fremdkörper’ of traumatic neurosis), whether as a melancholic-compulsive ‘acting-out’ or as a therapeutic ‘working-through’, sometimes without any deeper understanding of how film works.

The present thesis aims to consider the purchase of these processes precisely in conjunction with the workings of film, and in particular its dramaturgical structures. Whilst not impervious to the dangers of myth and metaphor, it will explore the meaning of social, as well as personal, trauma in close analysis of certain films created by, and in different ways representative of, societies suffering the aftermath of genocide, principally Germany in the wake of the Holocaust and the Balkans following both that atrocity and more recent ones. Examples of co-production between these and other world regions, both before and after the fall of the Iron Curtain, will indicate that national film production has always been qualified by transregional and internationalist tendencies and any analysis must take this into account.

### **The German and Balkan Genocides**

‘It might appear facile and cheap to compare the destruction of European Jewry with other attempts at genocide’ writes Anette Insdorf in her encyclopaedic study of Holocaust Film, *Indelible Shadows*, ‘after all, there is no comparison for the rabid persecution of individuals who were a respected and assimilated part of European life [...] Nevertheless, the impulse behind Nazism – if not the massive scale of its realization – has been shared by other peoples and nations’.<sup>75</sup> It seems necessary to challenge some aspects of this statement while concurring with others. The ‘rabid persecution of respected and assimilated individuals’ applies precisely to Idi Amin’s treatment of Uganda’s Asian minority, for instance, while the majority of Hitler’s Jewish victims (excluding German Jews) were unassimilated both culturally and economically. Further, the strange and surely unintended *sous entendu*, that

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<sup>75</sup> Anette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows, Film and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: CUP, 1983, 1989), p. xix.

‘assimilation’ or ‘respect’ might make the persecution of the Jews any more unacceptable than that of, say, the Roma, who enjoyed (and still enjoy) neither, is a graphic illustration of the perils involved in ‘comparison’. What is certain, however, is that the genocidal impulse is not confined to any one nation or ideology. While Auschwitz ‘created a material mirror image of imagined Hell’, Steiner continues: ‘the inventory of the inhuman continues without end’.<sup>76</sup>

Features that might seem to distinguish the Nazi genocide also figure in the more recent Balkan outrages in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and elsewhere: the urge to dominate one’s own fears of death or slavery by denying others the right to live; the acquisitive principle of empire; the fear of the interloper, the parasite, the ‘enemy within’ and the need for the community to reaffirm its wholeness through the eviction or sacrifice of a scapegoat to reinstate the *heile Welt* of *das Volk*;<sup>77</sup> the ‘claustrophobia’ of anxiety-ridden societies projected onto apparently threatening neighbours as a need for security through *Lebensraum*; the delusion of serving a higher ideal, a perverted spirituality and self-abnegation amidst the *Rausch* of shared transgression; the banal compliance of a desk job; even the sense that history has been irrational and that demographic fault lines need correcting through ‘modernisation’;<sup>78</sup> or finally (if not exhaustively), the ‘copycat effect’ of Hitler-worship, which marked some of the worst Balkan atrocities perpetrated by squads who took their inspiration explicitly from the Nazis and would have repeated the Holocaust had they disposed of an adequate bureaucracy to carry it through.

Conversely, however, one should beware of facile conflation. Jewish suffering under the Nazis was widely and unscrupulously recuperated for political ends by all sides in the recent Balkan conflicts, in the belief that ‘comparison’ with the Jewish cause would recruit international sympathy,<sup>79</sup> at times ‘reducing the Holocaust to a

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<sup>76</sup> Steiner, *Errata* (Frome and London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1997), pp. 106-107.

<sup>77</sup> See Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects, Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 76, on Derrida’s reading of Plato’s ‘pharmakon’ in relation to Edgar Reitz’s sublimation of German scapegoating instincts in the television series *Heimat*.

<sup>78</sup> See Zygmunt Baumann, ‘The Holocaust’s Life as a Ghost’, *The Holocaust’s Ghost, Writings on Art, Politics, Law and Education*, ed. F.C. Decoste and Bernard Schwartz (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2000), p. 12. Baumann cites G. Aly and S. Heim, ‘Vordenker der Vernichtung: Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung’, for a view of the Holocaust as ‘rationalization’ by ‘modernizers’.

<sup>79</sup> Marko Živković, ‘The Wish to be a Jew or the Struggle over Appropriating the Symbolic Power of “Being a Jew” in the Yugoslav Conflict’, *Ninth International Conference of Europeanists* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 31st March-2nd April 1994), LAMED-E 1, *A Quarterly Journal of Politics and Culture*, [http://www.elmundosefarad.eu/wiki/wiki/index.php?title=LAMED-E\\_1](http://www.elmundosefarad.eu/wiki/wiki/index.php?title=LAMED-E_1).

tool in a public relations strategy'.<sup>80</sup> The 'society of the spectacle' tends to perpetuate, indeed perpetrate, its own myths, so that disentangling genocidal repetition from its media recuperation is not easy.

However, given South-East Europe's dubious distinction as the only part of the world to have suffered both the Shoah and more recent genocide, it is perhaps not surprising that 'the Holocaust became the scale by which events in Bosnia were measured',<sup>81</sup> recounted on film by virtually unknown double survivors of both genocides, as the final chapter of this thesis will discover. Especially when rendered through the fertile traditions of Balkan film, this syndrome justifies the inclusion of the Balkan region as a subsidiary focus of enquiry in the search for a modern context and an onward perspective.

In the chapters that follow, the question must be: how can the Holocaust be understood as 'a transformative event',<sup>82</sup> one that galvanizes and locates, rather than fetishizing and displacing, trauma, in order to use it as a model, a warning, an augury even, and not just as a source of impotent wondering and despair? And how should this be done without indulging in self-perpetuating and potentially self-fulfilling prophecies of doom or unwittingly contributing to, or feeding off, the 'ghost of the Holocaust'.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames, Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), p. 48. See also note 17 on the tendentious equation of Serbs with Nazis: Peter Glotz, 'Der Fall Handke: wie sich Intellektuelle und Journalisten über den Serbien-Aufsatz heillos zerstritten' (*Die Woche* 16 February 1996, p. 17).

<sup>81</sup> Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames*, p. 48.

<sup>82</sup> Baumann, 'The Holocaust's Life as a Ghost', *The Holocaust's Ghost*, p. xvi. citing J. R. Watson, 'Hegel's *Camera Lucida*', p. 115: 'the transformative event that has yet transformed nothing'.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9: 'Can one exorcise the ghost of the Holocaust? a different (question) from making the world Holocaust-proof.' Surely this is a ghost that should never be exorcised but continue to haunt us. The dangers of emulation are outweighed and counterbalanced by a duty of memory. See also Zygmunt Baumann, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge/Oxford: Polity Press, 1989).

## 1. PERSEUS'S MIRROR

### Tangential Approaches to Traumatic Recall

Personen oder Dinge, die tabu sind, können mit elektrisch geladenen Gegenständen verglichen werden; sie sind der Sitz einer furchtbaren Kraft, welche sich durch Berührung mitteilt und mit unheilvollen Wirkungen entbunden wird.<sup>84</sup>

One of the paraphrases by which Primo Levi designates the Muselmann is “he who has seen the Gorgon”. But what has the Muselmann seen?<sup>85</sup>

#### The Ghost of Stills Photography

When Walter Benjamin in his essay *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* praises Atget who ‘around 1900’ took photographs of deserted Paris streets as though they were ‘scenes of a crime’ recorded in evidence,<sup>86</sup> he notifies us that stills photography (which has haunted the moving image from its inception)<sup>87</sup> henceforth furnishes ‘Beweisstücke im historischen Prozeß’ and acquires thereby its ‘verborgene politische Bedeutung’.<sup>88</sup>

Benjamin’s direct contemporary, Siegfried Kracauer, also (if indirectly) praises Atget in his *Theory of Film* when he quotes Marville writing about those same Paris streets as ‘impregnated with the “melancholy that a good photograph can so powerfully evoke”’.<sup>89</sup> Now, there is nothing directly contradictory between evidence and melancholy, but Kracauer’s language suggests a radically different approach to the business and function of film. For evidence requires lucidity, while melancholy ‘makes elegiac objects seem attractive [...] favors self-estrangement [...] entails identification with all kinds of objects’.<sup>90</sup> While Kracauer agrees with his fellow Marxist convert (and fellow Jewish refugee from the Nazis) on the political importance of the cinema, and while Benjamin’s austere Marxism was tempered by

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<sup>84</sup> Freud, ‘Totem und Tabu’, *Gesammelte Werke*, IX, pp. 3-195, here p. 29.

<sup>85</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 53.

<sup>86</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner Reproduzierbarkeit* (Dritte Fassung), *Gesammelte Schriften*, I (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969).

<sup>87</sup> See Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 3-22.

<sup>88</sup> Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk*, p. 485.

<sup>89</sup> Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

his appreciation of myth as a sustaining, civilizing force,<sup>91</sup> Kracauer's stress on the 'realism' of the photographic medium has been exaggerated and the undercurrent of aesthetic speculation and psycho-spiritual reflection running through his work has generally been marginalized. This applies particularly to his *Theory of Film*, despite its subtitle, *The Redemption of Reality*, which also informs his Epilogue:

Film renders visible what we did not, perhaps even could not, see before its advent [...] discovering the world with its psychophysical correspondences. We literally redeem this world from its dormant state, its state of virtual non-existence, by endeavouring to experience it through the camera. And we are free to experience it because we are fragmented. The cinema can be defined as a medium particularly equipped to promote the redemption of physical reality.<sup>92</sup>

Though the word 'redemption' is used without explicit reference to its religious connotations, *The Theory of Film* is haunted by its curious choice of subtitle. While arguing that 'Art in film is reactionary because it symbolizes wholeness and thus pretends to the continued existence of beliefs which "cover" physical reality in both senses of the word', Kracauer (with more than a hint of Jewish mysticism) defers to the oneiric, invocatory reception of the viewer, who 'watches the images on the screen in a dream-like state',<sup>93</sup> and 'cannot hope to apprehend, however incompletely, the being of any object that draws him into its orbit unless he meanders, dreamingly, through the maze of its multiple meanings and psychological correspondences.'<sup>94</sup> In this he comes perilously close to Benjamin's theory of perception formulated in *Das Passagenwerk* ('The collector really lives as in a dream'),<sup>95</sup> with its clear debt to Freud.

This state of being has both dangers and benefits, as will be explored in what follows by applying some of Kracauer's thoughts to a close reading of a little known Balkan masterpiece which recruits all the technical skills and interpretative power of film to reach into a not so distant past that nonetheless is in danger of archivization. A

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<sup>91</sup> See Joseph Mali, 'The Reconciliation of Myth: Benjamin's Homage to Bachofen', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 60, No. 1. (January 1999), pp. 165-87.

<sup>92</sup> Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 300.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 303.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>95</sup> Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, V, p. 272.



filmic recreation of the infamous photograph of the boy in the Warsaw ghetto with his hands up under Nazi guns, *Z podniesionymi rekami/With Raised Hands* (Mitko Panov, 1986)<sup>96</sup> was made by the émigré Macedonian filmmaker as a student in Polish exile during traumatic events at home,<sup>97</sup> the first of three little-known films made over the course of half a century in Poland which are introduced here as a prelude to thematic concerns explored later. They provide a hinge between past and present, between Germany and the Balkans, and between fiction, documentary and archive, whose symbiotic relationship will be a recurring motif of this study.

Since film studies generally suffer from a surfeit of theory and historiography, and a dearth of practical analysis (a tendency that radically underemphasizes the function of narrative in a primarily storytelling art), and since many of the films cited are not available to a viewing public, the principal method of analysis here will be a form of *explication de texte*. This method considers not just a film's 'meaning' but how, in both artisanal and conceptual terms, that meaning is transferred to an audience frame by frame, remembering always the 'meandering' state in which film reception occurs.

Panov's dramatic reconstruction of a still photograph certainly treats his source material as evidence, in Benjamin's strictest sense, but as evidence that can only be witnessed through the reconstructive power of the imagination. Placing the viewer in the position of Kracauer's dreamer, *With Raised Hands* seems to offer us an invocation of ghostly presences, communicants at a thanatotic altar, whose imminent passage to the gas chambers is a ritual act, conveying our knowledge of their passing, their irretrievable departure, paradoxically by effecting a full restitution of presence such as Lanzmann achieved by different means in *Shoah*.

### **Redeeming an Icon**

Before any picture appears, the first frames of black with their crackly sound are an invocation in themselves, taking us back to the days of newsreel. The deliberately distressed film stock is flecked with handling by its absent editors, scored with parallel scratches that oscillate through the old-fashioned projecting gate, premonitory

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<sup>96</sup> The film won the Palme d'Or, Cannes, 1991.

<sup>97</sup> Elements of this text were published in 'An Inner Exodus: The Many Diasporas of Balkan Cinema', *Cineaste*, Vol. XXX11 No. 3 (Summer 2007), Balkan Supplement ed. Iordanova.

rail tracks taking us on a journey that ends only with the film. A 1940s lens carousel fills the first frame, hands swivel it clockwise, selecting the optic, while smoke drifts past and the title is superimposed in 1940s-style diagonal cursive script. A lens shield is fitted, a ghostly, bleached hand fills the frame, and we cut to the same hand blocking the camera's vision. The camera as object has been replaced by the camera as mediating gaze. The hand withdraws to reveal a blurred, unfocused field of infinite depth with sacrificial white smoke drifting through (the mists of time), from which blurred figures slowly approach as if responding to the camera's summons. A female figure with her hands raised is barely discernable before she is obliterated by a helmeted soldier who breaks frame in close-up foreground, checking his prisoners before he glimpses the camera and grins at the unseen operator, sheepish, suddenly shy, caught 'on camera', and glances away again, self-conscious, embarrassed, ashamed not by what he is doing but by the fact of being observed.<sup>98</sup>

By now, the archival illusion is perfect, this might be Nazi footage of the period, and the film's prime purpose, to recuperate the past in perfect restitution, has already been stated. Through a locked-off medium close shot, the soldier proceeds to do his duty with demonstrative enthusiasm aimed at his unseen masters behind the camera, pushing each passing prisoner with the same efficient shove, the obligatory, routine humiliation, accelerating with no particular animus their progress to an apparently uncertain but utterly predestined fate. A poor actor, his massive physique ineptly blocks the shot for which he performs, his victims glimpsed first behind his shoulder then rapidly exiting foreground left, barely intuited shadows moving from darkness into darkness weighed down by shapeless bundles of possession, ghosts recalled from the grave and obliged to retrace their final steps, the only fleetingly identifiable figure a bearded old man carrying a cloth-swathed tome, the Torah no doubt.<sup>99</sup> With this clumsy oaf of a soldier, the second theme of the film is introduced: how hard it is to see them, after all this time! The perpetrator blocks the frame, shuts out the light, hogs the stage. Who were they, how do we reach them, how can we imagine, restore to life, those countless, nameless ones whose very afterlife – as Lanzmann fears – is defined by their aggressors?

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<sup>98</sup> See Daniel H. Magilow, 'The Interpreter's Dilemma', *Visualizing the Holocaust*, pp. 38-61, on Wehrmacht tourist voyeurism in the ghetto.

<sup>99</sup> An echo of Holocaust iconography from the massive frieze at Yad Vashem.

While Lanzmann argues that ‘Nazi-created images deprive viewers of seeing anything that the Nazis did not want them to see’, Panov’s strategy corresponds more to Adrienne Kertzer’s observation on the use of Holocaust photographs in children’s books, albeit avoiding the trap she here implies: ‘Unable to save the child in the photograph, unwilling to imagine children without hope, we hope to save the photograph with our words’<sup>100</sup> – or here, *mutatis mutandis*, our gaze.

Off-screen a train rumbles past, the female figure comes briefly into focus, her head turned away, refusing to be observed, surveilled, recorded, selected, till the soldier’s hand intrudes and turns her by the scruff of the neck to camera, then quickly pushes her onwards into oblivion, usurping the frame too narrow for its subject (as every frame of Holocaust representation or discourse). He knows he is being observed and probably assessed, and wishes to prove his worth to his seniors, unaware of the irony behind the gaze turned on him after so long, the decades he will have spent lying in dusty archives before this ‘undiscovered war footage’ will have been brought to light and restored to human contemplation, a genesis myth the film creates around its very existence that further establishes its false-but-absolute claims to authenticity.

Thus they thought of themselves, no doubt, the countless conscripts, as patriotic heroes ‘doing their duty’ against the enemy (armed or unarmed), not as war criminals destined for the judgement of eternity. From a fearful face we abruptly cut to black, as if the operator had censored such emotion from this SS-film record (for no other authority could have commissioned such a work), and the next shot lurches from below frame as the ancient projector runs up to speed, revealing a new frame from the lens carousel, this time a wide shot of the group being marshaled to camera by the soldier and his comrades, a family snapshot from which a boy in shorts (the woman’s son) wanders off and has to be dragged back, his lost cap wedged back on his head by the irritable soldier who wants it all to ‘look just right’. Meanwhile the exasperated, unseen operator has cut and resumed, on the same frame, for a second take, the wayward boy torn from his mother, singled out in front of the group but still refusing to turn to camera or raise his hands until the soldier waves his gun at him, exasperated that his creative handiwork should be thwarted.

And finally the soldier grins, as the motionless group settles, the famous still of the Warsaw ghetto is recreated, the exact moment the snapshot was taken, not

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<sup>100</sup> Adrienne Kertzer, ‘Saving the Picture: Holocaust Photographs in Children’s Books’, *The Lion and the Unicorn* 24.3 (September 2000), pp. 402-431, here p. 404.

through documentary analysis but via a complex, multi-layered reflection on the role of the camera, the viewing eye, the lapse of time, the changing ethos of arrest and persecution, and above all on the challenge of bringing the dead back to life, of embarking on an Orphic descent in search of the unappeased, unquiet departed. Despite the multiple layers of pastiche verging on the carnivalesque and the parody of frustrated propaganda (one thinks of Goebbels' commission of Kurt Gerron's *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt* (1944)), the terror of the moment never leaves us, the artifice so consummate we never doubt that 'this is how it was'. We have been captured. By a series of illusions, we have been made to be there.

The group settles, the frame freezes, but the scratchy parallel train tracks roll on, refusing anachronistic technological improvement. After the obligatory black, representing (and, in cameras of the era, caused by) the rupture of an interrupted take, we come up on a mid-shot of the cameraman hidden behind his view-finder, his right hand turning the crankshaft, his left hand steadying the tripod. Behind him, a tunnel in the flakey masonry recalls the entrance to Birkenau, the steam glimpsed beyond it betraying the transport about to leave, with his subjects destined to be on it. Wind whistles through a frozen, unchangeable moment, reconstructed in close-ups staged from details of the original still: the soldier with his motor-bike goggles and his deep-chiselled frown of baffled masculine determination - this happened on his watch, he stands accused before eternity; the woman, motionless, only her forelock fluttering on her forehead in that chilly breeze, eyes fixed on her son, his arms forever raised showing no sign of fatigue; the girl with the headscarf, her eyes burning through the filmstock from her over-exposed face, imperceptibly moistening her lips dry with fear and waiting, an astonishing cinematographic recreation of a moment long gone, more vivid than any archive. The wind howls, the boy's cap blows away. Awoken from a nightmare, he turns to the cameraman for instructions, his hands still raised.

In scrupulous montage the reverse shot picks up his raised hand partially blocking the lens, behind which the cameraman raises his head and looks round - a sensitive, creative type, perturbed that his composition has been compromised, its continuity ruined. The boy turns to camera, his face in foreground close-up, eyeing the soldier, who - in wittily mismatched reverse shot - wearily watches the cap blow away, preferring instead the unwavering attention of his own camera, which has captured him and will not let him go. The lens pans slowly right to left past each face

in turn and back again, finally coming to rest on the boy, who is considering his chances.

From the end of the tunnel, black smoke billows towards them, as from the crematoria. In the sudden wide-shot, the boy looks round, to find his companions frozen in time, caught in the act of being observed and leaving him a free agent. He simply walks out of shot, frame right, eyed by the soldier incapable of impeding this break with history. The boy's footsteps clip over cobbles, the sound effects unnaturally loud, out of synch and (of course) badly dubbed, a filmic jest that alerts us to editorial intrusion.

Our point of view now takes its distance from the group, offering us a first wide shot of the entire event, both the cameraman and his subjects, swathed in drifting smoke. Leaving them, the boy comes towards us through a gap in wrought-iron railings (the gateway to history) and drops his hands as he chases his cap, his shadow preceding him into the next shot, a close-up of the cap. It blows away before he can reach it and his legs chase it through frame, which whip-pans to find him several houses further, gazing back through the devastated ghetto, perfectly still – an effect achievable only by the invisible edit of two whip-pans, thrice repeated as the cap eludes him.

Each time he glances back, the camera marks his trajectory with an ever longer lens representing his more distant point of view, the depth of field crushed, the group receding into a different time and place. Banished back into the underworld, the mother attempts to answer his silent call but cannot cross this Styx to follow him back to life. The cameraman stares reproachfully after his escaping subject, and the whole group is finally confined to the top left corner of the frame, washed by white ashes in driving wind, while a shutter idly drifts across the foreground.

The cut to an empty transversal street in the burned-out ghetto tells them – and us – that the boy has gone. He has 'got away', from history, from deadening archive, from his embalming in a 'cult' still photograph. Along a diagonal cobbled pavement that rises into light he enters from behind camera and walks, then trots away, past a curiously ruined wardrobe lying on its side, which momentarily frames him as he throws his cap in the air, once, then twice... when it does not come down. The empty street freezes for five seconds over haunting piano, then the undercarriage of a train roars through frame (an echo of Lanzmann's visual epilogue to *Shoah*) replacing our wish-fulfilment with historical truth. The whole group left on this train.

The final shot offers us the photograph on which the film is based, the boy with cap, smart coat, bare knees, raised hands, his mother turned to him in profile, the snapshot paradoxically of better quality, and more full of motion, than its filmic reconstruction, which remains in one's mind as a series of stills.

Of course, this never happened, the boy did not survive, he did not chase his cap. Realism is *not* the only or even the best means of reaching out to the past. Evidence is complex and contradictory. In narrating the opposite of factual reconstruction, *With Raised Hands* uses the metaphorical power of film to confront us with our deepest fears of death, of the past, of guilt, and with our infinite desire for redemption. If only this had not happened. If only this might not be so. If only it had been like *this*, instead. If only we could 'turn back the clock' with the swivelling of a lens carousel. But in unveiling that desire, we are forced to confront its defeat. In acknowledging our longings, we accept reality. A magical engagement with reality through wish fulfilment has been at the heart of film since its inception. Film can be said to be uniquely placed to confront us with our own mortality expressed through its opposite, the yearning for immortality.<sup>101</sup> In Kracauer's words: 'Perhaps film is a gate rather than a dead end or a mere diversion?'<sup>102</sup>

Film can be said to offer the psyche an adventure into the unknown through a thanatotic encounter that marks us with the foreknowledge of our death while indulging our longing for immortality.<sup>103</sup> In this, it resembles an encounter with oneself in the form of one's double or *Doppelgänger*. 'In the visual field the autoscopic, or self-seeing subject beholds its other self as another, as visual object',<sup>104</sup> writes Andrew Webber of the German literary tradition, and the experience is equally applicable to the cinema. This 'departure from ourselves',<sup>105</sup> effected through viewer identification with on-screen events, is a separation replete with either healing or further traumatizing possibilities, associated in popular superstition with an augury of

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<sup>101</sup> The 'transcendental' ending of Wajda's *Korczak* (vilified by Lanzmann) lurches into sentimentality verging on denial, though Baron defends it, *Projecting the Holocaust*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>102</sup> Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 287.

<sup>103</sup> See Caruth, 'An Interview with Robert Jay Lifton', *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 131, on Freud's 'death denial'.

<sup>104</sup> Andrew J. Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 3.

<sup>105</sup> See Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 22, on the 'act of leaving', as reflected in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*; also Caruth, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 10: 'the challenge of the therapeutic listener [...] is how to listen to departure'.

impending death. An unconscious awareness of the uncanny ('unheimlich') accompanies many cinemagoers from the auditorium.

### **The Perpetrating Camera**

In its enquiry into our reception of perpetrator photographs (amongst other themes), the recent *Visualizing the Holocaust* marks, writes one of its editors David Bathrick, 'a generational shift', 'a willingness to challenge taboos and pieties'.<sup>106</sup> No fewer than three of its essays refer to 'the icon of the child in the Warsaw ghetto', which the volume reproduces in its introduction with this quotation from Marianne Hirsch: 'The pervasive role this photograph has come to play is indeed astounding: it is not an exaggeration to say that in assuming an archetypal role of Jewish (and universal) victimization, the boy in the Warsaw ghetto has become the poster child of the Holocaust'.<sup>107</sup> The mediatic recuperation perpetrated, as much as commented on, by that last phrase underlines the dangers of reification of the victim explored by the contributors to this volume, none of whom, however, mentions Panov's crucial film, which shares and explores their preoccupations. 'Problems arise of course on both sides of the camera', writes Bathrick (as Panov echoes in cinematic form). 'To what extent are we making ourselves complicit with the values, and even possibly the genocidal intentions, of a particular point of view?'<sup>108</sup> Prager adds, quoting Ulrich Baer: '...the Jews in these images are effectively "robbed of any interior life and self-directed mean of expression, while the Nazi photographer is endowed by the historians with motives, feelings, and a rationale for his actions"'.<sup>109</sup> These are questions Panov directly addresses through a cinematic and dramatic confrontation with the icon itself, and in doing so he asks whether aesthetic pleasure is as inappropriate to Holocaust reception as has often been insisted.

'Our imaginations undertake to restore life and a voice to those depicted' writes Prager, 'yet at the same time we are forced to acknowledge that we cannot

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<sup>106</sup> David Bathrick, 'Introduction: Seeing against the Grain', *Visualizing the Holocaust*, pp. 1-18, here p. 16.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 4, citing Marianne Hirsch, 'Nazi Photographs in Post Holocaust Art: Gender as an Idiom of Memorialization', *Phototextualities: Intersections of Photography and Narrative*, ed. Alex Hughes and Andrea Noble (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press 2003), pp. 19-40, here, 19.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>109</sup> Prager, 'On the Liberation of Perpetrator Photographs', *Visualizing the Holocaust*, pp. 19-37, here p. 25, citing Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2002), p. 136.

accomplish this goal'.<sup>110</sup> It is by playing out this conundrum that film performs its vital role in the 'redemption of physical reality', and in this case, of stills photography. Hirsch's apodictic: 'No retrospective irony can redeem or humanize the images produced in the context of Nazi genocide'<sup>111</sup> attempts to impose a taboo that her editor wishes to dismantle and *With Raised Hands* has already constructively broken. If the 'iconic still' is taboo (an 'elektrisch geladenen Gegenstand', in Freud's sense, 'der Sitz einer furchtbaren Kraft'), and approaching it, let alone reproducing it, fraught with 'unheilvollen Wirkungen',<sup>112</sup> we are excluded from discourse with the past through visual archive. Despite concerns correctly voiced by Carolyn J. Dean over the 'pornographic' leading to 'the failure of empathy now increasingly being articulated in many scholarly discourses', we should not abandon occasions for empathy lightly, even if Georges Bataille asserts in his essay on Hiroshima that 'the appeal to feeling is of negligible interest' in the assimilation of traumatic history.<sup>113</sup>

The anxiety Prager notes 'over the loss of feeling that would accompany the reproduction, viewing and analysis of harsh images'<sup>114</sup> (addressed later in this chapter) must be balanced against the loss of feeling (and information) at *not* daring to confront such images. Accepting without reservation, as Prager advises, that no 'act of empathy can provide even the momentary illusion that the passage of time is to be undone',<sup>115</sup> would be to deny precisely the restitution of presence and the full transmission of horror that Lanzmann urges, thus undervaluing the role of illusion as an imaginative bridge to the past. While the still photograph (submitted to Himmler by SS General Stroop as proof of his 'clearance' of the Warsaw ghetto)<sup>116</sup> is most certainly evidence, in Benjamin's sense, the film's 'historicizing against the grain' (another Benjamin injunction) provides the witness capable of redeeming the 'iconic photograph' from its inscrutability, thereby conveying its import to distant generations for whom the Holocaust may have no more resonance than the sack of Carthage.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 24, citing Hirsch, 'Nazi Photographs', p. 26.

<sup>112</sup> See chapter epigraph.

<sup>113</sup> See Georges Bataille, 'Concerning the Accounts Given by the Residents of Hiroshima', *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, pp. 221-235, here p. 221: 'feeling cannot be the point of departure for action, a vivid imagination (is) a negligible force to ward off the return of misfortune'; and p. 228: 'The sensibility that goes to the furthest limits moves away from politics'. This leaves Bataille advocating a 'sovereign sensibility', a site whose intellectual allure makes it no easier to locate.

<sup>114</sup> Prager, 'On the Liberation of Perpetrator Photographs', *Visualizing the Holocaust*, p. 23, discussing Carolyn J. Dean, 'Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 14.1 (2003): 88-124; here p. 92.

<sup>115</sup> Prager, *Visualizing the Holocaust*, p. 24.

<sup>116</sup> Daniel H. Magilow, 'The Interpreter's Dilemma', *Visualizing the Holocaust*, pp. 38-61, here p. 53.



## Slaying the Gorgon

In the final pages of his *Theory of Film*, Kracauer firmly grasps the mythical power of film when he retells the story of the slaying of Medusa by Perseus, who could avoid being turned to stone by the Gorgon's petrifying gaze only through the intercession of Athena's polished shield, which provided a mirror image of his terrifying prey, whose 'unheilvolle Wirkung' renders her the classic personification of taboo in Greek myth. 'Now of all the existing media the cinema alone holds up a mirror to nature', Kracauer muses. 'Hence our dependence on it for the reflection of happenings that would petrify us were we to encounter them in real life. The film screen is Athena's polished shield'. Kracauer believes that, in permitting an approach to Freud's 'elektrisch geladenen Gegenständen', cinema makes bearable not only graphic slaughter in a Paris shambles but the Holocaust itself.

In experiencing the rows of calves' heads or the litter of tortured human bodies in the films made of the Nazi concentration camps, we redeem horror from its invisibility behind the veils of panic and imagination. And this experience is liberating in as much as it removes a most powerful taboo. Perhaps Perseus' greatest achievement was not to cut off Medusa's head but to overcome his fears and look at its reflection in the shield.<sup>117</sup>

While recognizing that film can serve as public information and indeed evidence in the strict legal sense, we surely balk at the assertion that 'The mirror reflections of horror are an end in themselves.'<sup>118</sup> At this point Kracauer radically underestimates the dangerous and often perverse power of the medium, neglecting to add that the response of an audience (whether dreaming or not) can often be the opposite of the one intended, as Dean and Prager point out. The welter of catastrophic information available in audiovisual form today was not known to Kracauer, nor were the expressions 'compassion fatigue' and 'zapping'. Unlike the creative recuperation of a Nazi photograph, the indiscriminate replay of atrocity risks duplicating the offense without any commensurate gain. LaCapra correctly queries Lanzmann's

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<sup>117</sup> Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, pp. 305-306.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p 306.

paradoxical promise of “a frontal look at horror” insofar as he (Lanzmann) rejects direct representation’, preferring to psychologize ‘the frontal look’ in terms of ‘the actual reliving or acting out of a traumatic past’.<sup>119</sup>

Athena’s Shield, as Kracauer calls it, must be used with greater discretion, and to mark this departure we can recuperate his metaphor under the title ‘Perseus’s Mirror’ in order to explore the possible synergies of cinematic reproduction with traumatic recall and historical record, while attempting to respect Agamben’s cautionary citation of Primo Levi’s own recuperation of the Greek myth:

...those who saw the Gorgon have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the Muslims, the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have a general significance. They are the rule, we are the exception.<sup>120</sup>

As an example of ‘the submerged’ or of ‘living death’, Primo Levi recounts the final days of the tiny child Hurbinek, who repetitively uttered but one word whose very language no other inmate could identify, and who died just after the liberation.<sup>121</sup> In following Levi by insisting that the best died, that any testimony comes *de facto* from those least qualified to testify, Agamben poses a profound problem for film interpretation, for film is also a language even when silent. If those who saw the Gorgon are the only true witnesses, then only the dead can speak. The Holocaust has been declared taboo; a modern superstition has rendered it ‘electrically loaded’. Uttering a single word or conjuring a single frame in the victims’ name can only be a presumptuous usurpation, a recuperation of a voice unheard and unknown.

It is worth noting, however, that Levi’s account of Hurbinek’s death, as transmitted by Agamben, is not only one of the most moving moments in his discourse but also conveys to any empathetic listener (precisely through fiction at second hand) an intensely vivid picture of how the camp functioned. Agamben’s sensibility is here seriously at odds with his own pessimism. Our response to an event such as the Holocaust must of necessity be incomplete and inadequate but we must live with our own fragility.

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<sup>119</sup> LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, p. 101.

<sup>120</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 33, citing Primo Levi, 1989: pp. 83-84.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

In immuring himself in a perfectly airless critical space where anyone testifying must be lying because the only true witness is either dead or struck dumb, Agamben is doing a dubious service to Holocaust victims. One might also wonder whether his recuperation and critical enthronelement of the ineffably offensive epithet *Muselmann* is the linguistic equivalent of uncritical viewing of perpetrator photographs and a capitulation to the Nazis' negative sublime, and whether its constant repetition in philosophical discourse is an affront not only to Jews but in its casual racism to Muslims as well. This suggests itself all the more when accompanied by musings on the passive/active dichotomy in sexual relations that surely are neither decent nor relevant in this context,<sup>122</sup> a combination that has led, in film terms, to such adventures into sado-masochism as Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1974). We should not be reduced to silence by a train of thought initiated by the butchers of Auschwitz. Their victims would surely not have it so, however imperfect our mental and emotional grasp. While Levi, as a survivor, is entitled to use the camp expression *Muselmann*, one has no right today to appropriate his voice (a frequent recuperation of Holocaust studies). It seems more proper to use instead his partial alternatives 'the submerged' or 'the living dead', which better convey the condition of those who have lost nearly half their body weight through malnutrition and are suffering from traumatic shock, a medical diagnosis that should instil some critical self-restraint.

Having positively recuperated Felman and Laub's concept of the Holocaust as 'an event without witnesses' in their reference to Lanzmann's *Shoah*, Agamben goes on to criticize their praise of that film as 'the unique performance of a singing': 'To explain the paradox of testimony through the deus ex machina of song is to aestheticize testimony – something Lanzmann is careful to avoid.'<sup>123</sup> On the contrary, Lanzmann called *Shoah* 'une fiction', in other words an engagement with aesthetics, and Agamben himself refers to poetic utterance (citing Hölderlin) as the sole remnant available for witness,<sup>124</sup> an apparent contradiction in his thinking or a curious enigma at least. Beyond the special qualities of *Shoah*, all film engages with aesthetics with every choice of cut and lens.

To return to Kracauer: Perseus could only approach the Gorgon with eyes averted and likewise any gaze that confronts the Holocaust head-on is turned to stone

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., pp. 110-111.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>124</sup> See Introduction epigraph.

before the truth can be told, including, surely, the cinematic gaze. Most films rush in where angels fear to tread, but *With Raised Hands* is a rare exception. Panov's lens stands in for Perseus's Mirror, recounting the horror faithfully precisely because tangentially. Instead of dwelling on the transport about to depart, Panov creates a 'living' *Doppelgänger* of the boy in the 'archived' photograph through whom we can enter the frame, and thus breaks, with the courage of Perseus, a taboo on all Holocaust representation.

There is no danger of this film seeming sentimental, the craftsmanship is too immaculate and the sensibility – distinctly Eastern European in style – too bitterly poetic in Hölderlin's truest sense. This is a disquisition on remembrance, on the invocatory, religious function of film in its ability to summon the dead and restore them to life by placing the viewer in their shoes. Suspended in time, they are still with us, ghosts but alive, amongst us. This is a strategy of commemoration that stands out from other Holocaust films, comparable in its moral rigour to Lanzmann's very different approach in *Shoah*, eschewing the loquacity that Lanzmann so detested but arguably (in his nine hours final edit of hundreds of hours of film) did not avoid.<sup>125</sup>

Precisely through the workings of taboo, an icon, however frightening, is dead, drained of meaning by overfamiliarity. We think we know, but we know nothing. Panov's achievement is to have brought the 'iconic photograph' back to an empathetic space where it can be experienced, not just feared. In its accuracy of historical observation and the chilling entronement of the camera as the cause of what it sees; in its liberation of the victim from the posthumous gaze of his persecutor; in its aesthetic restraint, its expression of physical brutality through terrifying anticipation rather than explicit depiction, and its conveying of death through foreknowledge with hindsight, *With Raised Hands* deals better with issues of filmic representation of the Holocaust in its six minutes and thirty shots than many full-length feature films. As Baer writes of Jablonski's very different film *Photographer*, one that *scans* the stills taken by another perpetrator, the Nazi entrepreneur Genewein: 'For a fleeting moment his [the victim's] face has been retrieved from within the Nazi gaze, and the incontestable power differential between Nazi and Jew has been erased'.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> The three hours of *Au Nom du meme père* were compiled from over a hundred hours of footage, so the shooting ratio is not in itself of note, other than economically.

<sup>126</sup> Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2002), p. 156.

## The Jewish Witness

If a film of a different genre made fifty years earlier could be considered a pendant to *With Raised Hands*, *Das Warschauer Medem-Sanatorium für jüdische Kinder*, recuperated for this study from the Berlin Film Museum archives on one sixty-minute spool of 35 mm film, might well be it. Already the subtitle *Ein Film der Erinnerung* provokes the question: who is doing the remembering, from what vantage point, and with what relationship to the material we are about to be shown? ‘1937 entstanden’, the film is self-evidently a period piece, but who is telling us that the Jewish Labour Movement was ‘früher’, in other words extinguished? Presumably the same omniscient, silent narrator, who with the benefit of historical hindsight offers us two minutes of silent, scrolling caption, informing us that all the voluntary workers and children we are about to see are now dead. ‘Es gibt auch keine Sühne für das, was an ihnen geschah... Aber das Streben...und der Glaube an ein brüderliches Zusammenleben aller Menschen und Völker...sollte auch unsere Herzen erfüllen.’ The pious tone reminds us how rapidly the Holocaust was absorbed into Judaeo-Christian discourse of sin and redemption in the immediate aftermath of the war, too rapidly for the enormity to have sunk in, a rite of recuperation that occulted the real facts and disguised the dreadful scale of the losses, cultural as well as human. ‘Dann wäre das Heiligste, das in ihren Körpern wohnte, unzerstörbar geblieben.’

By two minutes forty-five the most patient hand is grasping for the fast forward, when finally a picture flickers into life, and a narrator arranged in stiff three-quarter profile to camera introduces the Sanatorium to an imagined audience in halting Yiddish to the accompaniment of declamatory music. Whether contemporaneous with the preceding captions or with the Sanatorium itself, he forms a bridge to the past equivalent in some senses to the infinitely receding optic that Panov arranges so well, and the effect, deliberate or involuntary, is the same. The viewer follows, as if ushered down a long, dark tunnel, and when finally, spot on the fifth minute, the first action picture (of happy children flying through frame on mercifully robust swings) bursts into life with an account of the ground-breaking work of this Jewish orphanage that flourished from 1922 till its dissolution in 1942, one is quite simply there. The children’s laughter is already as shocking as anything a Holocaust film could recount, for this first frame makes clear that these were not predestined victims.

Forty-five seconds later an eight-minute visual disquisition on the abject poverty of the Warsaw slums tells us why the Medem-Sanatorium might have been needed. Tucked behind a seething alley, a Jewish family shares one room, one bed; the grandfather sewing; the baby at its mother's breast, cradle dangling from the ceiling; a pile of laundry on the floor, taken in, no doubt, from paying customers. The extreme melancholy is pervasive, grim and potentially deceptive. After such an unpromising start, the signature of the original *auteur* is starting to emerge and the skill of the montage alone should alert one to the presence of a craftsman. Was the family always this dejected, or is there a *mise en scène* at work here, deliberately emphasizing indigence to underscore the relief provided? Neither answer can account for the almost premonitory, ghost-like presence of the protagonists, who are there yet not there, as if vanished before they have gone, in a way no actor could conceivably have transmitted. Street cries echo from the courtyard downstairs where children play, hawkers sell and a legless man is trollied past, a veteran of the previous conflagration perhaps. A cacophony of children's coughing convinces us that the ghetto was not a healthy place to grow up, and with a further desperate irony, as if the film were running backwards in time, a train whistles through close shot in clouds of steam (intercut with children's 'train impersonations') transporting them not to the gas chambers but to the Medem Sanatorium, where happy inmates greet the new arrivals.

A voice-over explains the Medem's secular, socialist and philanthropic ideals, which the film proceeds to incarnate through child performances one can only qualify as inspired: the 'family meal' - kids joyously stuffing faces, boy pinching last pretzel to be discovered by plus-foured teacher, reprimanded, and stealthily given back his ill-gotten gains; the 'return to nature' - chicken coop (with 'pecking music' reminiscent of early Disney - later a boy emerges covered in feathers), much-loved pets such as tortoise and tadpoles and rabbit in need of combing; 'bed time' - communal showers (another terrible foreshadowing) complete with boy who bolts fully clothed from matron doing rounds with thermometer and register and another who eats his soap bar, followed by sewing repairs, boot polish, neck scrubbing, teeth cleaning and finally sleep, leaving only a line of ownerless shoes and boots (which, again, seems terrible in hindsight). It is impossible to coax such radiant identities on screen from children who do not already possess them. The impeccable, exuberant performances delivered with wicked humour speak clearly of what they had been directed to do but would have done anyway (give or take an instruction, a shared joke

and a rehearsal or two). These are children ‘acting themselves’ and giving a better account of their lives than any hidden camera could possibly have captured, brilliant, witty, rescued and privileged lives about to be terminated in ways the *auteur* cannot possibly have anticipated but nevertheless appears to conjure. A direct inversion of Panov’s ‘historical knowledge denied’, this film might carry the equally illogical logline ‘denied future restored’.

The remaining forty minutes unfolds an extraordinary feat of social engineering, these ghetto boys transformed through outdoor exercise, fresh air, market gardening, egg production, bee-keeping, not to mention routine dental and medical care into self-reliant, self-sufficient pioneers prepared for the long journey to Palestine to found the kibbutz movement, perhaps, had they been allowed. Influenced, no doubt, by the forward-looking, ‘civilizing’ German ecological movement of the 1920s, the Medem-Sanatorium might beg some odious comparisons with the Nazi perversion of the same outdoor ideals in its youth camps, and worse through ‘Arbeit macht frei’, but one glance at the footage gives the lie to this construct. The squirting of water from the washroom taps, pillow fight in the dorm with attendant feather explosions, to be followed by confession, atonement and reconciliation next morning, all speak of a world imbued with Judaic values of fun and celebration, god and humanity, fall and redemption unimaginable to the Nazi mind. As evening falls, the children play chess and make music. A young fiddler plays Bach with feeling and flair to unenvious child applause, a talent he may have brought from the ghetto and that may yet save his life in the camps for which he is bound. A girl emerges from behind a corn doll while a voice reads Walt Whitman’s thanks for the harvest. And nowhere is a teacher in sight.

By its forty-fifth minute the film is turning to the elegiac with an unbearably wistful lullaby, a Germanic folksong in three-part harmony, the refrain ‘Alleluyah’ clearly delivered in Hebrew, a musical fusion soon to be extinguished. Feet briefly, frantically, chase a football, as if willing the end of the film to recede infinitely into a future that cannot be seen, the vote for the Children’s Council empowers the next generation of leaders, and the whistle of an arriving steam train ushers the graduates into the real world of spinning wheels and mining wheels, a reminder of the desperate fragility of this utopia that would shortly be crushed, by German hands. On minute fifty-four the children come marching hand in hand over the brow of a hill, to the strains of a Wanderlied, gazing into a future that does not exist.

The film cuts to black. There are no credits. Nothing betrays the brilliant, committed author of this piece, who thought, no doubt, that he was dedicating his professionalism (probably unpaid) to a cause he cherished, delivering what was planned as a corporate video with a degree of sentimental hyperbole that can neither vitiate his gift nor obscure the achievement of the Medem-Sanatorium and its children. This is a flowering of Jewish culture out of the ghetto that gives the lie to Nazi propaganda of a diseased, subhuman race; and one cannot discount in these days of renewed racial hatred and repeated genocide that such evidence is needed.<sup>127</sup> It is not sufficient to trundle Jewish characters onto the screen in perfect time for their trip to Auschwitz, or to devote our entire critical arsenal to the ‘submerged’ without dwelling on what it was that was destroyed, as though European Jewry had had no prior existence and no other *raison d’être* than to be victimized – a contempt that compounds the original injury.

How many post-war German films reflect a fraction of the Jewish achievement recounted here? How many attempt (as Panov does) an effective restitution through the eye of the camera? From Italy we have the exquisite *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, from Hungary *Sunshine* (both of them focused on upper-middle class Jewry), but where are the equivalent German films, whose creation would seem to be inseparable from a decent cinematographic restitution of the *status quo ante* of European Jewish civilization? Honourable but partial exceptions to the prevailing amnesia are *David* by Peter Lilienthal (1979),<sup>128</sup> which studies a Jewish community under growing pressure from the Nazis; *Die Geschwister Oppermann* a television series by Egon Monk (1983), which profiles successful, assimilated Jewry; *Charlotte S.* by Frans Weisz (1981), an evocation of the cultured, cosmopolitan Jewish milieu of actors and musicians; and even *Comedian Harmonists* by Joseph Vilsmaier (1997), a musical boulevard bio-pic of the eponymous entertainers. But the emphasis is overwhelmingly on the Jew as pre-destined victim, an unwelcome *Doppelgänger*, ‘a paradigm for the condition of a displaced or shadow identity on home territory’,<sup>129</sup> in other words, ‘elektrisch geladen’, unapproachable, taboo.

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<sup>127</sup> Wajda’s orphanage in *Korczak* is a welcome corrective but comes nowhere near this achievement. His much criticized but honest reflection of pre-war Polish anti-Semitism ironically illustrates the difficulties inherent in recreating Jewish culture on its own terms rather than those of its persecutors.

<sup>128</sup> See Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 7.

<sup>129</sup> Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 4.



## Archive and Witness

A third Polish film completes this cross-genre triptych, a post-war archival compilation held by the Bundesfilmarchiv, which finishes the story *Das Medem-Sanatorium* and *With Raised Hands* began. *Requiem für 500 000* (1963) is compiled in its entirety from archival footage from the Warsaw ghetto uprising, with no outrage spared in this litany of horror: bodies lie unburied in the burning streets, executions are carried out to camera, a horse-cart loaded with corpses crosses the mournful path of a steam train, civilians wait in line beneath the rifle of a single soldier supervising the exodus towards mass murder (much like Panov's sentry). SS flame throwers retake control and the ghetto burns over the swelling 'Hallelujah Chorus', a grim echo of the haunting *Medem* lullabye that crystallizes a growing sense of unease: how was this horrific information come by? The answer is provided in the closing titles: 'Alle Aufnahmen stammten von Kameralenten und Fotografen der faschistischen deutschen Wehrmacht, der SS und der Gestapo', in other words from the operator whom Panov so wilyly observed. Amidst insistent pans across archival stills, the Boy With Raised Hands is noted and recorded but somehow lost, reduced to a cipher, a victim like the others and nothing more.

A cursory comparison of this unmediated archive compilation with Panov's short film raises profound questions of decency: is it right to exhibit to the public gaze such hideous executions, displaying the gruesome death suffered by non-combatants through the prurient, perverse gaze of their murderers? Have the victims no privacy? What is the purpose of showing such footage and what is its likely effect upon an audience, especially when unaccompanied by any balancing narrative? The glorification of unbounded violence and destruction speaks loudly through the lens. Even if successfully (and unequivocally) evoked in the viewer, horror alone is not enough, it may even prove counter-productive, especially in this era of instant mediatization of genocidal outrage and its reproduction in torture pornography whether simulated or actual. The lines become blurred. The palate becomes jaded. The ritual incantation of horror fails to translate into active, critical intervention; it encourages instead the passive partaking of a ceremony, in which the communicant becomes an unwitting celebrant of hopelessness. The original trauma suffered by the subjects of such footage is transferred through the viewing eye, internalized, most often repressed and, finding no therapeutic outlet, lies dormant in the body politic for

generations. One may plead the vital public interest and regard the viewing of such footage as a personal duty, as was argued earlier in this chapter. But ‘witness’ is not necessarily acquired by hearing or seeing ‘testimony’. One may listen but not hear; see, but not comprehend; perceive, but repress, through the sheer scale of horror to which one has been exposed. And one disastrous editorial misjudgement can subvert the entire range of response, recuperating the message for agendas barely suspected.

Who commissioned this film? What cadre at what level in the Censor’s Office, and with what access to the Polish Politburo, sanctioned the use of the Hallelujah Chorus, one of the most emphatic hymns of praise ever written? If one is tempted to plead a naive faith in the critical power of sarcasm that characterized much of the nineteen-sixties, or the ignorance of religious motifs in an atheist, Communist system, or a misplaced desire to crystallize an affect or permit some degree of catharsis, it behoves one to remember that Polish Catholicism was as powerful as ever at the time this film was assembled, that it posed a challenge to the Soviet state and did nothing to resist the currents of populist anti-Semitism on which its teaching was implicitly based, especially in the years before the Second Vatican Council. The *means* portrayed in *Requiem* might have been the ferocity of the Nazi (i.e. capitalist) genocide; but the *ends* (namely the expunging from Catholic Warsaw of the deicide Jew) could be hailed as the hidden workings of God’s master plan, betrayed by a musical triumphalism whose references Christians everywhere would recognize, at least unconsciously. The Communists had no difficulty identifying the traditional scapegoat. The usefulness of playing to the masses at a time of renewed restiveness must have been clear to them, particularly since intellectual dissidence (particularly if Jewish) enjoyed little mass sympathy even if the Communist authorities enjoyed less. The genesis of this film was shortly followed by the largest, Communist-effected, Catholic-condoned persecution of Jews since the end of the war,<sup>130</sup> marked by waves of arrests, imprisonments, state-sanctioned brutality and forced emigrations. Despite its recognition on the Eastern Bloc festival circuit,<sup>131</sup> the timing of *Requiem* (with its implicitly quietist message) could be deemed a warning to the Poles to keep quiet and remember the bad times or things could turn nasty again, an example of how the apparently ‘neutral’ presentation of archival footage can often disguise an active

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<sup>130</sup> See *Au Nom du même père*, Rabbi Dr. Zvi Marx, for a consideration of Polish and Christian anti-Semitism, also Friedlander, ‘Under the Communist glacier, other forces lay dormant, now released’.

<sup>131</sup> Cracow Film Festival 1963, Golden Hobby-Horse of Cracow, Best Documentary, Jerzy Bossak, Wacław Kazmierczak; Leipzig DOK Festival 1963, Silver Dove, Jerzy Bossak.

political recuperation. The Wrath of God is deeply rooted as a trope of the Judaeo-Christian imagination, with antecedents that predate the Fall of the Temple; the Nazis as the Scourge of God have figured unhappily even in some corners of Jewish theology, where the Holocaust is depicted as God's punishment for secular Jewish assimilation in the diaspora, amongst other supposed wanderings from the faith.<sup>132</sup> The idea is not strange to the superstitious Christian mind either, and such unmediated apocalyptic footage is bound to provoke the naive question: why did God allow it? What taboo had the Jews broken, to deserve such terrible punishment? In suggesting or propagating such spiritual meanderings, film usurps the power of religion and steers by unconscious processes comparable to those invoked by the chanting of the liturgy to a subject congregation.

### **Film as Ritual**

Walter Benjamin notes that the advent of film, with its mechanization of the means of artistic reproduction (a process which negates the difference between 'original' and 'copy' and thus erases the distinctive 'aura' of an original work of art, bringing the distant falsely close and over-familiarizing the strange for the consumption of the masses) represents an 'Erschütterung der Tradition [...] die Liquidierung des Traditionswertes am Kulturerbe'.<sup>133</sup>

While respecting the canonical readings of Benjamin which tend to accept his political position at face value, it can be argued that his apocalyptic language of liquidation reveals the strains felt by a cultural elitist pressing himself into the service of the Marxist revolution, and in fact tells us less about the education of the masses than about the appropriation by 'film' of experiences previously reserved for the cult of religion. When Benjamin derides the film maker Abel Gance, who in 1927 exclaimed: 'all legends, all mythologies, and all myths, all founders of religion, and the very religions [...] await their exposed resurrection', Gance's naïve insight survives Benjamin's sarcasm curiously unscathed. This only serves to reinforce the philosopher's principal and incontestable assertion that film is a new departure in the relationship between subject and object, between performer and recipient, creator and

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<sup>132</sup> See *Au Nom du même père*, Dr. Mordecai Paldiel, Director of Yad Vashem's Department of the Righteous Among the Nations (1984-2007), on the theological fallacy of 'Hitler as agent of God'.

<sup>133</sup> Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk*, pp. 477-478.

audience, effecting a traumatic rupture in the way that art had previously been received.

We can extend this line of thought by suggesting that film itself is a traumatic event, not just in its genesis as an art form but in its very means of production and its ruptured perceptions. For while all performing arts had previously been bound to strict continuousness by the physical presence of its audience, film was the first art form that could not only capture and reproduce an observed moment in time but *annihilate the gaps between several such moments and repeat the process at will*, not just breaking taboos but mocking them with carnivalesque abandon. Benjamin was correct to discern a revolution in the advent of film; self-evidently the plurality of reproduction threatens the concept of the 'original'. However, he omitted to underline the fact that the 'original' of any film is the negative, which remains unviewable except as a ghostly *alter ego* or *Doppelgänger*, and that *only* the copies (the positive prints, each and every one of them) are the 'real and final object'. Benjamin's implicit distaste for reproduction, dictated by his class, education and aesthetic, speaks loud and clear. But there are yet more disjunctive processes involved in the making of films: the usurpation and reshaping of reality; the edited 're-run' of the living but fast-receding past; the capturing, dissecting and re-grafting of physical events; the projection of absent events and their transference onto an audience in a manner one might truly describe as traumatic and traumatizing; these processes have no precedent in the history of art.

Performed to camera as a pagan rite amongst the initiated without lay witnesses; processed in a dark room by strange alchemical means; first cut then assembled in the smallest gobbets into a montage relying entirely on suggestion, ellipsis, subtext and innuendo to create the appearance of presence; and replayed in the ritual dark to the faithful as an offering of the sacrificed but resurrected deity, cinema returns the act of dramatic representation and reception more closely to its Athenian origins in sacred ritual than theatre has achieved in the intervening two and half millennia.<sup>134</sup>

The simulacrum of religious rites, the direct appeal to subliminal psychological processes, the capacity of film to summon the numinous for an

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<sup>134</sup> See A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); also George Thomson, *Aeschylus and Athens* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1941).

audience barely aware of its own credulity, cannot be excluded from consideration and certainly not where it relates to the reflection and recovery of trauma; which is not to argue *a priori* that such a reception is valid or desirable, though neither should one reject that possibility out of hand. Therapy takes many forms, not all of them rational, indeed any healing is arguably impossible without ‘letting go’, without an affective surrender which alone liberates and potentiates the process of ‘working-through’.

The stigmatisation of the cinema experience as ‘voyeuristic’ (of course it is, by definition) comes nowhere close to reaching, in its moral disapproval, the emotional realities of the viewing experience. As *Doppelgänger* medium, (to recuperate Webber’s metaphor), film ‘recurrently introduces voyeurism and innuendo into the subject’s pursuit of a visual and discursive sense of self.’<sup>135</sup> Does ‘total immersion’ during a performance (neglecting Brechtian duties of self-distance) truly impair the critical faculties? Or does the oscillation between unconscious and conscious reception noted by Kracauer (between ‘trance-like absorption’ and ‘drifting ashore again’),<sup>136</sup> between identification and critique, facilitate the regenerative experience which many seek in cinema?<sup>137</sup>

## Therapy and Propaganda

It is precisely film’s apparently redemptive, ritual power (fetishistically distracting the gaze from all we seem to lack) that makes possible and attractive both its potential uses in the healing of trauma and conversely the perversion of this process by propaganda. This is Benjamin’s ultimate preoccupation in his essay. If the power of the hallowed has been transferred onto film, the power of film can be perverted spectacularly by clever or even crass abuse, notoriously by the Nazis in conveying the ‘scapegoat’ as ‘bad’ and racialism as ‘good’, a successful inversion we find hard to fathom in an age where the opposite is unassailable truth and the media, including film, are subject to more subtle controls. Attempting to put his theory at the disposal of the proletarian revolution, Benjamin bravely castigates the reading of ritual elements in film and invokes that ancient curse ‘ultrareactionary’ against authors who give film a sacred or supernatural context. He attempts a sneer at Werfel’s criticism of

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<sup>135</sup> Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 4.

<sup>136</sup> Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>137</sup> Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk*, p. 505: ‘Die Rezeption in der Zerstreuung [...] hat am Film ihr eigentliches Übungsinstrument’.

social realism as obstructing the elevation of film to the realm of art, only to conclude his paragraph by a long quotation from his chosen scapegoat (i.e. Werfel), whose eloquence and intuition again defeat Benjamin's argument:

Der Film hat seinen wahren Sinn, seine wirklichen Möglichkeiten noch nicht erfaßt [...] Sie bestehen in seinem einzigartigen Vermögen, mit natürlichen Mitteln und mit unvergleichbarer Überzeugungskraft das Feenhafte, Wunderbare, Übernatürliche zum Ausdruck zu bringen.<sup>138</sup>

This has the ring of truth, and it clearly places cinema within the German Romantic tradition. It is precisely these magical, ritual qualities, so profoundly rooted in the needs of the human psyche, that make film such a potent force for good and ill, and a platform so hotly contested, including by the critics who most fiercely mistrust the uses and implications of the transcendental. When Lanzmann insisted that *Shoah* was a fiction (*'une fiction'*), he surely did not mean that the persons and events it describes were invented. On the one hand, he asserts his authorship (in the *auteur* tradition) of a work of film creation; additionally, he draws attention to the almost magical invocation of which film is capable, a gift he exercises to the full in his attempt to restore the past before our eyes, through not entirely rational means directly opposed to those of journalistic *reportage*. Eschewing archive footage and documentary evidence, he creates a 'fiction' that paradoxically ranks amongst the best researched records and the most comprehensive testimony ever filmed, even if the author is frequently criticized for his dominant presence and over-intrusive interviewing techniques.

Staying with Walter Benjamin to the end of his polemic, one reads in his Epilogue: *'Der Faschismus läuft folgereicht auf eine Ästhetisierung des politischen Lebens hinaus. Der Vergewaltigung der Massen, die er am Kult des Führers zu Boden zwingt, entspricht die Vergewaltigung einer Apparatur, die er der Herstellung von Kultwerten dienstbar macht. Alle Bemühungen um die Ästhetisierung der Politik gipfeln in einem Punkt. Dieser Punkt ist der Krieg.'* He underlines the case with a lengthy quotation from warmongering Futurist Marinetti, who claims that 'war is

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 487.

beautiful'.<sup>139</sup> *Fiat ars - pereat mundus* concludes Benjamin. Mankind's 'Selbstentfremdung hat jenen Grad erreicht, der sie ihre eigene Vernichtung als ästhetischen Genuß ersten Ranges erleben läßt.'<sup>140</sup> Cinema is indeed abused for the enjoyment of self-destruction. Having shattered what remained of the taboo on graven images, it no longer recognizes 'elektrisch geladene Gegenstände' when it sees them.

## Holocaust as Spectacle

Given the Nazis' political aesthetic and their overwhelming sense of the theatrical, exemplified in the 'bread and circuses' principle underlying the Nuremberg Rallies, one might argue, from Benjamin's analysis, that the Holocaust was in some sense staged for the German masses much as Christians were murdered for the enjoyment of the Colosseum, and that any representation of this spectacle turns the producer into an impresario for the Nazis, parading their victims for the gratification (horror, pity – call it what one may) of a latter-day audience whom they would be delighted to address. There is a danger that the airing of Nazi crimes flatter the perpetrator and further victimize the victim, especially since Nazis rarely expressed remorse and often boasted of their crimes, which continue to elicit in some circles an illicit thrill and in others an occulted fascination, the baleful *faszinosum* that can infect anyone who stares too long into its poisonous waters. 'Nature – and humankind', writes Lawrence Langer, 'have been immersed in the murky waters of the Holocaust, leaving a residue of spiritual indecision virtually impossible to cleanse. Older rituals of purification are equally stained'.<sup>141</sup>

A reading of the Holocaust as spectacle might seem contentious, scandalous even. But Rousset alerts us that 'La propagande a jeté dans le monde la passion du lynch',<sup>142</sup> the ultimate spectacle thinly disguised as sacrifice. One may object that the Holocaust was planned and conducted in secret. But one does not have to agree with every inflection of Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*<sup>143</sup> to know that the fate

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 506.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 508.

<sup>141</sup> Lawrence Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 102.

<sup>142</sup> Rousset, *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, p. 115.

<sup>143</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners – Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

of the Jews was an open secret from 1942 ('Entsetzt hat das kaum jemanden'),<sup>144</sup> a deliberately leaked secret (transgressively shared by Hitler with the 'Volk' in no fewer than five speeches that year),<sup>145</sup> which served as a mobilisation for total war and a mechanism for enforcing German loyalty till the bitter end,<sup>146</sup> as if the Nazis with consummate seduction were whispering to its audience 'this is what we've always promised, what you've always wanted, and now its happening, far away but close at hand'. There is a powerful specular identification at work here, establishing a kind of *Doppelgänger* relation that mirrors the function of film itself. As Webber puts it, 'The performances of the *Doppelgänger* will be seen as so many rehearsals of a double role on various reconstructions of the Lacanian mirror stage.'<sup>147</sup>

For further corroboration, let us consider LaCapra's analyses of Himmler's 1943 Posen speech to senior SS officers, set out in *Representing the Holocaust*,<sup>148</sup> and reprised in *History and Memory after Auschwitz*,<sup>149</sup> in which Himmler elaborates on the idea of the death camps as an unspeakable spectacle which the SS elite has perpetrated, beheld, and endured. LaCapra demonstrates firstly that Himmler's speech establishes the aesthetic of a 'negative sublime' underlying Nazi self-awareness, a sense of holy mission driven by 'Rausch' to obey and fulfil the Führer's 'sacred orders' to annihilate the Jews; secondly, by extension, that the Holocaust was *itself* conceived, and sold to its executioners, as the enactment of confused religious pseudo-ideals, including ritual transgression of taboo and shared assumption of sin in the cause of redemption (a self-delusion betrayed by the oft-repeated perversion of the word 'anständig' as a bonding value amongst initiates).<sup>150</sup> Where LaCapra fails to follow through, however, is in his acceptance at face value of Himmler's paradoxical injunction of eternal 'silence' concerning this spectacle, an injunction designed to be observed more in the transgression (like the Jewish genocide itself) than the keeping. Himmler is *boasting*, and sharing the thrill of his illicit boast with his acolytes, in the sure knowledge that their 'never-to-be-written page of glory' will *inevitably* be

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<sup>144</sup> Saul Friedländer, *Den Holocaust Beschreiben, Auf dem Weg zu einer integrierten Geschichte* (Weimar: Wallstein Verlag, 2007), p. 117.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> See *Eva/The Silence of the Hills*, screenplay by Gareth Jones, 2008.

<sup>147</sup> Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 3.

<sup>148</sup> LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, pp. 106-110.

<sup>149</sup> LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, pp. 25-30, citing Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*.

<sup>150</sup> Caruth, 'Interview with Robert Jay Lifton', *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 140: '...you cannot kill large numbers of people except with a claim to virtue.'



written and *should* be written in order for the SS sacrifice (in taking the necessary sins of the *Volk* upon itself in pursuit of Germany's manifest destiny) to be revealed to future generations – just as it had already been leaked (nay trumpeted) to the German people - and that Nazis should be proud of it. This double negative, this double-think, this 'silent boasting' or 'boasting of complicit silence', is a rhetorical device typical of the Nazi flaunting of their extroverted repressions, a wink between insiders intended as a highly theatrical but actually insipid irony. It should draw one's attention to the entire *mise en scène* of the Holocaust, indicating that the apparent paradox actually is not one. LaCapra has interpreted Himmler's words but not his performance, and falls silent at the end of his chapter, alleging that 'at this point it is difficult for the commentator to know where to direct his thought'.<sup>151</sup>

It is, however, precisely at the point of greatest incredulity, of most unspeakable horror, that the critic needs to push on, in order to grasp the enormity of the Nazi imagination and the 'aesthetic' experience to which they constantly made reference, clearly conceiving of themselves as star actors on the world stage. The problem with representing the Holocaust in any way is: how does one avoid posthumously gratifying their pathetically overblown ambitions? These were men who (in their public posturing at least) still confidently expected to win the war and dominate a modernist, racially defined world order, already seeing themselves strutting on screen in the post-war years of UFA production. They would not necessarily be disappointed by some of the recent output. Cinema was indivisible from war, as Anton Kaes recounts through the 'making-of' of *Kolberg* (Veit Harlan, 1945), a historical epic which drained soldiers from the collapsing Eastern front to serve as extras, opened in siege-bound La Rochelle in January 1945 and was hailed by its Maecenas, Goebbels, in the following terms: 'Gentlemen, in a hundred years time they will be showing a fine color film of the terrible days we are living through. Wouldn't you like to play a part in that film?'<sup>152</sup>

The fact that these 'gentlemen' instead enjoyed their notoriety in the dock (Barbie or Eichmann, for instance, as reported by Hannah Arendt),<sup>153</sup> merely extends the sense of performativity, which is often imposed even on the surviving victims in

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<sup>151</sup> LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 110.

<sup>152</sup> Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat, the Return of History as Film* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 4.

<sup>153</sup> See Darcy C. Buerkle, 'Affect in the Archive: Arendt, Eichmann and *The Specialist*', *Visualizing the Holocaust*, pp. 210-238.

the relived traumas of their testimonies. 'They had to perform it', insists the directorial Lanzmann of his interviewees, 'in other words, to irrealize (*irréaliser*)',<sup>154</sup> and so to touch the 'Sitz einer furchtbaren Kraft' from which taboo could be broken and truth emerge.

It is precisely the performative elements in the way the Holocaust was enjoyed by its perpetrators that leads one to fear for its repetition in other circumstances, for genocides are rarely spontaneous but rather contain elements of ritual that can be hard to discern within the apparent mayhem of what we mistakenly refer to as mindless atrocity. This is why dramaturgy must take a tangential approach to trauma, to avoid rehearsing or re-inflicting it. Many harmful recuperations are performed with the best intentions in complete misjudgement of their connotations and results, precisely because a taboo has been incorrectly scanned before it was broken.

Perseus's Mirror was of course not a mirror but a highly burnished shield given him by Athena, in whose dazzling surface he could see Medusa reflected as he approached her, backwards, the shield held above his head and necessarily at a tangent to himself and his prey. Additionally, it was only with the helmet of invisibility he had already stolen from Medusa's immortal sisters, and with Athena guiding his arm, that Perseus dismissed the Gorgon (and her taboo) with a backward stroke of Hermes's sickle. While many headlong cinematographic approaches to the Holocaust have been fossilized long before they could convey anything but the horror of their own temerity, others have come away relatively unscathed through the magical appliance of authorial invisibility coupled with tangential reverence and the guiding hand of wisdom wielding a sharp dramaturgical weapon. Nothing less will do.

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<sup>154</sup> See Michael D'Arcy, 'Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* and the Intentionality of the Image', *Visualizing the Holocaust*, pp. 138-161, here p. 140.

## 2. REPRESSION

### A Strange Case of Traumatic Amnesia

Aber es wurde nicht die Mordtat erinnert, sondern anstatt dessen ihre Sühnung phantasiert, und darum konnte diese Phantasie als Erlösungsbotschaft (Evangelium) begrüßt werden.<sup>155</sup>

The suppression of Nazi anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in East and West German cinema until the 1980s is one of the most staggering characteristics of the on-screen memory discourse.<sup>156</sup>

#### Rites of Mourning

In the emergence of Judaism through the repressed memory of the murder of Moses, Freud establishes the concept of collective trauma and offers us a template for the study of other great collective repressions, of which Holocaust denial must be the classic instance of our times. Following the lead of Alexander and Margarethe Mitscherlich's *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* (1967), Eric Santner notes in *Stranded Objects* 'the apparent absence of any sustained emotional confrontation with the Nazi past in postwar German society'.<sup>157</sup> The loss of the Führer and with him a huge investment of narcissistic identification was followed not by the massive fall into melancholy and depression that might have led to profound analyses of culpability in cinematic and other artistic forms, but on the contrary by deep-rooted denial expressed in frenetic rebuilding, which Santner, quoting Adorno on Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the ego*,<sup>158</sup> explains thus: 'secretly, unconsciously smouldering and therefore especially powerful, these identifications as well as a group narcissism were not destroyed but continue to exist'.<sup>159</sup> 'In Lacanian terms, the Jews were assigned the role of the ones who intrude into and disrupt the Imaginary, akin to evil fathers who brutally uproot the children from their native matrix and maroon

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<sup>155</sup> Freud, 'Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion', *Gesammelte Werke*, XVI, p. 192.

<sup>156</sup> Daniela Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall, the Cinema of East Germany* (Manchester and NY: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 85.

<sup>157</sup> Santner, *Stranded Objects*, p. 1.

<sup>158</sup> Freud, 'Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse', *Gesammelte Werke*, XIII, pp. 71-161.

<sup>159</sup> Santner, *Stranded Objects*, p. 5, citing Theodor W. Adorno, 'What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?' trans. Timothy Bahti and Geoffrey Hartman, *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, ed. Hartmann (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 121-122.

them in the cold and abstract space of the Symbolic. To eliminate the Jews would allow for a fantasy of return to the purity of a self-identity unmediated by any passage through alterity.’<sup>160</sup>

For Santner, Germany’s post-war generations inherited, principally through family influences, the psychic structures of denial: ‘not guilt so much as the denial of guilt, not losses so much as lost opportunities to mourn losses’.<sup>161</sup> Meanwhile the younger generation of scholars tends to examine German film output with wary charity and a more ambiguous view than Freudian binaries allowed, ‘abandoning a strict distinction between melancholia as a pathological form of grieving, and mourning as the more advanced recuperative memory practice’.<sup>162</sup> We should arguably be reluctant to abandon Freud’s normative structure to admit of ‘constructive melancholia’ for reasons of clarity. Though Anke Pinkert’s assertion that ‘the various melancholic attachments to loss, including modes of sadness, grief, numbness, shame, anguish, and depression can be viewed as an ongoing, creative, open-ended process of mourning rather than as a pathological holding on to a fixed notion of the past’ deserves respect,<sup>163</sup> there is more potential in LaCapra’s highly nuanced reading of Freud’s conceptual structure, namely that ‘melancholia is ambivalently both a precondition to...and that which can block processes of mourning’.<sup>164</sup> Freud’s distinction between mourning and melancholia is of vital concern for film,<sup>165</sup> which can represent either a genuine working-through of historical grief and grievances or a hapless acting-out of voyeuristic compulsions depending on how it is used.

The difference is reducible perhaps to the question: who or what exactly is being mourned? Are the living truly mourning the persecuted victims? Or are they not mourning the dissolution of tried and trusted identities that Santner notes above, the lost hegemony that led to the injury in the first place? Do *I* mourn *you*? Or do I mourn myself, my own lost innocence? Mourning, as both ritual and concept, can all too easily be recuperated by narcissistic melancholia in the guise of self-criticism or even atonement. ‘It was often unclear to what extent Hitler was the lost loved object’,

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<sup>160</sup> Santner, *Stranded Objects*, p. 5.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>162</sup> Anke Pinkert, ‘Rubble Film as Archive of Trauma and Grief’, *German Postwar Films, Life and Love in the Ruins*, ed. Wilfried Wilms and William Rasch (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 61-76, here p. 63.

<sup>163</sup> Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 10.

<sup>164</sup> LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 213.

<sup>165</sup> Freud, ‘Trauer und Melancholie’, *Gesammelte Werke*, X, pp. 427-446.

writes LaCapra. 'Jewish victims [...] were not valued recipients of emotion.'<sup>166</sup> Could it be that the genocidal removal of European Jewry was echoed and completed in their virtual absence from post-war film records?

## **Evidence and Avoidance**

The question of evidence, its sourcing, interpretation and presentation, is crucial for any filmic reconstruction of such an important historical event, and evidence was not as available in the immediate aftermath of the war as observers or survivors might have hoped, partly due to the massive upheavals and migrations that followed the Nazi defeat,<sup>167</sup> partly to the care taken by the perpetrators to cover their tracks and partly to the war weariness of the victors.

However, amidst the chaos, film (as posited by Walter Benjamin) was an apparently unassailable form of evidential record, and archive film from the liberation and earlier has been used as primary source material by filmmakers ever since, providing the template for the many fictional or drama-documentary reconstructions of the concentration camps and other aspects of the Nazi machine. The impact of archive and documentary footage on the filmic imagination is hard to ignore, and one cannot consider such feature films as *Ein Tag* or *Aus einem deutschen Leben* (discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 below) without first considering the filmic evidence on which they were partly based.

Documentary film created its own account of the period. Its exaggerations, euphemisms, lacunae and repetitions provide an insight into the traumatic suppression that followed the end of the war, illustrating what Anton Kaes describes as a repressed resentment against the conquering powers together with a profound sense of betrayal.<sup>168</sup> Discussing W. G. Sebald's 'Air War and Literature' in her *Film and Memory in East Germany*, Pinkert broadly supports Sebald's 'language of traumatic shock to make sense of the emotional numbing and amnesia' but questions the 'persistent silencing of the German deaths in post-war culture' and the 'well kept

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<sup>166</sup> LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 214.

<sup>167</sup> See *Le Retour*, half-hour newsreel by 'Les Services Américains d'Information', Bundesarchiv, Berlin.

<sup>168</sup> Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat*, p. 14.

secret of the corpses built into the foundation of our state'.<sup>169</sup> Despite the recent, more lenient approach,<sup>170</sup> it is hard not to read the silent acceptance of the first as a trade-off for silence about the second, a bargain explicitly on offer in *Mahnung und Verpflichtung*, as we will see below.

## A Cinema of Sackcloth

From the very first, the four occupied zones took different approaches to the rebuilding of the massively successful Nazi film industry, as Daniela Berghahn has established in *Hollywood behind the Wall*. While the Western Allies were keen to suppress any clandestine resurgence of Nazi propaganda in cinematic form and broke up the nationalized film monopoly within their jurisdiction into smaller and scarcely viable private concerns, thus opening the way to the US commercial hegemony that broadly persisted (despite public subsidy of domestic films from the 1950s onwards) till the recent resurgence of German cinema, the Soviets by contrast (and Stalin in particular as a fanatical cinephile) were grounded in the Bolshevik recuperation of cinema in the service of the proletarian revolution,<sup>171</sup> and well understood the vital potential of film in the ideological re-indoctrination of this defeated country of compulsive cinemagoers accustomed to cheap tickets.<sup>172</sup> Long before the capitulation, the Soviet takeover plans were in place and they were skilfully implemented by returning film exiles from Moscow: the occupiers took a covert majority stake in the renamed DEFA studios (formerly Universum) and supervised its renewed output with complete political control that often side-stepped the Central Committee of the SED to involve the Politbüro directly in creative and economic decisions, though public discussion of the resulting policies and resolutions (e.g. by the Verband der Film- und Fernsehschaffenden) provided the requisite democratic trappings that legitimized the new socialist state.<sup>173</sup> Berghahn argues that 'The resultant didacticism of many DEFA features makes them in many respects the very antithesis of the products of the Nazi dream factory. Whereas the Nazis had used

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<sup>169</sup> Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*, p. 5, citing W. G. Sebald, *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1999), pp. 19, 37.

<sup>170</sup> See Prager, 'The Stones Begin to Speak', *German Postwar Films*, pp. 77-91, here p. 80.

<sup>171</sup> See Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 160, citing Vladimir Ilyich Lenin: 'The cinema is for us the most important instrument of all the arts.'

<sup>172</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, p. 13. 'The Germans...bought more than one billion tickets in 1943.'

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

entertainment for political purposes and camouflaged it as sheer fantasy, DEFA's founders and their successors denounced escapist entertainment as a manifestation of decadent bourgeois culture',<sup>174</sup> imposing instead the Communist aesthetic that had held sway in the USSR since the 1930s, namely Socialist Realism. Though she warns that 'it would be a gross oversimplification to understand the relationship between filmmakers and the state in terms of a straightforward polarisation between *Geist und Macht*'.<sup>175</sup>

Corresponding to the opposite agendas and ideologies of the victorious powers, the official process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (whatever its psychological reality) took opposite directions as the two Germanies emerged as distinct nations, expressed in the West in an obsequiously penitential philo-Semitism while the East developed the anti-fascist myth of heroic Communist resistance.

How far this myth influenced the GDR's documentary recuperation of the Holocaust, and to what extent it functioned as a mechanism of collective amnesia and existential denial, needs to be disentangled from more general evidential issues such as the near ubiquitous indifference that marked the war-weary response of Europe after 1945. The liberated survivors had no willing audience, were they capable of speech, indeed of assimilating what they had seen and suffered, as evinced by Levi's long search for a publisher of *The Drowned and the Saved*.<sup>176</sup> The suffering of the Jews seemed indistinguishable from that of mankind at large; and the victors had little interest in recognizing the Holocaust as a discrete event within the litany of horror. However, as the facts emerged in early, little known newsreel reports, one senses an immediate perception of 'unsayability' (i.e. taboo) in the artisanal struggle for appropriate generic utterance. The filmmakers' horror is expressed with a capital "H", the moral-aesthetic (and propaganda) value of the Horror genre being clear to film professionals and politicians alike.

## **Documentaries from the East**

### ***Majdanek***

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>176</sup> Caruth, Introduction, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 10, citing Dori Laub on 'the collapse of witnessing'.

Thus one of the first film documents from the Soviet-occupied East, *Majdanek*, is subtitled *Filmdokumente von den UNGEHEUERLICHEN Verbrechen der Deutschen im Todeslager Maidanek in der Stadt Lublin*,<sup>177</sup> its political pedigree immediately following with the ascription, against lowering black and white clouds: *Das mit dem Roten Bannenorden ausgezeichnete zentrale Studio für Dokumentarfilme Jahr 1944*. Built on the orders of Heinrich Himmler to accommodate Russian prisoners of war, Majdanek retained its official title ‘Kriegsgefangenenlager der Waffen-SS’ till February 1943, though the camp was integrated from its inception into the Nazi extermination camp system, accounting for 250,000 deaths (at a conservative estimate): 60% through hunger, sickness and torture; 40% through the seven gas chambers, two gallows and numerous mass shootings.<sup>178</sup> The Soviet forces arriving on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1944 found a thousand inmates and six SS guards and they immediately processed the traumatic remains onto film, with clear political intent which it is hard to analyse without echoing the tasteless discourse of the film itself.

As if at a fairground, the German-language voice-over promises the grisliest, apocalyptic sights: ‘Mit den raffiniertesten Methoden der Technik führten die faschistischen Henker ihr Vernichtungswerk durch’, ‘das Blut der Opfer schreit zum Himmel’; and the attempt to rouse moral indignation through haptic gratification is not entirely unsuccessful. It is startling to find the essential elements of the historical narrative already in place: over shots of tattooed survivors, of SS prisoners and bodies exhumed from trenches, we are told of ‘Massenerschiessungen an der Tagesordnung’, up to 18,000 shot in one day, their screams drowned by music; an account of the gas chambers includes a canister of Zyklon over verbal testimony from both inmates and guards; the ovens are still intact with boxes of whitened bones: ‘die Öfen brannten ununterbrochen, 1,920 Leichen pro Stunde’. The manufacturer’s brass plaque gleams proudly and the commentary continues remorselessly over the camp’s vegetable patch: ‘1,300,000 tot, als Dünger benutzt zu werden...auf menschlicher Asche ist dieser Kohl gewachsen’. The camera pans across discarded shoes; the clothing deposit bulges with gloves, toys, spectacles, all bound for Plötzensee, and with ownerless identity cards from all around Europe.

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<sup>177</sup> *UNGEHEUERLICHEN* occupies an entire line in jagged cursive script.

<sup>178</sup> ‘Landgericht Düsseldorf spricht Urteile im Majdanek-Prozeß’, *Landtag Intern*, 26. June 2001 (Landtag Nordrhein-Westfalen).



The fourteen and a half minute *Majdanek* concludes with an assertion of the need to testify, to accuse. A *Trauerfeier* or funeral ceremony in Lublin shows members of the liberating Red Army assembled (remarkably) beneath a Cross, suggesting that even battle-hardened Communists grappled for some meta-language, some religious ritual to digest such enormity and that ‘redemption’ was already perceived as a useful political tool in the final battles for Berlin, in which ‘good Germans’ were to be converted by the evidence of their leaders’ crimes via the generic recuperation noted above, and recruited, purged of their sins, to the newly liberated, newly subjugated socialist state. To cite Pinkert, ‘As Biess shows, in making the returnees into the “Pioneers of a New Germany”, the Socialist Unity Party (SED) privileged a pseudoreligious model of confession, conversion, and rebirth’,<sup>179</sup> and Berghahn confirms: ‘after the immediate period of de-Nazification the anti-fascist credentials of its founders were extended to the entire populace ...[who were]...not only exonerated, but had also collectively emerged as the victors of history.’<sup>180</sup>

Trauma has its political uses; its instant recuperation by the propaganda machine made any later working-through doubly problematic. The visual litany of horror (approached here naturally with no Perseus’s Mirror, any more than in *Requiem*) is accompanied by a projection of responsibility onto absent leaders whose disgrace is theirs alone. This proffered disavowal of guilt is already disguised within the ambiguous ‘Trauerfeier’, a suspect oxymoron combining ritual mourning for the dead (Trauer) with celebration of their departure (Feier), a premature, false catharsis intended to leave the newly absolved survivors (victims and perpetrators alike) available to join the cause of the victors. An aerial shot of the camp, accompanied by an astoundingly incongruous Beethoven symphony, betrays the recuperative agenda of this propaganda exercise in traumatic recovery.

It is underlined by one omission. The Jews are never mentioned. Not once. There is no word of a ‘Final Solution’. No reference to German anti-Semitism. No appeal on behalf of those Jews remaining in German-held territory, where the genocide continued for months. Handed this propaganda coup at Lublin, the Soviet machine used it for its own war aims, to blacken the enemy without identifying with

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<sup>179</sup> Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*, pp. 19-20, citing Frank Biess, ““Pioneers of a New Germany”: Returning POW’s from the Soviet Union and the Making of East German Citizens, 1945-1950”, *Central European History* 32, no.2 (1999), pp. 143-180, here p. 144.

<sup>180</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, p. 57.

the enemy's principal victim, for whom no one (on either side) had any sympathy.<sup>181</sup> Identifying with 'the Jew' by broadcasting news of the racist genocide might have fuelled panic and stiffened German resistance. The Soviet world order had no place for ethnic distinctions in the Great Patriotic War against Fascism, but this served as a convenient camouflage for the persistence of Russian anti-Semitism in the ranks of the Red Army. The pogroms of the 1880's were barely half a century old and Stalin was a notorious anti-Semite. No Soviet hero imagined he was dying to save the Jews. The figment of 'Jewish Capitalism' (a mirror image of the Nazis' 'Jewish Bolshevism', the Elders of Zion and similar fabrications) was shortly to prove a useful, recurring motif in the ideological management of the Cold War.

In this first omission lies the root of East German Holocaust denial, officially encouraged by the Soviets. The Socialist GDR was to bear no responsibility for the Hitler years, whose legacy was projected in its totality onto the Nazi successor-state, the Federal Republic, thus recuperating trauma and frustrating any attempt at a genuine working-through for two generations, an overarching policy that banished all reference to Jews from the GDR's memorial sites and was reflected in literary and filmic output of the following decades, with certain tentative exceptions.<sup>182</sup>

### *Memento*

Soberly subtitled *Ein Film des DEFA Studio für Wochenschau und Dokumentarfilme auf ORWO Kinofilm*, the fifteen-minute *Memento* betrays a similarly redemptionist agenda in a very different guise. Shot barely one year after *Majdanek* and dated 1945, this cleverly crafted (indeed crafty) film appears to gaze back through the mists of time at events now shrouded in mythical uncertainty. It is a narrative and political strategy already announced in the portentous, sorrowful voice over the slow tilt from a deserted Hinterhof to the overgrown gravestones of the Jewish cemetery: 'die verlorene Zeit, die vergessenen Erinnerungen an Alle, die lebten... Sind sie uns noch bekannt?' If the elegiac tone seems to foreshadow *With Raised Hands*, it is enough to remind oneself that the 'long-departed' were close neighbours in this very Hinterhof

<sup>181</sup> See *Au Nom du même père* for Jewish views of Allied complicity, as expressed by Rabbi Shlomo Goren (1917-1994), Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel (1973-83).

<sup>182</sup> See Susanne zur Nieden "'...stärker als der Tod': Bruno Apitz' Roman *Nackt unter Wölfen* und die Holocaust-Rezeption in der DDR', *Bilder des Holocaust, Literatur-Film-Bildende Kunst*, ed. Manuel Köppen and Klaus R. Scherpe (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1997), pp. 97-108.

till barely months earlier. The pseudo-religious invocation is designed to banish them into some unaccountable past divorced from the new dispensation, thus absolving the film's complicit viewers from any responsibility for their demise through the ritual appeasement of film. The lens dwells lovingly on the inscriptions 'Vergast in Sachsenhausen 1942', 'Verblieben in Auschwitz' (the euphemism itself a parody); and a list of prominent Jewish Berliners from the Mendelssohn family onwards is counterpointed with a hushed account of random Gestapo arrests over shots of harmless Berlin streets (now empty) where anonymous executioners lay in wait, as if the identity of those Gestapo officers were swathed in anonymity and not perfectly known to all in the audience. Meanwhile, in a verbal hangover of the old order, the audience's victims are qualified as the 'illegal lebende Juden' who took refuge in the cemetery's mausolea, and here the Freudian regression betrays the speaker utterly, for his listeners of 1945, imbued with years of Nazi indoctrination, will still have believed, unconsciously, that these Jews were 'illegal' above all and should not have been allowed to sleep rough or even exist, any more than the new dispensation in which they now acquiesced allowed other social misfits.

The second reel constructively conflates the Jewish resistance with Communist leadership and provides an anecdotal account of the deportations with drastically under-estimated statistics (500 arrested, 250 murdered, 250 to Sachsenhausen) along with the larmoyant mourning for a Jew denounced for keeping a bird as a pet. To compound the injury, the film closes on a Jewish lament, a cantor singing over a destroyed synagogue and a woman sweeping leaves in the graveyard, while a funeral procession passes down the misty autumn avenue into oblivion. Religion serves the newly installed, atheist state as a slow dissolve, blurring distinctions, swathing perpetrators in anonymity, soothing consciences, distancing 'the past that was yesterday' with shameless audacity. Over chiselling on a gravestone, symbolizing the memorialisation that will never happen, swastikas are daubed and 'Heydrich hoch, SS zu wenig!' scrawled, presumably to indicate that the business of mourning must be put to one side till more pressing threats of renascent fascism have been dealt with. Apparently a sensitive *auteur* piece, its collective credits headed by Werner Kohlert, *Memento* suggests how fast the political agenda shifted after the fall of Berlin and how mendaciously film can be recuperated for regime change under the guise of pseudo-religious ritual, replacing any attempt at mourning with narcissistic, unrepentant melancholia.

### *Mahnung und Verpflichtung*

Three years after *Memento* the re-invention of the GDR was complete, as commemorated in the lapidary *Mahnung und Verpflichtung*, produced to mark the reunion of resistance fighters in Berlin on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 1948 for the *Internationale Gedächtnisgebung für die Opfer des faschistischen Terrors* (closing titles), a mixed collage of generic motifs already familiar and banal. The Horror genre spontaneously applied in *Majdanek* has by now asserted its hegemony over filmic reconstruction of the Nazi era, with spiders crawling swastika-shaped across the map of Europe, dragging with them the names of concentration camps culminating in Auschwitz; a staged pogrom against ‘Rosenfeld Antiquitäten’ is curiously bloodless in the absence of Nazi uniforms and insignia, which were by now taboo (if only to spare the sensibilities of former soldiers); ‘überall lauerten die Schergen der Hitler-Macht’ we are told over theatrical silhouette of thugs closing in through the shadows, reminiscent of the worst *film noir*; ‘wenn Du die Wahrheit weißt, schweige!’ comes the admonishment, as a hand clamps tight over a disembodied mouth in close-up, and the corpse of a resistance fighter is dragged away across a carpet. As for the concentration camps, rabid dogs barking behind barbed wire prompt the whispered ‘davon sprach man im Flüsterton, leichter war es, nicht daran zu denken’ (as if things had changed). A rapidly growing pile of resistance pamphlets ushers in the smiling faces of the reunion rally of 1948 and a brief account of the resistance network (including an incongruous synagogue congregation), whose solidarity, we are told, transcended all social and ideological contradictions,<sup>183</sup> a founding myth designed to assert post-facto the right of the Communist resistance to subsume other movements.

Apart from laying claim to political legitimacy for the GDR through a fictitious line of descent from resistance movements that Communists never entirely controlled or wholly represented, the aim here is to banish recent history to a safe distance through promiscuous generic cliché, recuperating the audience’s personal memory and latent guilty conscience through an act of spiritual expropriation or nationalisation. Thus the new state usurps the laurels of liberation (a clay swastika is trodden underfoot like the biblical serpent), and conjures away the burden of guilt as a dim and distant fall from grace that no current citizen was likely to remember (barely

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<sup>183</sup> ‘über alle Gegensätze hinweg’.

three years on) let alone have partaken in. The requisite confession is intoned: ‘das deutsche Volk fand nicht die Kraft, sich seiner Verderber zu entledigen’; only the Soviets (‘erst die totale Niederlage’) could free the German people and cleanse them of their guilt. Faithfully recited, this creed restores a defeated people to the human, socialist fold without a flicker of self-interrogation, and this denial was the quietist pact on which the GDR was based, as Pinkert explains: ‘...the past of the returning soldiers who had served in the Wehrmacht needed to be relegated to a previous life that needed to be left behind, if not forgotten.’<sup>184</sup>

‘Wenn Du die Wahrheit weißt, schweige’: any German audience would have recognized this wisdom and they continued to keep quiet in their millions. Absolution was complete, the files were closed, the past was erased. East Germany bears no responsibility for what went before. This was a silence the GDR would not survive.

### *Exkursion*

Later documentaries confirm that East Germany never found a tone that was adequate to the subject, in part because of the traumatic repression that occurred at the moment of liberation. Bad conscience seeps through in the form of ill-digested sarcasm and self-defeating parody, sometimes disguising nostalgia too subterranean to fathom. Thus *Exkursion* (1966), a DEFA co-production with Czechoslovakia, shot entirely underground in an improvised munitions factory fed by slave labour from Flossenbürg and Theresienstadt, is narrated by the unseen, ghostly SS officer Karl Hartmann, who graciously shows us round his place of work, now a devastated catacomb strewn with débris and echoing with the shouts and groans of shades long departed. ‘Das ist unser Speisesaal’, he tells us over cracked ladles and shards of china, while naked overhead wires are labelled ‘Hochspannung, Vorsicht, Lebensgefahr!’ in this Nazi inferno of the living dead. Unavoidably, this Dante-esque descent conjures not just horror but fascination,<sup>185</sup> the *faszinosum* of evil that haunts the imagination to this day and perpetuates the Nazis self-engendered myth of immortality.<sup>186</sup> ‘Unsere Arbeiter sind leider nicht die Zuverlässigsten’, mildly complains SS-Hartmann in his weekly letter

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<sup>184</sup> Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*, pp. 19-20, citing Frank Biess, ‘Pioneers of a New Germany’, p. 144.

<sup>185</sup> On Dante and the Holocaust, see Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, pp. xviii-xix.

<sup>186</sup> See Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Joseph, 1988), pp. 11-12, citing the SS. ‘However the war may end, we have won the war against you’.

home, having had to ‘write off’ (‘abschreiben’) forty Poles to keep up with the delivery schedule for a new Panzer division. As we shall see elsewhere, the formal experiment of handing narrative control to a representative of the Nazi machine carries serious risks of emotional transference in the viewer, especially in those whose memories of the Nazi era had been suppressed by official denial. Mediated through such convoluted ironies of tone, in highly ambiguous, lurid style, the resurrection of an SS hero (for such they still were, and are, for many) presiding over an eternal underworld might as easily awaken profound nostalgia as critical judgement. What sleeping warrior might yet awaken from under this mountain? Germanic myth was fertile ground for the Nazis and would not be lost on the post-war German imagination. The closing voice-over, revealing that 12,000 out of 30,000 men were worked to death in this clandestine labour camp, comes far too late to dispel the Faustian phantasmagoria. Caves and cellars are of course projections of the unconscious, while concealment and persecution have been the making of many religions. *Exkursion* is playing with dangerous associations, and one cannot help feeling that something in the Communist psyche (and in the Politbüro) was not averse, by now, to recuperating some sense of lost continuity and even of legitimacy.<sup>187</sup>

### ***Der Mann an der Rampe***

As the GDR lurched towards dissolution, its filmic response veered wildly between vitriolic bad temper directed against the Federal Republic and a puny stab at *glasnost*, exemplified in two films dated 1989. *Der Mann an der Rampe* starts with the noise of a steam train and a camera track through the gates of Birkenau; proceeds through the visual litany of discarded prosthetic limbs, shorn hair and lost spectacles; only to betray itself utterly with a side-step into blatant propaganda, castigating the Federal Republic for ‘die sogenannte A-Lüge...daß es niemals ein planmässiges Vernichtungslager gegeben habe’, a lie which West Germany appears never actively to have disseminated, though there were certainly currents of denial and obfuscation revealed throughout the 1980s.<sup>188</sup> The rest of the film is dedicated, incongruously, to an exposé of the SS uniform and regalia market in West Berlin, reproducing the SS

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<sup>187</sup> See zur Nieden on SED recourse to Nazi rhetoric, “...stärker als der Tod”, *Bilder des Holocausts*, p. 107, Note 6.

<sup>188</sup> See discussion of the *Historikerstreit*, below.

officer on the ramp at Auschwitz ('in Neuanfertigung'), implying the Federal Republic is an SS vassal state while lavishly indulging the revanchist nostalgia it purports to condemn. The film's lack of proportion is faintly hysterical. On the eve of reunification, traumatic repressions struggle to the surface in the East German consciousness, attempting to reconcile the imminent death of one world order with the entirely un-worked-through afterlife of the previous one. Credited *Ein Film von Heynowski und Scheumann, Werkstatt H&S, DDR '89, Der Mann an der Rampe* is a form of professional suicide, a cry of despair in the face of history and impending unemployment. Its makers 'haben sich nach 1989 gestritten', the curator at the Bundesarchiv commented, 'sie sind nicht mehr gefragt'.

### *Spuren*

Made the same year, *Spuren* takes West German Jewish actor Martin Brandt back to the scenes of his pre-war triumphs as Saladdin in *Nathan der Weise*, through an East Berlin on the verge of dissolution both political and geographic. Slow pans across the city skyline reveal not just the Wall, which was otherwise censored or expunged from East German films, but also the hasty demolition work in the garden of the former Reichskanzlei on Wilhelmstraße that would finally expunge the last remains of Hitler's Bunker. With a deft blend of scratchy archive footage, Hitler waving to crowds ironically counterpointed with Soviets inspecting the damage ten years later, *Spuren* manages to suggest the GDR has something to hide and is disposing of the evidence while it still has time, a subliminal insistence on the continuity from the Nazi to the Communist order that suggests a terminal landslip in state control over film production. Apparently the censor had not realized that Brandt's wistful trip down memory lane, through the broken tombstones of Eberswalde, is less an exploration of Jewish Berlin or a chronicle of the deportations (despite discussion of the gas chambers and the Nuremberg Trials), than an implicit critique of GDR amnesia through a bitter-sweet invocation of the GDR's own, imminent erasure from history, a foreshadowing of the demise that will shortly sweep away the Wall along with Hitler's Bunker, refashioning the Berlin skyline. Tellingly, the fiction of collective authorship has been abandoned, with the *auteur* team boldly identified as Alfred Mainka (*Produktion*) and Eduard Schreiber (*Regie*). Superficially an indulgent collage, the ambiguously titled *Spuren* offers clues as well as traces, implicitly

occupying a place of augury that film tends to recuperate when the state has abdicated, or failed in, its responsibilities.

Berghahn ascribes this amnesia of the Holocaust in GDR film to various factors, amongst them the Marxist dismissal of anti-Semitism as a capitalist search for a scapegoat,<sup>189</sup> and the persistence of official and occulted anti-Semitism in the Communist state itself.<sup>190</sup> Persecuted for their race and religion, Jews were of no use to the GDR's heroic anti-fascist myth of origin. In the hierarchy of Nazi victims, Jews were accorded only the twelfth position.<sup>191</sup> Berghahn concludes, 'Only in 1990 did Hans Modrow, the Prime Minister of the interregnum between the SED government and the new government of a reunited Germany, publicly acknowledge that the GDR shared responsibility for Germany's fascist past with the FRG.'<sup>192</sup>

### **Documentaries from the West**

If the peoples of East Germany had been rescued from the abyss by their Soviet and Communist liberators, no analogous view of history pertained in the West, where a limited and abruptly curtailed de-Nazification (represented cinematically by the compulsory viewing of the American-sponsored *Todesmühlen*) barely scratched the surface of national responsibility and was designed less to confront defeated Germans with their complicity than to recuperate them as redeemed allies in the impending Cold War. This effortless redefinition compounded an already noticeable omission of soul-searching (in which cinema played its part) that would leave latent, traumatic guilt firmly repressed in family discourse and endorse profound currents of cover-up and denial in the public sphere, where the Nazi 'Gedankengut' persisted in many senior walks of life well into the 1980s, as the political antecedence of Chancellor Kiesinger embarrassingly demonstrated.<sup>193</sup> It would have been inconceivable, for instance, for a visiting member of the Soviet Politburo to lay a wreath at an SS cemetery as President Reagan did at Bitburg in 1985. The dominant West German myth of the decent Wehrmacht fighting an honest war was not put to the test till the

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<sup>189</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, p. 87 (Fox 1999:10).

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., (Danyel 1992, 1993; Kessler 1993).

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., (Jung 1998:54).

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p. 59 (Carter 1997:433).

<sup>193</sup> Kurt Georg Kiesinger (Federal Chancellor 1966-9) had joined the NSDAP in 1933.



photographic ‘evidence’ of the Wehrmachtsausstellung toured Germany from 1995 and proved that the military, not just the SS, had been the executioners of Hitler’s genocide in most theatres of war and particularly on the Eastern Front.<sup>194</sup> There was more than a grain of truth in the GDR’s accusation of Nazi recidivism in West Germany, where pervasive hypocrisy and denial contributed substantially to the explosive student revolt of 1968 and the moral outrage that (amongst other motives) drove the Rote Armee Fraktion, or Baader-Meinhof group.

The event that unblocked the traumatic suppression was as far-fetched as any film script and has since inspired a dozen movies,<sup>195</sup> namely Mossad’s extra-judicial abduction from Argentina in May 1960, and the subsequent trial and execution in Israel, of one of the principal architects of the Holocaust, Adolf Eichmann, who had been living under the pseudonym Riccardo Klement following his escape from US custody and the assistance of Archbishop Alois Hudal’s ratline for prominent Nazis. The Argentine kidnap caused a storm of controversy and the trial was followed with intense international interest recorded in (and provoked by) Hannah Arendt’s reports.<sup>196</sup> Apart from revealing the entrenchment of former Nazis at the highest levels of West German public life and their recruitment by the CIA amongst other agencies, the return of such an unwanted spectre functioned as a catalyst of repressed trauma. If Eichmann could be held to account, then nothing in Germany’s past was safe from scrutiny and Adenauer’s sanitized state could no longer wish away Nazi crimes with impunity.

### ***Der Prozeß***

The judicial process set in motion released a tidal wave of repressed emotions and delayed accusations, and Majdanek became its focal point both judicial and filmic. Whilst the Soviets had contented themselves with an immediate trial of the six guards found on site (two of whom committed suicide while the other four received death sentences), followed by trials of ninety-five further SS members four years later (of whom the female commandant and six others were executed), Majdanek had been

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<sup>194</sup> *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944*. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung.

<sup>195</sup> See filmography, also *The Portage from San Cristobal of AH* by George Steiner, dramatized by Christopher Hampton.

<sup>196</sup> See Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (NY: Viking Press, 1965).

officially forgotten in the West, where the federal authorities had not lifted a finger against those responsible till the changing political climate prompted criminal enquiries that lasted from 1960 till 1974. These culminated in the Düsseldorf proceedings of 1975 to 1981, the longest trial in German history, which (in an eloquent symbiosis of cinema and justice) also furnished one of the longest films, namely Eberhard Fechner's *Der Prozess - Eine Darstellung des Majdanek-Verfahrens in Düsseldorf*,<sup>197</sup> as inconclusive and rambling a work as the trial itself, demonstrating in its chaotic four and a half hours how repressed trauma can express itself with a vengeance once finally released. Filming was prohibited in the courtroom, so Fechner had to reconstruct the trial from the court proceedings.<sup>198</sup> A talented actor, who had experienced the débacle of 1945 as a young recruit, he shared something of Lanzmann's gift for interviewing recalcitrant subjects and succeeded in drawing a stream of intimate, often traumatic recollections from both victim and perpetrator, an illustration of the seductive but variably therapeutic function of the camera interview.

The principal revelation of *Der Prozeß* is the startling survival of the Nazi mindset well into the post-war era, a psychological stasis that wholly vindicates Freud's theories of traumatic repression and deferral, or 'Nachträglichkeit'. Far from pleading remorse or rehabilitation, the accused defend themselves with the impudent appeal to 'Befehlsnotstand',<sup>199</sup> this in terms their one-time masters could only have applauded. Their personae are apparently unchanged: 'wir mussten tun, was uns befohlen wurde', 'es war Krieg, ja?', 'ich habe niemand umgebracht' ('Die blutige Brigitte'), 'bin stolz auf die SS' (Emil Laurich). This unreconstructed grimace is reflected in their defence by neo-Nazi lawyers, 'wo ohne jeden Scham nazistisch-rassistisch argumentiert wurde' in language fit for *Der Stürmer*, while the judge dismissed an expert witness on the grounds that he had previously worked with Jews. The blameless curricula vitae are a fascinating insight into the 'banality of evil': after munitions work and nursing service (Hildegard Lachert) an application to the local concentration camp was a sensible step on the career ladder (Hermine Ryan), and the undeserved scrutiny a generation later provokes righteous indignation ('Unrechtsbewußtsein') at the flagrant scapegoating ('Sammelprozeß'): '(wir

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<sup>197</sup> Eduard-Rhein-Preis, 1985.

<sup>198</sup> A related method was used in the BBC's *The Trial of Klaus Barbie* (Gareth Jones, 1987), which reconstructed the Lyon court proceedings from the daily transcripts using actors in a replica courtroom, and was broadcast three days after the verdict.

<sup>199</sup> See Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 97.

sind)...kleine Leute... die Prügelhahn der Nation, stellvertretend bestraft... wir haben schon bezahlt!’ (Hermann Hackmann), to which the Staatsanwalt replies that the only legal way forward lies in undertaking ‘eine Abkehr von dem Schlagwort “Kollektivschuld” ...in den “Täterbegriff”’. Germany had swathed itself too long in the comfortably traumatic acceptance of collective guilt, by which an entire nation had occulted the extent of its crimes even as it confessed and apparently atoned for them. ‘Arendt observed’ – writes Agamben – ‘that the surprising willingness of post-war Germans of all ages to assume collective guilt for Nazism, to believe themselves guilty for what their parents or their people had done, betrayed an equally surprising ill will as to the assessment of individual responsibilities and the punishment of particular crimes.’<sup>200</sup>

Whether or not the *fact* of the trial justified itself, as the judge opined, parrying international furore at the lenient sentences; whether justice had been served by the re-traumatizing ordeal imposed on the three hundred and forty witnesses; the filmic question must remain: is it right to give so much imaginative space and apologetic screen time to the dryness of legal proceedings, especially when the film is so easily hi-jacked by the argumentative perpetrator chatting of mass murder as of supermarket prices (‘I shouldn’t have paid, they’ve cheated me, I was just an innocent customer...’). ‘Almost all the categories that we use in moral and religious judgements are in some way contaminated by law: guilt, responsibility, innocence, judgement, pardon’, thus Agamben on that necessary vice called justice.<sup>201</sup>

To return to Lanzmann’s challenge: how does one retain any sense of the enormity of the Holocaust when asked to become complacent (and complicit) with such trivia? It is not just evil that is banal but its prosecution, both in court and on film. Evil can be dull stuff, when strung out to six years’ court proceedings and four and a half hours’ screen time. ‘It is possible that the trials [...] that took place in and outside Germany [...] are responsible for the conceptual confusion that, for decades has made it impossible to think through Auschwitz [...] they helped to spread the idea that the problem of Auschwitz had been overcome.’<sup>202</sup>

Stifled by the complicit silence of the federal establishment, the reticence of the country’s film and media world was finally broken not by any indigenous effort

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

(the RAF had been and gone) but by the broadcast of an American television soap that hit the German audience mid-proceedings of the Majdanek trial, before Fechner could finish his film. The massive viewing figures for *Holocaust* in 1979 (20 million West Germans)<sup>203</sup> forced the repressed horror of the Holocaust into the collective imagination (whatever the merits of the series), provoking defensive and sometimes disreputable derision from Germany's wrong-footed filmmakers and critics,<sup>204</sup> and revealing an ingrained contempt for American mass culture as *entartete Kunst*.<sup>205</sup> It triggered a reactionary backlash that finally exploded in the traumatically belated Historikerstreit of 1986,<sup>206</sup> which Jürgen Habermas may be said to have started with 'Eine Art Schadensabwicklung' and its attack on historical revisionism.<sup>207</sup> As Santner puts it, 'The gist of Habermas's critique of these trends in the historiography of fascism and the Holocaust is that they attempt to recuperate notions of centrality and modes of national identity no longer feasible in the harrowed cultural matrix of postwar Europe.'<sup>208</sup> A yearning for restoration of the *status quo ante* led Ernst Nolte, for instance, to transfer the principal causes of the Holocaust, almost by stealth, onto the victim, via German anxieties about Communist annihilationism, as Friedlander drily notes.<sup>209</sup> 'Aber es wurde nicht die Mordtat erinnert,' Freud wrote, in parsing the psyche of another murderous collective, 'sondern anstatt dessen ihre Sühnung phantasiert.'<sup>210</sup>

Against this intellectual backdrop it is not surprising that none of the pioneering films about the Shoah came from Germany.<sup>211</sup> '*Holocaust*', writes Anton Kaes, 'allowed the Germans to work through their most recent past, this time from the perspective of the victims, by proxy, in the innocuous form of a television show that viewers could switch off at any time. Because the collective catharsis came about through a *film* (that is through a fiction, a simulation), one might well suspect that the

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<sup>203</sup> Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat*, p. 30.

<sup>204</sup> See Santner, *Stranded Objects*, p. 57, on Reitz's *Heimat*. Compare also Benjamin's mistrust of mass production.

<sup>205</sup> See Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat*, pp. 31-33, on the fallout from *Holocaust* in the FRG. 'Collective mourning in the Federal Republic itself became a public spectacle, played out, consciously or unconsciously, before the eyes of the world.'

<sup>206</sup> See LaCapra, 'Revisiting the Historians' Debate: Mourning and Genocide in History and Memory', *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, p. 43.

<sup>207</sup> Habermas, 'Eine Art Schadensabwicklung: Die apologetischen Tendenzen in der deutschen Zeitgeschichtsschreibung', *Die Zeit*, July 11<sup>th</sup> 1986.

<sup>208</sup> Santner, *Stranded Objects*, p. 50.

<sup>209</sup> Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, p. 34.

<sup>210</sup> See chapter epigraph.

<sup>211</sup> Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, p. 7.

catharsis, if there indeed was one, rested on self-deception.’<sup>212</sup> This raises an interesting set of questions: firstly, whether (as mentioned above) mourning can be real even when attached to the incorrect object; secondly, whether easy screen access to the victims enables a fatal transference of identification (as intuited by Freud), whereby the perpetrator unconsciously feels himself to be a victim too, a process almost certainly facilitated by US mass aesthetics devoid of genuine moral rigour; thirdly, whether catharsis in respect of crimes against humanity is either desirable or just. Kaes seems to be suggesting, additionally, that fiction of any kind is an unfitting vehicle for such working-through, which this thesis is not yet prepared to concede.

### *Der gelbe Stern*

It is no coincidence that the monolithic film history of the Holocaust *Der gelbe Stern* (1980) appeared one year after *Holocaust*, for the Jewish genocide was by now hot property and a German response was imperative and unavoidable, on both moral and commercial grounds. Opening with the burning of books by Marx, Freud and Remarque on Berlin’s Opernplatz, it quotes Heinrich Heine’s prophetic ‘Wo man Bücher brennt, verbrennt man auch am Ende Menschen’ and proceeds to tell the story of the Holocaust from beginning to end, which of course cannot be done and therein lies the problem. Relying almost exclusively on archive footage (the antithesis of Lanzmann), the commentary can only follow the pictures, and the pictures are partial in every sense. We see the SA celebrating ‘die Machtergreifung’ of 1933, but there is no analysis of the psephological patterns that brought Hitler to power with a claim to a democratic mandate. We are told how rapidly the Nazis consolidated their power and established the concentration camps; we are told of the boycott of Jewish businesses, the Berufsverbot, entartete Kunst, bureaucratic terror and electoral disenfranchisement, each episode labelled with commendable and alienating clarity, ‘Das Gesetz’, ‘Die Übergriffe’, ‘Die Drohung’ etc. Under the heading ‘Der Haß’ the film notes the spread of anti-Semitism across Europe, particularly through the notorious exhibition *Der Ewige Jude* organized by Seyss-Inquart, and the film of the same name in which rats (we are told in the commentary) symbolize the fear of infestation projected onto Jews by the Nazi hate press amongst other media. The commentary muses on Hitler the petit bourgeois, ‘der kleinbürgerliche...[der]... seine

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<sup>212</sup> Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat*, p. 35.

Minderwertigkeitsgefühle gegen Juden abreagierte’ and ominously quotes his ‘prediction’ that a World War prepared by international Jewry will lead to their destruction. This is a blindness to cause and effect that blights much Holocaust discourse and instates an unthinking post-facto prophetic strain in the place of logical enquiry, particularly for film, a medium with an inherent apocalyptic leaning derived from its ability to defy the laws of chronology and continuity.<sup>213</sup> The tone remains leaden, reverential, as if such monsters could only be handled with posthumous awe.<sup>214</sup> Yet the evidence is entirely anecdotal and a failure of analysis gives the lie to the whole undertaking. What is anti-Semitism, where did it start, why is it so deeply embedded?<sup>215</sup> What was the Jewish position in German society, who were their representatives and why might they have appeared a threat? None of these questions are addressed, in part, no doubt, for fear of causing offence and provoking criticism. A taboo attaches to Jewishness and Jews, precisely because of what was done to them.<sup>216</sup>

The result is the enthronement of the actual as the inevitable, a teleological turn that LaCapra warns against. It is an apotheosis of history as providence (viz ‘die Vorsehung hat uns den Führer gegeben’)<sup>217</sup> and a blind recuperation of guilt in preference to responsibility, a flight into damnation being less painful than interrogation, corresponding to Freud’s analysis of the primal murder as ‘diese Phantasie als Erlösungsbotschaft (Evangelium)’<sup>218</sup>

‘Die Bilder sollen für sich sprechen’, we are told over execution footage, a barefoot exodus and carts full of corpses, while SS Strob is quoted verbatim (on the razing of the Warsaw ghetto): ‘es gibt kein jüdisches Wohnbezirk in Warschau mehr’. These are precisely the sorts of montages of archive footage that Lanzmann mistrusts: ‘I call these images without imagination’.<sup>219</sup> ‘They petrify thought and kill all power of evocation’.<sup>220</sup>

As if for light relief, the heading ‘Die Villa’ invites a brief reflection on the Wannsee Conference, where ‘vierzehn Herren’, heard of ‘die Endlösung der

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<sup>213</sup> See Chapter One, above.

<sup>214</sup> Compare Wenders on *Der Untergang*, Chapter Four.

<sup>215</sup> See Steiner, *Errata*, pp. 60-62.

<sup>216</sup> Compare Freud’s ‘taboo’ surrounding the murder of Moses.

<sup>217</sup> See J. P. Stern, *Hitler and the People* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1975).

<sup>218</sup> See chapter epigraph.

<sup>219</sup> Lanzmann, ‘Le Lieu et la parole’, in Deguy, *Au sujet de Shoah*, pp. 293-305, here pp. 296-7.

<sup>220</sup> Lanzmann, ‘Le monument contre l’archive?’, *Cahiers de Médiologie* 11, (2001): 271-9; here, 274.

Judenfrage, von Goering angeordnet'. The cinders burning in the fireplace cannot redeem this faithful recapitulation of Nazi terminology delivered without irony, without comment, without questions asked, with no account of the Nuremberg testimonies linking Wannsee back to Hitler who remains, in his absence, unimpeachable. Where is the archive footage of Hitler signing the Decree? It doesn't exist, and there lies the rub. If film can be held to offer visual evidence, as Benjamin claims, it must also explain its own lacunae and this it is loath to do. 'Definitive' histories such as *Der gelbe Stern* establish unconscious expectations, whose disappointment leads to misconception.

The section 'Der Mörder' retrieves some damning footage of horrific executions of naked women and children by Einsatzgruppen (linked tendentiously to Himmler's visit). 'Der Transport' shows rare film of people squeezed onto a train, numbers scrawled on the side of a wagon, but the arrival at Auschwitz is represented by a still photograph intercut with some anodine footage of the ramp. 'Das Lager' is largely composed of liberation footage: bodies in the wire and emaciated survivors amidst the heaped corpses of Bergen-Belsen. But a totally convincing, connected narrative has not yet emerged, in part due to lack of research and limited access; and in part, arguably, because of the burden of 'working-through' of repressed trauma that this filmic reconstruction must have imposed on its makers, whose aim is still to shock, to mortify, to castigate, rather than to enquire or elucidate. Sackcloth shall be worn, but nakedness would be an affront.

### ***Das neue Hamburg***

A more subversive approach is taken by *Das neue Hamburg* (1985), an account of Hitler's plans to reshape that city by linking the two shores of the Elbe over a massive suspension bridge, while razing the Communist-held slums of Altona.<sup>221</sup> 'Das Tor zur Welt' was the portentous catchword for an architectural project of pharaonic proportions that included new National Socialist headquarters in an edifice both monumental and banal, the only skyscraper the Führer permitted in his disapproval of 'degenerate' American models. Archive footage dated June 1936 shows Hitler staring prophetically at the Elbe, before the film cuts to interviews with the architects, once

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<sup>221</sup> See *Das Beil von Wandsbek* (Falk Harnack, 1951).

young disciples now silver-haired apostles, who convey with reluctant honesty the excitement of the early Hitler years: ‘...und wir lachten, wir haben gejauchst und gejubelt...’ (even if the Gauhaus was mocked as an ‘Ungetüm’) ‘...ich möchte mich vorstellen, daß doch noch was von großen, guten Ideen zu retten sind.’ The snag was, that the Nazis’ ‘big ideas’ were to be built with stones dug by forced labour at the quarry of the local concentration camp Neuengamme (each major city had its own in the Nazi KZ-archipelago), the remains of which the film proceeds to excavate.

A contract between Hansestadt-Hamburg and the SS stipulated the delivery of 20 million stones a year, in the digging of which 55,000 prisoners died of relentless, factored overwork. The architects’ creative exuberance was paid in blood, as demonstrated in Albert Speer’s later rise to favour, their ritual ‘wir haben nichts gewußt, nichts geahnt... wir hätten nicht das Gefühl, dem Regime Vorteile zu bringen...[nur]...für Hamburg eine verbesserte Form [zu schaffen]’ a litany of cultured evasion ruptured only by a sober, late admission ‘wir hätten auf die Barrikaden gehen müssen’.<sup>222</sup> These are decent, educated, professional Hanseatic types without a whiff of Nazism about them, who in their youth had been (un-)witting collaborators in a genocidal machine that implicated an entire society through willed ignorance at the very least, a better warning of our permanent vulnerability to ideological recuperation than any horror movie. The film closes on archive footage of the destruction of the city by aerial bombardment in 1944, over Hitler’s promise of ‘a more beautiful Hamburg’, a useful experiment in mixed documentary genres including an important testimonial component that would be further developed in film over the next two decades.

### **The Holocaust and the Balkans**

Collaboration takes many forms and confession comes hard. Extending his enquiry from Germany into Occupied Europe, Santner finds undercurrents of denial even in Paul de Man’s failure to make a complete admission of complicity in collaborationist publications, and with it a profound flaw in the entire structuralist and post-modern project. ‘Difference’ has never fully been digested and accepted. ‘Mourning without solidarity is the beginning of madness’.<sup>223</sup> Though Germany may represent the most

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<sup>222</sup> Jeannette Hoppe, Architektin.

<sup>223</sup> Santner, *Stranded Objects*, p. 27.



disturbing case of traumatic suppression, collective amnesia has been the rule in most parts of Nazi-occupied Europe, and particularly in France, where the resistance myth framed by de Gaulle recuperated a history of collaboration that was not aired till the 1980s, as in Germany. This assertion applies equally to the Balkans, where the Holocaust has been mourned or denied in similar and very dissimilar filmic forms to those of Germany.

### *The Optimists* <sup>224</sup>

Germany's wartime ally Bulgaria must offer some filmic remorse for its collaborationist politics, one might think. Named after the pre-war Sofia jazz band that provides the film with one of its key witnesses (together with a musical exploration of the complex and cosmopolitan sephardic culture of the Balkans), the title of *The Optimists* (Jacky Comfory, 2000) also refers obliquely to what might, in earlier days, have been called a miracle, namely the eleventh hour rescue of the Bulgarian Jews from transport to the Nazi death camps. It is a story that this creative documentary delivers with a marriage of personal testimony and historical analysis.

The film has the beguiling appeal of a family scrapbook, and one might almost miss the multiple layers of irony disguised in the title, lulled by the soft-spoken narrator introducing the lovingly restored snapshots of days-gone-by with almost subliminal humour: 'This is Rachamim Comfory and his two wives.'<sup>225</sup> They weren't married to each other at the same time. They were traditional, and they were also modern.' The Comfortys were seized before dawn one morning in March 1943, destined for Treblinka, only to be released, inexplicably, the same evening. In admitting that he is Rachamim's grandson, the narrator reveals that only this quirk of history allowed him to be born or the film to be made, launching us on a political and metaphysical detective trail to piece together the sources of that reprieve and therefore of his very existence, while simultaneously placing us within a Holocaust sub-genre of 'second generation reconstruction'.<sup>226</sup> The filmmakers cover the ground with immense seriousness, tracing the centuries-old co-existence of the monotheisms in

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<sup>224</sup> A version of this passage was published by *Kinokultura*, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2006, ed. Iordanova, <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/5/optimists.shtml>

<sup>225</sup> Rachamim, meaning 'mercy' in Hebrew, serves as a leitmotif.

<sup>226</sup> 'Holocaust Documentaries Move Towards the Personal', in *FORWARD*, 11 January 2002. '...a child of survivors journeys with a camera not only into Europe but into the past.'

Bulgaria, the shared struggle against Ottoman oppression, the liberal Constitution, the growth of racist ideology under the pro-Nazi monarchy, the imposition of the Nuremberg-style 'Law for the Defence of the Nation'. They name the genocidal collaborators, as well as the political heroes who made a brave stand against the deportations. However, the prevailing tone remains that of stunned euphoria and tearful gratitude between friends, the solidarity of rescued and rescuer in the assertion of fundamental human values, rather than objective assessment or historical argument.

For instance, *The Optimists* does not quite account for how this apparently well-integrated, multi-cultural society was so quickly derailed into anti-Semitic fascism and became Hitler's first European ally, apart from the fact that Germany was Bulgaria's largest trading partner and economic interests overwhelmingly favoured coalition. Equally, however, some critics have missed the irony this film underlines so well.<sup>227</sup> Precisely because of Bulgaria's reliability as a willing cohort of the Nazis, the country was never occupied by the Germans (King Boris's son Simeon Rilski pleads this on-screen as the political justification for the fascist Three-Power Pact); the SS were not in charge in Sofia, despite the secret protocol signed by Bulgaria to implement the Final Solution. The orders were issued not from Berlin but straight from the Royal Palace, orders which could be challenged, both in Parliament and on the streets, where the protests of ten thousand demonstrators persuaded King Boris to put his genocide on hold (exposing perhaps the inherent weaknesses and contradictions of monarchical fascism) before he was struck down by sudden death – an irony of 'divine mercy' given ritual status by the reverent, even hallowed voice-over.

Through a masterly recuperation of Bulgaria's history, the film locates itself as a call to decent individuals everywhere to stand up and make a difference; critical distance is not anticipated or permitted within the intellectual range of the work. Though the street demonstrations were undoubtedly courageous, Boris did not have the military resources to impose his will against a substantial (if not overwhelming) section of his own people. The inference that there were no sound personal friendships between Jews and Gentiles elsewhere in Europe is misleading; the implication that honest intercultural relationships can solve historical conflict is simplistic. In its search for the uplifting, *The Optimists* brushes with euphemism at

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<sup>227</sup> New York Times, 21 October 2005: 'occupied Bulgaria'; Pioneer Press: 'courageous opposition to SS orders'.

several turns and its upbeat narration jars with valuable archive footage, unearthed in the Sofia archives (made newly available post-1989), showing the embarkation of Jewish deportees on Danube paddle-boats bound for Vienna and oblivion. Rare footage of the crammed transport trains, including one of the few extant boxcar ‘interiors’ of huddled inmates, should preclude the subsequent ‘happy ending’. These people are about to die, at the hand of Bulgarians. Not just because they are Jews; but because they are *non-Bulgarian* Jews from Greece. In its displacement of moral blame from everything Bulgarian, the film is silent about that country’s enthusiasm for Hitler’s gift of Thrace and Macedonia to a ‘Greater Bulgaria’ and the resulting failure of Bulgarians to defend the native Jews of that colonial annexation, eleven thousand of whom were transported through Bulgaria in those same cattle trucks to their deaths - a crime immortalized in the Bulgarian/East German co-production *Zvezdi* or *Sterne*,<sup>228</sup> which will be considered later as a pendant to *The Optimists*.

Only the Jews of Bulgaria proper were saved, and though this is of course admirable in view of Europe’s shameful failure to protect its Jewish citizens (Vichy France and Slovakia willingly deported their own Jews), *The Optimists* in its resolutely redemptionist tone poses problems concerning the relative ‘status as witness’ of the lucky survivor telling of his good fortune, juxtaposed with the eternally silent victim whose torment will never be heard, as Levi cautioned and Agamben reminds us. Bulgaria was, after all, on the wrong side, and one wonders whether the filmmakers are entitled to congratulate all in sight with such affable aplomb, offering the cinematic equivalent of Freud’s ‘Erlösungsbotschaft’.<sup>229</sup> How does one know, for instance, that everyone interviewed is telling the truth, fifty years later? Cover-up and denial are all too often the order of the day in Holocaust memorialization. Of course it is right that Yad Vashem should recognize the Sofia baker who rescued his Jewish neighbours in his cavernous oven with such eerie foreshadowing. But the posthumous awards to Bulgarian prelates at the New York première of *The Optimists* in the presence of Bulgarian and Israeli dignitaries raises issues that go beyond the admirable resistance of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, which clearly greeted the redemptive fantasy as mediated by film. Bulgaria has not yet joined Germany in public atonement for its role in the Holocaust and the historical

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<sup>228</sup> *Sterne/Звезди* (Konrad Wolf, 1959). Writer: Angel Vagenshtain. Cast: Sasha Krusharska, Jürgen Frohriep, Erik S. Klein. Bulgaria 103 mins, Germany 92 mins, B&W, mono.

<sup>229</sup> See chapter epigraph.

record cannot be wiped clean by the personal courage of the ‘Just Among the Nations’ or by Israel’s underwriting of historical revisionism. A similar restoration of Bulgaria’s war record was effected by the earlier, Communist-sponsored feature film *Eshelonite/Echelons* (Borislav Punchev, 1986), which lionized the same reprieve, suggesting that rites of recuperation are comparable whatever the officiating dispensation.

### **An Albanian Riposte**

‘Theirs was the only Jewish community to survive intact in Nazi Europe’, proudly states the producers’ website for *The Optimists*,<sup>230</sup> but a better record can be claimed by Albania (which *was* occupied), where King Zog’s government refused to release even the names of the Jewish population and the German Foreign Office persuaded the SS to desist for fear of popular reprisals.

In the Albanian Epics that recount the birth of the nation, the Arbni vie with the Slavs for the dowry of a great Jewish beauty and the Arbni end up winning her, an indication of the mothering centrality of Jewish culture in the Albanian consciousness. Jewish migrants first settled in Illyria in biblical times, conferring place names such as Olycum (Jericho) and Foinca (Phoenecia) and founding synagogues dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century (Sarander), to be followed by a later wave fleeing the Spanish Inquisition in search of sanctuary, who brought with them the caballistic mysticism of Shabbati Zvi, including a cult of numbers and a sabbatarian tradition which survives to this day in the general Albanian observation of Saturday as the Sabbath. Many Albanian Jews converted to Christianity while retaining a crypto-fidelity to their own traditions, not so much *marranos* avoiding persecution as creators of a new synthesis reflected in the prevalence of Pentateuchal themes in the decoration of many Albanian churches (e.g. the Moses Cycle at Elbasan), their messianic hopes cross-fertilizing with Albanian nationalism. The 1930s and 1940s saw the third great wave of Jewish arrivals when, especially after the Anschluss, Albania welcomed many Austrian Jews, who were soon followed by others from Poland and Germany, Serbia and Montenegro, Kosovo and Croatia.

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<sup>230</sup> Comforty Media: <http://www.theoptimists.com/pdfs/press-kit-ny-all-web.pdf>

This support, crucial to the fate of Albanian Jews under Nazi Occupation, is reflected in a report drawn up by Ribbentrop's Auswärtiges Amt on a meeting with SS-Gruppenführer Müller, concerning the ongoing seizure of Jews across occupied Europe in the wake of popular resistance encountered by the Nazis in Denmark. Under the separate heading 'Albania' the report advises that any deportation undertaken against the wishes of the Albanian Government could have serious repercussions for the occupying forces.<sup>231</sup> Gruppenführer Müller was persuaded ('habe volles Verständnis für die Stellungnahme') and Albania's Jews were left untouched. Of the many traumas Albania suffered in the twentieth century, the Holocaust was not one, and its course is generally absent from filmic record or popular awareness. Suppressed by the post-war Communist dictatorship (perhaps because it reflected too well on the previous regime), Albania's honourable exception was recounted only by later filmmakers working not in documentary but in fiction, which must serve, in the absence of witness, as testimony in its own right.

### *I dashur armik/Dear Enemy*

During the bloody takeover of Albania by German forces in October 1943 after Italy's capitulation and change of sides, a Muslim trader harbours in his cellar first the local Jewish clockmaker, next an Italian soldier, then a hunted Albanian partisan and finally the quartermaster of the German garrison, only to find himself arrested as a collaborator on the 'liberation'. Gjergj Xhuvani's witty fable on the dangers of charity and brotherly love sees the Jewish clockmaker emerge unscathed from his relatively comfortable seclusion, while his protector is taken away to an unpleasant fate for having harboured not a Jew but a renegade partisan, an apt reflection of the blindness of Albanian culture to issues of ethnicity and religion in favour of tribal loyalty and political allegiance.

This Muslim cellar is a place of fierce debate and mutual accusation but a 'heile Welt' nonetheless. Its welcoming embrace extends into the walled garden for

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<sup>231</sup> Aus den Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes: Vortrags-Notiz 17ten Oktober 1943 zwischen LR von Thadden und Gruppenführer Müller "wegen der technischen Durchführung der Judenfrage in den neu besetzten Gebieten" [...] Albanien: "Er (Müller) habe volles Verständnis für die Stellungnahme des Auswärtigen Amtes, daß eine gegen den Willen bzw ohne Wissen der Albanischen Regierung durchgeführte Aktion verletzend wirken würde und schwierige Komplikationen in Albanien hervorrufen könne." Albanian State Archives, courtesy of Mr Shaban Sinani, Curator.

civilized multi-lingual conversation and into the dining room for shared ecumenical Christmas festivities unthreatened by warlike realities outside, not least because the German quartermaster is clearly too homesick, too civilized and too much in love to betray the sanctuary he stumbles on and soon shares. On the one hand this evocation of a vanished world of harmonious coexistence is refreshingly unusual in dramatic terms, especially in its recuperation of the philo-Semitic, protective Islam of sephardic tradition; on the other hand its moral predicament is never sufficiently tested and the film's emotional range remains untroubled even when the rescuer's impotent poet brother is cuckolded by the handsome Italian deserter.

Ironically, however, the Holocaust is present in its absence, through fear. The story of the Jewish clockmaker is narrated through adversity, not through physical abuse. Danger is omnipresent but deflected, and this must rank as an honest narrative strategy, for it tells us *what* was lost, rather than *why* or *how* it was lost. It thus sidesteps the narcissistic enquiry into the psyche of the perpetrator that so often represents the only German correction of complete suppression, amnesia and denial. Lanzmann's insistence on transmission is respected, if not remotely in the manner he meant.

True to the Albanian experience, the enemy here is neither the 'dear' German nor the Italian philanderer, but the Communist mafia who inflicted the following genocide on their own country, to which we shall turn in later chapters. Western audiences have found *Dear Enemy* 'slow', and its cinematography certainly refuses the adrenalin of its subject matter with a lingering nostalgia that matches the acting. But precisely this 'slowness' is its strength and authenticity (as in *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis* and *Sunshine*), a refusal to be bullied by history inseparable from any decent rite of restitution of the *status quo ante* of European civilization, the only means through which the filmic taboo on Jewish subjects can be broken and a form of atonement perhaps effected.

### 3. LATENCY

#### The Trauma Of The Victim

##### Concentration Camp as Traumatic Self-discovery

Überlegen wir, welche Mittel wir haben, um einen derzeit latenten Triebkonflikt aktuell zu machen.<sup>232</sup>

I try to imagine the response of those in attendance – the mother, the witness, and the killer – but even more, I ask myself what we can do with such information?<sup>233</sup>

##### L'Univers concentrationnaire

In asking 'welche Grenzen der Leistungsfähigkeit einer analytischen Therapie gesteckt sind',<sup>234</sup> Freud ponders the risks for the psychoanalyst of not 'letting sleeping dogs lie' but of deliberately 'awakening' the repressed psychic conflict. The same caveat can be applied to the release of trauma through film. Lawrence Langer has spent a lifetime listening to survivors of the Holocaust and, as if to forestall complacency, he punctuates his *Preempting the Holocaust* with 'grim details'<sup>235</sup> of specific Nazi atrocities that send a bolt of adrenalin, fear, disbelief through the reader, who cannot choose but echo the almost biblical cries of despair with which his search for a rational discourse is interspersed. How can film, of all media, recount such cruelty, when even to *read* reduces the reader to speechless shame and language itself is 'scarred and dehumanized'?<sup>236</sup> What are our responsibilities as storytellers towards the victims? What would be the aim and function of visual recuperation? If honest representation is *not* possible, what business has film to meddle with such events?

While Lanzmann, attempting to invoke the monstrosity of what took place, renounces all direct visual reference such as archive footage or dramatic reconstruction as too safe, too comfortable, other filmmakers of the post-war generations have been irresistibly drawn to the concentration camp as the logical end

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<sup>232</sup> Freud, 'Die endliche und die unendliche Analyse', *Gesammelte Werke*, XV1, pp. 3-279, here p. 75.

<sup>233</sup> Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, p. 2.

<sup>234</sup> Freud, 'Die endliche und die unendliche Analyse', p. 75.

<sup>235</sup> Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, p. 1.

<sup>236</sup> Steiner, *Errata*, p. 106, referring to his *Language and Silence* (London: Faber, 1967).

point of the Nazi state, a dramatic microcosm whose depiction is vital to an understanding of the apparatus of state tyranny. Some fall into precisely the trap Lanzmann warns of, namely banalizing the unspeakable, falsely familiarizing us with the inconceivable; others perform a useful service in recording impressions and testimonies while they were still fresh. Very few avoid what Langer castigates as ‘exemplarism’, namely the suggestion that ‘the Holocaust contains a positive lesson for all of us today’,<sup>237</sup> and that ‘even in the most horrible experience, there is some possibility for humankind’s enrichment’.<sup>238</sup>

In this respect there is a notable difference of sensibility between German filmmakers of the immediate post-war era, who had grown up in families directly affected as the children of either perpetrators, victims or bystanders, and those still young today who must of necessity work from oral or written testimony from ageing witnesses and official or scholarly works of history. Thus a very different ethic and aesthetic can be discerned between, for instance, *Ein Tag* (Egon Monk, 1965) and *Die Fälscher* (Stefan Ruzowitzky, 2006), whose perceptions of concentration camp trauma, its physical infliction and its psychic consequences are conveyed by opposite if not unrelated dramatic means, the black-and-white, documentary sobriety of the earlier work giving way to the subtle half-tones (both moral and visual) of its successor. Recent output of the Federal Republic owes as much to the cinematic traditions of the GDR, represented by such works as *Nackt unter Wölfen* (Frank Beyer, 1963) and *Jakob der Lügner* (Frank Beyer, 1975), or the East German/Bulgarian co-production *Sterne (Zvezdi)* (Konrad Wolf, 1959), all of which show a willingness to work in realms of metaphor that may subtly efface the victim from the historical records.

## **Out of the Rubble**

The concentration camp was late in making an appearance in Germany’s post-war film fiction, its function recuperated by the ravaged urban landscape that impressed itself on the German psyche as a concentration camp in itself. This gave rise to the much studied *Trümmerfilme*, which will briefly be considered here, since they

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<sup>237</sup> Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, p. 1.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.



represent an interesting vehicle of traumatic recovery, if not always that of the actual victim.

### *Die Mörder sind unter uns*

Deliberately couched in ‘the expressionistic style of the Weimar Republic decried as degenerate by the Nazis’,<sup>239</sup> the first ‘rubble film’ *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (Wolfgang Staudte, 1946) captures the ruins of Berlin in jagged expressionist outline as a visual projection of Germany’s ravaged psyche, here personified by the concentration camp survivor and photographer Susanne Wallner (Hildegard Knef), who returns to Berlin after the war to find her ruined flat occupied by the traumatized battle-field surgeon Dr Hans Mertens (Ernst Wilhelm Borchert). Artist and medic, victim and perpetrator invert their traditional roles, as she allows Hans to share her living space and addresses his alcoholism by helping him retrieve his suppressed memories of an atrocity committed by his company on a Polish village, thus absolving him from the retribution he believes it his duty to inflict on his former commanding officer, the reborn entrepreneur Ferdinand Brückner (Arno Paulsen), who now makes pots out of disused army helmets. In this psychoanalytic exchange, recuperation or convalescence from trauma is effected only by a suspension of responsibility, the circle of perpetration being too hard to reconcile with the square of recovery, particularly since the trauma of the passive KZ-victim (Knef) has been so clearly transferred onto the perpetrating soldier (Borchert). While the latter wallows in horror, the fresh-faced Susanne returns as if from a Baltic holiday, carrying two smart suitcases and dressed in immaculately ironed clothes. Even allowing for the correct, even glamorous turnout invariably insisted on by wardrobe and make-up departments, this effacing of all exterior and psychic traces of concentration camp trauma is simultaneously an effacement of Nazi perpetration, the film’s protagonist being the city itself, Berlin, magnificently captured in its beauteous destruction inflicted by the Allies. The recurrence of crosses as a visual (and religious) leitmotif might well subliminally invert the relationship between victims and perpetrators, Berghahn notes, suggesting ‘that it is the post-war Germans who have to bear their cross – the burden of the past’.<sup>240</sup> Whether or not the earthly justice to which Brückner is instead

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<sup>239</sup> Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat*, p. 12.

<sup>240</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, pp. 66-67.

delivered will answer any of Hans's or Susanne's deepest psychological needs, it does at least allow them to start a new life together.

The director had tried to clear the script with both British and American censors, to be told by the latter 'in the next five years no film will be made in this country except by us' (i.e. till de-Nazification had taken its course),<sup>241</sup> so it was left to the Soviets to pick up this remarkable work and recuperate its author for the SED. As the original title *Der Mann, den ich töten werde* suggests, Hans's murderous revenge was deflected not just by Susanne's healing touch but by the Soviet authorities, who insisted on a change of ending, fearing that Hans's example might unleash a wave of lynchings.<sup>242</sup> This not unsensible censorship leaves the film a deeper and more satisfying if no less problematic piece, and may have forced the director to work through issues of personal culpability incurred from his having taken a minor acting role ('Freund und Vertrauter Fabers') in the infamous *Jud Süß*, though he had earlier been subjected to a Nazi 'Berufsverbot' due to his theatrical family's experimental, left-wing reputation.

The title *Die Mörder sind unter uns* is itself a magnificent prevarication, allowing the audience through its *film noir* poster and revenge intrigue to project their feelings of guilt and responsibility onto a single perpetrator, Brückner, while conspiring in the moral recuperation and atonement of the traumatized but deeply tarnished Mertens, who emerges as a victim of circumstance, deception and his own honesty, the founding figure of the 'decent Wehrmacht' myth. The murderers are *amongst* us - disguised but unreconstructed – we may not know them personally but they are definitely *not us*. The film premièred and was reviewed in the same week that the Nuremberg sentences were carried out, both film and trials offering their German audience what Berghahn calls 'a quick solution to the issue of collective guilt. With "the murderers" being tried and punished by the Allies, it seemed no longer necessary for the Germans to examine their own involvement.'<sup>243</sup> While the flashback sequences identify the source of Mertens' traumatic war experiences, 'the film's cathartic conclusion displaces the guilt'.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Dagmar Barnouw, 'A Time for Ruins', *German Postwar Films*, pp. 45-60, here p. 47, citing Malte Ludin, *Wolfgang Staudte* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1996), p. 123, n.56.

<sup>242</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, p. 64, referring to Brandlmeier 1989:39.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

‘The suffering of the real victims is typically marginalised in most rubble films’, Berghahn concludes. The genocide of the Jews is reduced to a brief glimpse of a newspaper headline ‘Millionen Menschen vergast. Bericht vom Konzentrationslager Auschwitz’, a visual reference probably inserted to establish the film’s time frame as 1945 (not later), a casual abuse of temporal signposts (analogous to diegetic radio news reports) that sends a shiver down the spine: Auschwitz was already yesterday’s news and the Jews are not even mentioned. *Die Mörder sind unter uns* sets a baleful tone that was to dominate German film output for many years.<sup>245</sup> Since the perpetrator had been irreparably damaged by his own acts, it must be left to the victim to be the healer, a phenomenon interestingly repeated in the Balkans today, as will be noted later.

### Countercurrents

In this context it is worth registering an apologetic turn in the most recent film scholarship, represented for instance by Pinkert’s ‘Rubble Film as Archive of Trauma and Grief’. She points to the suppression of any immediate post-war public space in which death could be recognized and confronted;<sup>246</sup> the complete absence of memorials to the German war dead; and the haste to bury civilian casualties without commemoration, itself a prolongation of the Nazi prohibition on displays of private grief in favour of the death cult of the Third Reich with its ritual glorifications of patriotic sacrifice. Noting the excessive length of the child’s deathbed scene in *Irgendwo in Berlin* with its melodramatic staging, Pinkert discerns a trend towards ashamed and therefore occulted opportunities of mourning in film: ‘a public space in which feelings of loss and grief concerning dead German men could hover’.<sup>247</sup> A rite of mourning, indeed, but for whom?

In his introduction to the same volume, William Rasch gives a salutary jolt to self-righteousness: ‘Armed with our historical knowledge of the Third Reich, we are confident that we know what the war generation knew, or should have known, thus we know what they should have seen, should have said, should have felt, should have

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<sup>245</sup> See Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat*, on Alexander Kluge’s *The Patriot* (1979).

<sup>246</sup> Pinkert, ‘Rubble Film as Archive of Trauma and Grief’, *German Postwar Films*, p. 72.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

done.’<sup>248</sup> However, while quoting Robert Shandley’s ‘indispensable study of German rubble films’ as inviting us to take a viewing position as ‘judge, jury and, ideally, executioner’, subordinating aesthetic categories to a catalogue of typical German sins, Rasch adds: “‘These films”, Shandley notes, “only rarely confront the institutions, traditions, and assumptions that led to the catastrophe that was postwar Europe. At best they mention them; at worst, they lie about them...[and they]... often conflate the wrongs committed during the Third Reich with the Germans’ own postwar suffering.”’<sup>249</sup> The normative post-war position, summarized as ‘we know what the Germans should be feeling, so why don’t they?’ on the one hand conceals a self-defeating solipsism that prevents fresh thinking; on the other hand it points to a salutary refusal to relinquish ethical issues in favour of aesthetic appreciation.

Who wants to know anything about truth nowadays? Thus the cabaret producer contemptuously dismisses Beckmann in Wolfgang Borchert’s luminous and terrible *Draussen vor der Tür*. The story of a returning traumatized soldier, the play worked well in 1947 but the film, *Liebe 47* (Liebeneiner, 1949), flopped only two years later. Borchert was dead, like so many other ‘survivors’.<sup>250</sup> No one wanted the truth. The Wirtschaftswunder had begun.<sup>251</sup> Looking back was taboo.<sup>252</sup> ‘The “disappearing criminal”’, Langer concludes, ‘is one of the most dangerous and lamentable legacies of the Holocaust experience’.<sup>253</sup>

### *Ehe im Schatten*

The first post-war feature film to deal explicitly with the persecution of Jews, *Ehe im Schatten* (Kurt Maetzig, 1947) tells of the indifference of the theatre world that led to the double suicide of mixed Jewish-German acting couple Meta and Joachim Gottschalk. Echoing the suicide of Maetzig’s own Jewish mother and sound-tracked by the composer Wolfgang Zeller, who (in one of many such redemptive ironies) had

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<sup>248</sup> William Rasch, ‘Looking Again at the Rubble’, *German Postwar Films*, pp. 1-5, here p. 3.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>250</sup> Robert G. Moeller, ‘When *Liebe* Was Just a Five-Letter Word’, *German Postwar Films*, pp. 141-156, here p. 141.

<sup>251</sup> See W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. Anthea Bell (NY: Random House, 2003), p. 7, cited by Prager, ‘The Stones Begin to Speak’, *German Postwar Films*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>252</sup> The same enforced suppression of the past in favour of frenetic nation building is observed in Israel’s Holocaust survivors of the same period by Aliza Olmert in her novel *Prussa shel yam*, trans. Mirjam Pressler and Eldad Stobezk as *Ein Stück vom Meer* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2009); screenplay for film version by Gareth Jones, 2011.

<sup>253</sup> Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, p. 183.

also scored *Jud Süß*, the film suggests, like *Die Mörder sind unter uns* one year earlier, that autobiographical reference and personal concerns were acceptable, indeed welcome, creative motifs in the immediate aftermath of defeat as aids to public remorse and reconstruction, and the public responded in droves, with 10 million cinema entries.<sup>254</sup> Yet even here Jews are not fully individuated but rather ‘assimilated in general victimhood’.<sup>255</sup>

A Communist since 1944, Maetzig had a steady career that saw him conquer the commanding positions in the cinema of the GDR. His next film *Der Rat der Götter* (Kurt Maetzig, 1950) dissected the complicity of German industry in Hitler’s hegemony and particularly the manufacture by I.G. Farben of the Zyklon gas used at Auschwitz. His impeccably socialist-realist (‘blatantly propagandistic’)<sup>256</sup> *Ernst Thälmann - Sohn seiner Klasse* (Kurt Maetzig, 1954) and its sequel *Ernst Thälmann – Führer seiner Klasse* (Kurt Maetzig, 1955) were bio-pics of the eponymous Communist martyr, in which Jews were nowhere to be seen except as members of the Communist resistance. By now, the authorized version of the GDR was firmly in place and very little was to dislodge it.

Nonetheless, from the war’s end till the late sixties, the GDR made more consistent efforts than its capitalist neighbour to reach a critical interpretation of its predecessor state and the various concepts of *Täter* and *Mitläufer* were common currency. The small man corrupted by a tyrannical system emerges as a paradigm, if only as fuel to the strident resistance motif that gave the GDR its legitimacy. There were limits to representation, as testified by the banned and scrapped films concerned with the Nazi era. For example, *Das Beil von Wandsbek* (Falk Harnack, 1951, based on the novel by Arnold Zweig) was deemed too sympathetic towards its real-life protagonist Albert Teetjen, a Nazi executioner played with beguiling humanity by the immensely popular Erwin Geschonnek.<sup>257</sup> After a promising launch with 800,000 entries in the first month, the film was pulled from the cinemas and its director, a survivor of the unsung ‘bürgerliche Widerstand’, emigrated to the West after Bertolt Brecht had failed to effect a somewhat disingenuous compromise. *Der verlorene Engel* (Ralf Kirsten, 1966/72), in its depiction of the artist Ernst Barlach’s struggle

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<sup>254</sup> See Christiane Mückenberger, ‘The Anti-Fascist Past in DEFA Films’, *DEFA: East German Cinema (1946-1992)*, ed. Seán D.Allan and John Sandford (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 1999), pp. 58-76, here p. 62.

<sup>255</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, p. 71, referring to Shandley 2001:77-115.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>257</sup> Compare Goetz George in *Aus einem deutschen Leben*, Chapter 4.

with the Nazi authorities who outlawed his work as ‘entartete Kunst’, was taken as a camouflaged attack on Communist censorship and released only several years later with drastic cuts. *Die Russen kommen* (Heiner Carow, 1968) was banned for its formalistic experiments with surreal dream sequences that were intended to convey the Nazi seduction of its Hitlerjugend protagonist. Nothing was to cloud the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of fascism as the final stage of capitalist imperialism. Screen characters must be typical representatives of their class, its political position and moral values. The idea of traumatic repression was incompatible with this black-and-white world, in which Freud was a *persona non grata*. The notion of delayed shock might negate political imperatives in the here and now; anti-social behaviour might be justified as psychosis; testimony might appear invalid or at best fluid. Representations, let alone psychoanalytical studies, of Nazi leaders were anathema. Psychologizing the perpetrators could only blur the moral lines and confuse a susceptible audience struggling to regain its self-respect. Strangely, we pass a point where Lanzmann began: with a refusal to ‘understand’. The mind of the perpetrator must not be probed, his motives and feelings must remain an object of indifference in the face of the terrible facts and even these were dealt with sparingly, possibly to avoid any odious comparisons. The Nazi concentration camps were late in making their screen début and when they did, the Final Solution was conspicuous by its absence.

### ***Nackt unter Wölfen***

It is therefore both surprising and predictable to find *Nackt unter Wölfen* (Frank Beyer, 1963) emerging from this desert. There are signs that the East German authorities had not planned for its release, indeed might well have preferred the concentration camps to have remained a closed book, for filmic purposes, but the meteoric success of the novel of the same name by first-time author, sexagenarian Bruno Apitz, published by Halle Verlag in 1958 and soon translated into thirty languages, must have suggested to the authorities that the Nazi archipelago was precisely where the moral high ground was to be regained.

Apitz had spent eight years in the camps, including Buchenwald, where his story is set. His credentials were impeccable, his style unremittingly socialist-realist, his message clear: Communist resistance was born in the concentration camps, the

GDR emerged from anti-fascist roots, the East German citizen no longer had anything to be ashamed of. A cursory viewing of *Nackt unter Wölfen* might confirm this thumbnail assessment and write off the work as cheap (or expensive) propaganda, as did Marcel Reich-Ranicki the novel as ‘anspruchlosen Unterhaltungsroman’.<sup>258</sup> But to understand firstly why *Nackt unter Wölfen* had such massive and continuing success in both Germanies and beyond (indeed why it ranks amongst the classics of German cinema) and secondly how it achieved the redemptive effect it exercised on the East German psyche, one has to dig deep into its dramaturgy and particularly its approach to trauma. Its impact derives from the deft recuperation of mythical and religious motifs, whose infiltration of socialist-realist norms may well have been apparent to its authors if not necessarily (though possibly) to the censors.

The film’s title sequence, over guards and inmates performing their ritual march across the Appellplatz to grotesquely festive military music, warns us immediately that we are in a heightened universe, a microcosm in which normal rules will not apply but which will not ultimately test us further than we can bear, and the highlighted distress of one particular new arrival with burning eyes and a secret mission provides an instant point of curiosity, suspense and identification focused on his suitcase. Appropriated by the ‘Personal Effects Squad’ under the implausibly doe-eyed Kapo André Höfel (the young Armin Müller-Stahl), the suitcase is opened to reveal a small boy from the Warsaw ghetto, whom Jankowski has rescued from Auschwitz, where the child’s parents were murdered. The challenge for Höfel and his comrades is how to conceal the child long enough to save him from the SS guards before the Americans arrive, this being Buchenwald in March 1945.

As if this nexus of narrative tropes and mythical echoes were not enough, Höfel finds himself in direct conflict with the shadowy, underground ILK (‘Internationales Lagerkomitee’), which is planning an armed rising against their oppressors. Led by the implacable but honest (‘Vertrauen? Ich scheiß drauf!’) Lagerältester Walter Krämer (Erwin Geschonnek), the ILK demands the boy’s immediate removal together with his saviour on the next Transport (i.e. Todesmarsch) to Dachau. Not only would the child be murdered instantly by the SS, its discovery would entail reprisals and fatally compromise the uprising. Composed exclusively of Communists from every nationality of the prisoner corps, the ILK is portrayed as a

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<sup>258</sup> Marcel Reich-Ranicki, ‘Mehr als die Autoren sagen wollen...’, *Die Zeit*, Nr.44, 27 October 1961, p. 17.

serious authority entitled to speak for the 50,000 remaining inmates, but the 'grey zone' of prisoner collaboration is never touched on. The ensuing conflict, once the child is hidden and spirited from place to place, turns on the opposing claims of the individual versus the collective, a well-rehearsed theme of tragedy generally, and of Marxist-Leninist drama specifically.

Before the issue can be decided, Jankowski has been dispatched alone to his fate, leaving the child as the undisputed property of 'Effects'. Discovered by the Hauptscharführer Zweiling (Wolfram Handel), the boy is saved by Zweiling's split loyalties (the allegorical character names further encouraging mythical connotations). In common with his SS brethren, Zweiling is looking for a way out and saving an orphan might look good with the Americans, 'wenn es anders herumgeht', a wonderful Nazi euphemism for impending dissolution. In a startling reversal of traditional gender roles his strapping blonde harpie of a wife Hortense (Angela Brunner, the only female in the film) tells him not to be a fool and to save his skin by betraying both child and rescuers: 'schaff Dir das Kind weg so schnell wie möglich'. Meanwhile his commanding officer obtains from a spy the names of forty-six leaders of the ILK on whom the camp authorities will exact reprisals, but these hostages are promptly spirited away into every nook and cranny of the camp, while the torture inflicted on Höfel, his Polish deputy Marian Kropinski (Krzyszryn Wójcik) and their valiant substitute Rudi Pippig (Fred Delmare) still fails to divulge the whereabouts of either child or resisters, though ritual betrayal duly ensues by the requisite Judas in the form of ageing coward August Rose (Peter Sturm), who is too scared and too old to die. 'Der Mann zwischen Leben und Tod entscheidet sich fürs Leben', is the SS gamble, one of many stale aphorisms. In a hastily convened council of war, reminiscent of the Last Supper ('das mag unser letzter Rat sein'), the ILK disciples listen spell-bound to Krämer's appeal: 'Ich weiß nicht, ob Ihr alle Kommunisten seid, aber Ich bin Einer'.

Ritual and religious elements pervade the film's surface and its subtext. The sacrificial shaving of prisoners' head hair is introduced in the first five minutes, by which we recognize that our characters have passed a certain bourn and are no longer fully 'living' in the sense that those outside might live, a ritual invocation of trauma both filmic and historical. The echo on the crackling Apellplatz microphone tells of death-laden orders and shattered ear drums; the child's discovery in a suitcase skirts unsought comedy by a hair's breadth to acquire Mosaic profundity, the abandoned



personal effects of Holocaust victims standing for bulrushes and the tender Kapo Höfel unwittingly cast as Pharaoh's Daughter protecting this last scion of Judah, who will become the first Messiah. 'Nicht schreien! Du darfst nicht schreien!' One bleat and they are all betrayed. Unlike so many similar situations both historical and filmic, the child does not cry, not once, not till his rescue is finally assured, a sign of his divine provenance and his ritual function. From the Pentateuch the references broaden inescapably to include the Nativity, as the entire squad gathers round to worship the infant in its suitcase manger, 'ein richtiger kleiner Mensch', ox, ass, shepherd and wise man clearly etched out in their various responses. Through an unscrupulous recourse to religious motifs, Beyer conjures a vision of male solidarity and humanity that transcends any concern with historical verisimilitude and casts a creative-redemptive spell of its own. The actors' response to this fragment of humanity in their midst, their bonding around it, the ingenuity of their stratagems, the smuggling of milk in a plastic hot water bottle, down to the penultimate sequence where, on the verge of insurrection, they imperceptibly close ranks around the discovered child to shield it and face down the impotent pistol raised against them. 'Ich habe selbst einen Jungen zu Hause', 'Einer muß sich um das Kind kümmern', the irresistible tide of human decency brushes expedience aside and dictates that one child must be rescued, even if all should die, and it contains the seeds of a religious message that may not have dawned on the censors (though indeed, it may) but will surely have reached its spiritually starved, defeated, self-despising viewers in need of liberation from a repressed past and unfamiliar with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, filmic or other.

Even the SS guards are aware of the film's agenda: 'Er hat Beichte gemacht', they snort of their tortured victim. Good and evil are transgressively inverted with ritual intent, the better to reinforce the former, a strategy reinforced in the minutiae of visual design, such as the Commandant's portrait of a heaven-gazing Führer in his incarnation as messianic crusader. The apparently realistic dramaturgy is driven by miraculous evasions in the rain and unexplained vanishings from imminent discovery, only for the child to be found safe amidst grazing pigs. Superstition nearly carries the day when a counter-current threatens to scapegoat the child: 'Mit dem Kind ist das Unheil angefangen!' Meanwhile the Commandant's map shows Allied advances, while the balding Belshazzar barks 'Ich werde immer der Kommandant von Buchenwald bleiben!' and the barracks radio warns the mutinous SS guards of their imminent demise: classic suspense devices laden with promises of retribution and

redemption. ‘Die Reformulierung unheilvoller Ereignisse in eine erzählerische Heilsperspektive war ein erklärtes Ziel des Autors’,<sup>259</sup> writes Susanne zur Nieden; Apitz would have preferred the title *Du bist ein Mensch, beweise es!*

The appeal to pseudo-religious emotions explains the remarkable effect that *Nackt unter Wölfen* had on its early audiences. While apparently conversing in rational language (in several languages, in fact, on-screen German-Polish interpretation performing a ritual assertion of prisoner solidarity), these men incarcerated in the shadow of death are carrying a latent trauma that their liberation will do nothing to heal. Their dilemma is absurd; they are not thinking straight; they erect false opposites as an obstacle to action at every step and they prefer the barbarity of ritual child sacrifice to efficacious action. If they can later hide forty-six of their number, who disappear from the SS without trace and retrieve in the last minutes of the film an entire armoury occulted from their tormentors, why could they not have solved the appearance of this child with the opening of a trapdoor, as Höfel and his accomplices do? Krämer finally realizes, as he could have done much earlier, that the child must *not* be handed over; the camp must *not* accept another transport; the hostages must be rescued; the uprising must take place. The film has been dealing in false opposites for its entire duration. This was simply bad plotting and the film barely gets away with it, but surely the real answer goes deeper.

One consequence of latent trauma, as Freud noted, is the inability to assimilate new information or accommodate unexpected stimuli, and he asks ‘welche Mittel wir haben, um einen derzeit latenten Triebkonflikt aktuell zu machen’.<sup>260</sup> The arrival of the child is just such a challenge, and traumatic denial of his presence is the inevitable response. The film’s true achievement is to retrieve the apparently functional traumatic surface (‘what it was like’) while conveying to our unconscious minds the emotional dislocation within. This mechanism is enough to explain the audience’s explosive approval. Finally their complicity had been explained! They were not evil, they had merely been deprived, by years of traumatic abuse, of their most elementary sense of moral priorities. Like Azdak in *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis* (and his model Solomon), the Communist ILK had been rescued from the most terrible failure of judgement. ‘Wenn wir das Kind haben, haben wir die Partei!’ runs one meta-sentimental line that can surely have no equivalent in the manuals of Marxist-

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<sup>259</sup> zur Nieden, “...stärker als der Tod”, p. 104.

<sup>260</sup> See chapter epigraph.

Leninism. Child and charity have been reconciled with authority and expedience. It is the immense internal struggle of noble but traumatized men to decide what is 'right thinking' and 'correct action' ('es ist schwer zu entscheiden, was man tun soll') that gives the film its apparent dignity and its power to move. A dissonance between fine moral character and flawed executive action might be one symptom of repressed trauma, and the film examines this latency through the thought processes of Socialist Realism that were once thought devoid of psychology.

The fact that the ILK is here composed solely of Communists rather than the political spectrum represented at Buchenwald; that the camp is liberated at the film's climactic conclusion by its Communist inmates rather than, historically, by the arriving Americans; that none of the actors or extras look remotely as starved as the real victims who met their horrified liberators along with the pile of corpses; all might seem to justify the criticism that *Nackt unter Wölfen*, despite its strengths, is fundamentally flawed by a propagandist agenda. However, the film does signal service in showing that traumatized men can communicate across language barriers; piles of corpses would not have added to the horror, which is adequately conveyed (in this context, though not in all films) by the smoke rising from the chimney behind the Appellplatz, by the cruelty and fear of the SS machine in its death throes and by the deft handling of the ritually requisite interrogation and torture sequences, which shock without inflicting further trauma on the audience.

That the characters appear not to realize that they are traumatized but continue to act and respond within a continuum of normality underlines the film's psychological verisimilitude, conveyed by deep group shots featuring the inner bafflement of our heroes in wide-lensed close-up backed by seething masses. Thus the individual conscience is isolated against the tide of uncontrollable events, a very different visual message to that of, say, *Thälmann*, where the eponymous militant never once loses the attention of his proletariat flock. Erwin Geschonnek had himself been an inmate of Sachsenhausen, Neuengamme and Dachau (where he had been a Kapo), and at first declined the invitation to play Krämer out of respect for the dead, before accepting that the film was necessary.<sup>261</sup> Many of the other actors had been through the camps and the film was shot at Buchenwald itself, which in itself guarantees nothing. Fifteen years earlier, *Ostatni Etap* (Wanda Jakubowska, 1947)

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<sup>261</sup> See *Regie: Frank Beyer*, Klaus Wischnewski, ed. Ralf Schenk (Berlin: Edition Henrich, 1995), p. 178.

had been filmed in Auschwitz and acted by its former inmates, using verbal accounts recuperated for future filmic recovery by the director while she was still an inmate. It is a startling example of how trauma victims can experience their latent trauma as a bad movie in which they cannot find their own roles. This state arguably persisted through the filming of *Ostatni Etap*, in which many of the actors appear unable to recuperate their own so recent suffering (a trauma which had not begun to surface), just as Primo Levi moved with every sign of sanity at approximately the same time from being an inmate of that same Auschwitz to being an assistant at the renamed Monowitz, an inner displacement that left his trauma undetected even by himself and thus ultimately fatal.

Let us admit that *Nackt unter Wölfen* is a prime model of the ‘exemplarism’ that Langer critiques, ‘born of this psychological impulse to discover in the spiritual economy of the world some reassuring lesson to neutralize the depressing fact of mass murder’,<sup>262</sup> a fairly apt description of *Nackt unter Wölfen*. But let us attempt a defence of euphemism nonetheless: German audiences would have known, if not necessarily admitted, that while this particular child might have been saved from the massacre of the innocents, countless more were not. Murder is the explicit jeopardy, from the boy’s first discovery onwards. The unrecountable death of millions is recorded in, and by, the rescue of one. As in *With Raised Hands*, the audience leaves this brief communion chastened as well as restored, in the knowledge that film redeems reality only for its own duration and that daily life resumes its compromises and betrayals. Like many totalitarian parties, the SED was capable of accepting ideological lapsus if it reinforced political obedience, which religion and ritual film (being the new opiate of the masses) most usually do.

Life has an unnerving tendency to follow film, and *Nackt unter Wölfen*, having traduced or subtly shifted many of its origins, went on to shape the reality it had depicted. Based on verbal accounts of ‘the Jewish child of Buchenwald’, whom Apitz had heard described but never met, the novel and subsequently the film speak of a nameless child (played here by a young, non-Jewish neighbour of the director) being rescued by a Polish officer, who claims ‘Ich bin mehr als sein Vater!’, while Stefan Jerzy Zweig, the *actual* child of Buchenwald, though rescued by two non-Jewish prisoners Willi Bleicher and Robert Siewert, was accompanied by his Jewish father

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<sup>262</sup> Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, p. 15.

Dr Zacharias Zweig who survived the Holocaust and emigrated with his son to Israel. The film identifies the child as Jewish only through the threats of his pursuers ('Wo ist der Judenbalg?') and no mention is made of the Jewishness or otherwise of any other prisoners, whose national differences (in the comradely spirit of the Communist *internationale*) are never thematized beyond the faltering German of the Polish actors. Some critics have identified this as an anti-Semitic marginalization of the Jewish Shoah, and Berghahn notes that 'despite dealing with the sensitive Jewish theme, Beyer's film reaffirms the GDR's official discourse on the Holocaust, which typically represents the Jew as a passive victim' dependent on Communist heroes.<sup>263</sup> We could go further: the rescue of a Jewish child by a clearly Christian or post-Christian society (their atheism must be judged skin-deep in such a religious construct) reflects the actual theft by Christians of surviving Jewish children in the aftermath of the Holocaust,<sup>264</sup> and it perpetuates the age-old Christian prejudice, derived from Isaiah, that the Jews are a stubborn people who refused their Messiah but will be redeemed by a second coming, in this instance a Communist redemption de-Christianized by the identification of a miraculous child with party purity. Controversy surrounds the last-minute substitution for Stefan Zweig on the transport list of the Roma teenager Willi Blum, who died in Auschwitz, reminding us that Jews were not the only victims of the Nazi genocide and that, as zur Nieden puts it, 'der Spielraum für humanes Handeln im Konzentrationslager oft viel enger war, als Apitz glauben machen wollte'.<sup>265</sup>

At the 1963 Moscow Film Festival, the film's 'real life' origins were recognized by two members of the audience and the press tracked down Stefan Zweig to Lyon, where he was studying engineering, a course he soon abandoned to take up cinematography under the mentorship of his 'creator' Frank Beyer. Thus the original traumatized child adopts film as the means of his own therapy and now works as a cameraman in Israel. The original boy has been recuperated by his fictional projection in a rite not without precedent but disturbing in this context. One suspects that the historical Dr Zweig had to be killed off in Auschwitz in his fictionalization, not to reflect the Holocaust but to clear the film of unwanted Jewish emphases and make way for Communist redemption. The filmic rites of recuperation exercised on the

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<sup>263</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, p. 88.

<sup>264</sup> For instance the Finaly children in France. See *The Trial of Klaus Barbie*.

<sup>265</sup> zur Nieden, "'...stärker als der Tod'", *Bilder des Holocaust*, p. 106.

child of Buchenwald were strangely echoed in the rights of ownership the director subsequently extended to the child himself. It is film's ability to move between the mythical and the real that gives it its unique and apparently magical power.

### *Ein Tag*

While *Nackt unter Wölfen* is set just days from liberation, one of the very few moments of the Holocaust bearable for filmic recovery, its West German pendant *Ein Tag* (Egon Monk, 1965), shot just two years later, chooses an opposite but equally fertile moment early in the gulag's existence, namely 1939.

'*Mögen andere von ihrer Schande sprechen, ich spreche von der Meinen*' reads an early caption. By this claim to moral responsibility, Egon Monk is surely not indicating that he was personally a perpetrator (though he was a teenage Luftwaffe assistant from 1943 to 1945); he is recuperating a moral duty that others (one might reasonably understand) have shirked. The ritual nature of this authorial utterance is in stark contrast to the objective, rational dramaturgy he subsequently unfolds, its quasi-religious resonance of confession and atonement apparently in conflict with his programmatically atheist mentor Bertolt Brecht. Monk was an assistant director at the Berliner Ensemble from 1949 to 1953 before 'crossing' to the West, where he worked as a freelance author and editor first for RIAS then for NDR. The trauma of desertion and betrayal tinges all of Monk's work, conveyed here through his bitterness at the inadequacies of post-war reconstruction on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The East-West exodus of filmmakers was rarely accompanied by enthusiasm for the new dispensation, where political asylum-seekers such as Monk refused to be recuperated by 'the machine' and featured as convinced leftists in the forefront of anti-Capitalist contestation.<sup>266</sup> Monk lost his brief tenure of the Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg in 1968 following his revolutionary staging of Schiller's *Die Räuber*, which scandalized the good theatre-goers of the Hansestadt.

Loosely based on the personal experiences of Sachsenhausen inmate Gunter R. Lys and generically labelled as a 'day in the life of' an 'average German concentration camp', *Ein Tag* starts its twenty-four hours long before dawn with the Transport that brings the silent men, crammed into a space too small for them, from their various, unknown points of origin to a common destination that will shortly be

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<sup>266</sup> See Thomas Brasch, Chapter 5.

revealed. Though the democratic gaze of an apparently indifferent camera singles out no particular protagonist, the montage nonetheless follows the eyes of one particular prisoner towards the train immediately opposite, where a half-open curtain affords a glimpse of comfortable travellers going the other way. Barely an arm's length separates civilization from its dark side. The curtain is abruptly drawn shut, the division maintained by deliberate myopia and moral complicity, consigning our travelers to some nether region from which there may be no return.

Unhurried routine dominates the prisoners' arrival, the rituals of concentration camp procedure transferring as if by dictation into dramatic form. The roll call in the freezing night air identifies our 'perspective carrier' as Hans Neumann, while the sleepy prison guard fumbles reassuringly with numb fingers for a pen to give the Commandant, so that he can sign the delivery notification: reassurance all too soon dispelled, as the prisoners enter past a corpse dangling in the barbed wire fence. The Rapportführer likes to see them there, is the throw-away explanation, as casual and impenetrable as the rules of Kafka's *Strafkolonie*. There's been a mistake, insists one distraught new arrival, but notional errors have already become self-evident facts in this world where abandoning hope is the best available counsel. 'Dir bleibt nichts übrig, nicht mal der Kopf', comes the laconic response during the perfunctory shaving of convicts' heads, while the podgy, complacent Kommandant enjoys a leisurely, pleasurable shave reminiscent of Büchner's *Woyzeck*, a work that chimed with the politicized theatre world of the 1960s from which Egon Monk graduated. Like the subject of Lanzmann's most commented interview, Neumann was a barber in his earlier life and unwise enough to retail an anti-Nazi joke to the wrong customer, a joke he is now ordered to retell, to the amusement of all, including the guards, thereby entailing further punishment. Enforced transgression justifies enforced retribution, a terrifying cycle that places this inferno in the tutelage of a bitter, cruel demiurge acting through the whims of his executioners, illustrating Langer's 'goal of useless cruelty, a desire for the suffering of others [...] simply for its own sake'.<sup>267</sup> Ordered at the Kommandant's caprice to dig a pit with tea-spoons, the prisoners labour all day on their presumed mass grave, only to be ordered at nightfall to fill it in again. ('Hier ist kein warum...').<sup>268</sup> The thematic elaboration of head hair as the outward sign of individuality is rounded off with the dictation of the Kommandant's memo, to a

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<sup>267</sup> Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, p. 37.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39, citing Primo Levi.

shaven-headed prisoner, on the onward sale of inmates' hair at 50 Reichspfennig a kilo - a timely reminder that the concentration camps were organized as a profit-making nationalized industry. Inmates had to be worked or punished to death to make room for the next consignment such as this one, a fact that Neumann gradually understands as the day takes its toll, the morgue fills up and the crematorium ovens perform their sacrificial duties. Death is foreordained. The only question is: how long will it take?

In true Brechtian style this is an ensemble piece, and the metaphysical references emerge through the scrupulously observed demography of the KZ-archipelago: as well as the unfortunate humorists and the woeful mistaken identities, the camp houses Jehovah's Witnesses, gypsies, homosexuals and other targets of Nazi animosity, amongst whom Jews have not yet assumed their pre-eminent position, the 'Final Solution' being still some years away. The underlying narrative of this day is the battle for supremacy between the 'politicals' and the 'criminals': between the highly organized Communists represented by their grey-haired, stony-faced Kapo, attempting to preserve some semblance of decency within the logic of the Nazi system (not unlike his opposite number in *Nackt unter Wölfen* though infinitely less idealized), and the mafia keen to exploit the inherent criminality of its new environment and to join its upper echelons.<sup>269</sup> Thus 'der alte Bolshevik', half an hour into this unrelenting nightmare, is forced to select candidates for penal labour and chooses the sickest because they stand no chance of survival. The clash of expedience with compassion speaks loudly in the actor's restraint, and this classic (or ritual) Brechtian dilemma performs its dramatic function without whitewashing the Communists of conscious if enforced collusion in the death machine. This is the sort of collusion that Geschonnek in Beyer's piece ultimately refuses: 'Es gibt kein Ausweichen mehr...Ich stelle kein Transport zusammen', but which Levi corroborates: 'the harsher the oppression, the more widespread amongst the oppressed the willingness to collaborate'.<sup>270</sup> The party-line interrogation of the Spanish Civil War veteran for suspected infiltration (which might have been lifted from *Mann ist Mann*) reminds us that over-disciplined, embittered resistance can create new scapegoats in the name of an opposed ideology and its illusory redemptive programme. The ritual curse of the beleaguered Kapo 'in zehn Jahren kriegen sie es

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<sup>269</sup> Compare Rousset, *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, p. 53.

<sup>270</sup> Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, p. 35.



alles zurück' resonates not just as welcome bravado or a prophetic glimpse into the dissolution of this hell, but rather as an intimation of its repetition under another regime in power at the time of writing, a vision of endlessly repeated orgies of revenge and injustice in man's recurring inhumanity to man.<sup>271</sup>

This camp is not Auschwitz but its proto-type, closely reflecting the archipelago described by Rousset, who noted differences of style even within a common annihilationist agenda.<sup>272</sup> The choice of date allows a detailed scrutiny of the origins, logic and implementation of a KZ-system that arguably beggars representation once mass extermination has begun. Letters arrive from home, prisoners worry about their loved-ones, they talk about sex and they laugh, occasionally, in the canteen. It is a world in which courage is still a meaningful concept. A priest gives absolution to the dying and is suspended, upside down, for refusing to declaim 'Ich war ein Priester, Gott ist ein Schwein', earning the routinely sadistic warder a weary rebuke from his Kommandant: 'Ich brauche keine Märtyrer', a startling sidelight on LaCapra's reference to 'deranged "sacrificialism"'.<sup>273</sup> While sacrifice is denied, human dignity is salvaged by the simplest gesture. Ordered to fetch his cap from the wire so he may be shot for attempting to escape, the Jewish lawyer Katz leaves his boots behind in the snow so another man may have them.

Meanwhile the treachery of subverted words rings loud in the exhortation of the Kommandant, a chilling Nazi recuperation of rhetoric: 'Es gibt einen Weg zur Freiheit. Seine Meilensteine heissen: Gehorsam, Fleiss, Ehrlichkeit, Sauberkeit, Opfersinn, Ordnung, Disziplin und Liebe zum Vaterland'. A litany of every virtue this world has banished. Under the caption *Unter ordentlichen Menschen* we suddenly find ourselves on parole, in the local Gaststube where the Kommandant is a respected guest amidst the well-behaved, convivial clientele, a regular, unexceptional presence on the social scene. The shock of the normal invites onward enquiry into one's own complacencies in a later but no less fractured global society.

Technically, the film has some isolated weaknesses. The blockhouse interiors, shot in studio, lack the extreme tension summoned by the snow-bound exhaustion of the actors on location. The performances slacken, the costumes are clean, the absence of breath in the air transmits a false sense of warmth. But these flaws scarcely detract

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid., pp. 67-68. Langer connects the Holocaust, Stalin, Cambodia and Yugoslavia.

<sup>272</sup> Rousset, *L'univers concentrationnaire*, p. 44.

<sup>273</sup> LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 88, footnote.

from a vital document constructed with painstaking attention to detail without banalization, sentimentality or understatement. Physical violence is used with great restraint, commendably so, for its explicit representation can never be adequate to reality. The inclusion of archive footage of Adolf Hitler may have seemed a necessary historicization of the period, but iconic sources, especially ‘negative icons’, tend to fetishize everyday experience and displace guilt from the dramatic characters.

One might equally reproach *Ein Tag* for barely recognizing Jewish oppression by the Nazi state, thus duplicating the omissions of East German narratives observed above. However, while avoiding Lanzmann’s trap of ‘understanding’ the perpetrator, the film explains the breakdown of civic accountability during the nineteen-thirties that alone made the Final Solution possible. In its depiction of the sustained traumatic abuse of sacrificial scapegoats approved by a complicit majority, *Ein Tag* is a microcosm of Hitler’s Germany. Unlike with *Nackt unter Wölfen* there is no redemption here, the latent trauma is understated and will clearly take years to surface. While Beyer offers his viewers the comfort of a state ideology, Monk holds out no such consolation. Where Beyer’s prisoners break out and find freedom, Monk’s are trapped behind the barbed wire in their eternal twenty-four hours, where his Germany, in this vision of hell, implicitly still languishes. ‘God, wherever you may be, There all of us are also not.’<sup>274</sup>

Like his East German counterpart, Monk had an unexpectedly high audience, suggesting that the prevailing ethos of suppression could finally be broken, also that the West German public, once roused from its denial, was more open to the democratic routines of self-questioning and self-doubt than its neighbours. While the documentary aspirations of *Ein Tag* might be challenged on a few technical details of historical accuracy, there can be little doubt about its authenticity both existential and dramatic, an authenticity entirely compatible with its exercise of ritual elements dating back to the birth of tragedy. In discussing Hegel’s model of the tragic, which is ‘for an apparently innocent subject to assume unconditionally objective guilt’, Agamben notes: ‘Nothing is further from Auschwitz than this model. For the deportee sees such a widening of the abyss between subjective innocence and objective guilt...that he cannot assume responsibility for any of his actions.’<sup>275</sup> While this may

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<sup>274</sup> Langer, ‘Landscapes of Jewish Experience’, *Preempting the Holocaust*, p. 94, citing Jacob Glatstein, *Smoke*.

<sup>275</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, pp. 96-97.

well be the case for Auschwitz, in which any suggestion of the autonomy essential to tragic conflict would be a deception,<sup>276</sup> the choice of an early outpost of the Nazi gulag in *Ein Tag* allows for just enough moral manoeuvre for tragic dramaturgy to function (despite the ‘an Brecht geschulten analytisch-aufklärerischen Dramaturgie’),<sup>277</sup> its daily rites replacing Steiner’s ‘ceremonies empty of belief’,<sup>278</sup> and effecting the ‘immediate contact of terror’ that he misses.<sup>279</sup> In partaking of the *univers concentrationnaire*, both poet and participant once again share ‘the same habits of belief’,<sup>280</sup> which, despite God’s absence, echo the holy dread of the Greeks. Perhaps we have no choice but to accept that the knowledge of evil entailed in the camps now bonds an audience more closely than any other modern ritual, and that shared horror, resisting despair, must be the well-spring of tragedy.

Egon Monk was also responsible for two of the very few restitutions of German-Jewish civilization to the television screen with his series *Die Oppermanns* (1983) and *Die Bertinis* (1988). In the West, confrontation with the past, once broached, was rapid and unstoppable. In the East, the optimistic start made by Frank Beyer came to a grinding halt with the suppression of his next film, the milestone *Spur der Steine*, whose subversive attitude to delinquency and corruption in the construction industry was met with stony disapproval by the Politbüro, which effectively imposed a Berufsverbot that relegated him to provincial theatre for several years. His chance of rehabilitation came with another war film, devoted to the fate of Germany’s Jews.

### ***Jakob der Lügner***

The opening sequence of *Jakob der Lügner* (Frank Beyer, 1975) is an early warning of the immense dangers this and other films court by treating the Holocaust as suitable material for metaphorical elaboration or metaphysical speculation. Confined to the ghetto, a Jewish community anxiously goes about its daily life as the front draws closer, caught between fear of transportation and hope of liberation by the Russians, encouraged by the optimistic radio reports relayed by the eponymous Jakob, who

<sup>276</sup> See Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, p. xvi.

<sup>277</sup> Köppen, ‘Von Effekten des Authentischen – *Schindlers Liste*: Film und Holocaust’, *Bilder des Holocaust*, p. 147.

<sup>278</sup> Steiner, *Death of Tragedy*, p. 331.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*

shares with us, the audience, a secret denied his fellow captives: that he has no illegal radio, whose news reports are invented by his fertile imagination, partly to succour and support his people, partly for his own amusement and vainglory, partly as downright denial of the traumatic events unfolding.

‘Die Geschichte von Jakob dem Lügner hat sich niemals so zugetragen’, advises an opening subtitle, superimposed on a yellow star, followed by ‘Ganz bestimmt nicht’, then by ‘Vielleicht hat sie sich aber doch so zugetragen’. Charitable interpretation might dwell on the fashion for ironical commentary as an appeal to the audience’s rational judgement; or on the role of the unreliable narrator refusing to ask the audience for unconditional identification. To what extent can a creative lie be justified? - this appears to be the film’s line of enquiry. But while a major dramatic talent such as Zuckmayer can turn the same conceit into a delightful, thought-provoking satire on unthinking deference to authority in *Der Hauptmann von Köpenick*, Beyer and his Gemeinschaftsproduktion fall headlong into the trap their material offers them. For unlike Zuckmayer’s hero, Jakob does not poke fun at the mighty and undermine the powerful, he turns his guile against his own people, already exposed to a terrible fate and traumatized in anticipation. ‘Die Russen sind zwanzig Kilometer von Brizanka’, ‘Die Russen sind vor Brizanka’, ‘die Russen sind schon wieder fünf Kilometer weiter’ runs the repetitive placebo. Laughter dies in the throat as the gullible victims become the butt of a blunt comedic device, taken in by a lovable charlatan peddling psychotherapy for an incurable cancer. Terrible doubt is the only response to this foolhardy narrative strategy. The ascription of tragi-comic status to Jakob as more deluded than deluding does nothing to alleviate the dramatic and moral strain.

While a couple falls in love and ‘happy Jews’ play draughts, the German oppressor is represented only by curfew rules so leaky that their Jewish hostages come and go unimpeded. ‘Nach acht erschossen’ is apparently an empty threat, since the occupier is generally civilized and well-behaved, and the only corpse we see is randomly discovered on the railway lines where trains are innocuously marshalled, a draining of the train metaphor central to Holocaust discourse. Left to its own devices, the Jewish community wallows in speculation and conspires in Jakob’s wish fulfilment, competing to retail the fictional good tidings. When Jakob confesses ‘Ich hab kein Radio, ich weiss nicht, wo die Russen sind’ and prepares to cut his wrists, he is not believed, for the need for self-deception goes too deep. Instead it is the barber,

retailer of gossip, who kills himself by hanging, a sacrificial victim reminiscent of Lanzmann's hairdresser in *Shoah* or Neumann in *Ein Tag*.

The presence of fairy tale motifs, for instance in the children's 'Königstochter' game with its fantasy projection of a castle overlooking the ghetto, perhaps suggests that the film itself should be understood within the German tradition of folk tale, but this narrative strategy is undermined by even a cursory glance at Langer's *Inner Life of the Kovno Ghetto*,<sup>281</sup> or one of Abraham Lewin's last entries in his *Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto* before his own deportation: 'Isolated refugees who arrive here literally by miracle from Treblinka bring reports that freeze the blood in the veins. The killing machine that never rests.'<sup>282</sup> The supposed 'passivity' of the Jews in the face of deportation was much debated in the 1970s,<sup>283</sup> when the mechanics of the Final Solution had been imperfectly studied and latent contempt for the Jewish predicament was stiffened by an ideological attack on superstitious trust in divine providence.

In the course of its mythical meanderings, the film is obliged to restate every known infantilisation of Jewish character and behaviour, interpreted by well-fed, non-Jewish actors (a rosy-lipped budding starlet in the juvenile lead) with no knowledge of a culture thirty years extinct at the time of production (they even pray as Christians, an unforgivable recuperation). Not even the agonizing complicity of the Judenräte is examined. This community is locked in by its own short-sightedness, it has no need of any persecutors so no German characters are included, a terrible elision that displaces responsibility for the Holocaust back to where the authorities had decided it should lie: on the Jews themselves. They had only themselves to blame. Therein lies the propaganda value for a GDR keen to distance itself from its Nazi inheritance.

This is perhaps not what the authors consciously intended and the film was undoubtedly a courageous infraction of the official taboo surrounding the Shoa, given the key role of film in the cultural politics of the GDR and the SED's procrastination in authorizing the production. But the results are so dubious compared to the same director's earlier work in *Nackt unter Wölfen* that one is entitled to probe the shifting political agenda of the times for a closer explanation. While the latter had been shot in the full flush of resistance commemoration, this stab at accounting for the Holocaust

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<sup>281</sup> Langer, 'The Inner Life of the Kovno Ghetto', *Preempting the Holocaust*, pp. 146-156.

<sup>282</sup> Abraham Lewin, *A Cup of Tears: A Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto*, ed. Antony Polonsky, trans. Christopher Hutton (NY: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 236.

<sup>283</sup> See Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, p. 88.

followed hard upon the renewed outbreak of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism that swept the Eastern Bloc in the wake of the Six Day War and the student revolts of 1968, in which young Jewish radical intellectuals played a leading role that was implicitly ridiculed in the fictional *Jakob der Lügner* and that led to arrests and deportations in reality.

‘Der Transport ist ein gutes Zeichen’, ‘Du siehst sie bestimmt wieder’, run the lies and delusions, intended perhaps to convey sublime resignation, and the euphemisms continue till the end. The wagon has ample sitting room, the trees speed by outside, the families are together, Lina dreams of her princess in a snow sleigh and a gypsy fiddle, off camera, makes it all bearable. ‘Even the eventual deportation of the Jews is presented so poetically that one might almost share the little orphan-girl Lina’s misconception that the entire ghetto is going on holiday,’ notes Berghahn.<sup>284</sup> The film never states their destination, an error of judgement in a world prone to revisionism and amnesia, equivalent to the wagon uncoupling in the final sequence of Wajda’s *Korczak* that so outraged Lanzmann. In half a century most viewers will be ignorant of their ultimate fate. *Jakob* will have ceased to be a comment on self-delusion, it will simply be delusional, ‘a “fetishistic” or redemptive narrative that makes believe it did not occur or compensates too readily for it’.<sup>285</sup> Apparently the director thought that enough corpses had been seen elsewhere and explains his socialist purpose thus: ‘Die Geschichte endet tragisch und doch nicht pessimistisch, der Gedanke von der unzerstörbaren Menschenwürde wird verteidigt bis zum Schluß’.<sup>286</sup> This is the problem, for human dignity is exactly what the Holocaust destroyed. ‘I feel no impulse, not the slightest, to reclaim meaning from Holocaust atrocity or to embrace a Lincolnesque rhetoric seeking to persuade us that “the horrible experience of the camps will not have been in vain”’, Langer concludes.<sup>287</sup>

Rapidly removed from circulation for its ideological ambiguities, the film fared better abroad: Vlastimír Brodský won the Best Actor Award at the Berlinale and the film was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film. It was the

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>285</sup> La Capra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 220. See also Santner on narrative fetishism ‘designed to expunge the traces of the trauma’ [...] ‘a strategy of undoing, in fantasy, the need for mourning by simulating a condition of intactness’. ‘History beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma’, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”* ed. Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 143-54, here p. 144.

<sup>286</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, p. 92, citing Beyer 1974.

<sup>287</sup> Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, p. 10.

only DEFA film that was remade in Hollywood (where Jakob was recuperated as a positive hero who takes up arms in self-defence) and Berghahn convincingly traces a direct line of descent to Benigni's sentimental comedy *La Vita è Bella* (1997),<sup>288</sup> which was an international hit. Lest Holocaust avoidance be thought the exclusive preserve of the Germans, such palliatives have been peddled by many national cinemas in an attempt to make the Holocaust seem acceptable and ultimately survivable, if not for its victims (with whom few films genuinely identify) then for future generations, whose sensibilities and self-regard must not be overly assaulted and whose creeds and ideologies must not be offensively discredited. Hollywood has always understood the power of religion and particularly of the Christian churches, which is one reason why it has generally recuperated a narrative of faith and hope. Above all, God must not be held to account. Nor must the Politbüro. To paraphrase Agamben's sarcasm on 'the conciliatory vice of every theodicy' (of which *Jakob* is a prime example): 'Not only does this theodicy tell us nothing about Auschwitz, either about its victims or executioners; it does not even manage to avoid a happy ending.' And echoing Adorno on Chaplin's *Great Dictator*, the film 'loses its satirical force and becomes offensive. [...] Political reality is sold short for the sake of political commitment; that decreases the political impact as well.'<sup>289</sup>

### *Sterne/Zvezdi*

*Jakob der Lügner* was not the first excursion of the GDR into Jewish Holocaust material, for while *Jakob* uses the ghetto as a metaphorical antechamber to the death camps, *Sterne* (Konrad Wolf, 1959) does the same with a transit camp in a small Bulgarian town, where Greek Jews are being held pending deportation to Auschwitz, their departure mournfully heralded by a steam train whistle over the ascription 'Eine Gemeinschaftsproduktion des DEFA-Studios für Spielfilme und des Studios für Spielfilme Sofia'. The lead titles continue, as buffers clash and wagons clank in a long tracking shot along the goods train, the camera presumably carried on the parallel track in a manoeuvre that subliminally conveys its solidarity with the inmates and their destination as its own, the mournful cacophony of steam travel blending with the

<sup>288</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, p. 93.

<sup>289</sup> Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, II, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (NY: Columbia UP, 1992), p. 84.

Jewish lament *Unser Städtl brennt*,<sup>290</sup> credited here as ‘Ein Lied von Mordechai Gebirtik, ermordet 1942’. In its opening sequence *Sterne* establishes both its moral-political agenda and its creative ambitions, the black-and-white footage as impressively smoky as the steam trains themselves. A yellow star is trampled in the mud, the camera tilts upwards with passing boots to the Jewish contingent boarding the train.

‘Ich schlafe schon ein’, is the telling first dialogue from a soaked German soldier, tired from a long night’s work in the pouring rain, the weary ‘schneller, schneller’ delivered without animosity while a helping hand offers to get the deportees on board. The doors roll shut, chalk scrawls ‘Juden’ beside a Star of David already effaced in the rain. Hands hold the bars, faces peer out as the train rumbles away, pursued by a new arrival, a German soldier, looking for someone. Pausing only to pick up the mangled star, he chases again, up an embankment, from where he witnesses the train disappearing into the tunnel, its rear lights vanishing ghostly in the rain and mist, picking him out (with heavily atmospheric assistance from overhead arclights) on top of the cut. The camera swoops to follow into the dark, capturing the last steam vapour, before the frame blends to black.

Nothing that follows is quite as impressive as these first five minutes, which create from the elements of water, earth, steam and fire a meta-language for transportation to the death camps that little in Holocaust film has rivaled, a language on which Panov was surely drawing many years later, if with far more modest means, in *With Raised Hands*. Unlike in *Jakob der Lügner*, there is no doubt where these deportees are bound, even for an audience that knows nothing of the past. History cannot be undone; they cannot be rescued; their anguish scars us all. The impressive commitment of financial means and material suggests that these two Communist powers were one hundred percent behind this endeavour, however badly it might reflect on their shared past. Thus it would seem. And the Bulgarian screenplay writer Angel Vagenshtain assured me after a screening of the film in Sofia in 2005 that his collaboration with German director Konrad Wolf had been thoroughly collegial and creative, the resources on offer endless and all trace of political interference absent. One has to search long and hard to surmise why this film was funded and promoted at

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<sup>290</sup> For full text see ‘It’s Burning’, *Theatrical Performance during the Holocaust, Texts, Documents, Memoirs*, ed. Rebecca Rovit and Alvin Goldfarb (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 93. Compare also *Kasrilevke Brent* in Langer’s account of *Undzere Kinder, Preempting the Holocaust*, pp. 157-165.



precisely this time, especially since Wolf's films have been credited by successive critics as being more internationalist in influence than those of his GDR peers.<sup>291</sup>

A Bulgarian-accented, unattributed voice-over picks up the story in flashback: 'Aber beginnen wir von Anfang, ganz von Anfang an... Man wusste nichts von ihm, vielleicht nur, dass er etwas hinkte...' The camera swoops down from the town belfry over rooftops to discover 'him' ('den Unteroffizier') in the marketplace twirling worry beads, a gesture already indicative of latent angst. 'Deshalb wollen wir ihn in unserer Erzählung einfach Walter nennen.' Safely anonymized by this *nom de guerre*, Walter reassures us by refusing to respond to a cheery 'Heil Hitler', and his sultry, lean and not particularly 'Arian' good looks place him if not in the matinee idol league (he bears a passing resemblance to Humphrey Bogart) then at least within a recognizable cinema tradition, albeit through the prism of a newly fashionable existentialism well removed from the Nazi aesthetic, a 'stranger' to himself and the world. Already some of the greater creative liberty of the Balkan cinematographic industry can be felt at work within the DEFA mindset. Walter is soon revealed as a sensitive amateur painter, his sketches torn up by his contemptuous Captain with the epithet 'Sie, Rembrandt!' hurled as the worst of insults. References to Smolensk and 'die Amis' flying overhead inform us the war is not going well. The column of Jewish deportees seen straggling through the valley are merely an additional burden, even for this comfortable outpost far from the front, a useful reminder that the Final Solution was implemented once the war (for any alert prognostician) was already lost, to no military advantage and arguably as an act of prescient revenge (though others argue radicalization through victory).<sup>292</sup> 'Verflucht nochmals, ich muss sie übernehmen', grumbles Walter's well-fleshed comrade Kurt, for whom (as for so many perpetrators) Jews are simply an added chore for which they must be made to pay. Then the camera swoops again from the garrison roofs to find the column snaking into the courtyard below to form a carefully delineated question mark. The hidden biblical references to the Valley of the Shadow of Death and the passage through the desert would have been discerned by anyone familiar with the contemporaneous Hollywood Bible epics, and are now reinforced by the tracking shot along the line of tired, hungry faces.

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<sup>291</sup> 'Weimar left-avantgarde, Italian neo-realism and the New Waves.' Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, p. 78, citing Elsaesser and Wedel, 2001.

<sup>292</sup> See Christopher R. Browning, 'Beyond "Intentionalism" and "Functionalism": The Decision for the Final Solution Reconsidered', *The Path to Genocide: Essays on Launching the Final Solution* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), pp. 86-122.

Ill at ease with this procedure, Walter offers a cigarette through the wire to receive a polite but emphatic rebuke. 'Danke, ich rauche nicht'. Smarting, Walter dismisses urgent pleas from young Ruth for a woman dying in childbirth, 'Was soll ich machen? So was kann doch vorkommen', to receive the ultimate stigma 'Wilde Tiere, alle Deutsche sind gleich!', a first statement of the theme of personal responsibility in the face of barbarism. Inside the packed garrison building, the camera cranes masterfully upwards in a single continuous shot establishing Ruth's moral ascendancy as she hurries up the stairs past the exhausted deportees, past the praying rabbi, to find the woman giving birth. Their language is the Sephardic ladino spoken by the actual victims and this underlines dramatically the film's concern for moral authenticity. This story is being enacted by the families of the survivors, possibly by the survivors themselves, the Greek Jews about whom *The Optimists* said so little, who were delivered to their executioners by the Nazis' Bulgarian allies. The arrival of a repentant but smouldering Walter with a doctor brings the first false note in the film: 'Keine Sorge, wir kommen in irgendein Dorf, Auschwitz', a debate to which Walter contributes with bad-tempered placebos: 'Menschen verrecken an der Front, Ihr werdet bloss arbeiten' that earn him an old edition of Heine's poems from a grateful father. 'Sie haben gelogen. Ich danke Ihnen.'

This pithy exchange illustrates the perils of screen discourse on the Holocaust. The word 'Auschwitz' cannot be spoken as above without bitter hindsight rendering its irony unacceptable. A hint of blasphemy haunts the scene, its easy dialogue too light for the subject matter. The 'thanks for lying' line, foreshadowing the problematic theme of *Jakob der Lügner*, diminishes the victims who are otherwise well-represented. The clash of tonalities continues in the next, heavily elegiac sequence on Ruth's reaction to the newborn child, her motions dancing, her face ecstatic and finally frozen in full frame (like some star publicity still), washed by flowing water in a slow-motion dissolve to a stream. The cry of the newborn child echoes distantly as the camera tilts from stream to sky, presumably searching for Ruth's innermost longings. The highly emotive screen language installs an emblematic fetishization and unreachable alterity in the place of character psychology and plausible motivation, reifying Ruth as iconic victim and sacrificial lamb. One has only to read Langer's

account of what the SS *actually* did to newborn Jewish babies to realize how far from reality, and how far into myth, the film has already strayed.<sup>293</sup>

Returning to the comfort zone of routine and recognizable characterization, the next scene gives us Kurt gnawing on a chicken bone, thoroughly affable in his routine Jew-bashing, a chilling, intimate glimpse of the social bonding function of anti-Semitism, a requisite facet of *Gemütlichkeit*.<sup>294</sup> ‘Ich hab kein Hunger’ expresses Walter’s longing for something better than this shabby occupation, and a high-angle wide-shot looking down past a dusty lampshade isolates the two men still further as they prepare for bed, a gaze that invites the detached scrutiny of history, as Walter asks in the dark: ‘Kurt, was ist denn eigentlich Auschwitz?’

This filmic moment must surely be valuable, as it begs the question: who knew and who asked? How many, and to what extent? Kurt is first elliptical: ‘Von denen die da reinkommen, ist keiner zurückgekommen’, then definitive: Auschwitz is no ‘Gemüsegarten’ but ‘eine Mühle für Menschenfleisch’. Coming at the twenty-eighth minute of the film, this revelation closes the expository first act and launches the second under the clear thematic heading: what is Walter going to do about it?

The answer is mightily abetted by the opportune discovery of Bulgarian Communist partisans operating from the local smithy, but their first target is to harass the garrison, not to liberate their prisoners, till Walter becomes involved with them through the black market in stolen medication. His eventual recruitment by the partisans is an interesting departure for German film and illustrates the concerns with ‘confused allegiances and ambivalent national identity’ that Wolf continued in his semi-autobiographical *Ich war neunzehn* (Konrad Wolf, 1968). As Berghahn notes, Wolf cleverly avoids the usual anti-fascist clichés by concentrating on the ‘psychological processes that determine his protagonists’ experiences of the Third Reich, tracing their “paths of discovery” (Coulson, 1999) to an eventual choice for or against fascism’, at which point the films end.<sup>295</sup> While in East Germany (and in Bulgaria) the partisans and the Communist resistance were lionized and their role exaggerated, on neither side of the Iron Curtain were military deserters regarded as heroic. It is worth remembering that the Volksgericht’s death sentences for Landes- und Hochverrat on Sophie Scholl and her comrades of the Weisse Rose, or on

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<sup>293</sup> Langer, ‘Gendered Suffering’, *Preempting the Holocaust*, pp. 43-58.

<sup>294</sup> See Shulamit Vokov, ‘Antisemitismus als kultureller Code’, *Jüdisches Leben und Antisemitismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1990).

<sup>295</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, p. 77.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was implicated in various assassination attempts against Hitler, were not quashed until the early years of this millennium, while the naming of a Berlin street after Bonhoeffer was not greeted with universal approval: he was, after all, a traitor, both legally and (for many) morally as well.<sup>296</sup> The emotional conflict at the heart of *Sterne* is reflected in a deep ambivalence of the filmmakers towards their hero, whose strange passivity (again, like Camus's *Etranger*) is blamed for his ultimate failure to rescue Ruth but tacitly held out as a saving grace: after all, he never took up arms against his own comrades, however odious. This represents the dominant behaviour pattern amongst potential conscientious resisters of the Wehrmacht, most of them too uncertain or too cowed to act on their principles. However, Walter's failure to rescue Ruth was imposed, in the last resort, by the ludicrous dramaturgy of a concentration camp romance that was never to be consummated.

Reverting to elegiac mode, the story rescues Walter from a drunken frolic with Kurt and the local girls by Ruth's arrival on another mission of mercy, and their moonlight stroll provides space for philosophical reflection on whether mankind has made any progress in two million years. Curiously upstaged by brilliant cutaways of the young recruit protecting them, the six-minute sequence plays against a studio backdrop of moonlit mountains at the crisis point of act three, when Walter finally warns Ruth that Auschwitz is no vegetable garden (a feeble repetition) and that staying with her family is 'ein sinnloses Opfer'.

With that word the entire dialectic of sacrifice is summoned and Walter's redemptive urge to deflect an apparently ineluctable fate overtakes his soldierly common sense. His heartfelt 'Sie müssen fliehen' is answered by a dreamy 'vielleicht zu den Sternen' and the stars duly glisten in the night sky through a series of slow dissolves over harp music that accompanies them back past the church, where they will never be married, to her foreordained demise, while she muses 'Man sagt, dass jeder Mensch einen Stern im Himmel hat' over their first and only kiss. 'Das darf nicht sein', is Walter's reproach to history, but the ease with which Ruth comes and goes could surely have enabled rather more radical action on his part.

One suspects that the film's authors were engaging not just with contemporary demands for a redemptive if thwarted 'love story' but also with Schiller's tragic

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<sup>296</sup> Gareth Jones, 'Films of Student Resistance', paper given at CRASSH in dialogue with screenplay writers of *Die weiße Rose* (Mario Krebs) and *Sophie Scholl* (Fred Breinersdorfer), 26<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

concept of the sublime. In refusing to take the proffered lifeline, Ruth is rising above her own weaknesses, and her very mortality, to achieve divine moral status through acquiescing in the inevitable. Hollywood has constantly toyed with notions of the sublime and vested them in the personal appeal of the latest diva. If this was the aim, either consciously or unconsciously, the result is profoundly problematic for Holocaust discourse. For while it is undoubtedly true that many individuals who might have hidden or escaped (like Korczak) chose instead to accompany their loved ones, whether in full or partial knowledge of the end that awaited them, it remains the fact that the overwhelming majority had no such meaningful option. As Langer notes: 'Some features of tragedy infiltrate Holocaust response when commentators seek among victims [...] exemplars of heroic dignity to rescue from the anonymity of mass murder individual gestures of self-affirmation. Stage representations of suffering may induce a raw admiration; but history is unbearable in ways that mimesis is not.'<sup>297</sup>

In weary acceptance of the inevitable the camera painfully repeats the rising crane shot of the first act, through the ranks of exhausted deportees for whom Ruth has become a pariah by her dubious association with their persecutors. Walter's direct request for help from the local partisans comes too late. By the time he returns, the yard is deserted in the pouring rain; the station is empty, the train is pulling away. Ruth's hands clutch the bars of the cattle truck as Walter fruitlessly gives chase, in a re-run of the opening sequence with certain additions: the train rolls over the camera, suggestive of history crushing all in its path, intercut with the reverse shot of sleepers flashing past into the tunnel, evocative of the passing miles and the innumerable who perished, the smoke from the funnel foreshadowing the crematoria of Auschwitz.

The final shot is of Ruth's defiant face on her passage to extinction. All that remains in Walter's hand is the yellow star. His last act is to approach the partisans: 'Ihr habt gesagt, Ihr braucht Waffen?' The voice-over resumes: 'Für uns war er nur der Herr Unteroffizier, deswegen haben wir ihn Walter genannt', suggesting that there were many such Walters, or might have been, or at least should have been. The song from the Shtetl plays the film to black: 'Es brennt, es brennt', concluding with the pious 'die Hilf liegt nur in Euren Händ!', a ritual admonition of the socialist-realist tradition, here curiously devoid of authority. There is no help. Walter did not act on his conscience, certainly not fast enough. History has had its way with us.

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<sup>297</sup> Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, p. xvi.

The wholly redundant subplot surrounding the arrest of a young Bulgarian partisan and his subsequent, implausibly mild interrogation by the fascist Bulgarian police commissar, leave one wondering whether the Bulgarians were not trying to have their ideological cake and eat it. Walter's prevarications do not reflect too badly on the behaviour of the Wehrmacht generally and the wholly absent German populace of course emerges unscathed, a huge advantage for the GDR's official line. But the overall impression, despite stylistic excesses, is of a genuine effort by two past and current allies, within certain propaganda constraints, to face up to their countries' disreputable past through a little known Balkan episode that might have been lost amidst the later self-congratulation of, say, *The Optimists*.

The question remains, however, as to whether the Holocaust should be treated as the vehicle for soul-searching by the perpetrator, as the following chapter will enquire. Ruth's cinematic apotheosis at least obliges the audience to look more closely at who she is and what is about to befall her. Nonetheless the optic remains firmly on Walter and his predicament, and Ruth's ladino community disappears into 'the smoke of Auschwitz' leaving us forlorn perhaps, bereaved at best, guilty but not suicidally so. They have gone, and life goes on, with the partisans.

### **Auschwitz and Absence**

Is 'smoke' enough? Or is this synecdoche a final insult? In her analysis of *Ich war neunzehn*, Pinkert notes Wolf's intercutting of footage from Richard Brandt's documentary *Death Camp Sachsenhausen* (Brandt, 1946) with its shower scenes, and she quotes the mention of Goethe and Auschwitz as being two irreconcilable terms 'followed by a melancholic perplexity that carries over into an additional frame where we see the protagonists quietly smoking'. This scene renders the Shoah in the historiography of the GDR as 'a silent moment', and this indicates that Auschwitz was not entirely absent from cultural discourse and film in the GDR.<sup>298</sup> While accepting this, we might well find in the Auschwitz dialectic of the earlier *Sterne* (however partial) more compelling evidence that East Germany had not erased the Holocaust from the history books. The reduction of Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz to 'a moment of silence' is so subtle a 'Perseus's Mirror', coming at such an oblique

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<sup>298</sup> Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*, p. 168.

tangent to its target, that it risks missing it altogether, serving rather to confirm the inability on both sides of the German divide to find a language in which the Shoah could be addressed.

Of course we have to recognize that there can be a ‘silence that speaks’ as well as a ‘silence that denies’, just as Lanzmann identified a ‘loquacity that occults’. But beyond politics, guilt, suppression, ‘Bilderverbot’ and other responses already discussed, there remains the formal, stylistic question: ‘how’? What filmic means can release the buried trauma without traducing it? ‘Welche Mittel wir haben, um einen derzeit latenten Triebkonflikt aktuell zu machen.’<sup>299</sup> How could Auschwitz be represented, if the will were there? Or, as Langer asks, ‘What can we do with such information?’<sup>300</sup> While graphic representation risks demeaning its subject and alienating a viewer (either through shock or through understatement), its alternative, namely ellipsis or metaphor, however delicate and suggestive (as in Wolf’s case), risks effacing the truth through sheer discretion.

The inclusion of staged or archival ‘documentary evidence’ within fiction is no panacea, it can often prove self-defeating. Dramaturgy and its reception is fraught with paradox and no filmmaker can be sure that the meaning intended will be the meaning received. Precisely because of the ‘dream state’ in which Kracauer understood reception to take place, the concept of ‘meaning’ in film is a shifting, elusive thing and sometimes ends up the opposite of what was intended. Representing Auschwitz on screen has its own problems, as the next film to be considered here will show.

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<sup>299</sup> See chapter epigraph.

<sup>300</sup> See chapter epigraph.

## 4. TRANSFERENCE

### The Trauma Of The Perpetrator

#### Concentration Camp as Self-Inflicted Trauma

Es sind durchwegs Eindrücke, denen die adäquate Abfuhr versagt ist, sei es weil die Kranken aus Furcht vor peinlichen Seelenkämpfen die Erledigung von sich weisen [...] oder endlich weil diese Eindrücke in Zuständen empfangen worden sind, in denen das Nervensystem der Aufgabe der Erledigung unfähig war. Zum Trauma wird jeder Eindruck, dessen Erledigung [...] dem Nervensystem Schwierigkeiten bereitet.<sup>301</sup>

When I speak of a traumatic dimension, I agree with those historians who have recognized the possibility of perpetrator trauma and the necessity to work through it, while rejecting the slightest analogy with the actual victims and survivors.<sup>302</sup>

#### Retrieval and Responsibility

The question of ‘perpetrator trauma’ poses one of the most delicate issues for trauma theory and it takes us back to the discussion in the Introduction. Any psychic phenomenon rooted in the unconscious and based on deferral, latency and the return of the repressed must by definition impede or at least complicate the retrieval of memory and therefore the admission of remorse and the acknowledgement of guilt. Trauma involves unconscious processes occulted from the sufferer, while repentance must, self-evidently, be a conscious act. Caruth brushes with the possible implications when she writes: ‘The experience of the soldier, faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our century’.<sup>303</sup> Can trauma be applied thus only to ‘good’ soldiers, or is it suffered also by ‘bad’ soldiers? What is this ‘numbed state’? Is the soldier rendered unfit for service? Or does he continue to function, as the killing machine he is, whilst *not experiencing* his own actions? Could one argue that such suspension of experience is *inseparable* from its execution? And if this *is* the case, then ‘perpetrators’, it would

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<sup>301</sup> Freud, Schriften aus dem Nachlass, ‘Zur Theorie des hysterischen Anfalles (Gemeinsam mit Josef Breuer)’, *Gesammelte Werke*, XVII, p. 13.

<sup>302</sup> Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*, p. 172.

<sup>303</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 11.



seem, must be the most traumatized of all, for ‘das Fehlen der Angstbereitschaft’ and the hypercathexis of the protective shield will be complete, not contingent.<sup>304</sup> The mental states described by Freud in the epigraph above, especially ‘die Furcht vor peinlichen Seelenkämpfen’, could well describe the ingrained denial of the perpetrator, whose own actions have created so many ‘Eindrücke, dessen Erledigung [...] dem Nervensystem Schwierigkeiten bereitet’.

In *Der Mann Moses* Freud extends his earlier thoughts on trauma into the socio-historical field with speculation on the emergence of the Jewish people from a defining trauma, namely from the guilt of having murdered their strictly monotheistic leader of the Exodus (whom Freud believes to have been an Egyptian), only to accept his religion under the leadership of a second, Jewish Moses several centuries later.<sup>305</sup> In establishing the resulting ‘Messiah redemption phantasy’ and with it the genesis of Christian anti-Semitism (‘Ihr habt unseren Gott getötet’), Freud incautiously defines the trauma of the Jewish people as that of the perpetrator, not the victim, a notion fraught with dangers of misinterpretation that may have motivated in part the cries of protest from Jewish scholars at the time.<sup>306</sup>

As observed earlier, it is perhaps accurate to think of ‘trauma’ as a morally neutral term. However, the separation of moral judgement from clinical diagnosis risks inviting speculation on whether personal responsibility is effectively compatible with the notion of traumatic deferral. It is surely not the purpose of psychoanalysis to offer every perpetrator the blanket excuse of having acted when ‘under trauma’. This is a danger that will be parsed now in some detail from the perspective of a first-time viewer coming unprepared to the West German film *Aus einem deutschen Leben* (Theodor Kotulla, 1977), whose traumatic transgressions illuminate Lanzmann’s apparently counter-productive refusal to inquire into the psyche of the perpetrator, thereby shedding some light on the phrase ‘the obscenity of understanding’.

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<sup>304</sup> Freud, ‘Jenseits des Lustprinzips’ (1920), *Gesammelte Werke*, VIII, pp. 33-34.

<sup>305</sup> Freud, ‘Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion’, *Gesammelte Werke*, XV1, pp. 195-196.

<sup>306</sup> Unease at Freud’s rehearsal of anti-Semitic precepts in *Ein Wort zum Antisemitismus* is misplaced. His projection of such opinions onto third parties was designed to protect himself and others and to satirize by elaborate theatrical irony. The pretended ‘cites’, camouflaged with the coy disclaimer ‘I am a very old man and my memory is no more what it was’ are almost certainly his own words (cf Strachey’s reference to Ernest Jones 1957, p. 256), a rare and infelicitous stab at English, issued by a vulnerable refugee as *samizdat* and designed to be understood as such. *Complete Works*, XXIII, pp. 289-293.

### *Aus einem deutschen Leben*

The title sequence over black, to the accompaniment of portentous music, informs us that the film is adapted from *Der Tod ist mein Beruf*, a novel by Robert Merle, thus presumably a work of fiction, and, from its lurid title, perhaps of the thriller or detective genres. The star is identified as Goetz George, one of the leading actors of the day. The first frames, set in a military hospital, are labeled 'Franz Lang will in den Krieg'. The young orderly, whom one might presume to be an orphan,<sup>307</sup> since his family is never mentioned let alone shown, has tried three times to abscond to the front, a fact that endears him to the convalescing Captain, who inculcates in him the dominant ethos of the day: 'Es gibt nur eine Sünde: kein guter Deutscher zu sein, und das Vaterland bis ins Grab nicht zu lieben'. The year is not identified, but the desaturation of colour to a sepia monotone, the stiff manners, the barking delivery of the programmatic dialogue and the starchy, unseduceable matron successfully convey the period as being the First World War. A likeable rogue, the Captain brims with patriotism and lust, a conflation of war with (not very repressed) sexual desire that clearly dazzles the simple, honest, dull but determined Franz, who is duly granted his innermost wishes when the Captain recruits him into his company. Shades of 'Frühlingserwachen in uniform' haunt the opening in a curiously Wagnerian key, the twice-intoned 'eine Kirche, und die heißt Deutschland', 'meine Kirche heißt Deutschland' spicing a heady brew of sex and religion through ritual incantation that elevates the traumatized orphan Franz to the status of sacrificial victim, an impression reinforced by the next scene labeled '1917 Franz Lang wird ein Held', which shows our young man in the midst of bombardment attempting to rescue his Captain, the sole survivors of their company.

Acute shell shock would surely be the clinical diagnosis, leading to an inevitable identification of the spectator with such a young victim of the war machine, despite the warning ironies and the episodic, epic construction that attempts to reduce the narrative progression to a series of tableaux illustrative of a generic experience devoid of psychological motivation or consequence. In an awkward transition, the third scene introduces the adult male actor, George, as our hero returns from military

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<sup>307</sup> In the novel Franz Lang has a tyrannical father, a dictator figure, whose baleful influence suggests an Oedipal reading of Franz's career.

defeat barely months later to a Germany on the brink of civil war, a traumatized nation in which the traumatized Franz (like so many veterans across Europe) lacks the very different survival skills demanded of him. Pressured by Communist unionists to work more slowly, Franz refuses to compromise his military honour and is promptly sacked for causing trouble. In this enterprise the Reds run the roost, and an embittered Franz clearly has every reason to hate them. Discovered amidst a derelict urban landscape in the next tableau,<sup>308</sup> headed 'Freikorps Rossbach', Franz is now a member of that notorious right-wing militia (identified by a swastika on the helmet) fighting left-wing insurgents 'irregeleitet durch diese verfluchte jüdische Propaganda'. In the course of his duty, Franz shoots an attempted escapee (whether Jewish or not, we cannot tell). On the Freikorps' dissolution, he logically joins the NSDAP.

As a chronicle of the making of a young Nazi, the film is thus far eminently plausible, for the trauma of war, defeat and social collapse scarred an entire generation. This is a victim of history, not a fully responsible individual, and his dramatic status retains the innocence of the sacrificial offering. Even when he shoots the escapee, there are no consequences, either narrative or moral, he is merely an agent of political events, and this unveils the dramatic disaster of identification denial. While insisting on the rational judgement of the audience, the disjointed dramaturgy of epic theatre withholds the dramatic chain of cause and effect that makes such judgement possible. The reference to Jewish propaganda is entirely out of context; there are no Jewish characters thus far; and no attempt is made to represent either Jews, their community or their 'propaganda'. The emergence of a Nazi 'scapegoat mechanism' has been established solely via personal and collective trauma.<sup>309</sup> As an audience we are meant to order these references in an ironical schema that the film takes for granted, on the basis of our presumed, pre-existing awareness of history in the making. While this might work in a stage play delivered each night to a participating audience whose cultural references and historical education can be taken for granted (or established by the theatrical exchange), it is a highly risky strategy in an immutably finished work of art delivered blind to posterity.

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<sup>308</sup> A post-WW2 bomb site still available at the time of production, now generally recreated by computer generated images (as in *Der Untergang* and *Dresden*).

<sup>309</sup> See LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, pp. 87-88, footnote 13. 'The "ideological" role of such forces as deranged "sacrificialism", scapegoating and victimization cannot be reduced to the basic model of instrumental rationality that informs both intentionalism and functionalism.'

The dangers become clear even in the chapter headings. While a classic dramaturgy of cause and effect might allow an audience to assess Franz's descent into Nazism as it happens, its advance notification by subtitling skews not only our powers of identification but with it our moral clarity. When, immediately after this graphic announcement, Franz collapses from back-breaking work on a building site, nearly dies of hunger, retrieves his pistol from under his mattress and contemplates suicide till rescued (as by the Samaritans) by a Nazi knocking on his garret door with the news that 'Deutschland ist nicht besiegt', the ironical detachment and historical knowledge demanded of an audience cannot be taken for granted. For all the film has traced thus far are the origins, within the Nazi psyche, of precisely the traumatic repression and sacrificial self-pity that will later be transferred onto, and revenged upon, their victims. As LaCapra puts it, 'I would suggest that Nazi scapegoating and victimization may indicate the role of an extremely problematic "sacrificialism" (which took a particularly degraded form in the Nazi quest for purification through the elimination of a putatively contaminating presence) and raise the question of its relation to both a policy of extermination and instrumental or technical rationality'.<sup>310</sup>

Smartly turned out in the local NSDAP office, Franz's purification by 'ideology as secular religion'<sup>311</sup> and his redemption from despair are visible in his smart uniform, his Nazi armband and the reassuring military decency of his recruiters, which points us to the social origins of the Nazi virtue of 'Anständigkeit'. Franz, like many others, has found his natural home, a world he understands, where he longs only to belong. Slowly raising his arm in the Hitler salute, George manages to recuperate that all too familiar rite from swathes of historical accretion and film cliché to restore it to its original state of gestural innocence, stripping away the passing time before our eyes, and underlining one of the film's great merits, its refusal of hindsight. This single scene, played by actors old enough to remember the body language of fascism with its bustling petit bourgeois self-importance, its obsession with respectability, its social bonding through boyscout ritual, recreates a social context for the rise of Nazism that would serve a representational purpose in itself, were it not so appealing. The political seduction of the traumatized Franz of the hypnotic calf eyes and unconsciously virile good looks becomes our own seduction. He has become his own *Doppelgänger*, and ours. The dramaturgy may call us to censure him but we refuse.

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

By now the film is past its half way mark and it has still not revealed its real intent. Sentenced to ten years in prison for the murder of a Communist infiltrator after a night of drunken camaraderie, Franz Lang is released early through Nazi intercession and procures an agricultural job in Pommern, where the land-owning Colonel,<sup>312</sup> in a faithful recreation of military and feudal atavisms, offers him a derelict cottage and an acquiescent wife. ‘Sind Sie... krank?’ (i.e. homosexual) comes the coded response to Franz’s nervous reluctance (and his denial may be read one way or the other), but despite this additional hint that repressed libido may have been a key factor in the psychogram of the period, the film pays no attention to Franz’s marital exertions, which one might suppose as perfunctory as the cottage renovations, soon interrupted by the summons to an interview with Himmler, a narrative acceleration that leaves the viewer faintly queasy.

The following sequence speaks volumes of the early collusion between Nazism and the impoverished Prussian military. Through a brilliant Himmler impersonation by the close look-alike Hans Korte, it conveys much of the banal theatricality of fascism in its everyday practice, his every gesture a calculated game, a psychological gambit inviting connivance and complicity. This Himmler is supremely manipulative, mendaciously thoughtful, quietly bullying, cleverly flattering, wheedlingly exploitative. A man of the people risen to dizzying power, he appears to know his victim intimately as he extols Franz Lang’s ‘German virtues’: ‘wahrhaft deutsche Genauigkeit ... Ihre besondere Stärke ist die Praxis’. Franz is paralysed with wonder at this semi-divine visitation long before he is told of his impending transfer to the correction centre at Dachau, his task (should he accept it, which he is apparently free to choose): ‘Die Feinde des Nationalstaates einschliessen, um sie gegen die Empörung ihrer Mitbürger zu schützen....[und]...durch Arbeit zu bessern’. With the mention of Dachau comes the first admission of where the film might be heading.

Under the amusingly retentive label ‘Franz Lang und Else machen sich Gedanken’, the next scene provides the film’s only attempt at ‘realistic’ character development. In a wooden marital exchange, neither partner is prepared to take the initiative, Franz full of doubts, Else willing to serve his career, Franz wanting to be of use, not wanting his wife to work, a soap opera parody convincing in its emptiness of any real grasp of the implications, a living illustration of the ‘thoughtlessness’ that

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<sup>312</sup> A cameo by Kurt Huebner.

Arendt noted amongst Nazi functionaries.<sup>313</sup> Asked by Else whether prisoners at Dachau might be mistreated, Franz answers loyally: ‘im nazionalsozialistischen Staat sind solche Dinge unmöglich’. Deep stirrings of unease set in here, for this is by now a double murderer, at least, with personal experience of how the party works, and his patina of innocence has long since worn thin. Yet nothing in the line’s delivery suggests that Lang is deliberately lying to protect his wife, or assuaging his own doubts, or unconsciously deceiving himself for the sake of his career. Arendt’s observation concerning the ‘manifest shallowness in the doer that made it impossible to trace the uncontestable evil of his deeds to any deeper level of roots of motives’<sup>314</sup> is here illuminated by dramatic retrieval, for George’s magnetically passive, sensual physical presence reveals the entirely repressed trauma of his war years, a shared trauma that inhabits him like a succubus (Freud’s ‘Fremdkörper’)<sup>315</sup> and perhaps explains the forging of a national conspiracy of denial from the smallest unit of society upwards. His misgivings are brushed aside not contemptuously but out of loyalty, duty and a desire for modest self-improvement through service: commendable but confused urges raised to the status of moral vindication by uneducated, traumatized minds, unused to decisions of any kind, venturing down the labyrinth in which the German psyche got lost. Traumatic repression explains (in this screen version at least) the ordinary, commonplace ‘inability to think’, (‘neither demonic nor monstrous’), that Arendt noted as the key factor in her concept of the ‘banality of evil’.<sup>316</sup>

Unfortunately the film never gives itself the chance to examine the psychological ramifications of this marital relationship. Returning brusquely to its epic agenda, the next label informs us with laconic dispatch: ‘1941 Seit einem Jahr ist Sturmbannführer Franz Lang Kommandant des KZ-Lagers Auschwitz’. And finally, through massive ellipsis and literary pronouncement, the film divulges its hidden agenda: these are not just scenes from ‘any old German life’, but the biopic of the Auschwitz commandant Höss, here rendered under the pseudonym Franz Lang. The dissonance with everything received thus far is so jarring that the unprepared viewer is left with no moral compass and no psychological moorings. The man George

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<sup>313</sup> Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, pp. 287-288.

<sup>314</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978), pp. 3-4.

<sup>315</sup> See Introduction epigraph.

<sup>316</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, pp. 3-4.

portrays so brilliantly is clearly unable to organize his own life let alone a concentration camp. He is also far too nice. Himmler must have got the wrong man.

The apparent levity of this criticism must not be taken lightly, for it is by just such audience reactions that a film sinks or swims, and from this point on *Aus einem deutschem Leben* is bound for the rocks. Its narrative strategy, repressed and occulted till now (in a mirror image of its subject's trauma), has all along been to convince an unsuspecting public, by means of withheld information (where so much detail is labeled in advance), that the commandant of Auschwitz was just 'an ordinary guy', a perfectly average German of the time and representative of his generation. Poor Franz has walked away, apparently unscathed, from the 'train crash' of the Great War and his latent trauma renders him thoughtless of what he is doing. By extension the film applies this by inference to the German collective, this being 'ein deutsches Leben' and the nation traumatized by its recent history. The logical conclusion of any analysis of 'history as trauma' turns out to be that no one is to blame, a disastrous consequence that all trauma theorists disclaim but few avoid. Noting in the same breath 'the high suicide rate of survivors, for example survivors of Vietnam or of concentration camps',<sup>317</sup> Caruth obliterates at a stroke the distance between perpetrators (Vietnam vets) and victims (KZ-inmates). Trauma is seen as universalized, undifferentiated and driven: 'The postulation of a drive to death, which Freud ultimately introduces in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, would seem only to recognize the reality of the destructive force that the violence of human history imposes on the human psyche, the formation of history as the endless repetition of previous violence'.<sup>318</sup>

Summoned by Himmler, Franz climbs the echoing marble stairs of a pompous, theatrical building to be told that he has become indispensable to 'eine geheime Reichssache'.<sup>319</sup> Himmler's relish in his own duplicity is itself a seduction, not only of his prey but of his wider audience behind the camera. 'Der Führer hat die entgültige Lösung des Judenproblems in Europa befohlen', he smoothly announces, 'und Sie sind dazu ausersehen, diese Aufgabe durchzuführen'. Treblinka is going too slowly. 'Auschwitz als Ort der Vollstreckung' is the obvious choice, being on a railway crossroads. 'Haben Sie Einwände?' The hapless, permanently flattered Lang has no

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<sup>317</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 63.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>319</sup> See Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat*, p. 22: 'intimidating corridors and marble stairs have becomes mere signs unmistakably signaling "fascism".'

objections and therewith his fate is sealed. It is worth noting that this recruitment scene is a flashback from the scene label quoted above, an alienation device undoubtedly designed to obviate excessive suspense in order to facilitate calm reflection, but the outcome is more complex: from the moment we read the label, our unconscious has accepted that Lang's fate is sealed before the meeting; he has no choice; his moral responsibility is on hold; he is merely the victim of fate, here represented by a steamrolling party machine. This is a highly dangerous dramatic strategy, for it effectively removes Lang from moral scrutiny. The exchange with Himmler has been reduced to a ritual sealing of his fate, a delivery of the sacrificial victim to the altar of his demise.

The next frames cut directly to Auschwitz (the actual camp) looking pretty in the autumn sun, prisoners reasonably well kept despite the corpse of a returned escapee carrying the grisly sign 'Hurra, ich bin wieder da'. In his comfortable Commandant's accommodation, Lang proceeds to discuss logistics with an affable Eichmann,<sup>320</sup> who is charming to Else and respectful to Franz, very much the man that Arendt observed in Jerusalem. It might escape one that these functionaries are discussing the building of Birkenau (Auschwitz 2), in which nearly a million were to perish. Else gardens with her pet prisoner and pushes a buggy in the sunlight; Franz pushes papers across his desk; the children dispel the domestic longueurs by playing with a yellow star, to the irritation of their father, who is showing mild signs of stress. Behind the banality of everyday life, Franz's undiagnosed trauma acts itself out, its latency felt in his inferiority complex and its destructive force transferred without animus onto his victims, who might be anyone the Party had ordained for this scapegoated, sacrificial role. Franz Lang knows nothing about Jews, his anti-Semitism (if it exists) is entirely notional. They might be anyone.

If it is obscene, in Lanzmann's sense, to ask 'why were the Jews murdered', it might be because Holocaust survivors and scholars search insistently for causal links between perpetrator and victim, links that were maybe never essential but merely contingent. 'Anti-Semitism', however virulent and well documented, does not explain the rage, the hatred and the destruction that so preoccupy Langer and Agamben, 'la haine insensée' laid bare by Rousset;<sup>321</sup> nor the banal, bureaucratic efficiency and lack of reflection that deflected Arendt from her earlier perception of 'radical evil'. There

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<sup>320</sup> Smoothly delivered by Walter Czaschke.

<sup>321</sup> Rousset, *L'Univers concentrationnaire*, p. 114.



was, perhaps, no innate correlation between perpetrator and victim. The perpetrator simply needed one. Almost any would have done. The Jews were there, the most obvious, the most vulnerable, around whom Hitler could foment a consensus of hate. A national conspiracy of genocide is the surest way to impose obedience and perpetuate dictatorship, as Himmler's recruitment of Franz Lang demonstrates and as the Nazis carried through right till the end. If one thing emerges from the horror, it is its anonymity, a tyranny of the random.

'Don't take it personally' is of course the final insult. It is not surprising, therefore, that the weight of international response, particularly in the Jewish response surrounding the Eichmann trial, has been to argue *ex posteriori* that the Jews were the true object of the Holocaust, a group apart, marked out by Christian and post-Christian animosity. This was a politically expedient interpretation in Israel, as Arendt lost many friends in divulging. But it is equally possible that the perpetrators had no feelings about their victims of any kind, and this is arguably what Arendt intuited but could not quite reach in her formulation of the 'banality of evil'. Evil is an end in itself, it needs no specific object. The Jews were in the way, they were different and taking up space ('Lebensraum') so they were a perfect target. Hatred is a self-generating and degenerative condition. The spiraling violence of the camp warders speaks more of self-contempt, and loathing of the victim *qua* victim, than of any feelings about Jews. The murderers (so we might understand from *Aus einem deutschen Leben*), were merely 'acting out' their own rage born of traumatic repression and neurotic inferiority and transferring (i.e. revenging) their supposed (and often self-inflicted) 'sufferings' onto others. This gives us one clue as to why German film has never concerned itself with the victims. There is an unadmitted perception that they were not an essential part of the story.

By this point the film's repetition compulsion and its traumatic fixation on its protagonist are seriously compounded by its lack of means in recreating the camp. The prisoners are few and generally well fed, the exterior spaces empty and well kept. Apparently the director had chosen to spend his not inconsiderable budget on the earlier sequences of German trauma, leaving Jewish trauma to recreate itself, a fatal error since the Auschwitz museum (especially in the 1970s) was carefully sanitized by the Polish authorities. There is no blood on the execution wall, little on-screen brutality and few corpses; shots are heard off-screen to a cry of 'es lebe Polen' (in the wrong language); prisoners are heard praying in the shadows but we never engage

with the reality of their existence; the innumerable deaths are rendered by a graceful pan to a silhouette of trees against the sky. Euphemism verges on *Verharmlosung*.

Like a god descending from the flies, Himmler visits his stooge and the label informs us: ‘Der Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler lässt sich zeigen, wie Sturmbannführer Franz Lang in Auschwitz Juden vernichtet’. Now the syntax of this announcement deserves parsing. Note that the genocidal visitor is dignified with his full title and personal name; the pleasing condescension of the mighty is wrapped up in the magnificent ‘lässt sich zeigen’; the ‘wie’ contains a strong performative element – not ‘that’, but ‘how’: a spectacle is required and Franz Lang as the impresario is called upon to deliver a command performance; the venue is naturally stipulated with the iconic ‘Auschwitz’; but the object of the dependant clause (and of the show) is relegated to the one word ‘Juden’; the action of the play (‘vernichten’) is theatrically withheld, as the German language demands, till the end of the sentence and thrown in almost casually for effect. The use of these words is a ritual in itself, a rite that distances us massively from the objects of this genocide, who barely deserve a word, let alone a sentence. Sarcastic rhetoric was often applied in the early 1970s; it was intended to convey moral outrage through ironical brevity and it comported a strong shock factor bordering on the *épatisme* that the Situationists espoused, as we have seen earlier from Lanzmann’s deliberately outrageous utterances. The declamatory style, reeking of theatrical self-consciousness, is of course a rite of recuperation in itself, and it comes perversely close to capturing the performative essence of Nazism. Himmler did indeed, no doubt, expect a performance. However, the lack of directorial modesty, the failure to invest empathy where it was due, the colossal lack of proportion, the overweening intellectual confidence in the communicative power of shallow irony speaks not just of the post-war failure to grasp the enormity of what had happened but the inheritance and perpetuation of that failure by the next generation onto whom the structures of denial had been transferred, as Santner noted. The resort to an ‘alienation effect’, communicating instructions to an audience on how they should respond, is an ideological arrogance insufficiently challenged. Far from concentrating minds, the technique compounds the original crime by reifying the object of persecution. ‘Jews’ is all they are (were) and the film has no more to say about them than their destroyer has. Can it be that the German psyche is struggling with the notion that it was all a terrible mistake? It was not the Jews who were meant, at all. It was mankind in general. This denial is felt even in the

SED refusal to commemorate the genocide of Europe's Jews, or of other targets of transferred self-hatred such as homosexuals and gypsies.<sup>322</sup>

The narrative action further compounds the visual problem. A slow track along the barbed wire perimeter fence reveals a soldier astride the gas chambers and murmured discussions between the Nazi nomenclatura, while a handful of well-dressed 'Jews' (presumably) are politely ushered down the stairs to their death under Himmler's unmoved gaze. The doors are closed, the Zyklon B scattered down the hatch. And that is it. We have no glimpse of the victims; we hear no cries, no screams. Smoke rises from the chimneys into a clear sky, leaving no impression of the hell inside. 'Das ist eine harte Arbeit', Himmler comforts his henchman, who is promptly promoted to Obersturmbannführer.

Even admitting - to pick out Agamben's descriptions - that the horrendous medical condition of 'the submerged', the 'fabrication of corpses', the degradation of death through production line genocide, the unimaginable 'limit state' or Levi's 'grey zone' of the Jewish *Sondereinsatz* that prepared and emptied the chambers (and even such a subtle insight as the shame of the intimacy of being murdered)<sup>323</sup> are things that cannot easily be recuperated by film representation, nonetheless the failure of this film to attempt any narrative correlative to the fact of perpetration and its absence of any reliable witness to genocide is a scandal in itself.

Lanzmann's prohibition on fictional representation, his '*interdit de la représentation*' on the grounds that 'a certain absolute of horror is untransmissible' risks absolving filmmakers of even *attempting* to confront the Gorgon and results in an unintentional complacency; his norm of unrepresentability risks becoming a self-regarding taboo that disguises (thus Michael D'Arcy) not an ethical position but merely 'a meditation on aesthetic means, or modes of (cinematic) representation'.<sup>324</sup> Alternative visual approaches to the gas chambers have been attempted and are analysed by Manuel Köppen, who notes that the Polish film *Kornblumenblau* (Leszek Wosiewicz, 1988) is the only fiction that (to his knowledge) dares view the torment of the dying 'in einem allerdings ballettartigen Todeskampf', a qualification that probably serves to warn off any repetition.<sup>325</sup> While *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg,

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<sup>322</sup> 'Les grands oubliés de ce martyre.' Jacek Wozniakowski, Mayor of Cracow, *Au Nom du même père*.

<sup>323</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 103.

<sup>324</sup> D'Arcy, 'Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* and the Intentionality of the Image', *Visualizing the Holocaust*, p. 140.

<sup>325</sup> Köppen, 'Von Effekten des Authentischen', *Bilder des Holocaust*, p. 147.

1993) saw the showers rain down gas before cutting away, other films such as *Holocaust* have opted for the ‘Guckloch’ option, by which an unprepared visitor observes the death throes of the gas chambers through a glass spyhole and conveys the scene through facial expression and subsequent dialogue, a wholly inadequate procedure that reduces the film viewer to the status of voyeur twice removed and places impossible demands on the actor concerned, as in the Franco-German-Greek co-production of the Hochhuth-based *Amen* (Costa-Gavras, 2002), which reduced to petrified expressionlessness the usually excellent Ulrich Tukur as Kurt Gerstein, leaving one ignorant of what he might or might not have seen or what he might be attempting to tell Pope Pius XII about the unfolding Shoah. Modesty and reticence (i.e. good taste) can disguise a disastrous failure of nerve; none of these are qualities that generally impair Balkan film.

As if this interminable biopic had not sufficiently traduced its subject matter, it continues its epic meander for a further half hour. Under the next label ‘Else Lang erfährt, welche Arbeit ihr Mann im Lager verrichtet’, we are treated to matrimonial discord of a routine nature. Franz is working too hard, he is too conscientious, so Else (Elisabeth Schwarz) believes. She locks him out of the bedroom, absurdly referring to scenes from Breughel. ‘Es ist ein Befehl’, Franz pleads, it would be ‘gegen die Ehre’ to refuse, besides which, ‘ich wäre geschossen’. ‘Ich bin nicht dafür verantwortlich’, he insists, and most revealingly, ‘es ist mir physisch unmöglich, einen Befehl nicht zu gehorchen’, though whether through honour or cowardice the film does not explore. That the wife of the camp commandant should be entrusted with the role of moral mouthpiece merely dignifies the perpetrators with scruples and concerns they never evinced;<sup>326</sup> Else eventually reconciles herself to the situation and family life continues seamlessly with her four happy children, while Franz busies himself unblocking traffic jams caused by excess deliveries. Where, in all of this, is Steiner’s ‘midnight of mankind at Auschwitz’?<sup>327</sup>

A final label abruptly tells us: ‘Franz Lang ist von den Alliierten auf einem Bauernhof in Schleswig-Holstein, wo er sich versteckt gehalten hatte, verhaftet worden’. Franz is being interviewed by an American military prosecutor entirely inadequate to the task (both the character and the actor). Franz confesses the Führer’s

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<sup>326</sup> See Lanzmann, cited Chapter One: ‘And the viewer has to become complacent with these Nazi women with mater dolorosa faces...’

<sup>327</sup> Steiner, *Errata*, p. 51.

suicide has shaken his faith in the Nazi dispensation, but he has no particular feelings about his Auschwitz occupation, his original trauma overtaken by and conflated with the more recent one. At this point the bounds of dramatic representation are clearly crossed and the suitability of film fiction for the rendering of this material must be in doubt. For no degree of sobriety, alienation or restraint can impede the natural process of identification that defines all dramatic exchange. Goetz George clearly does *not* feel nothing, his face is alive with feelings, indeed he cannot exclude his own human decency from his performance and it is this decency that we respond to. By contrast Primo Levi tells us that Höss, the real commandant of Auschwitz, ‘became a living corpse from the time he entered Auschwitz’,<sup>328</sup> as Ralph Fiennes had some success conveying in *Schindler’s List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993). In a belated effort to move the film from fiction into documentary and to underline the reality of the unbelievable, Lang spends his detention detailing in his memoirs the efficiency of the operation, the numbers burned per day, a compulsive acting out of his latent trauma, whose causes will remain eternally closed to him.

By being made to follow the apparently ‘inevitable’ historical progression from his aspiring childhood to his genocidal end, we have been made to feel that we too might have done the same, we have accepted what Köppen calls ‘die irritierende Einladung an den Zuschauer, sich einführend mit dem durch Götz George gespielten Lagerkommandanten Höß auseinanderzusetzen’.<sup>329</sup> ‘Born on the century and representative of that half century’ are the film’s closing words. In its desire to punish the German people collectively for the acts of a criminal few, the film is thoroughly representative of its time and expresses the anger of the post-war generation against their Nazi parents, an anger that inspired the revolt of 1968 and its subsequent terrorist excesses. But the final effect defeats the supposed critical objective (namely explaining how Germany came to perpetrate the Holocaust) in favour of its opposite (justifying the Holocaust because a traumatized Germany did it). The actual victims have been replaced by a single sacrificial victim, who has taken the guilt of a nation upon himself and atones through his on-screen presence. The status of victim has been transferred onto the perpetrator, whose trauma has been installed as the Holocaust’s principle preoccupation and proper subject matter, a deep historical trauma that in

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<sup>328</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 57.

<sup>329</sup> Köppen, ‘Von Effekten des Authentischen’, *Bilder des Holocaust*, p. 147.

large part absolves him of personal responsibility for his actions and renders him, disastrously, a subject of tragedy and an object of 'holy dread' or taboo, unapproachable and unimpeachable. All great heroes act to a large degree in ignorance, despite bouts of lucidity, and George conveys this sleepwalking quality to perfection. But if Höss has been made a tragic hero, then Germany is redeemed by his predestined fate.

The film has no conclusion, no trial, no execution. 'Please, no catharsis', Lanzmann insisted, hoping to guard against easy redemption. But catharsis in the Aristotelian sense connoted not just a purging but also a learning through vicarious experience, a learning this film conspicuously denies its audience after more than two hours despite fascinating glimpses into the emergence of Nazism from military defeat. In all its loquacity *Aus einem deutschen Leben*, with its self-consciously ritual title, not only remains silent on the main issues of the Nazi genocide but, in its fixation with the trauma of Germany personified by a largely sympathetic executioner, it recuperates the Holocaust for its perpetrators and further marginalizes the victims.

This is not an aberration found anywhere in Balkan cinema, despite the endemic and fertile self-pity explored by Iordanova under the heading 'Villains as Victims', in which she traces 'the ideology of preventive aggressiveness'<sup>330</sup> to Serbia's historical inferiority complex as the excluded, vulnerable victim. However, if we compare this very German film with the output of its neighbour Poland, we may equally find that a fixation on the perpetrator reveals an inherent temptation within the subject matter.

### ***Pasażerka/Die Passagierin***

The filming of *Pasażerka/Die Passagierin/The Passenger* (Andrzej Munk, Poland 1963) was interrupted by the death in a car accident of its creator on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1961. Enough had been shot, however, for his close collaborator Witold Lasiewicz, with others of the creative team, to complete the film with a series of stills accompanied by two voice-overs: the first, male and neutral, representing the editorial voice; the second, female and highly subjective, that of the protagonist of the piece, Liza, formerly a guard at Auschwitz. Returning to Europe on a cruise liner fifteen years after the war, Liza thinks she recognizes a fellow passenger as a former inmate

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<sup>330</sup> Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames*, p. 169.

of the camp named Marta, with whom she was once intimate, a *Doppelgängerin* whose compulsive return is most definitely ‘unheimlich’.<sup>331</sup> Both voices are unreliable, but for very different reasons.

The editorial voice questionably eschews an authorial role through multiple ironies and double negatives such as ‘We do not intend to say...’ [or offer] ‘solutions which might not have been his’, (i.e. Munk’s), ‘or complete a plot which his death left unresolved’, preferring to present ‘what was actually filmed’ and ‘the questions he wanted to pose’ through a series of interruptions, lacunae and hypotheses (‘We are left with fragments’) designed to speak of the double trauma of the subject matter on the one hand and the death of its author on the other. Reading between the lines, the editors’ refusal to recuperate Munk’s authorship seems a complex game of mirrors through which they defended his inheritance as best they could, publicly distancing themselves from him while creatively backing him. By instating the fate of the author at the very heart of the film, they invite the audience to speculate firstly on the relationship of that author to those who controlled his output and secondly on whether the Auschwitz legacy is somehow fatal to those who go near it, as if complicity in perpetration had been transferred to the author through the hubris of narrating it. An air of holy dread, of what Rudolf Otto called ‘das Heilige’,<sup>332</sup> hangs over the film, as if sacrilege were never far and retribution but a stone’s throw away.

This surmise is intensified by the highly coloured tone of the second, female voice-over. Through furtive eye contact between the two cruise passengers captured in the editors’ stills that interlace the filmic wartime reconstruction, we are supposedly alerted to Liza’s bad conscience and the unreliability of her testimony. ‘I didn’t hurt anyone. If Marta’s alive, it’s because of me’, she insists, absorbing our attention and sympathy, truth and fiction blurred by the compulsive acting-out of the traumatized perpetrator. Delivered in an acting style best described as ritualistic, Marta and her lover Tadeusz emerge from the mists of time as sacred icons projected from Liza’s erotic longings, to which one is afforded ample access (as in *The Night Porter*) and inevitably a voyeuristic participation.

Apart from the pitfalls of romantic narrative in concentration camp settings already observed in *Sterne* (shot shortly afterwards), narrative control remains with

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<sup>331</sup> Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 4.

<sup>332</sup> Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige - Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Breslau: Trewendt und Granier, 1917).

the concentration camp guard, despite the occasional scene that Liza cannot possibly have witnessed. ‘In Marta I saw something childlike, vulnerable... I was sorry for her’. The editorial voice warns us that this was ‘the first, noble version of her relationship with Marta’, which she shares on board with her husband Walter (a code name for anonymity, as we shall see), while ‘the other version she’ll keep to herself’. Though apparently designed to restore the viewer’s critical distance, this in fact invites greater identification through suspense, since Liza’s unconscious (from which her words are uttered) bears a relationship to reality impossible to quantify. No genuine working through is possible in this framework and Liza remains an unchallenged mythomaniac, her unresolved trauma (again, a ‘Fremdkörper’) the film’s elusive and fascinating subject matter.

True, the excellent, grimy reconstructions of Auschwitz (unlike in the previous film) recall the physical facts of the case, and the staging consistently favours surreal and grotesque performative elements<sup>333</sup> such as the camp orchestra concert, the portrait Tadeusz draws of Marta (another artist, as in *Sterne*) and the ritual of prisoners running the gauntlet. ‘I didn’t like such performances’ is Liza’s strict and almost certainly mendacious comment, her self-justification and self-pity being the dominant note even as she reveals the psychological mechanisms of control. ‘We win the confidence of chosen prisoners... worth more than brutality... restore the camp to its proper character.’ Rarely, in *Auschwitz 2*, where brutality grew with disgust, can this strategy have applied. Following Agamben we might legitimately doubt whether differentiated human relationships were feasible within the charnel house of the Final Solution, whose implementation this film conveys without delving into its gruesome logistics. Liza’s multiple confessions echo the fractured, promiscuous proliferation of plot points, in which an implausible international delegation (as at Theresienstadt) is fooled by Marta’s convalescing in a sanatorium and a Jewish baby (again, this trope: new life amidst the carnage) is discovered amongst the abandoned personal effects in Marta’s care only to be abandoned by the film itself moments later. ‘I was humiliated, because of my weakness, I was complicit in the rescue of a Jewish child.’ The contrast with *Nackt unter Wölfen* could not be stronger. While the German film strives to make sense of resistance by dignifying the prisoners through their concern for the sacrificial child, *Pasażerka* views similar events through the traumatized recall of the

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<sup>333</sup> See next chapter.



perpetrator, incapable of remorse or regret, who transfers her guilt onto the victim, Marta, who was incapable of reciprocating her advances and therefore has only herself to blame. 'The repetitions of the traumatic event – which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight – thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing'.<sup>334</sup> In espousing a narrative strategy very close to this insight of Caruth's, *Pasażerka* imperceptibly relegates the actual victims to figments of her trauma, while transferring the warder centre-stage as the principal actor (actress) of the Holocaust. While this result may have been far from the author's intention, the use of dramatic irony does not so much criticize and expose his protagonist as complicate and enrich her. Unfinished and arguably unfinishable, *Pasażerka* had lost its way. The director can be sensed to be overwhelmed with waves of self-doubt and self-culpability and he may have been under considerable editorial pressure when he lost his life, unable to face the fact that his psychological strategy had led him into a maze from which there was no exit. As a study of perpetration and the trauma it inflicts on the perpetrator, the film is a classic, whether or not this was the intention of the author and/or his editors; its psychogram of self-delusion, sexual frustration and homoerotic yearning combined with military discipline and sadomasochistic mastery exercises an equally compulsive effect on the viewer that defies rationality let alone political correctness, taking us into the domain Agamben describes where 'this paradoxical character of shame is consciously [...] transformed into pleasure'.<sup>335</sup> This fact alone may have landed Munk in trouble with Communist authorities eager for simple truths and Polish heroes, thus rendering the director a victim of his own film. It is possible that he was overwhelmed with shame at his own material, the 'subject of his own desubjectification'.<sup>336</sup>

The political virtue of *Pasażerka*, namely to have exposed the anonymous, undetected presence of unreconstructed Nazis as a 'foreign body' in the midst of a supposedly de-Nazified post-war society, will not have endeared it any further to its Communist patrons, many of them with pasts of their own, since it subversively hints at broader questions of secrecy and accountability. 'Things are not what they seem'

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<sup>334</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 92.

<sup>335</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 107.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

was never a tenet of Socialist Realism. A universe suspended in time and space, an island on which ‘yesterday and tomorrow cease to exist’, through which the human psyche free-floats and the passing resemblance of a perfect stranger suffices to trigger suppressed trauma through guilt pangs long denied was not a formula they could possibly have approved or understood.

One item remains a constant, shared with *Nackt unter Wölfen* as with so many other films of the post-war period. The explicit Jewish presence in the film is virtually nil, reduced to the voice of a baby who cries, unseen, its presence explained away by a child’s doll. Dramatic interest is transferred to the aggressor, the film usurped by ‘the ways perpetrators construct a morally acceptable post-war account of their crimes’, as Iordanova describes it.<sup>337</sup> Hurbinek,<sup>338</sup> and a million other children, are nowhere to be seen. Whatever else *Pasazerka* narrates, it is not the fate of the Jews, whose torment serves as a vehicle for more contemporary concerns: those of an intellectual elite trapped in a people’s dictatorship with a gulag of its own. The Khrushchev succession of 1956 may have briefly interrupted Stalin’s tyranny and momentarily opened windows onto liberalization but these soon slammed shut, as the Cold War dug deeper after the Berlin Wall was built by Poland’s edgy neighbour the GDR, quite possibly closing down this brave experiment in cinematographic psychoanalysis amidst the political repression that followed, leaving it to be rescued in fragmentary form by Munk’s nervous but dedicated colleagues.

### ***Der Vorleser/The Reader***

The suitability of eros as a dramatic vehicle for Holocaust narrative has been questioned here and elsewhere,<sup>339</sup> as implying not only a space for human warmth that did not exist within the ‘grey zone’, but some equivalence or reciprocity between perpetrator and victim. A similar symbiosis is the prime concern of a recent German novel and its highly awarded film adaptation, which instate the concentration camp guard as the emblem of social exclusion and victimization, raising serious questions about the transference of literature to the screen and the apparently unstoppable international recuperation of German Holocaust guilt.

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<sup>337</sup> Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London and NY: Wallflower Press, 2003), p. 79.

<sup>338</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 33, citing Primo Levi 1989: pp. 38-39.

<sup>339</sup> See Avisar, *Screening the Holocaust*.

While Bernhard Schlink's novel *Der Vorleser* offers an introspective critique of generational interdependence through the story of a young man ensnared in an obsessive and sadomasochistic love affair that paralyses his active life even as it sharpens his social, critical and aesthetic responses (much in the *Bildungsroman* tradition), the film version, shot in English with a partly German cast, divests itself of such complex baggage. In the person of the lovely and persuasive Kate Winslett (who won an Academy Award for her performance), the former concentration camp guard Hanna Schmitz has already acquired an advocate more eloquent than any adjective Schlink may have offered ('jung, schön')<sup>340</sup> and the on-screen love-making is of such tenderness that one doubts whether Winslett could ever have performed the duties required of her ('und in der Erfüllung ihrer Aufgaben von gewissenloser Gewissenhaftigkeit'),<sup>341</sup> let alone have been the warder nicknamed 'Stute' for her uncontrolled cruelty,<sup>342</sup> a criticism that cannot be levelled at Aleksandra Slaska who played the icy Liza in *Pasażerka*.

The camp being wholly absent from *The Reader*, the film attempts to convey the crimes that our protagonist committed by literary and legal reconstruction and also, most importantly, through Hanna herself. For in the dislocated, somnambular quality of this rootless, anonymous survivor, disguised in her anodyne civic uniform perpetually in circular motion in the tram she conducts, one reads an emotional transference from her camp duties that strongly suggests she is a warder ever, condemned to act out a pale facsimile of her earlier crimes in post-war purgatory without hope of cure or redemption. Repressed trauma and conscious concealment haunt her, contributing strongly to her erotic value to the young boy. The Germany of the nineteen-fifties was full of such displaced persons with all too explicable lacunae in their not too distant past and, like *Pasażerka*, the film successfully evokes the twilight world in which they lived. Regrettably, not even the sadomasochistic nexus of control and desire bound up in her insistence that he read aloud for her pleasure goes any way to hint at the grim history in which we are meant to believe she was caught up. The central theme of literacy translates to the screen with character implications unexplored in the novel, so that the viewer either cannot believe that she was ever a concentration camp guard or, more fatally, is lulled into a series of inner

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<sup>340</sup> Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser* (Zürich: Diogenes Taschenbuch, 1997), p. 115.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

adjustments that divorce the character from the moral implications of her past with highly dangerous consequences for Holocaust representation and criminal accountability. Bluntly, the character as given by Kate Winslett shows not the slightest proclivity to violence other than some mildly titillating, mostly verbal sex games. She should not just be haunted but *inhabited* by her past, as if she were permanently acting it out. The repressed violence of highly dangerous individuals in the immediate post-war Nazi years is effectively occulted, and one key passage of the novel has either been excluded from the screenplay or been left on the cutting room floor, quite possibly because the producers found it too disturbing. Overnighing at a country Gasthaus during a bicycling weekend, the unequal couple share a room as presumed mother and son, and Hanna wakes the next morning to find her young lover gone. When he returns with their breakfast, she slashes his face with her leather belt, splitting his lip and leaving him blood-stained, only to dissolve in howls of rage that leave him appalled and unable to calm or soothe her.<sup>343</sup> In the film, the scene is missing. Their arrival at the picturesque Gasthaus is followed immediately by their departure the next day.

With this single excision the film reveals its Hollywood aesthetic, for the filmmakers were clearly so unwilling to confront the realities of the Holocaust that they banish Hanna's Nazi crimes to a safely cordoned past that will not intrude on the audience's awareness, sanitizing both character and relationship to a point where Hanna can function as both tragic and romantic heroine, the victim of her inferior social status and of a ruthless political machine. A plausible link between illiteracy and fury, subjection and mastery through the prism of the erotic might have saved the film. Instead, through a Hanna who bears no trace of her Nazi crimes, they offer us a confected *Doppelgängerin*, fit for our voyeuristic consumption, who distances Germany from its heritage and exonerates the new generation of any culpability. This is precisely the opposite of Schlink's tortuous enslavement to the Nazi past through erotic fascination, political contestation, inter-generational strife and legal polemic, themes which the film is entirely incapable of pursuing and the miscast Ralph Fiennes over-challenged in conveying, his vague unease coming nowhere near the existential angst and lacerating self-irony of the original. By contrast, his younger German counterpart David Kross captures the vulnerability, curiosity and concupiscence of the

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid., pp. 114-115.

post-war youth to perfection, demonstrating that the German psyche cannot be internationalized with the same cavalier recuperation as its history.

Failure of nerve further complicates the problematic second half of the film, which, as in the novel, is devoted to the war crimes trial (based on the Majdanek trial discussed above) where the narrator rediscovers Hanna many years later as a prisoner in the dock. While the novel permits mature reflection on the flawed legal process by which Germany might be deemed to have scapegoated junior SS staff for its collective guilt, the film adaptation (almost unavoidably, for such is the business of screen fiction) singles out the wronged protagonist as sacrificial victim and sacred redeemer, her mute acceptance of guilt in preference to an open admission of her illiteracy setting her apart from her hatchet-faced co-defenders and the predatory judge. Schlink's polemic against the failures of de-Nazification has been turned on its head, the former Nazi accepting her fate with sublime resignation, unjustly sentenced but nonetheless purified as she transfers the guilt of a nation upon herself. All trace of the novel's literary irony is lost (as almost always) in its transference to the screen.

One consequence is that the Jewish survivor testifying against Hanna appears as the 'bad guy', for she lacks the necessary information that Hanna has withheld. Her verbatim quotation of Lanzmann's 'Please, no catharsis', inserted by the filmmakers almost as a legal disclaimer, cannot endear her to us any further. How (or why) such experienced producers as the Weinstein brothers fell into this trap is hard to grasp, for the film has taken upon itself to draw a line under the Holocaust, dispensing dubious justice and unearned mercy ('cheap grace')<sup>344</sup> in a wish fulfilment working-through that never rises above the psychological detective genre.<sup>345</sup>

### *Der Untergang*

One unacknowledged reason for the transference of interest from victims to perpetrators might be that perpetrators are more attractive than victims and make better box office, a fact apparently born out by the wave of Hitler films unleashed by *Der Untergang* (Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004), which became one of the highest earning German films by defying the taboo on Hitler representation that for nearly six decades

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<sup>344</sup> Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, p. 175.

<sup>345</sup> The generic agenda is painful even in the novel, where Hanna's covert illiteracy is (wishfully) occulted from the reader in the interests of suspense and finally deduced with all its psychological ramifications in a four-fold exclamatory unravelling each starting 'Deswegen...!' *Der Vorleser*, p. 127.

had been thought unbreakable and is now barely remembered. Though the most spectacular, it was in fact not the first, preceded as it was by Syberberg's post-modernist *Hitler, a Film from Germany* (Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, 1977), whose surreal theatrical staging had offered a cultural psychogram rather than any physical restitution or screen portrait; and by the more closely related *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler - die letzte Stunde im Führerbunker* (Schlingensieff, 1989), a painstaking but much-criticized account of Hitler's last hours. *Der Untergang* was followed hard upon by *Speer und Er* (Heinrich Breloer/Horst Königstein, 2005), which sought to explain the Führer's political appeal through his petit bourgeois charm and homoerotic 'ladies' man' persona; and, the very next year, by *Mein Führer* (Dany Levy, 2006), which trampled on the recently dispelled taboo through the traumatic release of comic parody. If the floodgates had been opened, it was nonetheless *Der Untergang* with its Wagnerian 'Schicksalsrausch' that became the *cause célèbre* and thereby earned itself a fortune.

Before dismissing a legitimate German concern with the great figures of the recent past, be they heroes or villains, let us admit that perpetrators have always made easier drama than victims. Drama thrives off agency, not passivity, and perpetrators are by definition agents, while victims are by definition objects of that action. Perpetrators initiate and execute; victims react and suffer. Particularly in the case of racial persecution there is a lack of logic and consequence (as noted above), in that the genocidal persecutor-perpetrator exercises an agency that the victim has neither sought, nor deserved, nor most often even conspired in. The agency is, as it were, incidental to the nature of its object. This poses a dramaturgical problem for representation of the Holocaust and of any genocide, in that the victim is not an antagonist but a random target. Any attempt to integrate the victim into the action or motivation of the agent-perpetrator risks running precisely the risks that Lanzmann detected, namely ascribing some logic or indeed justification to the mindset of the perpetrator. 'It is enough to formulate the question in simplistic terms – Why have the Jews been killed? – for the question to reveal right away its obscenity.' The victim played no part in generating the action that victimized him. This is a huge problem for any dramatic author. Put simply, perpetrator and victim should not be in the same film. Conversely, putting them there implies they deserve in some obscure way to be there, that they have earned or shall we say (to put it at its most neutral) that they *belong* in the action in which they appear. The Jews did not *belong* in the Shoah. They

*belonged* in almost any other story than that of the Holocaust. The Shoah was *not* their story. It was Hitler's story, forced upon them. Representing this fact dramatically is such a challenge that most dramatists, for formal as much as political reasons, or out of personal reticence and aesthetic decency, have preferred to focus on the perpetrator and expose his villainy. But, as we have seen, this strategy has pitfalls of its own, as the victims are usually reduced to walk-ons in a film about Nazis. This is again the problem with *Der Untergang*, whose traumatized victim (as in the early *Trümmerfilm*) is the ruined city on which the Nazi perpetrators squat like some parasitical foreign body or 'Fremdkörper'.

It is not enough to argue that the historical facts have been well observed and truly delivered, or that Hitler (despite the magnetism of Bruno Ganz) emerges from the film as a broken, despicable loser. Film cannot spend so many millions on reconstructing the death throes of the city and the culture this man destroyed without conveying on him some spurious glory even in defeat. Writing in *Die Zeit*,<sup>346</sup> Wim Wenders pinpoints the crucial failings of this mighty film and castigates especially the posthumous respect shown to Hitler and Goebbels, whose deaths are prepared and reported rather than being portrayed on screen, while countless victims (and other perpetrators) are shown torn apart without the slightest restraint. 'Warum dürfen wir nicht Hitler und Goebbels sterben sehen? Werden sie durch das Nichtzeigen nicht erst recht zu mythischen Figuren? [...] Was für ein Verdrängungsvorgang entspinnt sich da vor unseren Augen?'<sup>347</sup> In according their protagonist the dignity of an off-stage death the filmmakers recuperate him for a mythical eternity, genuflecting before the very taboo they were dismantling and conferring on him an almost numinous status. 'Warum verflucht nochmal!? Warum nicht zeigen, dass der Schwein endlich tot ist? Warum dem Mann diese Ehre erweisen, die der Film sonst keinem von denen erweist, die sterben müssen?'<sup>348</sup>

Wenders's objections go right to the heart of the filmic process and the recuperation of ritual. Through the Führer's 'non-death' one intimates more clearly one's own mortality and thereby longs more deeply for one's own resurrection. The perspective of an eventual rebirth is left tantalizingly open through his magical disappearance, which confers on him the status of a demigod born again at the

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<sup>346</sup> Wim Wenders, 'Tja, dann wollen wir mal', *Die Zeit* 44, 21st October 2004. [www.zeit.de/2004/44/Untergang\\_n](http://www.zeit.de/2004/44/Untergang_n)

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

moment of death or translated unscathed through the portals of Hades. In its defiance of cause and consequence and its ability to redefine reality, film plays with the deepest layers of our unconscious, thereby retrieving superstitions and yearnings one might presume long outgrown but which were projected onto Hitler by Germans in their millions. The final escape from ruined Berlin into the sunlit countryside by the Hitler Jugend survivor together with Hitler's secretary Traudl Junge (a prime source for this film) is a breathtaking act of historical revisionism through cinematographic sentimentality. Wenders writes, 'Und was in den Schlusstiteln geschieht, spottet dann jeder Beschreibung. Sie beginnen mit dem Datum der Kapitulation, klären uns dann auf über die sechs Millionen Juden, von denen der Film nicht gehandelt hat, nicht handeln wollte oder konnte.' *Der Untergang* closes instead with credit captions dedicated to Hitler, Goering and all the other war criminals. '...und so finden sich Verführer und Opfer zum Schluss noch einmal in der beliebigen Haltungslosigkeit vereint, die diesen Film so unglaublich ärgerlich macht. Allein der Mangel an Erzählhaltung führt die Zuschauer in ein schwarzes Loch, in dem sie auf (beinahe) unmerkliche Weise dazu gebracht werden, diese Zeit doch irgendwie aus der Sicht der Täter zu sehen, zumindest mit einem wohlwollenden Verständnis für sie'. This luminous perception could be applied to most of Germany's post-war output.

Wenders closes his article by reminding us that Charlie Chaplin (in line with Adorno)<sup>349</sup> had doubts about the wisdom of having ridiculed or even represented Hitler in *The Great Dictator* (Charlie Chaplin, 1942), 'weil er die Ungeheuerlichkeit Hitlers noch nicht in aller Konsequenz hatte ahnen können', a trepidation that others like Dany Levy would have done well to emulate. Chaplin's well-loved grimace, transferred onto the monstrosity of Adolf Hitler, remains an emblem of aesthetic miscalculation, as we shall see in the next part of this enquiry, where, in search of useful comparison and alternative benchmarks, the investigation moves from the Holocaust into more recent, Balkan genocide, with the following *vademecum* from Robert S. Frey: 'In sheer numbers of dead, even HaShoah pales beside the cumulative loss of noncombatants in the twentieth century...'<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> See above. Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, II, p. 84.

<sup>350</sup> Robert S. Frey, 'Is Objectivity Morally Defensible in Discussing the Holocaust?', *Problems Unique to the Holocaust*, ed. Harry James Cargas (Lexington, University Press of Kentucky), pp. 98-108, here p. 99.



### *Kolonel Bunker*

Though Albania was left virtually unscathed by the Holocaust, it suffered its own genocide in the years that immediately followed, a Communist terror largely ignored in the West and inadequately digested by that country itself. One Albanian filmmaker of international status has made it his business to interrogate his country's recent past, during which he came of age as a filmmaker. Son of a Communist father and an anti-Communist mother, Kujtim Çashku shot five films under the old regime, amongst them *Dora e ngrohtë/Human Hand* (1983), which dealt with the taboo subject of social delinquency in the son of a divorced family. Personally vetted by the dictator Enver Hoxha, the film was long debated by the Politburo and finally become a huge success in a country starved of any kind of personal statement in cinema, where Socialist Realism demanded an unflawed positive hero in every film. Çashku's *Shokët/Post-mortem* (1981) had fallen foul of the censors, and his son Eol Çashku, himself a filmmaker, was twenty before he could see it. His later *Balada e Kurbinit/Ballad of Kurbin* (1988) dealt with forced conversion to Islam under the Ottomans as a veiled allusion to Albania's enslavement to Communism and was shot only after Hoxha's death.

Perhaps it is the survivor's guilt at having made films during the great repression that liberates Çashku's immense energy and gives him his unique understanding of the Albanian trauma of which he may be seen as the victim as well as commentator in his two great films *Kolonel Bunker* (1998) and *Magic Eye* (2005). The first of these is a merciless exposé of the genocidal Communist gulag, in which the perpetrator occupies centre stage, much as in *Aus einem deutschen Leben* but with one vital transference: in *Kolonel Bunker* the perpetrator ineluctably falls prey to his own perpetration and shares the fate of his erstwhile victims.

A knock on the door in the middle of the night, men in raincoats with torches, a frightened wife obliged to wake her husband, who is driven away to an uncertain fate: from the opening scene, *Kolonel Bunker* establishes a pattern of premonition suggestive of the desperate efforts of a sleepwalker to wake from a potentially fatal nightmare. Arriving at deserted party headquarters in the dead of night, Colonel Nuro is left to find his own way down over-lit, echoing corridors to an ante-room where an eerie recording of the Supreme Leader – a voice from the beyond - informs him that

since military ranks have this night been abolished he can no longer be promoted to General, as planned, but instead will be entrusted with the duty of bunkerizing the country against its enemies. In the decent, balding Nuro (Petrit Mulaj), now 'Colonel Bunker', one reads the baffled determination of the Old Testament prophet. Henceforth, his every breath must be dedicated to strewing his land with concrete beehives from virgin beach to unploughed field, destroying churches and desecrating cemeteries, mobilizing vast reserves of men and material in an operation aimed not against the illusory enemy but against his own people. In his own home an effigy bunker becomes an indispensable fashion item, much to the distaste of his Polish wife Ana (Fatime Lajai) (a classical pianist like Çashku's wife), whose pleas must be muffled by polythene sheets hanging from the bathroom ceiling to protect them from the eavesdropping of the secret police.

Already we are in a world of hallucination, where Bunker successfully reconciles the irreconcilable to our complete satisfaction: his wife's complaints are unreasonable, he clearly has an important job to do. When his friend and neighbour, a former partisan, is executed together with a disgraced minister and an army general in ready-dug sand pits on the orders of a 'Military Tribunal', and the Bunkers are woken in the middle of the night to find the partisan's wife hanging beside a suicide note reading 'Be proud of your parents, love mum'; when Ana suggests they take in the orphan girl and Bunker objects that she must be out of her mind to put them at such risk... we do not even have to excuse him, he is clearly in the right. The self-evident inversion of any recognizable moral order conveys the reality of life in a totalitarian state as eloquently as Orwell (more so than the domestic sequences in *Aus einem deutschen Leben*). The film deploys dramatic means that constantly flirt with dangerous humour and occasionally spill into dark comedy, as when Colonel Bunker, logically enough, is required by the *nomenklatura* to demonstrate his results in person by withstanding a bombardment from air and land before the eyes of the coffee-sipping Politburo in long black coats and pork pie hats, who observe this *auto da fé* in eerie silence. Nuro emerges from his seaside bunker outwardly unscathed, but his eyes are wild, his gestures crazed as he discards his helmet into the sea and flees reporters, for whom he has just become a national hero. Clearly a comic metaphor for shell shock, this scene uncovers the trauma of both the perpetrator-victim Nuro and the crazed, disordered society he serves, a 'bunkerized' society infested, polluted and corrupted by a plague of concrete beehives, pentateuchal references forcing

themselves irresistibly to mind, since Bunker is clearly an object of divine wrath. 'I don't understand what's happening', he confesses to Ana in a moment of transcendent irony, a sleeper unable to wake from his own nightmare. 'The country is filling up with bunkers.'

Fittingly enough his lurking decency is his undoing, expressed in a desperate emotional need coupled with an inability to be held, surely one hallmark of shellshock trauma. Knowing the end is approaching, the couple reaffirm the inviolability of their ghostly charade of a marriage in a night of nostalgia for the better days of their Polish courtship, which culminates in their wild dancing to an accordion band ('I'm a General, I will not be humiliated!'). Then the premonition of the opening scene explodes into terrifying reality. Bunker is torn away from his home to be strapped in a coffin and left to rot in a dank basement accoutred with the regime's tools of torture (documented in the National Museum but left felicitously unused here), his only crime having been 'You dreamt, and secretly that dream became a reality - that's treason'. Meanwhile Ana's family heirlooms are expropriated and she herself is horse-carted away to the gulag, arriving beneath a sign that might as well read *Arbeit macht frei*. Here she is reunited with the orphan she failed to protect, an 'enemy of the people' condemned to a form of *Sippenhaft* to atone for the sins of her murdered father, a horrifying perspective with which the biblical references reach a new pitch.

Even as *Kolonel Bunker* plummets into a Bosch-like world of medieval horrors it never loses its poetic irony, its profound sense of natural justice and above all its dark Balkan wit, an extraordinary accomplishment that alone makes the narrative watchable and even macabrely entertaining without indulging in euphemism. This is helped by the (relative) humanity of the camp itself, more a rural commune of forced agricultural labour (such as those installed by Hoxha's ally Mao) than Kafka's penal colony. This is not Auschwitz, and the director eschews tendentious comparison to the benefit of his overwhelming case. The arrival of Ana's piano dragged through the gulag mud provides a point of contact with the young peasant Commandant, who punts his skiff with suppressed longing through marshy waters to listen to her play. For a moment one trembles at the prospect of concentration camp romance or, worse perhaps, redemption through the power of music, but any failure of nerve is headed off by the extra-judicial execution of a young couple rash enough to use one of Bunker's beehives for better purposes. Believing from her gaolers that her husband has died of a heart attack in prison, Ana

is deported to Poland and disappears from the film (somewhat to its detriment), leaving the Commandant baffled before a silent keyboard. Bunker is allowed to watch her flight departing over the bunkerized dunes from behind barbed wire in an act of sadistic compassion that effectively finishes him off. The tenderness of the torturer, the gentle art of the inquisitor, are never far, most eloquent when least stated, most terrifying when least explicable. Again, we recognise the goal of useless cruelty, as Langer defines it.<sup>351</sup>

‘Rehabilitated’, the traumatized Bunker (by now he has no other name) is sent to push hand carts in the mines, where he shares the fate of those dissidents and social misfits he once persecuted: monarchists, anarchists, the priest whose church he blew up (who provides the requested absolution, necessary forgiveness being a running theme of Çashku’s), the maverick who is just ‘against everybody’, and another with the desperate gift of perfectly mimicking Elvis Presley (that icon of capitalist depravity) with a faithful rendition of *Jailhouse Rock* in the prison mines. Amidst comradely laughter, Bunker is given the Charlie Chaplin moustache that encapsulates the hubris of the small man who has dared to play with history, a fallen dictator mocked in his downfall. Briefly he rises to the jollity but he never speaks a word again. One of the ‘submerged’, he has been reduced to a living ‘wound that cries out’,<sup>352</sup> his blank gaze haunted by his own perpetration and the bunkerized psychosis of his country, of which he is the perfect sacrifice and acceptable offering. The nervous systems of Bunker and his country are traumatically overloaded: ‘Zum Trauma wird jeder Eindruck, dessen Erledigung [...] dem Nervensystem Schwierigkeiten bereitet.’<sup>353</sup>

The final act breaks the stasis of imprisonment with an unavoidable *deus ex machina* in the student revolts of 1992, which toppled the Communist regime along with Enver Hoxha’s colossal statue. Archive footage is here cleverly intercut with the fictional revolt inside the mines, in which Bunker, relegated to the status of walk-on in his own story, plays no discernable role. Released into newly enfranchised civilian society, he tries fruitlessly to trace Ana in Poland, witnesses the afterlife of one of his bunkers as Elvis’s burial chapel and wanders away through a bunkerized fairground like a ghost, appalled more by western hedonism than by the gulag, finally to hear the

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<sup>351</sup> Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, p. 37.

<sup>352</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 4.

<sup>353</sup> See chapter epigraph.

cock crow one misty dawn beside a lake, where he follows a wraith-like Ana into the waters, his trilby floating ownerless into the rushes.

The ending is clearly fictional, for Nuro survived his ordeal to work with Çashku on transferring his story to the screen. In other respects, however, *Kolonel Bunker* scarcely departs from historical fact, a testimony firstly to how trauma effects a deliberate breach in sensory perception in favour of an unconsciously willed amnesia that proves subsequently reversible under more clement conditions; secondly (developing on Caruth), to the fact that a trauma victim can recount his own trauma without actually experiencing it: ‘trauma consists not only in having confronted death but in *having survived, precisely, without knowing it*’.<sup>354</sup>

Colonel Nuro had been one of the ‘submerged’ of the Albanian gulag, but he ‘recovered’ sufficiently to bear witness to his own trauma in filmic form. It is a rare exception of the sort that Agamben covers in his final observations in *Remnants of Auschwitz*,<sup>355</sup> where he quotes extensively from the ten testimonies of *Ich war ein Muselmann*,<sup>356</sup> a grammatical construction that his earlier insistence on ‘unsayability’ should logically exclude. Nuro’s recuperation, in the Freudian sense of a healing recovery, is replaced, in the film, by his traumatized suicide, and one might legitimately wonder where the deeper truth lies.

Albania, like Nuro, continues in the knowledge of what happened without having actually digested it. The deserted National Museum has a well-documented, gruesome section entitled *Gjenocidi dhe Terrori 1948-1985*, listing the names of the 5,157 killed by the Communist regime, whose faces confront one from their show trials full of hope, guile, pleading or dignified resignation; the 17,900 inmates of the 48 concentration camps, where officially photographed public executions ‘encourage the others’ paraded to witness state barbarism; or the 30,383 deportees, now in the diaspora, who left a gap in Albania’s intelligentsia unfilled to this day. But nothing in the conscious behaviour or public discourse of the nation reveals a people aware of having been subjected to genocide; the school parties pass through the museum without therapeutic counselling, and voices in the street are heard to regret the good old times. ‘It’d never’ve happened in Enver’s day’, grumbles an old woman in

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<sup>354</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 64.

<sup>355</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 165.

<sup>356</sup> Zdzislaw Ryn and Stanislaw Klodzinski, ‘An der Grenze zwischen Leben und Tod. Eine Studie über die Erscheinung des “Muselmanns” im Konzentrationslager’, *Auschwitz-Hefte*, Vol. 1 (Weinheim and Basel: Beltz, 1987), pp. 89-154, here 121-124.

Çashku's *Magic Eye*, revealing a pervasive subservience, a willingness to herd, a reluctance to individuate which make Albania's emergence into the twenty-first century a passage into uncertainty.

Like the three-legged dogs hopping through the havoc of Tirana's traffic over untarred roads and muddy ditches, Albanians quite literally 'do not know what has hit them' (the vernacular English reveals an intuition of trauma theory in the collective unconscious that Freud might have classed with word play in dreams). They have walked away from the scene of an accident apparently intact, amnesiac for a season but with the knowledge of their escape burned upon the inner eye, unassimilated, undigested, incubating for a period before it forces its way into their consciousness with either healing or yet more destructive effect. Any question of mourning, forgiveness or atonement does not arise, for the trauma goes too deep. Not unlike the dazed survivors emerging from Nazi hegemony amidst the rubble, Albania gives the somnambular impression of a country where initiative has been bred out by decades of discouragement; where anticipation often proved fatal and the smallest instruction must now be spelled out to have any effect; where spying and informing on one's neighbour are still normal habits of mind and authority is simultaneously revered and abused with no perceptible threshold; where the concept of a neutral negotiating space does not exist and the mildest criticism leads either to abject self-flagellation or to pre-emptive aggression, to violence and vendetta. In this context 'forgiveness' (of oneself or others) is not applicable, as amply unearthed by the controversy surrounding Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower*,<sup>357</sup> whose artificial moral dilemma leads to insoluble aporia: the SS never asked for forgiveness, nor is anyone entitled to grant it. The trauma of perpetration is its own punishment and Bunker is flayed by his filmic purgatory. Poetic justice renders *Kolonel Bunker* entirely satisfying, where Holocaust films so easily run into the sands of evasion couched as 'unrepresentability' or 'factuality'.

Unlike Hitler's murderous deportations or Stalin's mass collectivisation, the Hoxha genocide touched limited numbers directly but left the majority scarred by complicity and connivance, mentally broken by the reign of terror inflicted by a paranoid dictator whose traumatic legacy is still being acted out. Çashku's Marubi

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<sup>357</sup> Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, rev. ed., ed. Harry James Cargas and Bonny V. Fetterman (New York: Schocken, 1997). See also Langer, 'Wiesenthal's *Sunflower* Dilemma, A Response', *Preempting the Holocaust*, pp. 166-186.

Film Academy has recently been exposed to a grim war of attrition by government and business interests, enclosed behind barbed wire and cut off from the road, despite the protests of the European Union. The dramatic post-1992 *glasnost* permitted a state-sponsored *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that even carried a whiff of anti-totalitarian propaganda, as in post-war Germany. Çashku had access to all the tanks he needed, and *Kolonel Bunker* is strikingly authentic. But that brief moment of retrieval has now been superseded by further repression, both political and psychological. The slowness of *Kolonel Bunker* at the box office, the reluctance of the Albanian public towards this kind of confessional cinema and their continuing allegiance to the simple films of the dictatorship suggest the lassitude of a latent trauma that must wait some years to be catalysed and worked through, be it through film and other creatively therapeutic forms of expression or through further calamity inflicting further trauma.

### **Transference and Transmission**

What makes *Kolonel Bunker* stand out from the films of perpetration discussed above is its transcendent irony in transferring the perpetrator to the object of his perpetration, thus conveying the self-inflicted folly of perpetrator trauma, which by no means absolves its subject from moral scrutiny. Critical detachment is actively encouraged by the film's bleak humour (not be confused with the sentimental comedy of *Jakob der Lügner*), a detachment the Balkan tradition has never felt to be incompatible with a high degree of viewer identification, unlike the literal-minded binaries established by the Brechtian school. The uncompromising Balkan acceptance of human frailty, outrageous fate and hidden meaning hovers over the film, imparting a sense of history well parsed and decently mourned.

This kind of humility is hard to acquire, and few German filmmakers adequately grasp, let alone convey, that a rich and fascinating culture living side by side with the (post-)Christian tradition was wiped out by an inferior tribe consisting of the most brutal and least cultivated elements of German society, who had managed to seize power, it is true, but who in themselves, as sentient or creative beings, are not deserving of any great cultural enquiry, certainly not as deep an enquiry as the vanished German Jewry they destroyed. Again and again, historical transmission is transferred onto the grisly facts of the genocide instead of enquiring into the human and cultural haemorrhage it occasioned. This is largely because Germany appears

incapable of divesting itself of the ‘Leitkultur’ label and accepting that the Holocaust was amongst many other things a terrible act of self-mutilation by brutish and stupid people incapable of appreciating their neighbours, animated perhaps by self-hating resentment at their own inferiority, as Steiner speculates.<sup>358</sup> In our deepest unconscious, the Nazis, however reprehensible (and not the Jews) are nonetheless the true inheritors of the European tradition and their place in history is increasingly being normalized, as the films discussed above (and below), despite their best intentions, most amply demonstrate.

The possibility that the cadet, Jewish branch of the European adventure might have been the truer representative of our continent is not a perspective that is entertained in films made in Germany; nor is the likelihood that the wholly untraumatized children of the Medem Sanatorium were the flower of Europe and such institutions amongst its finest achievements. Their film is now even less known than its traumatic pendant, *Undzere Kinder*, shot in Yiddish just after the war, which tells of the very few such children who survived the camps, only to find themselves in another orphanage.<sup>359</sup>

Hitler’s genocide leaves Europe a poorer place, a result that has been unthinkingly accepted as a fact of history. Some of the deepest traumas of the Holocaust remain yet to be excavated, and they lie in the absences that haunt the cities of Europe to this day, sensed but seldom attributed by residents or travellers.<sup>360</sup> There is a gaping wound in the European psyche that no filmmaker has managed to locate, in part because we no longer know where to find it. Very few survivors remain who can vividly communicate to the third and fourth generations what it was like to live before the Nazi era, when Jewish culture thrived; and few actors or actresses can make the imaginative and cultural leap to return there.

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<sup>358</sup> Steiner, *Errata*, pp. 60-61. ‘Three times, Judaism has brought Western civilization face to face with the blackmail of the ideal. [...] Out of such pressure, I believe, is loathing bred.’

<sup>359</sup> See Langer, ‘*Undzere Kinder*, A Yiddish Film from Poland’, *Preempting the Holocaust*, pp. 157-165.

<sup>360</sup> A hole lies inexplicably in central Wiesbaden and only a tablet explains that here once stood the Great Synagogue destroyed on Kristallnacht. Most German films convey as little of vanished Jewry as does this tablet of the former Synagogue.



## 5. ACTING OUT

### The Trauma Of The Survivor (1)

#### Performative Repetition and the Return of the Repressed

Frühes Trauma – Abwehr – Latenz – Ausbruch der neurologischen Erkrankung – teilweise Wiederkehr des Verdrängten: so lautet die Formel, die wir für die Entwicklung einer Neurose aufgestellt haben.<sup>361</sup>

I have suggested a linkage in recent theory of acting-out not only with possession by the repressed past, repetition compulsions, and unworked-through transference but also with certain modes of performativity, inconsolable melancholy, and the sublime.<sup>362</sup>

Indeed, the carnivalesque itself would have a crucial part to play in a viable process of working through problems, and it is one aspect of Jewish culture that warrants recovery and reaffirmation. During the Shoah, Nazis made sadistic use of carnivalesque processes stripped of their fruitful ambivalence and serving only to degrade victims.<sup>363</sup>

With the schematic development arc in the first epigraph above, Freud elaborates a dramaturgy of traumatic neurosis which uncannily resembles the unfolding trajectory of a good screen story with all its elements of disguise, suspense, repetition and revelation, thus underlining the proximity of psychoanalysis to dramatic art and its uses for screen fiction. The crisis point reached here brings us to the first physical manifestation of the repressed trauma (or ‘Fremdkörper’), which can often bear a semblance of compulsive repetition (or ‘acting-out’) amounting to the ‘demonic’ or ‘unheimlich’. These are qualities that may equally characterize carnival, on whose healing powers LaCapra appears to waver in the hint of incompatibility between his two statements above. Is all performance, by definition, an ‘acting-out’ of repressed trauma, and, in some films, a mere repetition of the Nazis’ ‘sadistic carnival’? Or should carnival be understood as Situationist provocation, a subversive defiance of the recuperative ‘spectacle’?

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<sup>361</sup> Freud, ‘Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion’, *Gesammelte Werke*, XVI, p. 185.

<sup>362</sup> LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 209.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

‘To talk too much about the Holocaust is a way of being silent, and a bad way of being silent.’ With this eloquent paradox Lanzmann hints at the dangers of confusing the compulsive revisiting of trauma (‘acting-out’) with its therapeutic resolution (‘working-through’), of mistaking a psychic blockage for a healing release. Along with other creative artists, filmmakers have revisited the scenes (literal or metaphorical) of trauma with something akin to ‘possession by the repressed past’, and the Holocaust survivor has been used as a filmic standard bearer for sometimes unrelated traumatic experience.

## Surviving

The fact that the first Holocaust films were made by survivors does not necessarily guarantee their authenticity or their plausibility, as suggested above in the case of *Ostatni Etap*. The business of performing can entail artistic licence, interpretative hindsight, involuntary euphemism or populist trivialisation, to all of which the traumatized survivor is even more vulnerable than the uninvolved third party. However, one of the earliest survivor films, *Lang ist der Weg* (Herbert B. Fredersdorf, Marek Goldstein, 1948), is also one of the most compelling, not only as a historical document but as an acting-out of trauma not yet fully apparent to its subject.

It is sometimes assumed that ‘survival’ is a tangible event, such as the liberation of a concentration camp or the end of the war. But this bears no resemblance to the experience of many survivors, for whom ‘liberation’ did not herald either freedom or a marked change in their status beyond the removal of the threat of imminent death. Homeless or unable to travel, large numbers remained in the same camps (now Displaced Persons Camps) for several years more (one thinks of Primo Levi at the renamed Monowicz), whilst others experienced their return to ‘civil society’ as anything but civil. It is a common mistake to assume that the liberating Allies were free of the anti-Semitism of their Nazi enemies, were fighting to rescue suffering Jewry, and swept away the Nazi system on arrival. On the contrary, authoritative Jewish sources accuse the Allies of collaborating with the Nazis through their reluctance to divulge the scale of the Holocaust or to make its interruption a specific war aim.<sup>364</sup> Whatever the truth of these allegations, Germany (and Europe)

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<sup>364</sup> See *Au Nom du même père*, Rabbi Shlomo Goren.

took years to change its habits of mind. The experience of the ‘survivor’ was likely to entail traumatic repetition of the *status quo ante*, as Polish massacres of liberated Jews can testify.<sup>365</sup> Monowicz may have been the safest place to remain.

### *Lang ist der Weg*

Shot at the Munich Geiseltasteig (later ‘Bavaria’) studios under US censorship by an UFA-trained director with a long career in Nazi cinema, *Lang ist der Weg* is the story of a Jewish family from the Warsaw ghetto, as told by Holocaust survivor Israel Becker, who wrote the largely autobiographical script and played the leading role. This unholy coalition is typical of the chaotic de-Nazification of West Germany, where survivors and perpetrators cohabited as they had done in pre-war society and indeed in the camps, acting out their traumatic symbiosis with LaCapra’s shared ‘modes of performativity’.<sup>366</sup> Precisely due to this lack of political correctness, *Lang ist der Weg* contains a remarkable insight into the psyche of the traumatized survivor, an eloquent if abbreviated account of the death camps and a searching interrogation of unreconstructed post-war Europe, eerily mediated through the gaze of a Nazi director of flair and experience (as if Hitler were commenting posthumously on his own legacy) with irrepressible hints of the Nazi ‘carnavalesque’.

In a deft collage of documentary footage and live action, we are introduced to elegant Warsaw where couples stroll in the autumn sunlight, only to be dispersed by Stukas dive-bombing the city now in flames, observed from a basement window by the fearful protagonist David. At home, his parents perform the Sabbath rites, his father’s voice breaking as he breaks the bread, an introduction of the religious motif that will pass through several variations. Loading up the family cart, they give their keys to the neighbour who will look after their apartment. Backlit in smokey silhouette, David takes a last, lonely look round his home and stubs out his cigarette on the chipped wall, an alienated urban hero accorded a post-war cinematographic status that no Jew had ever enjoyed in pre-war Germany, recuperated by the narrative craft of his director, whose previous film *Der Täter ist Unter Uns* (Fredersdorf, 1944) was a *Krimi* typical of the Nazi ‘Täter’ who commissioned it.

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<sup>365</sup> Kielce, July 4<sup>th</sup> 1946.

<sup>366</sup> LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 209.

The ghetto gates close behind the family in a sequence so skilfully blended it is impossible to distinguish documentary from reconstruction, separated as they were by a mere five years. The five hundred thousand prisoners of the ghetto are reduced by tens of thousands per second in an unthinking recuperation of Nazi graphics flashing over mass charnel piles, proving that remorse can rarely free itself of a certain boastfulness. The deportation train is cramped and tearful, a woman gives birth. The lens makes uncanny use of cracks in the wooden slats, trains flash past inches away from and over the low-angle camera in thundering, whistling repetition. The father cries: 'Where is God in all this?' Loss of faith becomes the lament of both victim and survivor. Betrayed, then assisted, by Polish peasants, David lands up with partisans amongst other Jewish escapees, his rites of initiation being to overcome moral scruples by killing a German soldier and winning his own weapon. Meanwhile his parents arrive on the ramp at Auschwitz. In one of the most terrible renderings of the selection procedure the camera is set squarely behind the officiating soldier. Duplicating the perpetrator's gaze it watches impassively, unmoving, merciless, as the new arrivals shuffle forward in hope, to be split by a nod of the head, the mother to the right, the father to the left, where he lifts his eyes and sees the smoke billowing from the chimneys, wafting across his face. No attempt is made to show the chambers, no literal reproduction is offered. Will the metaphor be clear, one wonders, centuries hence?

In the concentration camp barracks the women miss their families, they dream of release; the men fantasize about bread, they dissolve in screaming fits. This is one of the few film sequences that renders the total psychic rupture inflicted by the camps, rather than imposing a coherent narrative on traumatic breakdown. Disruptive documentary technique converges here with psychoanalysis. Tellingly, the persecutors are not present as characters, an omission of bad conscience on the part of the director, they are reified as barbed wire, electrical installations and warning signs. Drastic ellipsis takes us via front lines advancing across a map to liberation newsreel footage (American, Russian and French), into which David's mother Hanne (Berta Litwina), having survived the death march to Dachau, is cleverly intercut in matching black and white stock. The war is over but *Lang ist der Weg*, refreshingly, is only half way through its story: an act of resistance in itself, where so many narratives bookend the victims' destinies with the genocidal agenda of their persecutors. The former combatant David returns to devastated Warsaw, where his neighbour is throwing a

wild party in his erstwhile apartment. Homeless and stateless, David is picked up by the displaced German Jewish Dora (Bettina Moissi), who succumbs to nightmares as soon as she falls asleep on his shoulder amidst the ruins, while David's burning eyes search the devastated cityscape, the trauma of survival perfectly reflected in the outer ravages of war. Making common cause they search for Hanne amongst half a million refugees on the move, including Germans evicted from the Ostländer, who resent sharing their train compartment with 'lazy Jews', a salutary corrective to Andreas Hillgruber's and Ernst Nolte's patriotic advocacy of the suffering Eastern Germans, who were generally as complicit in genocide as any of their compatriots.<sup>367</sup>

Arriving at the overcrowded processing camp Landsberg (where *Lang ist der Weg* was shot), David leaves Dora in safety with fellow Jewish survivors, while he goes looking for his mother, who is looking for him. A casualty of multiple near misses, she finally succumbs to her concentration camp trauma, unable to distinguish her German helpers from her previous persecutors, their language the trigger that plunges her back to the source of her trauma. Confined to a mental hospital, she has recurring, hysterical nightmares of the Auschwitz selection: 'Rechts, links, rechts, links!', 'smoke, smoke!', her trauma appearing clearly as Freud's 'Fremdkörper', 'welcher noch lange Zeit nach seinem Eindringen als gegenwärtig wirkendes Agens gelten muss.'<sup>368</sup> There being no psychiatric help at hand, Hanne's trauma, though brought back to its *status nascendi*, goes undiagnosed and is given no verbal utterance. This belated reliving and compulsive acting-out, co-existing with 'lucid' spells, makes *Lang ist der Weg* one of the earliest film to explore mental health problems in survivors. David returns to marry Dora but finds nowhere to consummate their love behind the Nazi barbed wire, its new administrators not genocidal, perhaps, but not tender either. Jews are still a 'problem' in this liberated Europe; they need to be 'put to work' but have no obvious status. Refused entry by one country after another, David and Dora join the clamour of the Jewish Congress for the closure of the camps, as a vestige of Hitler's Europe, and the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, an early filmic evocation of Israel's birth from the ashes of the Holocaust. Shared trauma unites disparate Jewry from across Europe, forging a new solidarity

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<sup>367</sup> See Friedlander, 'A Conflict of Memories?', *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, pp. 32-34.

<sup>368</sup> See Introduction epigraph.

amongst the survivors, reflected here in the language mix of Yiddish, Polish and German depending on the context and relationship.

Alerted to his mother's advertisement in a Jewish magazine, David and Dora find her in a sanatorium. Unable to distinguish reality from wish fulfilment, Hanne takes him to be an apparition, then tears stream down her face in recognition, a reunion which (in contrast to later kitsch) is neither sentimental nor sublime but merely the overwhelming 'affect' that Freud needed to cure his trauma sufferers.<sup>369</sup> The final scene finds the family in a meadow where David ploughs while Dora stretches on the grass and Hanne continues her 'working-through' by caring for their baby, a self-consciously iconic holy family waiting for their transfer to the Promised Land of Eretz Israel. Surviving Jews were not required in Europe, even after Hitler's genocide. Whether trauma on such a vast scale can be resolved by the further trauma of forced emigration to a new continent, in which the European Jewish *aliya* will have no cultural, economic or religious toehold, is not explored in this context.<sup>370</sup> But the film's secularized iconography, combined with its psychoanalytic characterization, implies that, in this family at least, the Jewish faith as an active system linking God and man is irrecoverable. Divinity died at Auschwitz,<sup>371</sup> and the Sabbath prayers of the opening will not be repeated at the end.

*Lang ist der Weg* is impossible to view without registering the intrusive survival of Nazi aesthetics in the lingering traces of a 'negative carnivalesque'. These might seem to celebrate the survival of not just the narrator but the fascist culture that frames him. The film is redolent of an early post-war tendency to 'forgive', rashly and prematurely, and without adequate knowledge or understanding, a need equally important to perpetrator and victim amounting at times to collusion. The Holocaust features as just 'a terrible thing that happened', its enormity conveyed but not understood by stunned survivors incapable of digesting or enquiring.

### ***Der Passagier – Welcome to Germany***

While many careers, like Fredersdorf's, continued uninterrupted and apparently unblemished, other filmmakers were seized on as scapegoats for collective guilt and,

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<sup>369</sup> Freud, 'Über den psychischen Mechanismus', p. 85.

<sup>370</sup> See Olmert, *Prussa shel yam*.

<sup>371</sup> See Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 77.

in at least one case,<sup>372</sup> paraded through the courts. Yesterday's idols were cast down by their erstwhile fans as though propaganda had never seized their deepest imagination, a denial so deeply rooted that the Nazi imaginary survived, repressed and unprocessed, for many years after the war. Attempts to challenge this amnesia were rare, but amongst them we find the epic of psychoanalytic enquiry *Der Passagier – Welcome to Germany* (Thomas Brasch, 1988), which, having recruited no less a star than Tony Curtis (the most senior American actor ever to have appeared in a German film), was premièred in competition at the Cannes Film Festival without attracting either prizes or plaudits and sank into the public amnesia from which it had attempted to rescue its subject matter by means that LaCapra might recognize as 'experimentally transgressive' with elements of 'the carnivalesque'.<sup>373</sup>

The bravura opening sequence leaves us in no doubt that we are within the 'film-within-a-film' convention and in a concentration camp. Curtis (clearly playing a film director) stages a failed escape attempt that leaves a young man dangling over the barbed wire gate. In one of many traumatic interruptions to the narrative sequence we now flash back to Curtis (alias Cornfield) being interviewed to the television cameras on first arriving in Germany, having abandoned a lucrative career in Hollywood in favour of 'a film about Jews released from concentration camp to make films, then sent back to concentration camp', which will be shot in 'the language of the murderers'. With a throwaway 'Arbeit macht frei', Cornfield reveals a long-suppressed linguistic trauma that overtakes him as his signs of anxiety increase. Demanding that each auditioning actor tell a Jewish joke, he earns the rebuke that he's using Nazi methods in a Holocaust exploitation movie. The film then performs one of its many *volte-faces* in offering us a convincingly harrowing concentration camp selection scene. Jewish inmates have been assembled on the Appellplatz to be interviewed by star Nazi director Körner, who needs authentic Jewish extras for his next film and demands that the Rabbi (George Tabori) select the lucky inmates whose freedom will be secured in return for their artistic services.

Just as this theatrical parody of the ramp at Auschwitz lurches from the transgressive into the improper, it dawns on Mr Cornfield's crew that his improvised film is no fiction but a documentary reconstruction of events in which Cornfield may have played a role. The scrambling of the time frame is no longer attributable to the

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<sup>372</sup> The *Jud Süß* trial of Veit Harlan.

<sup>373</sup> LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 223.

ineptitude of director Thomas Brasch but to the traumatized state of his protagonist Cornfield, who may be using this film (and the massive evocative power of film in general) as a means of locating the source of his trauma by reconstructing long-forgotten atrocities on screen. Therewith, Brasch takes us to the heart of the repressed and equally traumatic role of the German cinematographic industry itself. For Körner's selection echoes precisely the procedure of Nazi collaborator Veit Harlan, who recruited Jewish extras for *Jud Süß* (Veit Harlan, 1940) from Nazi-occupied Prague and obliged them to travesty their own identity in anti-Semitic parody. This fantasy projection of the 'requisite Jew' was matched the same year in *Der ewige Jude* (Fritz Hippler, 1940), in which the Nazi-installed head of the Judenrat, Adam Czerniakov, was directed to 'act more Jewish' and caricatures himself to appease the 'Nazi carnivalesque'. By 1944, with the Allies closing, the 'requisite Jew' was of course the 'happy Jew' and the lies and euphemisms of *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt* (Kurt Gerron, 1944) are likewise never far from Brasch's cinematographic references. The German film industry covered itself in shame during the Third Reich and is now confronting the fact with films such as *Jud Süß - ein Film als Verbrechen* (Horst Königstein, 2001), which puts the film itself on trial, and the more recent *Jud Süß - Film Ohne Gewissen* (Oskar Roehler, 2010). The return of the repressed inside the survivor Cornfield is designed to expose this criminal dereliction through his traumatic self-reconstruction, as well as offering Situationist-style protests at the persistence of anti-Semitism and war guilt denial in post-war West Germany.

The tempestuous arrival of Cornfield's actress wife known only as 'Mrs.' (Alexandra Stewart), a classic screen Megaera, provides a glimpse into the high-pressure, high-style Hollywood existence that has sustained some surface cohesion in Cornfield's identity till now, a constructed identity that progressively disintegrates, revealing the shredded inner life of the trauma victim, as he yells with almost comic rage at his dog, his protégé, at anyone available, 'Everywhere I look, I see them!', the camera tilting down to isolate him amidst the shining surfaces of the hotel lobby. Till now the viewer might have imagined the enigmatic Cornfield was none other than the Nazi director Körner returned to do screen penance for his collaborative crimes. 'The *Doppelgänger* is an inveterate performer of identity,'<sup>374</sup> Webber warns us, and both Brasch and his protagonist oblige. 'So I'm working with a murderer?' exclaims one

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<sup>374</sup> Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 3.



crew member and Brasch appears to have encouraged this misreading, not just through the alliteration of Körner with Cornfield but by a possibly unconscious allusion to another player in the whole affair, namely the Czech playwright Paul Kornfeld, whose broadly philo-Semitic stage play *Jud Süß* (one of Harlan's sources) was performed in Berlin in 1930 and who was transported by the Nazis to Litzmannstadt (Łódź), where he died, most probably of famine, in 1942. It is worth recording that Harlan's ex-wife, the Jewish cabaret singer and silent movie actress Dora Gerson, was murdered at Auschwitz with her family.<sup>375</sup>

As often in dramaturgy, the viewer's mistake contains a clue to a derailed narrative. The Cornfield-Körner equation might have contained an interesting sidelight not just on filmmaking guilt but on Nazi émigrés in post-war Hollywood, but it is not the route that Brasch chooses. His psychologically afflicted Cornfield turns out to be an avatar of the young, non-German speaking extra rescued by the Rabbi's selection and later named as Janko Kornfeld (Gedeon Burkhard), a baffling discovery that points, as we shall see, to a trauma buried more deeply in the film than that of its protagonist, namely that of its maker, Brasch himself. From the perpetrator of the original screen atrocity (Körner), attention shifts to the fate of the amateur conscripts and particularly to Janko and his buddy Baruch (Birol Ünel), who realize that the Nazis' promise of freedom is illusory, as it proved to be for the extras of *Jud Süß* and the director of *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt*. Körner's film once wrapped; the lingering cast party with its erotic bohemian fraternization once over; the camera once relieved of its exquisitely accomplished tracking shot past their half-obscured flirtations, both beautiful and doomed, with make-up artist Sofie (Katharina Thalbach); Janko and Baruch will be returned to the camps and to their deaths. It is a fate they will share with Körner himself, who was fired and dispatched to Stalingrad (we finally learn) for failing to make his film sufficiently anti-Semitic, while Sofie's back will be broken, literally, by the film's SS overseers.

An air raid siren announces the dissolution of both film and studio and the two Jewish boys escape with the help of Sofie's professional skills at disguise. In the viewer's mind, the opening sequence with the mangled body spread-eagled on the camp gate irrepressibly returns, the memory of a long-forgotten wound rising in the mind of the traumatized Janko Kornfeld, now returned to Germany and the site of his

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<sup>375</sup> See *Theatrical Performance during the Holocaust*, ed. Rovit and Goldfarb, p. 49.

trauma to direct this crucial moment of his autobiography. How this monoglot youth from Budapest rose through the post-war years to inhabit the heights of Hollywood is never explained, but the viewer might surmise that a compulsive re-enactment of his trauma, a fertile but uncontrolled acting-out of his narrow escape from screen martyrdom, appears to have driven Kornfeld/Cornfield into precisely the milieu, the trade and the bond that inflicted his trauma in the first place. The final act progressively disintegrates as Cornfield's control of both crew, cast and narrative slips into wild improvisation expressive of the last throes of terminal denial, his first stab at a happy ending (the opening sequence euphemistically revised) revealed in Sofie's voice off as being a fake reconstruction, 'weil seine Augen zwei Lügner sind', leaving his team disgusted by this directorial abuse of the filmmaking ethos for personal therapy. Their falling-out is reminiscent of the ideological internecine strife of Situationist theatre collectives and suggests a direct confrontation of director Thomas Brasch with the dangers of his art and the aesthetic doubts surrounding his whole enterprise.<sup>376</sup>

Only via religious rites of recuperation can Cornfield retrieve the real facts of his survival and finally exorcise himself of what he did, namely desert his companion Baruch at the moment of escape, if more through bitter disagreement than any deliberate betrayal, revealing the corpse spread-eagled over the camp gate as that of the companion who saved his life at the opening selection. The final, accurate reconstruction is staged by ensemble intuition with almost hypnotic ritual power in the ruined studio, accompanied by a drum roll and wind howl amidst otherwise eerie stillness. The revelation that all were gassed except Janko fails to tell us, though, how he survived, a strange lapsus in a tale fixated on survival that possibly indicates the semi-divine status that the filmmaker-as-trauma-victim has by now attained. Liberated of his burden of guilt, Cornfield muses on his own recovery: '...arbeiten im Traum, für Bilder, für wen? Träumt Ihr mich, oder träume ich Euch?'

Attempting to gain some critical distance from this fascinating and elusive, absorbing and infuriating film, strewn with deliberate aporiae and unconscious lacunae, one might object that *Der Passagier* shifts ground too radically from the guilt of the perpetrators to the excusable failure of courage in one of their victims. But this shift from the objective to the personal, from the rational to the occulted, from

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<sup>376</sup> See LaCapra on aestheticization and religion, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 221.

resistance to paranoia is precisely what characterizes repressed trauma. In its skewed priorities the film captures the self-deception and constant self-torment of Agamben's 'guilty' survivor: '...the survivor's discomfort and testimony concern not merely what was done or suffered but what *could* have been done or suffered'.<sup>377</sup> Several facets of 'survivor syndrome' are captured here: the self-absorption, the compulsive acting-out, the pervasive, exaggerated sense of guilt, the self-disgust expressed in the baleful victim/perpetrator identification hinted at in the Cornfield/Körner equivocation, the inability to look history straight in the eye or to find a reliable new persona for the future, but most of all in the traumatized fragmentation of the narrative itself, which conveys the denial and repression of a wounded psyche in search of healing but frantically refusing the medicine it has itself prescribed, his melancholia (as LaCapra diagnosed it) both a 'precondition' and a 'block' to mourning and working-through.<sup>378</sup>

*Der Passagier* might also be criticized for its self-referential introspection, the narcissism inherent in the 'Films about Filming' genre, but in this it reflects the narcissistic 'acting-out' of the survivor's unhealed trauma, which Brasch appears to have shared. Born in northern England of intellectual German-Jewish émigré parents in the closing months of the Second World War, he was two years old when his Communist, trades unionist father returned to the newly-formed German Democratic Republic, where he rapidly established a political career as a member of the Central Committee of the SED. Young Brasch was put through an exemplary proletariat upbringing, first in military cadet school then in metallurgy and media studies at Leipzig University, where his working class morals declined and he was expelled for making slanderous comments on leading political figures. Perhaps his father's influence helped, for four years later he can be traced to the film school in Babelsberg where in 1968 he was arrested for distributing leaflets against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. After early release from prison, he worked for his rehabilitation in the metal industry, from which he was rescued by Brecht's widow Helene Weigel and put to work on Brecht's literary archive, from which Brasch most certainly did not draw his psychoanalytical dramaturgy. In 1976 he abandoned the GDR for the West, where the Stasi pursued him till the end. In common with other East German asylum seekers such as Egon Monk, and in keeping with the Situationist-inspired culture of 'contestation', Brasch scorned consumer culture and his works reflect more on the

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<sup>377</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 77, original emphasis.

<sup>378</sup> LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 213.

decadence of the West than on the failings of the East. In a classic Situationist provocation, he famously refused to accept the Bayerischer Filmpreis for his 'gangsters in the rubble' film *Engel aus Eisen* (Brasch, 1981) from the hands of the arch-conservative Franz-Josef Strauß and chose instead, amidst boos and whistles, to thank the film schools of the GDR that had trained him.

In relation to this double dissidence it is worth remembering that Brasch's contemporary Rainer Werner Fassbinder made at least two attempts to tackle the subject of anti-Semitism, in a proposed film of Gerhard Zwerenz's *Die Erde ist unbewohnbar wie der Mond* and in *Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod*, a television series based on Gustav Freytag's anti-Semitic novel *Soll und Haben*, which he felt provided a depiction of German 19<sup>th</sup> century society that would explain the origins of anti-Semitism. Both came to grief on Fassbinder's characteristically abrasive insistence on reproducing in explicit dialogue the anti-Semitism of his characters. This provoked a storm of protest amidst accusations of 'anti-Semitic leftist Fascism' and led to the indefinite postponement of both projects due to official resistance.<sup>379</sup> While rejecting 'philo-Semitic' characterizations of Jewish characters as being nothing more than anti-Semitism in reverse,<sup>380</sup> Fassbinder's character labelling of the 'Rich Jew' complete with all known capitalist appurtenances (a stereotype that provoked theatre riots) shows how rudimentary, indeed traumatized, was Germany's critical response to its own prejudices. It would take another generation before difference could be framed with anything like confidence.

A perversely stubborn dissident against life as much as any political system, Brasch was born an émigré and he died an émigré. The title *Der Passagier* reflects not just the displacement of his eponymous Holocaust survivor but his own sense of the transience and the transits of life, and Cornfield's *Lebensangst* is less the result of Holocaust trauma than that of the latter-day filmmaker who made him. 'Ich bin kein Tourist', Brasch dismissively comments in a 1988 television interview on the launch of *Der Passagier*, his leather jacket and T-shirt underlining his lack of co-operation with suited talk show host Manfred Naegele.<sup>381</sup> Brooding, repressed, blocked and blocking, Brasch leaves the viewer in no doubt throughout this edgy, embarrassing

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<sup>379</sup> See Kaes, 'History as Trauma', *Hitler to Heimat*, pp. 90-97.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid. p. 96, citing Fassbinder in interview with Benjamin Henrich, *Die Zeit*, 16th April 1976.

<sup>381</sup> *Im Gespräch*, July 1988, a magazine programme of Süddeutscher Rundfunk. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S59JJRX35jI>

encounter that he is indeed Janko Kornfeld, through whom he is acting out his own political repression, self-imposed exile and traumatized return.

Should we be bothered by this recuperation of the Holocaust as ‘Heilmittel’ by a second generation suffering its own unresolved trauma? Brasch escaped the Holocaust only through his parents’ timely escape from Germany, and though never exposed to danger he shows signs of ‘second generation trauma’. But *Der Passagier* takes its cue rather from the prevailing anger of the post-war generation at its own powerlessness and political disgust at the *pax americana* that Cornfield persuasively represents despite and *because of* his traumatic inheritance, a passenger weighed down with useless luggage that constricts and perverts his view of the present, and an international passenger, at that, who has played a central role in the creation of the stifling world order he is now attempting to smash. Sympathy for the Holocaust survivor is not presupposed in this anti-imperialist construction, and the viewer is never courted with the film tricks that Cornfield will surely have learnt through his Hollywood trajectory. His redeeming feature is his remorse for having abandoned his friend, just as Brasch abandoned his father. Our guilt is the best thing we have, our trauma makes us what we are. Once healed, what is left? A wanderer. A passenger.

### ***Die Fälscher***

Performance was a known survival strategy of concentration camp prisoners, tragically embodied by the actual victims who travestied ‘themselves’ in *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt* and subsequently represented in screen fiction by the musicians seen in *Pasażerka* (and *Schindler’s List* etc), by Hanna’s readers in *Der Vorleser*, the conscripted extras of *Der Passagier-Welcome to Germany*, and, in a variation on a theme, the criminal counterfeiter of *Die Fälscher* (Stefan Ruzowitzky, 2007). In each case, the ability to traduce one’s own art, to lie, forge, fake or make believe has held out a faint hope of release, generally dashed but in this film fulfilled, as the opening sequence of *Die Fälscher* reassures us by showing the glamorous protagonist gambling in a post-war Monte Carlo casino.

Luring us by flashback into the Berlin low life of the pre-war years, *Die Fälscher* dives into a teeming basement bar reminiscent of *Cabaret* with its jaded eroticism, where we are re-introduced to this same protagonist Salomon ‘Sally’ Sorowitsch (Karl Markovics) as a talented artist extorting favours (both financial and

sexual) for his faked exit visas from Nazi Germany. In the *film noir* tradition, the film downplays his virtues in favour of his seedy, choleric but brooding degeneracy, a perfect representative of 'entartete Künstler'. Eschewing lavish Berlin exteriors, the film offers us a narcissistic, delusory and self-deluding world already in dissolution. Nothing suggests the concentration camp world into which the 'hero' is snatched from his bohemian garret by the eruption of a corrupt state into private (if criminal) lives in the shape of Friedrich Herzog (Devid Striesow) who exults at having caught not a Jew but the King of Counterfeiters.

The destination is the same: KZ-Mauthausen. As Sorowitsch trudges with other new arrivals across barren fields through a cold, static wide shot (an inventive variant on the arrival of *Ein Tag*), an exhausted inmate falls to his knees and is bludgeoned to death, captured in tracking close shot from Sally's incredulous point of view, an immediate identification recruitment. But Sally is needed. His talents are required for what will become (so the film's publicity informs us) the largest counterfeiting operation in history, a plot to undermine the UK and US economies by forging sterling and dollar banknotes. Sally's team awaits him in a privileged, protected wing of the concentration camp with a fully equipped workshop, ample food and clean sheets. To survive, they must succeed; if they succeed, the Allies may lose the war. It is a neatly constructed dilemma, which of course has nothing to do with the Nazis' 'Final Solution'. But while this 'true story' might seem a highly partial fragment of the whole, one should not dismiss the metaphor as a vehicle for Holocaust scrutiny. While the workshop seems a 'heile Welt', hell reigns just beyond their protected compound, from where an omnipresent sound picture barks out orders, screams of terror, pistol shots and machine gun fire, as executions follow their daily course off-screen. If the visuals now convey something like normality, the audio track reminds us we are living in the antechamber of hell. *Die Fälscher* thus pursues a more effective narrative strategy than attempting to narrate the 'whole picture', to which nothing does justice, as we have seen above. The fact that we are living this ordeal with potential survivors makes it not bearable but at least approachable, as if Perseus were shielding us with his mirror while the Gorgon is heard in all her horror just steps away.

This being a criminal world, all values and the moral order itself are inverted, as Levi fully explained. Or, as Langer echoes, 'The camp experience sabotaged the

ethical vision that he cherished as a human being.<sup>382</sup> Forgery becomes the litmus test for authenticity, a religious rite within the ‘carnavalesque’ atmosphere designed to separate the faithful from the traitors, in the process, one might argue, recuperating the Shoah for all its victims, both cowards and heroes. In Levi’s own words, ‘Saintliness seemed dangerous to me and out of place.’<sup>383</sup> In this shadowy ghetto, the antagonist’s role is naturally transferred onto the ‘good guy’, the idealistic Communist printer Adolf Burger (August Diehl), who first secretly then openly sabotages their efforts, knowing that their scam could compromise the outcome of the war. Cleverly recuperated for the wrong side, the viewer reacts with anger and disbelief at his disloyalty, along with the rest of the team. We have been made to share their disgrace, their trauma. Identifying with the victims, we also side with the persecutors and partners-in-crime on whom they utterly depend, an enlightening invocation of the victim/perpetrator symbiosis portrayed by both Levi and Rousset.

‘This isn’t easy for me either’, is the larmoyant plea from the SS officer in command, under pressure from his superiors, a *Mitläufer* keen to save his skin (and the forged cash) by cutting a deal with the forger-artist, whom he summons to his villa to paint a portrait of his sweetly unprejudiced, well-behaved bourgeois family, much as in Agamben’s account of Aldo Carpi, who survived Gusen by accepting painting commissions for the SS.<sup>384</sup> When the lucky few survivors are finally rescued by armed inmates of the abandoned camp, we suddenly see ‘our team’ through the eyes of the real victims and our screen *Doppelgänger* are collaborators, SS stooges, saved from instant lynching only by displaying their tattoos, one of many accomplished twists in the film’s generally classic dramaturgy.

Naturally *Die Fälscher*, complete with its Oscars, can be dismissed as a genre film, a B-movie tailor-made to Hollywood principles along the lines of a caper movie. Is this a bad thing? It should be noted in passing that there is no such genre as ‘Holocaust Film’. ‘Holocaust’ denotes a subject matter, not a genre. Genre is based on a tacit understanding between filmmaker and audience concerning the dramatic conventions within which the subject matter will be handled, in order for identification and interpretation to take place. Some of the problems analysed in earlier films stem precisely from the absence of any generic contract with the

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<sup>382</sup> Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, p. 24.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid. p. 25, citing Primo Levi, ‘A Disciple’, *Moments of Reprieve*, trans. Ruth Feldman (New York: Summit, 1986), p. 52.

<sup>384</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 50.

audience in films that rely instead on the assumption that it is sufficient to ‘narrate the Holocaust’. This is the height of folly, for any head-on approach (without benefit of ‘Perseus’s mirror’) will reveal nothing while attempting to reveal all. The full horror of the Holocaust cannot be conveyed by any direct visual representation because the Gorgon will always be more terrible than we can convey, and the ultimate witness, as Agamben said, is the ‘submerged’ incapable (but not always) of testifying.<sup>385</sup> The truth may, however, be summoned paradoxically by a more partial approach that conveys the horror of the unseen but close-at-hand, attempting a full restitution of presence by demarcating a limited objective and implying its metonymic relationship to the whole. If *Die Fälscher* comes at its subject at a tangent, from the wings of the Holocaust, using genre as a ‘Peseus’s Mirror’, it nonetheless captures much of the performative essence, the Nazi carnivalesque and the utterly horrific degradation of that event. Suspense becomes transiently bearable instead of being utterly intolerable, allowing the viewer to place him- or herself more personally within the experiential ordeal. To cite Langer, ‘The only alternative is to find ways of making the inconceivable conceivable until it invades our consciousness without meeting protest or dismay.’<sup>386</sup> Even Agamben concedes that ‘unsayability’ risks ‘transforming Auschwitz into a reality absolutely separated from language’, thus denying the testimony of the ‘submerged’ and unconsciously repeating ‘the Nazi gesture’,<sup>387</sup> thereby handing victory to the SS boast ‘we will be the ones to dictate the history of the Lagers’.<sup>388</sup>

We should not forget the countless acts of creative heroism by Jewish actors and musicians recounted in *Theatrical Performance during the Holocaust*, who performed in the camps in hourly anticipation of ‘selection’, not just under Nazi orders in ‘show concerts’ such as those laid on for the Red Cross at Theresienstadt and filmed in *Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt*, but after dark in the barracks in shared subversive improvisation. Examples would be Samy Feder’s at Bergen-Belsen (‘Sometimes we paid for it with casualties but we never gave up’),<sup>389</sup> or Bruno Heilig’s public cabaret at Dachau,<sup>390</sup> often using a coded language of resistance or

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<sup>385</sup> Ibid. p. 53, p. 157.

<sup>386</sup> Langer, *Preempting the Holocaust*, p. 65.

<sup>387</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 157.

<sup>388</sup> Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>389</sup> Alvin Goldfarb, ‘Theatrical Activities in the Nazi Concentration Camps’, *Theatrical Performance during the Holocaust*, p. 119.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., p. 121.



open satire. Though the travesty of talent was amongst the most grotesque recuperations of the death camps, we should not let the Nazis define our terms of reference. Some performances may have been unwillingly or unwittingly ‘collaborative’, but the proto-Situationist ‘performative resistance’ of the camps was an underground rebellion that in no way duplicates the ‘constructive lie’ of *Jakob der Lügner*, a film which did a terrible disservice to the spirit of Jewish resistance by implicitly ridiculing those whose creative powers offered solidarity and moral support where they could not provide weapons. It is surely wrong to dismiss these acts of cultural resistance as ‘ultimately futile’, for any expression of the human spirit under such circumstances is its own vindication. As Goldfarb argues, ‘That theatre survived in the ghettos and concentration camps during the Nazis’ war against the Jews does not diminish the horror; ...[it] underscores even more sharply the abandonment of Europe’s Jewish population.’<sup>391</sup>

*Die Fälscher* is a ‘true story’, we are told, and this raises questions of witness and testimony, especially since the principal source is none other than Adolf Burger, the unflinching Communist cadre. Without its clever transferences and inversions, this might have ended up an earnest partisan epic not far from *Nackt unter Wölfen*. But the granite good looks of August Diehl are cleverly sidelined by the moral dubiousness of the grubby but constant Sally, who is redeemed despite himself without ever quite losing his cynicism, a narrative gamble that allows us intimate access into the psyche of the would-be survivor, an unwitting trauma victim in the making. What did it cost to survive? How many compromises, how many small betrayals did it take?

The film’s epilogue reveals the toll. Sorowitsch compulsively gambles away the forged fortune rescued from Sachsenhausen in a hapless acting-out of his trauma, whose totality he is incapable of grasping let alone healing. Physical survival was no guarantee of mental health in the ‘after-life’ that had seemed the holy grail to all prisoners. Levi also ‘survived’, it seemed. But his suicide tells a different story.

Though the German ‘Nachwuchs’ appears, with *Die Fälscher*, to have caught a generic balance their forebears never found, a concomitant reproach might be that, with the loss of anger and incredulity, the cinema loses also an immediate relevance of the traumatic past to our apparently protected future. Generically encapsulated in the perfect tense, the Holocaust may be contemplated in safety without fear of

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

repetition, a complacency that was surely not Perseus's when he lifted his shield-mirror to view the Gorgon. The Holocaust's recuperation as spectacle for our consumption rather than as an object lesson in preventable catastrophe represents the Situationist's worse case scenario and a triumph of the trivial loquacity abhorred by Lanzmann.

### **Carnival and carnage**

The retro-impulse characterising contemporary German works is not shared by films from the Balkans, which retain a grim sense of the omnipresent dangers of dissolution all too vindicated by that region's recent history. Permanent suspense in the face of fragile peace and hostile powers is conjured by the performative elements enshrined in the Serbian tradition in particular. And it lurks behind the triumphalism of partisan film, whose emotional complexities and augural warnings are often overlooked amidst the derision of post-Yugoslav hindsight.

One of the undisputed masterpieces of the genre, *Tri* (Aleksandar Petrović, 1965), shows us the frailty of any human order in its carefully balanced three-act triptych of crumbling, Nazi-invaded Yugoslavia viewed across three time scales. A village poised between imminent occupation and mass exodus; a savage manhunt amidst a vast and indifferent wilderness; the partial and flawed restoration of human community in a partisan encampment, where the traumatized survivor of exodus and manhunt (now in command) fails to prevent further injustice on new victims. Combining intensely intimate character evocation through its alternation of long-lens close-up panning through dense crowds (a cinematographic *tour de force*), with vast landscapes in which the hunted prey dwindles to a dot on the screen, *Tri* shares something of the grandeur of *King Lear* in its pessimistic evaluation of human behaviour and governance. Its sensitive, admirable hero knows his own fallibility and dawning corruption even as he gives in to it, presaging untold repetition and future reprisals in a self-perpetuating cycle.

Far from precluding ludic elements, this pessimism demands them. Thus *Tri*'s first act assembles its fleeing populace at the train station in almost festive mode, accompanied by a gypsy band, a performing bear, a doomsday preacher (social dissolution being ideal terrain for religious recuperation) and a professional photographer, whom his fellow citizens turn on with the peasant's suspicion of the

camera, occasioning his prompt execution as a spy. This startling interspersing of the 'carnavalesque' with flagrant injustice (committed by Yugoslavs) is one of only two on-screen deaths in the film's exploration of war's dehumanizing spiral. As Iordanova notes, 'Balkan cinema has exploited very little of the spectacular visual quality of violence'.<sup>392</sup> The second example is the burning of the protagonist's comrade by SS troops inside a shepherd's croft at the climax of the second act, which spares us the victim's agony and ends instead with the traumatized howl of the survivor. When, in the next scene, we rediscover him months later in apparent control of himself and a partisan brigade, we can be in no doubt that this man will never be 'whole' again, that his inner landscape is as ravaged as the marshlands through which he escaped, that desire for revenge must constantly play on his psyche and his judgement must perforce be as flawed as that of the soldiers' who shot the photographer. As a teenaged member of the Yugoslav Communist Youth Organization, Petrović had witnessed, and effectively participated in, the massacre of four hundred Montenegrin monarchist partisans in 1944, and the trauma of the perpetrator speaks clearly through his film in its reflections on violence and guilt. 'One man's lonely struggle to survive and remain sane,'<sup>393</sup> *Tri* bequeaths us that sense of legacy vital to all great historical films. Its bitter interrogation of the 'partisan myth' compares favourably with other Yugoslav output, suggesting a degree of latitude unthinkable in East Germany with its ideological 'partisan' purity.<sup>394</sup>

While defying the popular, caricatural perception of 'Balkan violence',<sup>395</sup> Serbian films have always enjoyed the paradoxical but essential contiguity of celebration and aggression, of performance and passion, *Splav Meduze/The Raft of Medusa* (Karlo Godina, 1980) being just one example.<sup>396</sup> In *Krvava Bajka* (Branimir Tori Janković, 1969) a group of Yugoslav street children share the drunken carousing of an open air wedding feast while the Germans occupy their town. Extending the sense of transgressive carnival, they espouse the shoe-shiner's trade in their Situationist-style efforts to undermine the garrison; they witness random executions behind the barbed wire compound, are shot at stealing coal from a train and abscond

<sup>392</sup> Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames*, p. 161.

<sup>393</sup> Vlastimir Sudar, 'Tri', *The Cinema of the Balkans*, ed. Iordanova (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), pp. 43-51, here p. 45.

<sup>394</sup> See Andrew S. Horton, 'The Rise and Fall of the Yugoslav Partisan Film: Cinematic Perceptions of a National Identity', *Film Criticism*, Volume X11, No. 2 (Winter 1987-88), pp. 18-28, here p.22.

<sup>395</sup> Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames*, p. 162.

<sup>396</sup> See Svetlana Slapšak, 'Splav Meduze', *The Cinema of the Balkans*, ed. Iordanova, pp. 149-158.

with an arms crate from the German warehouse only to discover it contains the coffin of the recently assassinated German Commander. Handing him over to shady middlemen who can at least use his boots, they play amidst childish delight with a scrapland pig only to find the pig has been slaughtered for celebration. Another confrontation with cruel reality leads directly to the massacre of the local slave labour force at the makeshift concentration camp, an atrocity in which the shoeshine children, discovered hiding in haystacks, are rounded up and machine gunned with the rest. Only one escapes, on abandoned crutches. A girl weeps. The message is uncompromising, unredemptive, unforgiving. They died. They did not live long enough to work out their trauma. The future of the two survivors must be unhappy at best.

In its unapologetic and unmediated descent from carnival to carnage, *Krvava Bajka* not only denies us any thought of redemption but arguably any hope for the future, leaving the spectator traumatized and disempowered. Catharsis, as defined by Aristotle, does not so much disculpate the participant/celebrant from the myth represented, as implicate and empower him/her in its ongoing interpretation. The story is over, but the story-in-life continues. Without the bridge of catharsis, the story has not finished and cannot be interpreted or worked through. Much scathing dismissal of 'catharsis' rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of how drama functions.

The carnivalesque cohabitation of war and circus in Yugoslav film was made explicit one year later in the much loved *Biciklisti* (Mladomir 'Puriša' Đorđević, 1970), a homage to the cycling resistance fighters and to the bicycle itself as symbol of freedom and Situationist resistance. The title sequence, composed of bicycle parts from penny farthing onwards, is succeeded by a protracted tracking montage of six riders on one bike, untroubled, festive, oneiric and compulsively repetitive, as though time stands still while the invading German military band comes down the seaside cliff carrying their bikes and musical instruments, as if to join the party. Divided into willing collaborators and fledgeling resisters, the town is run by an effete restaurateur happy for any available clientele, delighted at first that the Germans are arriving. A strange cabaret number sung straight to camera extends the film's not always successfully mixed conventions, which include badly matched close-ups, static dialogue exchanges and expressionist experiments that are not entirely consistent with the film's surrealist agenda. The improvised resistance of an odd assortment of social misfits meets with the inevitable reprisals, until the circus passes through and they all leave together for the hills, where the circus performs its fabulous tight-rope walking

displays as a decoy for partisan attacks. The profligate, even promiscuous proximity of partisans and occupiers is accompanied by a strange casualness of performance expressive of the era in which *Biciklisti* was shot but alien to received ideas about the Second World War as contained, for instance, in *Tri*. Amidst the carnival, danger is omnipresent but not perceived by the celebrants themselves till the very end, when the circus members are strafed during a marriage ceremony.

A Situationist refusal to be recuperated by the dominant current runs from *Biciklisti* through to the recent *Circus Fantasticus/Silent Sonata* (Janez Burger, Slovenia 2011),<sup>397</sup> in which a bereaved family, barely surviving in a burned-out house amidst a ravaged warzone, receives a visitation from a travelling circus, whose members perform first for them and then for the belligerent armies. While war is circus, circus is not war. Celebration stands above and outside, its resistance is immaculate, untouchable, whatever violence is wreaked on it. In its timelessness *Cirkus Fantastikus* might refer to the Holocaust as well as to recent Balkan atrocity, and a similar universality attaches to a great deal of earlier Yugoslav output including *Biciklisti*, whose ending heralds not the victorious conclusion of any specific war but the ongoing, if flawed and fatal resistance of the life principle enshrined in circus, to the thanatosis of war in general.

A more explicit connection of wars past with wars future is attempted in *Jevreji dolaze/The Jews are Coming* (Prvoslav Marić, 1992), which comments on the unfolding dissolution of the former Yugoslavia through references to Balkan war guilt and the murder of Balkan Jews in the Second World War, one of the very few Yugoslav films to engage with the Holocaust independently of issues of national resistance. Already with the opening tracking shot along the ceiling of an endless corridor (the tunnel of time, or the tunnels to the gas chambers) accompanied by the legend 'Requiem for an Illusion' to the strains of 'Yugoslavia, oh Yugoslavia'; even before the camera alights on an iconic portrait of Marshal Tito in full uniform and discovers that the children singing beneath it are the choir of the Association for the Blind, we realize we are in heavily metaphorical screen territory, where narrative is likely to be thematically weighted. 'Give me your hand, let my voice lead the way,' they sing, as the fraternal delegate of the Yugoslav Emigrants Bureau brings news to the Socialist Association of the Blind of an impending return: exiled Yugoslav Jews

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<sup>397</sup> Script consultant, Gareth Jones.

are returning to Novy Sad for the first time since the war and the Association for the Blind has been selected to perform a welcoming play in their honour. Both the film, and the stage play within it, unfold within the hermetic world of state-controlled organizations that are rapidly losing their legitimacy as Tito's legacy crumbles. Yugoslavia is here an asylum for the blind administered by the bad, amongst them the Association's veterinarian director Jova, loving philanthropist by day but a tyrant father to his drug-taking son and an abusive husband to his alcoholic wife by night.

From the 'Let's Put on a Show' genre and the dreams of Hollywood engendered in idealistic young blind couple Eva and Boban, there emerges a fateful decision: the returning Jews will be welcomed by a stage representation of the genocide that drove them away, as researched in unpublished archives from the early nineteen-fifties entitled 'Crimes by the Fascists and their Helpers'. Though the performance will have a penitential and healing purpose, the whole exercise is aimed at the visitors' dollars, without which the Association will go bust. While Jova's nymphomaniac daughter fornicates in the stables of the stud ranch where he puts down sick horses, and his son clocks up unpayable debts to the local *patissier* and drug dealer Nusret, the blind are put through their paces in improvised reconstructions of prison torture and massacre by a second rate stage director who might be learning his part from Fellini's *Eight and a Half*. Nusret, it transpires, deals not only in drugs but in weapons, and contrives to hide his armoury in the basement of the former Party dacha where the performance will be given, a socialist pleasure dome now turned into a concentration camp. In a fantasmagoric variation on the 'death of Titoism' theme, Nusret's bullets are concealed in row upon row of disused busts of the late Marshal, which he smuggles over the Kosovo border with his Albanian sidekicks to fuel the burgeoning ethnic conflict for his own gain, with the active connivance of the local police.

Through its recuperation of buried war guilt, *Jevreji dolaze* offers us a genealogy of the break-up of Yugoslavia, the collapse of state socialism, the rise of the mafia classes and the first incursions of 'Jewish-led' US capitalist imperialism, via a monstrous assembly of conflicting dramatic tropes. Given the promiscuity of contemporary reference, the often portentous camera work (tracking through opening doors over spooky music) and the uncommented transmission of casual Serbian anti-Semitism, it is surprising that *Jevreji dolaze* says anything useful about the Holocaust. Yet it rises above the dangers of Shoah exploitation through its very vulgarity,

evoking the continuing perils of Serbian nationalism and partisan violence in a world that was rapidly descending into renewed genocide as the siege of Sarajevo took its bitter hold. The stage performance of the blind is rather a good piece of theatre, transcending its context despite the excoriating criticisms of its petulant and indecisive director. 'What you're acting actually happened to real people during the war!' he reminds them (and us), his state duties forgotten amidst Situationist improvisation and scatological outrage as a guide dog ('an SS guard dog') mounts a bound, blind, kneeling inmate ('prisoner') and another blind actor is blindfolded by his guardians ('Nazis'), a wondrously effective tautology replete with tragic irony. The groping, stumbling performance of the blind expresses perfectly, precisely through its outrageous abusiveness, the torment inflicted on the bewildered, disorientated, coerced 'submerged' of half a century earlier, while foreshadowing the imminent genocides of Srebrenica and Banja Luka. And indeed the performers fall victim to the events they are portraying, when the predatory Nusret, seeing only a ritual from which he is excluded and whetted by the recreated rape scene, takes his revenge by raping Eva in the guise of her own husband.

Representation again triggers repetition when the American Jewish scout, a Holocaust survivor, weeps uncontrollably at the stage performance and fights off a heart attack. Revisiting the past is fraught with danger. The acting-out of trauma is not a passive process like the fingering of worry beads, it releases violent emotions that compound the original injury. The actors in any representation of genocide may become secondary victims; the blind and handicapped of today are the easy targets of tomorrow. Whether this charade represents the 'potentially healing dimensions of the carnivalesque in history',<sup>398</sup> or on the contrary the 'experimentally transgressive' that neglects to explore its own relations with 'normative limits',<sup>399</sup> is a question worth putting to Balkan cinema in general. Film often perpetrates what it seems to criticize. However, it is surely carnivalesque extravagance, that the skateboard Nusret gave to the caretaker's granddaughter Snežana should topple the bust of Tito placed so reverently on stage and divulge its lethal cargo amidst the shards of dictatorship. As the show falls apart, the blind flee into the darkening woods, while the director gets drunk, the busts of Tito explode in a hail of bullets and Nusret dies amidst the desecration, leaving a corrupt police force still in charge.

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<sup>398</sup> LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 222.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

By all accounts the director Prvoslav Marić had been a favourite of the Tito regime, a loyalist and a safe pair of hands, so it is not hard to detect in this transgressive *tour de force* a furious elegy to a dying order and the rage of despair at history squandered. Whether it is a legitimate use of the Holocaust to enshrine its worst Balkan episodes as an omen of (or, at worst, an incitement to) further genocide may be a matter of critical standpoint as well as taste, but Marić appears to be saying that unresolved violence lies at the heart of Yugoslav society in its denial of responsibility for the Nazi genocide and that long-harboured denial inevitably brings repetition and the return of the repressed. Worryingly, he appears to echo that denial by displacing perpetration onto occupying Hungarian forces through a digression about uniforms. The mixed Yugoslav war record had been so firmly repressed under Tito, whose personal canonization absolved an entire nation, that even amidst transgression new ‘normative limits’ were hard to establish. Hereditary mistrust of the ‘partisan Serbs’ for the ‘collaborating Croats’, re-surfaced in the Balkans while this film was being shot.<sup>400</sup> Few remembered, amidst the resumption of ancient hostilities, that the partisan leader and hero Marshal Tito was himself a Croat, albeit one who recognized and fostered Serbian hegemony, an act of Realpolitik that left a fatal legacy in his successor Slobodan Milošević, the petty tyrant who unleashed a second genocide amidst the ruins of the first in the name of a Greater Serbia.

For all its pyrotechnics, the moments of *Jevreji dolaze* that stay in the mind are the verbatim testimonies to atrocity quietly recited by the blind from their archive material, each one preceded by a date: ‘12/12/1944... puddles of blood...people wanted to get it over... pushed through holes in the Danube ice...’. These testimonies, specific and universal, speak loud and clear down the decades, and all the more tellingly for such transgressive framing, even though it seems to recreate the ‘negative sublime’ of the perpetrators with all their ‘sadistic carnival’.<sup>401</sup> Would such testimony have been clearer, more honest or more revealing *without* the carnivalesque framing? Certainly this treatment raises in acute form the question: is screen fiction the correct vehicle for truth and witness, let alone for healing and reconciliation, or should testimony stand alone, austere, unvarnished, unmediated?

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<sup>400</sup> See also *Pad Italije/The Fall of Italy* (Lordan Zafranović, 1981) and Margit Rohringer, *The Cinema of the Balkans*, pp. 183-192.

<sup>401</sup> See chapter epigraph.



Through its dionysiac festivities, carnival facilitates the socially sanctioned infraction of taboos, most explicitly through the anonymity of face masks. Often accompanied by wild excess, larceny and sexual license, it is close, maybe too close, to the spirit of comedy.<sup>402</sup> Whether film as carnival functions as a safety valve or as an aphrodisiac (or both simultaneously) is an aporia this study will not solve, but while carnival may be ‘one aspect of Jewish culture that warrants recovery and reaffirmation’,<sup>403</sup> we should not forget that, behind its amiable celebration, the Christian tradition of carnival has historically descended all too frequently into tribal bonding, scapegoating and pogrom. Fasching was also an incitement to anti-Semitism, a spur to annihilationist tendencies of which the Holocaust was the outcome.<sup>404</sup> Transgressive urges can be felt in all the films mentioned above, in which a complex dramaturgical strategy associated with Freud’s traumatic development arc leads to profound conceptual ambivalence, encouraging blurred allegiances, confused emotions and possibly harmful transferences of status between victim and perpetrator, in other words precisely that fruitless repetition compulsion we call ‘acting-out’.

They are also, however, amongst the most illuminating films, suggesting perhaps that the function of filmic representation is precisely not ‘to work through’ in a spirit of sobriety but rather to create difficulties, strain nerves, provoke the unspeakable and encourage free-fall dreaming. In other words, sanctioned ‘carnavalesque’ deviation operates in the firm (and possibly complacent) anticipation that a return to ‘real life’ will awaken the dreamer and reconfigure the wish-fulfilment dream experience within a rational world order. Alas, this awakening to reason never blessed the audiences of *Jud Süß* and we cannot assume that film is harmless today. As LaCapra cautions, ‘When acting-out is taken from a larger frame of reference, in which it may to some extent function as an antidote [...] one may unintentionally repeat the traumatizing, dispossessing, nonnegotiable strategy of the victimizers.’<sup>405</sup>

## The Return of Film as History

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<sup>402</sup> See Andrew S. Horton, *Laughing out Loud: Writing the Comedy-Centered Screenplay* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), p. 7. ‘Key to both is not just festivity and public and personal renewal and reaffirmation of the community, but the sense of total freedom from the normal rules of society and culture.’ See Horton also on the Greek and Balkan spirit of comedy, in *Comedy/Cinema/Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>403</sup> See chapter epigraph.

<sup>404</sup> See Steiner, *Errata*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>405</sup> LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, p. 223.

As we have noted, history has an unnerving habit of imitating film. That very crucible of compulsive repetition, Sarajevo, had been the setting, indeed the subject, of Hajrudin 'Šiba' Krvavac's partisan trilogy *Diverzanti/The Demolition Squad* (1967), *Most/The Bridge* (1969) and the immensely successful *Valter Brani Sarajevo/Das ist Walter (Walter defends Sarajevo)* (1972), which soldered the historically troublesome, ethnically divided Bosnia and Herzegovina into the collective consciousness of the former Yugoslavia like little else in its short history, sold (and still sells) worldwide and inspires a massive cult of its own, particularly in China.

Led by the shadowy resistance leader codenamed 'Walter' (again that emblem of anonymity), Sarajevo's multi-ethnic communities band together in an acting-out of the official Tito ideological line of 'brotherhood and unity' to evict the genocidal Nazis from their city. For once the myth is true to its historical origins in the proverbial solidarity of this crossroads of the monotheisms. But far from deterring the Serbs from subjecting that fabled city to their own genocide just twenty years later, the myth created by *Valter* may even have encouraged them by creating a desirable icon which they would rather destroy than relinquish. Film bestows value, meaning and possession.

'Sehen Sie diese Stadt? Das ist Walter!' confesses the defeated German general in *Valter*'s last line, an embarrassing rite of Sarajevo self-recuperation compounded by the generic good looks, ingenuity and courage of the invincible hero, mere self-flattery in carnivalesque disguise, one might think, until one weighs the repetitive and resistential value of this comic book carnival for Sarajevo itself.<sup>406</sup> As the Serbian assault began, reducing the city again to a concentration camp, Sarajevans flooded into the streets shouting "We are all Walter!" and the atmosphere of Situationist carnival was never entirely lost during the longest siege in recent history. The acting-out of a film was the rallying cry for four years' resistance. In a tragic inversion of his indomitable dramaturgy, the author, Krvavac, a self-confessed anarchist, died in Sarajevo during the famine and destruction of the siege, refusing to leave and giving interviews till the end.<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> Krvavac experimented with film puppetry in his short film *Miss Zelengrada/Miss of the Green City* (Hajrudin 'Šiba' Krvavac, 1962).

<sup>407</sup> Rada Šešić, 'Valter Brani Sarajevo', *The Cinema of the Balkans*, ed. Iordanova, pp. 107-115.

## 6. WORKING THROUGH

### The Trauma of the Survivor (2)

#### Concentration Camp as Testimony

Wenn Du noch Schmerzen hast, so ist es wirklich nur Deine Schuld.<sup>408</sup>

If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of the testimony.<sup>409</sup>

Under this second quotation, from Elie Wiesel, Shoshana Felman tells the story of a class she had taught with the title 'Literature and Testimony', based on literary sources (or 'testimonies') of relevance to the evaluation of trauma, by Camus,<sup>410</sup> Dostoyevsky,<sup>411</sup> Mallarmé,<sup>412</sup> and Celan.<sup>413</sup> It also included an assessment of psychoanalysis through *Die Traumdeutung*, 'Freud's most revolutionary testimonial work', as 'a finally available statement (or approximation) of a truth that, at the outset, was unknown but that was gradually accessed through the practice and the process of the testimony'.<sup>414</sup> In divulging and analysing his own *Irma* dream, Freud makes himself the prototypical psychoanalytic witness and thereby 'creates the revolutionized clinical dimension of the *psychoanalytic* dialogue... in which the doctor's testimony does not substitute itself for the patient's testimony but *resonates* with it, because, as Freud discovers, *it takes two to witness the unconscious*'.<sup>415</sup>

Before we instate the psychoanalyst as a dialogic partner (and in the case of this dream, a *Doppelgänger*) of his patient, we should remind ourselves that Freud's self-analysis of his *Irma* dream reveals large-scale transferences of guilt and

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<sup>408</sup> Freud, 'Der Traum von Irmas Injektion', *Die Traumdeutung, Gesammelte Werke*, II/III, p. 111.

<sup>409</sup> Shoshana Felman, 'Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching', *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, pp. 13-60, here p. 17, citing Elie Wiesel.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., p. 20. Albert Camus, *La Peste*, with its metaphorical association of plague with war.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., p. 21. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, the 'belated testimony to a trauma [...] of the one who has been made into a witness of his own firing squad'.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., p. 30. Mallarmé arriving breathless in Oxford with news of the 'poetic revolution in France'.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid., p. 39. 'Todesfuge', Celan's experience of the concentration camp, defying (thus Felman) Adorno's dictum 'to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'.

<sup>414</sup> Felman, 'Education and Crisis', *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 23.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

resentment from himself onto his patient and colleagues. His intemperate dream diagnostics are probably the most honest ever given by psychoanalyst to patient, whether asleep or waking, and one is left in some doubt about whose ‘pain’ the dream, in truth, relates to (Irma’s or Sigmund’s) and whether the dream transferences have been truly reversed in the waking analysis. The proximity of ‘Traum’ to ‘Trauma’ in the German language suggests an exchange within the unconscious that further complicates the psychoanalytical role play, suggesting that the ‘working through’ of trauma is rarely linear. In their provision of ‘wish fulfilment’, dreams (like film) may play a healing role, but they may also complicate and threaten, as Felman goes on to reveal.

Felman concluded her course with the viewing of two taped testimonies of Holocaust survivors from the Fortunoff Video Archive, and found herself confronted with a class in crisis, grief-stricken by the trauma recounted on screen. Her account of this transference, and of her ‘crisis intervention’ to rescue her students and restore the group’s self-confidence, leads her to reflections on ‘teaching as testimony’: both teaching and psychoanalysis are called upon to be ‘*performative* and not just *cognitive*’, to offer not just *congruent* but *dissonant* information. ‘Testimonial teaching fosters the capacity to witness.’<sup>416</sup>

### **Teaching Film, Teaching Trauma**

Felman’s testimony to the experience of her class is important to this study. Firstly, the moment of rupture or *caesura* in the class’s composure came clearly with her final contribution, which took the form of film, and film of a personal testimony; this implies that film has taken an unassailable hegemony in not just the popular but also the academic mind as being the ultimate arbiter of meaning and veracity, or ‘evidence’ in Benjamin’s sense. Secondly, film’s immediacy of witness breaks down resistances and inertias left unchallenged by traditional literary forms. Lastly, therefore, film can be regarded in some sense as the harbinger of trauma.

Felman’s empathetic teaching has been criticized as self-aggrandizing, deliberately ‘creating crisis’ through an excess of transference in ‘students of trauma now victims of trauma’. ‘We are *not* all survivors of Auschwitz’ and should resist the

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<sup>416</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

‘dark glamour of regarding ourselves as traumatized subjects’.<sup>417</sup> In Felman’s defence, and moving now into a personal register essential to the conclusion of this study, I must confess to having been in an analogous situation when teaching a class of Tirana film students, who were attempting to transmute their own traumatic experiences (inherited from a century of political persecution) into film narrative, who dissolved into uncontrollable tears at the truths they had stored up in silence. Admittedly this was primary witness, for creative uses in which transmission is impossible without affect. But I recognize the concept of ‘testimonial teaching’ also in my own initially unconscious practice as script consultant to the Sarajevo Film Festival’s pan-Balkan screenplay competition Cinelink. The ‘listening’ of an empathetic but challenging teacher converges with psychoanalytic dialectics the closer the relation of the writer to his or her material approaches the traumatic.<sup>418</sup>

In any one group, at Cinelink, I have had a Serb working with a Bosnian, or a Croat with Serb and Albanian alike, and it was not long before I realized that most of these writers were attempting to deal with the trauma of the recent Balkan wars and their chaotic aftermath, in tones that varied from social realist docu-fiction to surreal, scrambled autobiography. These were my contemporaries, many of whom had been conscripted (or had volunteered) into opposite sides of a bloody civil war, and I was struck by the lack of rancour with which they addressed their shared wounds in this creative forum; equally however, by their silences, which seemed as meaningful as their dialogue, suggesting that much of what might have been told remains inaccessible to the teller or recoverable only in flashes of sudden release, a pattern of recall made problematic by deep-rooted denial and unconsciously willed amnesia.

Without wishing it I found myself in the position of a father confessor or therapist, teasing out lost meaning and occasionally launching a provocative challenge, hoping to dislodge some psychic block or loosen some deep-rooted resistance. In soliciting this testimony, however, I had constantly to bear in mind the dangers of transference and over-identification, especially given the dangers of neo-colonial recuperation: these were their stories, not mine; the Balkan region has a rich cinematic tradition of its own and Aristotelian dramaturgy is not always applicable. A glance at Bosnia’s recent output is enough to confirm the traumatic fallout: *Kod*

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<sup>417</sup> Professor Colin Davis, ‘Trauma and Ethics: Telling the Other’s Story’. See footnote 9.

<sup>418</sup> See Caruth, ‘Interview with Robert Jay Lifton’, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 143. ‘There’s a double witness there...’

*amidze Idriza* (Days and Hours, 2004) written by Namik Kabil, directed by Pjer Žalica, with its endlessly slow recounting of the moments of bereavement stretching to eternity on a simple family visit; Srđan Vuletić's *Ljeto u zlatnoj dolini* (Summer in the Golden Valley, 2003), apparently a simple genre piece about a teenage kidnap, whose explosive violence reveals the harrowing of an entire generation of Sarajevo's youth along with its architecture; Ademir Kenović's siege-bound *Savršeni Krug* (Perfect Circle, 1997) which tells of orphaned kids surviving the war with a drunken poet; through to the elusive *Grbavica* (2006) by Jasmila Žbanić, winner of the Golden Bear at the Berlinale, a study of traumatic suppression by a mother incapable of revealing her daughter's paternity from rape in a prisoner-of-war camp. The unique voice of Nedžad Begović offered us *Sasvim Licno* (Totally Personal, 2004),<sup>419</sup> an anarchic collage of Sarajevo on home video, in which the siege years are recuperated (in every sense) through dada-esque autobiography. And this is just Bosnia-Herzegovina. Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia have all made comparable films.

In the process of working with these filmmakers I gradually became aware that I was skating on thin ice in terms of my own subject position. While I could recite my anti-Vietnam demonstrations and the draft dodgers I had supported, I had to ask myself what I had been doing during the Balkan war that had ended barely ten years previously. I had been making a film about the Holocaust, or more specifically about the genesis of Christian anti-Semitism that culminated in the Holocaust,<sup>420</sup> and a biopic on the Nazi-resisting theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer.<sup>421</sup> But I had written nothing about the genocidal siege of Sarajevo, which was ignored also by large sections of the western public and by western governments. In a spirit of self-criticism I am forced to ask what motivates our urge to record the tribulations of more than half a century ago, when the world around us is repeating the same mistakes. Is testimony to past injustice the best means of avoiding its future repetition?

What is the apparent purpose of the testimony for the testifier? Why has s/he remained silent till now? Is it wise to attempt to recover trauma after several decades, or may the emotional cost (for both parties) not outweigh the potential benefit? How far can delayed testimony be viewed as faithful, unclouded by subsequent replay or

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<sup>419</sup> Script consultant, Gareth Jones.

<sup>420</sup> *Au Nom du même père.*

<sup>421</sup> *Bonhoeffer – die letzte Stufe.*

acting-out? What will be understood from these fragments by an uninformed viewer today and by future generations as the Holocaust recedes? How can these personal traumata be pieced together into a coherent account, and indeed should they be? Can trauma be healed by personal testimony, soothed by its filmic narration, or is it, on the contrary, confirmed and deepened?

### **Sarajevo – the scandal of the double survivor**<sup>422</sup>

This unease was brought sharply into focus by two little known testimonial films I discovered during a guided tour of the shell-scarred, pock-marked masonry of Sarajevo before coming upon the abandoned, desolate Jewish cemetery and finally enquiring about the Jewish community here and its fate under the Nazis, to be told that Muslims protected Jews from Nazi persecution, if not always successfully - a very Balkan story enshrined in Krvavac's Muslim clockmaker in *Valter* and Xhuvani's Jewish clockmaker of *I dashur armik*. Fifty years later, the three confessional communities stood side by side throughout the four-year siege, in which many ethnic Serbs chose to fight for their city state rather than for their tribe.

My discomfort increased when I realized that amongst the victims of the recent siege had been survivors of the earlier genocide. By now my reluctance to think 'comparatively', to move beyond the hallowed fence that rings the Holocaust from any previous or subsequent event, was being challenged by the living evidence, namely by the unbearable irony that while the Holocaust was being memorialised, recuperated and even fought over, one of its rare surviving victims was being subjected to another assault on her very identity and existence (not as a Jew, but as a Bosnian) without a finger being lifted to save her. Despite the hope expressed in the Introduction, it appears that the Holocaust has not yet been understood as 'a transformative event' that galvanizes and locates, rather than fetishizing and displacing, trauma. The 'ghost of the Holocaust' haunts us still,<sup>423</sup> not just as memory but as repetition. The following two films emerged from the Balkan genocide but

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<sup>422</sup> Published in an earlier draft as 'Sarajevo – Trauma Revisited', in the proceedings of the conference *Beyond Camps and Forced Labour – Current International Research on Survivors of Nazi Persecution* (London, 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> January 2006), ed. Johannes-Dieter Steinert and Inge Weber-Newth (Secolo, 2007), pp. 759-770.

<sup>423</sup> Baumann, *The Holocaust's Ghost*, ed. Decoste and Schwartz, p. 9.

neither of them has been released in the west and Holocaust scholarship has generally ignored them.

*Rikica*, a student graduation film of approximately twenty minutes by Marko Mamuzić, was shot in Sarajevo in 1991/92 on the eve of the war in honour of Rikica Slosberg, who was deported from Sarajevo in 1941 and spent four years in Nazi concentration camps; fifty years later she was forced out of Sarajevo a second time when the Yugoslav wars started and she died in Switzerland in 2002. *Greta*, a longer piece of one hour and fifteen minutes, was shot after the last ceasefire principally in Sarajevo but also in Paris, Auschwitz and Yad Vashem by Haris Pašović, and its subject is Professor Greta Farusić, who was deported from Sarajevo to Auschwitz, liberated in January 1945, graduated in Architecture in Belgrade and taught at the University in Sarajevo, only to endure the entire four-year siege of that city.

Agamben writes: 'At a certain point it became clear that testimony contained at its core an essential lacuna; in other words, the survivors bore witness to something it is impossible to bear witness to. As a consequence, commenting on survivors' testimony necessarily meant interrogating this lacuna or, more precisely, attempting to listen to it.'<sup>424</sup> And he adds: 'Listening to something absent did not prove fruitless'. I have tried to follow this paradoxical precept, remembering that film may mask several absences with an apparently seamless presence, furnishing an illusion of completeness to something intrinsically strange, whose strangeness may take some patience to intuit. In stressing that I have met neither subject personally, I put myself in a position we will all share as the generation of survivors gradually leaves us, obliged to rely on recorded testimony rather than on oral transmission, and therefore to ask: to what extent can film testimony convey the reality of actual experience and thereby assist the transmuting of memory into history?

### ***Rikica***

In a single scene in the devastated Jewish cemetery of Sarajevo an old lady bids farewell to her home on the eve of the siege, visiting for the last time her father's grave, where she expresses a feeling known to all Holocaust survivors (and echoed by Greta Farusić) 'thank God he died before seeing all this'. This is a grave she can at

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<sup>424</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 13.



least identify, but her mother and brother lie in unknown lands, the latter probably in Jasenovac, the largest and most brutal of the concentration camps set up by the Croatian Ustaše to assist the Nazis. Her words are as jagged and lopsided as the tombstones, her grief overwhelming, her trauma still latent, unmastered.

Somebody (in the adjacent cell) was playing something...a guitar or violin. I asked who was playing there. I was told: "Liechtenstein. Do you know how to sing?"

"I know some."

"Ok, show what you can sing!"

So I sang just a bit, just to show I could.

He said: "Fine, I see you know how to sing. I'm a composer, I'll write some music and we can sing all together."

After three or four days, he said: "I wrote one song for you and tonight we can now sing all together".

One might deduce that the rest is too appalling to narrate, or that traumatic repression has worked its own amnesia. Instead, she gives us this luminous fragment of restored experience, which clearly has sustained her for decades past, though whether she consciously remembered Liechtenstein and his spirited musical resistance during her following four years in the camps, or has retrieved (or even conjured) them more recently, one cannot know. But nonetheless Rikica's luminous-because-fragmentary account convinces one that this moment of shared song is indeed first-hand experience, clearly remembered, a threshold memory, a bourn, a limit, beyond which her mind is not prepared to return and where nothing more in her epic of suffering is recoverable or redeemable.

To cite Agamben once more, 'In the camps, one of the reasons that can drive a prisoner to survive is the idea of becoming a witness'.<sup>425</sup> Many survivors speak of the desire, the absolute imperative, to outlive their persecutors and bring them to justice. What kept Rikica alive, she says, was love of life and of her child:

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

Every morning I woke up, I opened my eyes and I was thinking of him. I was saying to myself “oh god, how is he, where is he, what does he eat, how does he look?” But I never thought he might not be alive. I always knew he was alive. I knew I had to see him.

The compulsive repetition in her speech patterns conveys the acting-out of a scenario never truly laid to rest, which haunts her even as she speaks so many decades later, contemplating her flight from a second ordeal. ‘I believe in love. I don’t believe in God. If God wanted...If there was a God, then he would never have done what he did. Then, *but also now*.’<sup>426</sup>

In this simple *but also now* we feel the second trauma about to overtake her, despair at lessons unlearned, at man’s compulsive re-infliction of wounds, and one harbours doubts about her readiness for this testimony of such shapeless authenticity: her memories are so partial, so fractured and so painful. Van der Kolk and van der Hart ask: ‘Can the Auschwitz experience and the loss of innumerable family members during the Holocaust really be integrated, be made part of one’s autobiography?’<sup>427</sup> Others, including Caruth, have elaborated on ‘the betrayal of trauma’ by which the object of trauma is lost, travestied and traduced by its naming, leaving the ‘beneficiary of therapy’ with guilty resentment at having been stripped even of her suffering through a testimony that can never adequately convey the experience.<sup>428</sup> Can trauma ever be recovered, one might ask, or is the very recovery an act of abandonment? With van der Kolk and van der Hart once more, ‘The question arises, whether it is not a sacrilege of the traumatic experience to play with the reality of the past?’<sup>429</sup>

However it is worth returning to Felman: ‘Psychoanalysis [...] profoundly rethinks and radically renews the very concept of the testimony, by [...] recognizing for the first time in the history of culture that one does not have to *possess*, or *own* the truth, in order to effectively bear witness to it; that speech as such is unwittingly testimonial; and that the speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless continues to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, *not available* to its

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid., p. 17. ‘Imagine that the SS let a preacher into the camp...his sermon would be an atrocious jest in the face of those who were beyond not only the possibility of persuasion, but even of all human help.’

<sup>427</sup> van der Kolk/van der Hart, ‘The Intrusive Past’, *Trauma* ed. Caruth, p. 178.

<sup>428</sup> See Caruth on *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 27: ‘...the unremitting problem of *how not to betray the past*’.

<sup>429</sup> van der Kolk/van der Hart, ‘The Intrusive Past’, *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 179.

own speaker'.<sup>430</sup> Even respecting Ruth Leys' warning that trauma theory is 'fundamentally unstable',<sup>431</sup> as intimated in the Introduction, *Rikica* requires the empathy of Caruth's approach when she writes of 'the way in which trauma may lead [...] to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound.'<sup>432</sup>

### *Greta*

If *Rikica* reveals the suffering of its subject in startlingly unmediated form, in fragments and explosions whose lacunae reflect the unhealed trauma of the speaker, *Greta* unfolds with majestic self-control of both witness and filmmaker. A single interview in unwavering mid-shot interspersed with occasional close-ups from an identical angle shows the corner of an elegant living room with the subject composed, reflective, as she recounts the salient moments of her life with the conscious accuracy of a court witness wishing no trace of hyperbole to cloud her credibility. In keeping with this agenda, the film starts with several minutes of post-siege Sarajevo unadorned by music or commentary, the snow on mountain bunkers, the graveyards, the burned-out parliament, the ravaged post office: objects that tell their own story in a silence finally broken when Greta's voice picks up, eerily eloquent, where *Rikica* left off so speechless:

We who have survived not just one war but this war too have started to think that the idea of justice is very abstract... it takes various forms and is interpreted very differently.

As a warning to the viewer against easy transference, this bitter opening salvo is mitigated by a glimpse of a startlingly youthful Greta exchanging banter with friends on a Sarajevo street corner, a moment of affectionate levity like countless others in this most witty and sophisticated of cities. Silent cutaways to crutches amidst the crowds, and to the mountains which had recently rained down more firepower than was concentrated on Berlin in 1945, are followed by a symbolic collage of synagogue, mosque and church, then we rediscover Greta heading home, unaware of

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<sup>430</sup> Felman, 'Education and Crisis', *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 24.

<sup>431</sup> Ruth Leys, speaking at University of London, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2006.

<sup>432</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 8.

the camera watching as she pulls her strap more firmly over her shoulder, her face closing in a lonely mask of resistance and (who knows?) repression or denial. Then the interview starts, with Greta immaculate, proud, unfaltering, not one syllable out of place as she tells her story from start to finish, as if determined not to let her persecutors get the better of her composure even for a second, relying on sober good humour to exclude any trace of the shame notoriously ascribed to survivors.<sup>433</sup>

The signals that betray this composure are fractional, barely Agamben's 'lacunae': the flutter of her hands immediately suppressed as she speaks of the family's removal to Subotica; the clearing of the throat as she mentions the *Schutzpolizei*; the vertical movement of the hand as she demonstrates the red stripe behind the Auschwitz uniform, her fingers immediately stifling the gesture as inappropriate. 'Everything is my personal experience, I don't want to discuss other people's experiences', she says with almost patrician disdain, underlining on the one hand her veracity, her refusal to speculate or demean by vulgar retailing of commonplaces, and on the other her detachment from even her own suffering.

In that confusion the men were separated so I didn't see my father any more. My mother and I walked side by side, I went right, she went left, I stopped and turned at the same time as she stopped and turned, and we looked at each other but they hurried us on. Those who went to the left, we never saw them again.

This moment shared in anguish by thousands upon thousands has been told and retold (for instance in *Lang ist der Weg*) but rarely with such absolute self-control, enabling a tangential glimpse of the horror, the extreme, suppressed (even prohibited) emotions precisely through the re-enactment of the same suppression in the telling. The clue lies in the infinite extension of that single moment – surely a few seconds at most – between the losing of her father and the losing of her mother, a double loss she stretches almost to infinity in the recollecting. 'Other girls saw their mothers decline, I remember my mother as a healthy woman...how much worse it must have been for them' – her compassion asks for no more attention than her suffering, perhaps for fear of self-pity. While the rain drums endlessly on block house corrugated roofs in slow pans reminiscent of Lanzmann, one thinks also of the

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<sup>433</sup> Leys, *From Guilt to Shame, Auschwitz and After* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

contrasts: the interviewer/director of *Greta* has left no personal trace, perhaps considering himself an irrelevance to his narrative. At no point does one sense that Greta has been pushed or pressured, let alone interrogated, and what emerges is paradoxically more horrific and more real than any evocation Lanzmann achieves with his insistence on the release of long-buried trauma in and through the interview. When Greta reports 'there was a very bad smell in the camp' her matter-of-fact tone is becoming unbearable and it is precisely this factual unbearableness that best conveys the original experience and simultaneously the unresolved trauma of the survivor. One is in the presence. But the presence veils itself, so as not to destroy the beholder, and in the process becomes more visible. Greta mercifully holds up a 'Perseus's Mirror' of her own, in which we see reflected the Gorgon in all her horror.

She remembers the faithful Jews, mainly from traditional, uneducated families. 'The worst thing was their belief that the camp was God's punishment for their so-called sins', and parodies them, with a glimmer of carnival, 'It was a sin not to know Yiddish, that's why we're here'. But despite this rejection of the holy in its usual forms, this is a testimony that shines not just with personal conviction but with a secret perception of meaning, even of transcendence, again suggesting that Lanzmann's insistence on transmission unadulterated by interpretation might not be the only model for such testimony. Articulacy should not be mistaken for mendacity, nor self-control for self-censorship. 'Letting go' is not always a therapeutic 'working-through'. The restraint of Greta's testimony tells us as much as a chaotic unburdening, while leaving the witness herself arguably more intact, more whole, less traumatized and indeed less victimized, than an apparently cathartic 'confession'.

Of course one asks what she might have left out, forgotten, repressed or occulted. With inclusivity all too rare, she remembers the screaming of the murdered gypsies, but it is impending liberation that brings perspiration to her face and scrambles her chronology. Her finger movements tense, her head flicks, as she comes to 'one very ugly, difficult picture' of the Soviet 'mercy killings' of incapacitated prisoners, 'the submerged', whose bodies were allowed to lie where they fell. 'Normally they would have been taken away', she tuts, and suddenly, with a falling sensation, one realizes she is back in the camp, within its rules and regulations; after an hour or more of solid concentration she has finally regressed, 'gone under', in an almost hypnotic sense. With this simple 'normally' she is still in thrall to the perpetrators who administered this hell, evoking, of course terror and pity but also

doubts about her defiant sanity. Through this latency made fleetingly visible, the whole interview and the very technique of film testimony is thrown into question. A courageous 'working-through' is in danger of reverting to a ghastly 'acting-out', a ritual re-enactment and re-infliction of psychic scarring that can never be healed, and certainly not by the dubiously fresh air of speech. The victim-perpetrator symbiosis continues unhealed. 'Hunter and hunted are bound obscenely close', as Steiner noted.<sup>434</sup> History has indeed been written by the perpetrators.

Not once does Greta mention 'the Holocaust' as a historical event. She offers no overview and no interpretation, and this raises questions of form and presentation for future generations deprived of frames of reference we take for granted. Will the 'iconic' barracks and railway lines still speak once memory fades?

She calmly refuses an apology for having resumed her life immediately afterwards: 'My reasoning was, and it was what others thought too, that it was better to think about the future than to mourn.' For the first time her eyes are lowered from camera with a tone of regret, maybe remorse, as if knowing that her mourning had been too short and that this in itself was a source of shame, though youthful vivacity returns with a hint of vanity. She recalls her triumphs as a student, achieved despite psychic damage inflicted by Auschwitz and particularly the serious impairment of her ability to retain new information, a post-war hangover, perhaps, of that self-defence against trauma by which extraneous sensory experience is blocked and denied, a 'closing down' against the physical reality of the camps, which in extreme cases was known to lead to total numbing and even psychogenic death (as in the 'submerged') a condition which Greta clearly avoided or recovered from.

It is a sign of this first-time survivor's resilience that she saw the second ordeal approaching and refused to take the lifeline offered. 'Once in my life already I had been forced to leave my home. So let the fate of the city and its inhabitants also be my fate.' This almost biblical utterance, this apocalyptic foreshadowing, could scarcely come from another person or city, as if in this second visitation she searches for a reckoning, a chance to confront her ghosts and live down both her past and her persecutors. But the siege rapidly gets much worse than she or anyone else had ever expected, and one wonders whether her initial confidence was not based on an assumption we all tacitly share, namely that horrors once experienced to such an

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<sup>434</sup> Steiner, *Errata*, p. 52.

overwhelming degree can never be repeated. From above her rooftop, artillery bombards the town, month after month, year after year, 'the Yugoslav so-called People's Army, the army we had created ourselves, with our own taxes'. Her son cracks up, her grandchildren are evacuated, a tank shell crashes through her window without exploding just after she has left the room. 'That day I became superstitious... it shook me from my previous balance.' She wouldn't again use the cups or tray she had used that day, nor allow three people to sit in that room. 'Now we use those things again', she reveals with a huge smile, a smile she suddenly tires of and wipes from her face without warning - a gesture that leaves one worrying that she has underestimated her life's travails and that even now, in the telling, it might overwhelm her, as warned by Judith Herman in her diagnosis of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder:

Because post-traumatic symptoms are so persistent and so wide-ranging, they may be mistaken for enduring characteristics of the victim's personality. This is a costly error, for the person with unrecognised Post-traumatic Stress Disorder is condemned to a diminished life, tormented by memory and bounded by helplessness and fear.<sup>435</sup>

'Everything that happened here was genocide again', Greta says starkly over shots of snow-covered cemeteries, 'because the only fault of the Bosniaks was that they were Bosniaks'. She would not go out, she had a dreadful feeling of inferiority. 'For three months I was psychologically unbalanced. Though I wasn't crazy!' she adds with a merry laugh and cites the everyday resilience of siege-bound Sarajevo that emulated carnival in all but name: the concerts, the education, the fashion events and the founding of the Sarajevo Film Festival amidst the hail of artillery. These were acts of resistance (like the Jewish performances noted above) that defied the barbarism bent on destroying an entire city, perpetrated 'by people we lived with and students I had so carefully nurtured', a traumatic incredulity shared by so many Jewish intellectuals of the 1930s that contributed, amongst many other causes, to their vulnerability.

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<sup>435</sup> Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery, From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (USA: Basic Books, 1992; UK: Pandora, 1994, 1998), p. 200.

When I look back now on these four years of war, although I cannot say one could compare this with the death camp, nor do I want to, but I can say that this was more difficult for me to bear, than those years 1941-45 apart from the camp year. It was more difficult to survive. ... It hurts to know that this part of Europe has suffered such horrors and injustice while everyone else enjoyed peace... while only one hundred kilometres away as the crow flies people were living normal lives, unaffected and not noticing.

The mingled wit, stoicism, anger and hurt that speak through this testimony leave one in no doubt that, though a symbol of Western shame and of an unacceptable complacency that allowed the unspeakable to recur, Sarajevo is also a place where humanity has asserted itself to its fullest and in some unspecifiable way redeemed the horrors of passivity and reification of the Holocaust, as exemplified in the testimony of this one courageous double survivor who learned to face down one trauma by living through a second.

### **Trauma, Justice and Therapy**

Even if Greta's testimony is not unclouded by elements of 'acting-out', of compulsive repetition, which she does so much to censor and to filter, it is possible, by listening to the lacunae (as Agamben puts it), to understand this very 'acting-out' as being (in part at least) a deep-seated, inextinguishable craving for justice. It can be seen as an unconscious effort to retain the evidence necessary to confront the persecutors with the truth (the very motivation that saved many survivors, as we have seen), evidence which would be lost with a fully therapeutic 'working-through' whose feasibility or desirability many doubt. As LaCapra argues, 'One may maintain that anyone severely traumatized cannot fully transcend trauma but must to some extent act it out or relive it. Moreover, one may insist that any attentive secondary witness to, or acceptable account of, traumatic experiences must in some significant way be marked by trauma or allow trauma to register in its own procedures.'<sup>436</sup>

These films and many others like them are indelibly marked by trauma. Whether fragmented or continuous in their witness, they carry traces of precisely that delayed release, or 'Nachträglichkeit', which Freud defined as the hallmark of a deep,

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<sup>436</sup> LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, p. 110.



unprocessed wound. Second generation trauma is now a trope of clinical and academic discourse, and film output from both the Balkans and Germany tends to support this. One thinks of the recent spate of *Väterfilme*, in which the offspring of Nazi perpetrators piece together their fathers' wartime records and often destroy their families in so doing, *Zwei oder drei Dinge, die ich von ihm weiss* (Malte Ludin, 2005) being just one example. Marianne Hirsch has coined the concept of 'postmemory' to describe the 'remembering' that children of survivors absorb from parental experiences 'so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right.'<sup>437</sup>

Though this warning comes too late, it seems that researchers concerned with such subjects may over a period of time become tertiary victims of the trauma they record. 'Listening' is a hazardous occupation and Langer's writings (for instance) burst with the pain of the helpless recipient. Lanzmann's Situationist exhibitionism can be read not just as political intervention but as post-traumatic abreaction; his personal fixation on the Holocaust marks him as an ongoing victim of that terrible event, condemned to act out the history he has transmitted, a martyr to his undisputed masterpiece of traumatic retrieval. On a more modest scale, I have a recurring dream, which is perhaps cautionary: my eyelids are covered with snail shells, beneath which snails are consuming my eyes. Notwithstanding the dangers of over-identification, however, LaCapra registers the need for 'a discourse of trauma that itself undergoes – and indicates that one undergoes – a process of at least muted trauma insofar as one has tried to understand events and empathize with victims'.<sup>438</sup>

## Janus and Future History

With all forbearance for the sensibilities of both witness and listener, the therapeutic function of testimony for the testifier must be balanced against its usefulness for posterity. It is all very well to respect the victim's privacy, to insist on the therapeutic dialogue and the healing power of association and recovery. It is perfectly admissible to weigh the cost and consequences of secondary witness and second generation trauma. But while we are searching for cures, history continues and truth gets lost.

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<sup>437</sup> Hirsch, 'Surviving Images: Holocaust Photography and the Work of Postmemory', *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. Barbie Zelizer (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2001), pp. 215-46, here pp. 217-18.

<sup>438</sup> LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, pp. 220-221.

Diagnosis is needed early, as a matter of urgency. Testimony is vital, and preferably long before the approach of old age. The time lag in traumatic absorption can mean that understanding never catches up with experience. Evidence loses presence and legal power, as the Hague tribunals demonstrate. All prospect of justice recedes as memory turns to myth – in the reception by others if not in the ever-present experiencing of it by the witness.

In this gap of understanding lies the potential for further traumatizing catastrophe, as evinced by the Balkans, where Albania (one of the most traumatized societies on earth) has lurched from a double occupation during the Second World War, through half a century of genocidal Communist dictatorship, the Civil War that followed the collapse of the tiger-capitalist Pyramid Investment Scheme and into the unbridled mafia control under which it now lives. It is remarkable that such events have been documented in the most recent output of Albanian film, very little of which has been seen in the West. This alone might help restore one's faith in the ability of film fiction to cope with trauma as it happens, rather than waiting many decades, by which time therapy comes too late.

There is one other consideration that must not be overlooked in the relative strengths of unembellished personal testimony as opposed to film fiction, and that is audience. If testimony is to be more than an unburdening for the witness, then it must have listeners, and these are rare and hard to come by. While fiction suffers from all the drawbacks outlined above, it has the advantage of speaking to an audience and often a large one. That public education on historical trauma should be delivered by films of dubious authenticity is not a situation we should support, but of all the films criticized here there are few of which it could be categorically asserted that they would have been better left unmade. Recent Balkan cinema, rallied by Cinelink, has been working hard on dramaturgies susceptible of reaching an audience while relaying historical truths. Sometimes this can involve the 'fictionalization' of an actual testimony, a hybrid strategy worth considering as a model for recuperation and transmission.

### ***Magic Eye* or 'Lying Eye'?** <sup>439</sup>

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<sup>439</sup> The following passage featured in 'Film amidst the Ruins: The Trauma of Albanian Film' and 'Censorship and Freedom: Presenting the Evidence', papers given at CRASSH in dialogue with Kujtim Çashku, July 11<sup>th</sup> 2006, accompanying the UK premières of *Kolonel Bunker* and *Magic Eye*.

Set at the height of the pyramid debacle of 1997, Çashku's most recent film examines the traumatic fallout of a gulag survivor attempting to come to terms with his own survivor guilt, and, like its predecessor *Kolonel Bunker*, it treats Albania as a single concentration camp. *Syri magjik/Magic Eye* (Kujtim Çashku, 2005) frames its reflections on 'film as witness or voyeurism' within the manipulation of news reporting by powerful business interests, a subject made topical by the assassination of an Albanian media executive widely believed to have mafia links, though it could equally apply to the US networks whose invasive role is touched on.

A wistful former cameraman attempting to celebrate his sixtieth birthday with his wife amidst the chaos of civil war, Petro turns his Arriflex on the turmoil down in the street (where enraged citizens gun down total strangers in random revenge for their lost savings), only to find he has captured on film a television reporter inciting an old man to provide him with some lurid footage by firing an abandoned Kalashnikov, a seduction that leads to the accidental shooting of the old man's granddaughter and his own immediate suicide. While the 'mock up' of atrocities by the big networks may seem small beer to jaded western audiences and the political repercussions are exaggerated by the genre-dictated thriller twists, the Balkan wars were attributed by many to media indoctrination,<sup>440</sup> and concern with truthful reporting could equally apply to Iraq, Rwanda or Afghanistan. This is a salutary reminder from a country raised on disinformation that we should mistrust the information we are purveyed. Triggered, quite literally, by this outrage, Petro's trauma of 'responsibility once shirked' now resurfaces, confronting him with the existential challenge of atoning for the cowardly false confession that freed him from Enver Hoxha's gulag many years earlier by now releasing his unsought-for footage to any news organ willing to unmask the ensuing cover-up. At risk to his life, he finally accomplishes this mission not on the airwaves, which are stubbornly denied him, but - with Situationist improvisation - exactly where the killing occurred, his black and white film flickering silently before a local populace blinded by false reports of a mad old man who murdered his granddaughter for nothing.

Rehabilitation is a fundamental theme of the film, both in its inversion of the Communist practice of forced false confessions and in its sacramental perceptions of the cycle of hubris, fall, atonement and redemption that leads to the young reporter

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<sup>440</sup> See Iordanova, *Cinema in Flames*, pp. 167-168.

calling on the dead man's family to confess and ask for mercy. In post-Shakespearean dramaturgy this redemptive urge proves unwise, as the boy and his girlfriend are discovered dead in the following sequence, victims of the chilling blood dues exacted in Albanian and other peasant vendettas, now waged by a media mafia keen to silence any further confessions. Petro's latent, unassimilated gulag trauma thus reaches its full period of incubation through a repetition of similar physical violence during the pyramid crisis, catalysing a face-to-face with his past that obliges him to relive (or rather, in Caruth's sense, to live for the first time) events he never experienced or digested which now demand a belated moral response. That 'the coward redeeming his cowardice' might be the generic fare of westerns and war movies comes nowhere near impairing the grandeur of this film, though its pyramidal dramaturgy comes close to collapse more than once. This is the cinema of trauma in a high degree and its success stems from the self-critical introspection of the author witnessing his own failings, coupled with a desire to liberate the society he stems from and will never abandon despite the recent state vendetta against his film school.

### Orphans and Outlaws

And so we return almost to where we started, to orphanages, in which, unsurprisingly, Balkan cinema (following post-war Poland) takes a recurrent interest, orphans being by definition trauma victims and orphanages the incubating jar of trauma, the 'incubus' by which trauma is so often expressed in the orphan's compulsive night search for the missing parent, where we might legitimately expect to find traumatic testimony and the double identities that it spawns enshrined. As Webber argues, 'The *Doppelgänger* is typically the product of a broken home.'<sup>441</sup> On this fertile ground, the uses of film fiction in transmitting genocidal trauma are most plausibly to be defended, precisely due to the cultural specificity and rigorous self-interrogation of recent Balkan (particularly Albanian) cinema, which, as it emerged from dictatorship, escaped also from the combination of psychological repression and political denial that so stultified Germany's post-war output.

*Lulekuqet Mbi Mure/Red Poppies on the Wall* (Dhimiter Anagnosti, 1976) tells of an Italian fascist orphanage under Mussolini's occupation of Albania, whose inmates are waiting only to become Communist partisans; *Golemata voda/The Great*

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<sup>441</sup> Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 5.

*Water* (Ivo Trajkov, 2005) recounts what those same Communist partisans, once in power from 1945, inflicted on their own orphans; the Kosovar *Kukumi* (Isa Qosja, 2005) narrates the unplanned diaspora of lunatics set free by warfare in a country taking leave of its senses; and Gjergj Xhuvani's unfilmed script *The Missionary* completes the cycle with the vicissitudes of an American-run orphanage under siege during the Albanian pyramid collapse, thus forming a pendant to the *Magic Eye* of Kujtim Çashku, an old friend of Xhuvani's. Albanian cinema is a small world, sometimes given to internecine strife, like the country itself.

While *Lulekuqet Mbi Mure* observes all the generic requirements of the propaganda film from colonial black shirt boss to local idealist teacher, the film lives to a startling degree in the freshness and honesty of the boys' performances, which transcend, subvert even, any political message the film might lazily nod at with the ritualised resistance solidarity of its optimistic conclusion, in which the filmmaker himself clearly does not hold much faith. Remarkable is rather the extent to which the Italians – even the Mussolini look-alike – are *not* demonised but represented by default as educated carriers of a malevolent philanthropy, the school itself being no concentration camp but a botched colonial experiment. The inciting violence is carried out not by the Italians but by the Albanian partisan who assassinates the local garrison commander, and subsequently by the boys themselves when they set up the Italian Headmaster for the hail of bullets that eventually despatches him. The filmmaker (or the censors) maybe took it for granted that Fascists deserve to die on the basis of their known and palpable crimes, but the lack of proportion in this sentence has a fatal effect on the moral authority of their film, demonstrating that any film story needs to be tested within its own dramatic reality rather than propped up by external consensus. The chemistry of boarding school life is well observed, though rarely are we allowed to dwell on the boys' interior world, bar one scene which stands for the orphans' bereavement trauma repeated: one of the boys is mistaken for the assassin and gunned down trying to escape, creating a bond between the survivors expressed through the bunch of flowers left on his desk the next day. This is trauma as propaganda, functionalised as motivation for murderous political activism.<sup>442</sup>

Shot across the border from Albania in Macedonia, *Golemata voda/The Great Water* deals more harshly with the Communists than *Lulekuqet* did with the Fascists.

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<sup>442</sup> See also *Kthimi I Ushtrisë Së Vdekur/Return of the Dead Army* (Dhimiter Agnasnosti, 1989), from the novel by Ismail Kadaré, and Iordanova, *The Cinema of the Balkans*, pp. 237-245.

Based on the much-loved 1970s novel (originally for children) by Zhivko Chingo its narrative is confined almost entirely to a crenellated fortress resembling Kafka's Castle, into which all stray, miscreant or dissident children are rounded up in the chaotic aftermath of war and pressganged into the brave new world of Uncle Joe Stalin, to whom the Warden bears a sinister resemblance. Amidst ritualised solemnity he appears on a long flight of steps and stares down with avuncular menace at the children paraded by their fanatical youth leaders. Brainwash is obligatory; the faintest whiff of individualism let alone sexuality or humour is severely punished; the theft of the icily desirable commissar's Red Flag running shorts (a coveted Party Award for Athletic Achievement) is a dereliction for which the whole colony will pay if the culprit is not betrayed, which should prove routine in this culture of spying and informing. The hint of carnival, complete with dominatrix innuendo, is more slight than subversive, but the fortress is chillingly well lit, the repressive atmosphere sustained and the paranoid logic that led to *Kolonel Bunker* already present in embryonic form: perfectly healthy if war-traumatized children are confined to a psychotic institution that will drive them mad, an apt metaphor for Tito's 1945 seizure of Yugoslavia, his early Stalinist purges and his neighbour Hoxha's genocide by insane asylum, to which this film bears witness.

Written barely a year later and still in search of finance, *The Missionary* (Gjergj Xhuvani) takes us into an entirely different world where the repressive conformity of Communism has lurched into the unthinking anarchy of the capitalist pyramid calamity, introduced in the prologue via a tank careering through a checkpoint to bring lottery-winning newly-weds to the National Football Stadium, whence they will be airlifted out of the chaos to safety. 'I'm the only taxi driver left in town', declares the tank commander, quoting the lottery advert 'Get married in Albania, get laid in New York', a bizarre twist on the emigration fever that saw hundreds swimming through Durres harbour in a last desperate effort not to miss the relief boat bound for Italy and freedom. Unbeknownst to its occupants, the tank passes a lonely figure just arriving, American missionary John Jefferson bound for his orphanage in Vlora, scene of some of the worst atrocities. Simultaneously, Tirana prostitute Bela tries to rescue her daughter whom she left there four years earlier, an orphan to her mother's trade. Sex worker and missionary narrowly fail to cross amidst the banditry of the road and barely avoid the random bullets of rooftop snipers killing for fun, though Bela is raped at an unofficial checkpoint subsequently wiped out by a

rival gang. The weight of the script is given to the terrified children holed up in the orphanage without food or drink, whose rescue requires of Jefferson the abandonment of his evangelist certainties in favour of theft and violence, and even of adultery. Amidst the gunfire outside the girls lie awake, crying for their mothers:

Gesi escapes from the hold of her friends and starts to climb up the sandbags. Trapped, she screams again. 'I want my mommy!' The other girls pull Gesi down. She begins trembling violently. 'Why did they put your mom in the grave before she was dead? Because she was a witch, that's why!' Vjollca slaps Ani in the face hard. Ani screams. The other girls begin screaming...

These are orphans who are literally climbing the wall, as the trauma of personal bereavement, already a 'Fremdkörper' lodged in their psyche, is released by the physical, political violence invading their protected world, stray bullets shattering windows and terror accompanying every knock at the sandbagged door. The style comes closer to an emotional encounter with the reality of trauma, whether infant or adult, than any of the preceding titles. The script achieves what a western writer labouring under preconceptions about Christian evangelism would struggle for, namely a missionary who is complex in motivation and action, urging his orphans 'thou shalt not steal' as he goes out to rob on their behalf, protecting their innocence with his sin.

In Xhuvani's development from *Dear Enemy* to *The Missionary*, as in Çashku's from *Kolonel Bunker* to *Magic Eye*, one reads a growth of moral sophistication redoubled by its outlawing under the Communist system these authors had grown up in and moved on from, a moral sophistication born of trauma and its aftermath which we in the West, after half a century of peace, can match only in the rediscovery of our own traumatic past through the Holocaust.

Returning to Felman's 'testimonial teaching', and to my analogous experience with a class of young Albanian filmmakers and their film projects in development, one of these runs as follows:

At the end of the second world war my grandfather, an Albanian partisan, is liberated from a Nazi concentration camp too traumatized to manage his freedom and sent to work for German farmers equally traumatized by the

defeat of their nation, a defeat they deny in their scapegoating of this convenient victim obliged to start each day with *Heil Hitler!* Eventually recovering his independence, he regains Albania and his home to find his family destroyed by his own side and only two orphans remaining. (Ermal Himaj).

Only the scrupulous recording of this story in a foreign language, English, had enabled the student to confront the reality of bereavement. Amidst the tearful interruptions, the Principal Kujtim Çashku properly suggested an adjournment, while I insisted on continuing to the bitter end, an act of violence which, rightly or wrongly, allowed the student's autobiographical unburdening to take filmic shape rather than be squandered. Whether the multiple ironies of this tale will ever reach the 'silver screen' or remain the personal testimony of one amongst several brave writers in that classroom, it certainly reached its audience that day and constitutes not just remembrance but witness, of second as well as first generation trauma.



## CONCLUSION

Längst vergessene Zeiten haben eine große, eine oft rätselhafte Anziehung für die Phantasie der Menschen.<sup>443</sup>

Behind the powerlessness of God peeps the powerless of men, who continue to cry “May that never happen again!” when it is clear that “that” is, by now, everywhere.<sup>444</sup>

### Film as Trauma

The notion that testimonial film is an ‘epistle without ink’ should need no elucidation. But the question remains: to what extent, in its espousal of ‘testimony’, has film not only created a form of its own, but additionally usurped and superseded any or all of its predecessors listed by Elie Wiesel,<sup>445</sup> particularly the sacral function of tragedy and the elegiac lament of the sonnet. Just as Holocaust lyric poetry, represented by Celan, for instance, has survived the calls to deferential silence from Adorno and others,<sup>446</sup> it may be time to ask whether the dramaturgical functions of the tragic muse often scourged for ‘sacralization’ or ‘false catharsis’ are genuinely incompatible with a decent working-through of trauma. While Steiner asserts that tragedy requires ‘the intolerable burden of God’s presence’,<sup>447</sup> his own writing conveys the intolerable burden of God’s absence. A redemptionist discourse of ennoblement through suffering, impossible since Auschwitz, is not the only tragic model available, nor is a capitulation to futility in the guise of the ‘absurd’. The loneliness of our aspirations in an empty universe must surely be matter for tragedy while any individual is left to write and perform it.

These thoughts echo closely Caruth’s approach when she writes in *Unclaimed Experience* of ‘a parable of psychoanalytic theory itself as it listens to a voice that it cannot fully know but to which it nonetheless bears witness’.<sup>448</sup> Caruth’s ‘surprise of

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<sup>443</sup> Freud, ‘Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion’, *Gesammelte Werke* XV1, p. 175.

<sup>444</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 20.

<sup>445</sup> See epigraph to Chapter Six.

<sup>446</sup> See Peter Hutchinson, ‘Paul Celan, “Todesfuge”’, *Landmarks in German Poetry*, ed. Hutchinson (Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt/M., New York, Wien: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 201-215, here 201. “‘Todesfuge’ [...] proved that the horrors of ‘Auschwitz’, contrary to the famous utterance of Adorno, could actually be made into the very subject-matter of poetry.’

<sup>447</sup> Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 331.

<sup>448</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 9.

listening to another's wound'<sup>449</sup> aptly describes the operation of film on its audience as a psychoanalytic, creative-therapeutic dialogue which functions as testimony in itself. To apply the memorable formulation of van der Kolk and van der Hart: 'Traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experience, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language'.<sup>450</sup>

This describes perfectly the process of film making, which moves from the isolation and recovery of countless traumatic moments in single shots, via the editing process which gives meaning to these moments more through the interstices, the *non-dit* or subtext concealed within the countless ruptures of montage, to the emergence of a final assembly. From this finished form, the viewing eye can integrate the occulted, repressed or denied events into 'existing mental schemes' of acculturated reception, concluding with the miraculous transformation of traumatic fracture into a cogent, healing, narrative language.

Film is a confrontation with our mortality through the creation of a specular relationship,<sup>451</sup> allowing us to partake in a life which continues in our absence and to which our feelings are curiously extraneous even though passionately experienced. Half sleeping in a darkened room, separated from our fellows in a strange coma of subliminal reception,<sup>452</sup> our state resembles Hamlet's speculations on the after life: 'To sleep, perhaps to dream?' When Lifton writes that 'a confrontation with death in trauma is a radical break with any kind of knowledge, or with what we normally think of as experience', and insists on 'the numbing experience as having potential for insight',<sup>453</sup> he might be describing the psychic state of cinematic reception, a haunting by the intimation of our phantom double or *Doppelgänger*. Film, by its very nature (assembly, montage, disruptions, ellipses) reflects the discontinuities of trauma and arguably exerts a traumatic secondary effect on the viewer.

Creativity is impossible without latent trauma, for any fully experienced event is absorbed without trace into the subject's psyche and offers no spur for creative exploration. Only the nagging sense that something is wrong, that forgotten or undigested grief must be unearthed and processed, provides the necessarily urge to

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>450</sup> van der Kolk/van der Hart, 'The Intrusive Past', *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 176.

<sup>451</sup> In the sense of the primordial specularity of the Lacanian mirror-stage.

<sup>452</sup> See Caruth on 'insight through numbing', 'Interview with Robert Jay Lifton', *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 134.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

abandon the comfort of amnesia and confront the hidden pain – Freud’s unexperienced accident - from which creative expression is born. Its fusion of the oneiric with the thanatotic gives film a unique power to recapture the near-death experience of trauma,<sup>454</sup> privileging the spectator with an Orphic insight into the afterlife by instating the trauma survivor as ‘the hero who returns with new knowledge’,<sup>455</sup> a witness to the beyond, thus apotheosising the cinema as the site of our symbolic struggle for immortality. This is a function that film has usurped from religion, whose dark side is manifest in the perpetuation of the perpetrators’ propaganda even after their demise, perhaps best summarized by Santner writing about Syberberg’s *Hitler* in a telling blend of religious and Situationist language: ‘Cinema [...] became the literal and figural site of that lethal aestheticization of politics that was German fascism. The guilt or fallenness of cinema derives, then, from its complicity in mechanisms of projection and identification which were deployed by the Nazis to mobilize the population, and which have become integral to a postwar society largely grounded in image consumption and spectacle’.<sup>456</sup>

### **Traumata Past and Future**

If, as Caruth writes, ‘trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on’,<sup>457</sup> the history of trauma cannot be confined to a clearly delineated historical period. Rather, it is prolonged in its ‘haunting’ of survivors, their offspring and their societies into an infinitely extendable purgatory, while other genocides intervene, complicating, postponing or displacing entirely the business of healing and atonement. Modern genocides may go unnoticed amidst traumatic fixation on rapidly receding history.

The challenge is to match the pace of human absorption of experience with the redoubled speed of that experience. At any one moment in time we are not just living (or avoiding) the present, we are also assimilating (or denying) the past, rendering

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid., p. 128: ‘Focusing on survival, rather than on trauma, puts the death back into the traumatic experience, because survival suggests that there has been death, and the survivor therefore has had a death encounter, and the death encounter is central to his or her psychological experience.’

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., p. 134, on ‘death equivalents’.

<sup>456</sup> Santner, *Stranded Objects*, p. 142.

<sup>457</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 4.

several periods psychologically synchronous. History continues unstoppably without us, whether we experience it or not. This creates a disjunction, a space in which events can be repressed and forgotten, leaving second or third generation ‘survivors’ to deal with the post-traumatic residue, obliged to process the guilt of ancestors they never knew. The sins of the fathers (and mothers) are indeed visited upon the children, often in ways they cannot possibly understand or interpret. The delayed reaction to trauma is something humankind can ill afford, for while one traumatic event is being suppressed, denied or acted out, another is in the making: between 1960 and 1979, arguably the heyday of Holocaust suppression, there were at least a dozen genocides or genocidal massacres,<sup>458</sup> and the number has accelerated exponentially despite the carnivalesque explosion in Holocaust studies sardonically dubbed ‘Shoah-business’.

While accepting that the Holocaust occupies a place of unique horror and metaphysical anguish (an ‘ontological’ genocide),<sup>459</sup> and that ‘comparison’ can serve the revisionists as a tool for euphemism or denial, we must nonetheless accept that ‘unique’ does not necessarily connote ‘unrepeatable’. Reverence should not leave us blind or complacent to the growing temptations of radical answers in a world where diplomacy is so easily overtaken by aggression, ‘an overwhelming obstacle to civilization’, as Freud noted in the late pessimism of *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*.<sup>460</sup>

Genocide is *not* ‘an event outside the range of human experience’ (the US legal definition of trauma till very recently),<sup>461</sup> any more than rape or child abuse. It recurs with the compulsive repetition of long repressed trauma. Until the balance of retrospection and expectation is redressed in scholarship, until the tone of surprise and grief in Holocaust studies is itself addressed, we will continue to lull readers into a false sense of security. This is not to suggest that the academy should abandon aspirations inherited from the Enlightenment and much earlier, nor that commentators should coarsen their intuitions of human achievement at its highest. It does mean that sensibilities should be stiffened with an alertness to the omnipresence of crisis and the

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<sup>458</sup> Bauman, *The Holocaust’s Ghost*, citing Helen Fein, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective* (London: Sage, 1993), p. 6.

<sup>459</sup> Steiner, *Errata*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>460</sup> Freud, ‘Das Unbehagen in der Kultur’, *Gesammelte Werke*, XIV, pp. 419-506.

<sup>461</sup> Brown, ‘Not Outside the Range’, in *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 185.

resultant attractions of trauma-inflicting behaviour,<sup>462</sup> which aptly illustrates Arendt's much-abused dictum on 'the banality of evil', in other words its everyday availability.

Efforts have been made recently to 'step back from purely loyalist positions' on the Holocaust,<sup>463</sup> and Hoffmann addresses 'the task of unfreezing myths and unpacking stereotypes' by combining personal reflections on the burdens inherited by second generation Holocaust survivors with vivid responses to more recent atrocities in South Africa, Rwanda, Uganda and Ethiopia as well as the Balkans,<sup>464</sup> most of them now receding from the public mind. 'Who now remembers the Armenians?' she chillingly quotes Hitler, contemplating his own genocide and its future irrelevance to history. Noting that for the current cult of memory as an undisputed 'source of value and virtue', the Holocaust is a 'central pillar and paradigm of tragic and exalted memory', she also detects that compassion has become self-referential: 'It is easy to mistake keening for ourselves for keening for the Shoah', which should serve instead as 'a template for the study of analogous events and certain fundamental problems'.<sup>465</sup> Even this worthy overture is open to dubious recuperation, for Balkan genocide has often been compared to the Holocaust but rarely to non-European genocides, which are implicitly deemed to deserve, and bestow, a less 'tragic and exalted memory', confirming our stubborn Eurocentrism.<sup>466</sup>

While post-colonial enquiry has successfully challenged, even inverted, our perceptions of the European colonial adventure, works of imaginative or critical reconstruction on the Holocaust and its results stop short of projecting a hypothetical future for a culturally mixed continent, simply because the Holocaust is such a massive *fait accompli*. Perhaps we should ask how our modern multiculturalism might have been assisted or impeded by Europe's pre-existing, now vanished minorities, or how the Middle East might have fared without the Jewish *aliya* that the war precipitated. The unconscious dread that haunts interpretation of the Shoah is that the world may yet pay for this transgression. Myths live on in phylogenetic memory, Freud tells us, active agents at once internal and other ('Fremdkörper'), even when their origins (such as the murder of Moses) have been forgotten. Long after its precise

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<sup>462</sup> 'The Shoah is treated with such piety in academic circles that criticism [...] is taken as anti-Semitic.' Professor Colin Davis. See notes 9 and 417.

<sup>463</sup> Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge*, p. 146.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113. '...in the recent Yugoslav wars, the less reliable soldiers of mercilessness were plied with vodka or even drugs to deaden whatever inklings of compassion they might still have harboured.'

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>466</sup> See Iordanova, *Cinema in Flames*, pp. 48-49.

history may have been lost, and long into an unknowable future, the Holocaust will be remembered as the original sin of modern man that threw us out of Eden into further catastrophe. Friedlander warns, for instance, that a buried fear of repetition will become self-fulfilling, that 'the Holocaust will be so deeply ingrained in Jewish consciousness as to become an impediment to the progress towards peace'.<sup>467</sup>

Meanwhile the questions of German guilt, atonement and redemption lead us constantly in the wrong direction, namely back to the perpetrator, the Gorgon, whose psyche is hideously shallow but vested with a malefic *faszinosum* more conducive to repetition than healing. The only issue, as Lanzmann says, is transmission; and, we might add, re-creation, restoration, recuperation. Through its restitution of presence, film, were it only to find the correct rites, would be uniquely placed to recuperate the traumatized psyche of our continent.

While the Holocaust is undoubtedly a unique event in many of its primary features, the possibilities of recurrence (in modified or even in heightened form) demand our vigilance. The origin, direction and pseudo-justifications of genocide are various, but the temptations to impose radical 'solutions' by extreme violence, to solve a 'problem' by effacing it, to dismantle a binary opposition rather than deconstruct it, are ever-present and increasingly seductive in a world confronting new challenges such as population explosion, water shortage, climate change and fuel exhaustion as well as the older ones of religious bigotry and race hatred, any one of which could provide the breeding ground for action which might consign the Holocaust to a footnote in our history.

So let us remember the *mitzvah* of Sarajevo, that our fixation on the Holocaust as the eternal *ne plus ultra* of horror not prove sadly short-lived.

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<sup>467</sup> Friedlander, *Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, pp. xi-xii.

## EPILOGUE

Is the testimony, therefore, a simple medium of historical transmission,  
or is it, in obscure ways, the unsuspected medium of a healing?<sup>468</sup>

### Cinema as Traumatic Diplomacy

As an apparatus of the society of spectacle, film can certainly be recuperated for purposes that manipulate or subvert its content. But, on a less baleful note, it also functions as a vehicle for international exchanges, and for more positive and equitable forms of recuperation. A brief account of one such can serve as a hopeful outlook here. It is the signal achievement of the Sarajevo Film Festival, co-founded by its long serving director Mirsad Purivatra in the midst of the siege accompanied by genocidal atrocity, to have created a forum in which historical disasters can be addressed, an asset to Bosnian diplomacy and the locus of negotiation between recently warring states of which it was the prime target and principle victim. The Festival's Cinelink script development programme, organized by Sarajevo producer Amra Bakšić Čamo, unites cineastes from Bosnia with their counterparts from across the former Yugoslavia (and beyond) in creative reconciliation through the asking of hard questions, while the culminating Cinelink market held during the festival invites producers from across Europe (and beyond) to invest in the results.

In the process, Sarajevo has made itself the motor of an accelerated process of healing, which paradoxically it seems only the victim can set in motion. Through the lasting kinship of a shared spoken language (albeit now named variously Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian etc.) with its enduring cinematic traditions and a concomitant distribution market, the film producers of the region are finding reason to make common cause. The recent *Karaula/Border Post* (Rajko Grlić, 2006), with its ribald tale of venereal disease erupting as *casus belli* between Balkan neighbours, effectively satirizes the artificial and unwanted diaspora of the former Yugoslavia, a once unitary state now fractured into its not-quite-constituent parts, inflicting on its inhabitants an inner exodus,<sup>469</sup> which might prove an unhappy model for diasporas yet unimagined. Mounted by Sarajevan producer Ademir Kenović with subsidies from the Ministries

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<sup>468</sup> Felman, 'Education and Crisis', *Trauma*, ed. Caruth, p. 47.

<sup>469</sup> A longer version of this epilogue was published as 'An Inner Exodus: The Many Diasporas of Balkan Cinema', *Cineaste*, Vol. XXXI No. 3 (Summer 2007), Balkan Supplement, ed. Iordanova.

of each of the constituent republics of the former Yugoslavia, *Karaula* was a feat of cinematic diplomacy that arguably transcended the creative aspirations of the film and might serve as an example (after the Scandinavian model) for the reconstruction of a Balkan film industry that once thrived under the command economy. However, the *Karaula* audit provides a note of caution: the addition of so many co-producers, each with their own costs, inflated the production budget by nearly a third. Nevertheless, Kenović is unrepentant: ‘Suddenly the participants were no longer separated by an ice wall, the canyon that had separated them was filled with stepping stones, creative energies were liberated.’ The tug-of-war between competing Ministries was overtaken by appreciation of the political benefits, once it became clear that *Karaula* advocated neither greater ‘closeness’ nor greater ‘separation’. The main achievement, he believes, was to show that the former Yugoslavia is capable of looking at the seeds of the conflict, to reflect on the situation before and after federal disintegration and to overcome uneasiness about the truths this disguises.

A similar recuperation of the much-missed Yugoslavia in more troubled mode has been achieved by Panov in *Comrades* (Mitko Panov, 2002), in which he reunites his fellow conscripts of the Yugoslav ‘Peace Army’, who have since fought each other on opposite sides in a genocidal war. His latest film *The War is Over*<sup>470</sup> traces the traumatic impact of the Kosovar crisis on Medvedar refugees in Switzerland, of whom Panov, despite his international career, is still one.

The inward and outward diasporas inflicted by the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, and the traumatic effect on its forcibly evicted inhabitants, cannot be reversed even in the imagination of the inspired filmmakers of the region, but their newfound co-operation in ‘pan-Balkan mutuality’,<sup>471</sup> aided by the healing role assumed by Sarajevo, will surely assist the current if fragile *détente* and the cause of peace and reconciliation. Whether or not this accelerated *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* can be achieved to good effect before the asset strippers of the international film world leave the Balkans a cultural desert and the filmmaker again a rootless nomad, remains to be seen. Despite (or even because of) the trauma of war, with its usual aftermath of endemic corruption and criminality, Balkan film is developing with an originality that Western Europe, including Germany’s reinvigorated industry, will find hard to match.

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<sup>470</sup> Script consultant, Gareth Jones.

<sup>471</sup> Iordanova, *The Cinema of the Balkans*, p. 11.



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