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Memory and Power:

Reflections on History, Memory, and Auschwitz in Contemporary Art and Film

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Art History, Theory and Criticism

by

Orly Shevi

Committee in charge:

Professor Lesley F. Stern, Chair
Professor Norman Bryson
Professor Jean Pierre Gorin
Professor Yen Le Espiritu
Professor Lisa Yoneyama

2010

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2010

Dedication

For Yuval Shevi, and girls like her who are so eager to learn about our world

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Abstract of the Dissertation

Memory and Power:

Reflections on History, Memory, and Auschwitz in Contemporary Art and Film

by

Orly Shevi

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Art History, Theory and Criticism

University of California, San Diego, 2010

Professor Lesley F. Stern, Chair

This project aims to explore the connection between history, memory, political power, and visual art. It aims to contribute insight to how contemporary visual artists, like the filmmaker Jean Luc Godard, and the installation artist Christian Boltanski, confront politics through the reformation of collective memory. In their case the memory and history that they evoke are connected to Second War World and the Holocaust. In a very schematic way I will try to describe their role as a provider of a sight; a sight of the political struggle. I structured our investigation of Boltanski and Godard's works around three general questions on art, history and power. These questions provided a point of

departure for my exploration, and helped with the formation of my arguments. At first, I tried to understand the presence of history in both Boltanski's and Godard's works. As I explained in this project, their motivations come from different reasons and events. Above all, as I have presented in this project, these artists use history in order to understand the conditions of the present moment. Therefore, I will argue that both Boltanski and Godard are historians of the present. Secondly, it was important for me to understand their specific use of the Holocaust and Auschwitz in their works. Here we notice how this event is perceived, as a reflection of social structures, and our understanding of the way power operates has grown accordingly. In this respect, Boltanski and Godard's works fall, both directly and indirectly, under the theoretical framework formulated by Michel Foucault, Adi Ophir, and Giorgio Agamben. The third question relates specifically to the art world and art practice, focusing on the attempt to expose how artistic methods and technique function as apparatuses of power. In other words, I wanted to understand and expose how power suffuses art through artistic practices. Here, I followed Godard's own investigation of cinematic montage, and Boltanski's challenges of archival practice. Therefore, it was through their paradigms that I was able to consider alternatives.

Chapter 1: Introduction:

‘A Site of Struggle’: The Political Challenge of Memorization in Contemporary Art

*The choice for Jews as for non-Jews is not whether to have a past, but rather – what kind of past shall one have.*¹

1.1: Locating ‘Sites of Struggle’

In a 1974 interview² in France, the philosopher Michael Foucault was asked about the then-new cultural phenomenon of ‘retro’ style films evoking World War II and the Nazi regime. Although the focus of the conversation was Louis Malle’s *Lacombe Lucien* and Liliana Cavani’s *Night Porter*, the discussion also alludes to cultural and political change on a larger scale. As many historians notice,³ the beginning of the 1970s, the period after ‘68 in particular, marks a shift in the discourse and practice regarding history and memory, generally, and visual arts, practically. The interviewer inquires as to what contemporary issues lead to the appearance of films reflecting on such a specific and complicated past, and wonders why the films are met with such an incredible response.

¹ Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. 1996. *Zakhor : Jewish History and Jewish Memory, The Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish studies*. Seattle: University of Washington Press: p.99

² Reprinted under the title “Film and Popular Memory” in: Foucault, Michel, and Sylvère Lotringer. 1996. *Foucault Live : (interviews, 1961-1984)*. New York: Semiotext(e): pp. 122-132.

³ Rousso, Henry. 1991. *The Vichy Syndrome : History and Memory in France since 1944*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

He was guiding the discussion toward the centrality of sexuality or re-eroticization of power that these films provoke.⁴ Foucault, however, suggests a much more profound interpretation of this phenomenon; he describes the films as part of a real struggle that takes place in the present moment over what he defines as ‘popular memory’ of the history of the war in France. Accordingly, popular memory is the practice of recording the past, usually by private people and organizations outside of the official historical discourse. These agents are usually regarded as a threat to the social order. As Foucault explains, “Since memory is actually a very important factor in struggle (really, in fact, struggles develop in a kind of conscious moving forward of history), if one controls people’s memory, one controls their dynamism. And one also controls their experience, their knowledge of previous struggles. (...) It’s vital to have possession of this memory, to control it, to administer it, tell it what it must contain.”⁵ Therefore, he continues, a number of apparatuses have been set up to obstruct the flow of popular memory. Among them are popular literature, war photo albums, history lessons in school, as well as the recently added and quite effective means of television and cinema. The goal of these apparatuses is to present not what really happened, but what must be remembered as having happened. This is a way to reprogram popular memory vis-à-vis dominant discourse and maintenance of the political status quo. Hence, according to Foucault, memory, like history, is a significant and powerful political tool. Whenever it is dredged up and discussed, we ought to be vigilant.

⁴ Foucault, Michel, and Sylvère Lotringer. 1996: p. 126

⁵ Ibid: p.124

That Foucault sees memorization as a powerful political apparatus is not surprising. What is striking in this interview is how he describes the formation of memory and history as a 'site of struggle'. Foucault repeatedly uses words like struggle, fight, battle, and war to depict the process of reprogramming memory. This brings to mind the way he inverts Clausewitz's phrase, claiming that politics is a continuation of war by other means, and memory and history have a fundamental part in it.⁶ Yet, the struggle is not necessarily a quarrel over historical facts, or the truth about what really took place in the past. As Foucault explains, the struggle is the way memory provides a framework to interpret the present. A 'site of struggle' over memory is, therefore, a struggle over interpretation of the past through the political prism of the present. Whenever we come across these sites we have to ask ourselves, first, how they embody the prism of the political reality in the present, and second, how they have been reprogrammed to perpetuate contemporary power. In this interview, Foucault exposes this mechanism while examining a 'site of struggle' over the memory and history of popular struggles during the 20th century, particularly in France:

Popular struggles have become for our society, not part of the actual, but part of the possible. So they have to be set at distance. How? Not by providing a direct interpretation of them, which would be liable to exposed. But by offering an historical interpretation of those popular struggle which have occurred in France in the past, in order to show that they never really happened! Before 1968 it was: 'It won't happen here because it's going on somewhere else.' Now it's: 'It won't happen here because it never has! Take something like Résistance even, this glorious

⁶ Foucault, Michel, Mauro Bertani, Alessandro Fontana, François Ewald, and David Macey. 2003. *Society Must Be Defended : Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*. 1st ed. New York: Picador: p. 15

empty, a hollow façade! It's another way of saying, 'Don't worry about Chile, it's no different; the Chilean peasants couldn't care less.'⁷

The dangerous phenomenon that Foucault notices here is obviously not the shattered memory of the Résistance in France, which sparked the reestablishment of a national identity after the war. But in the struggle over memory, this fragmentation operates as an apparatus to stifle any ideas or hope for change in the present moment; in 1974, it referred specifically to popular struggles like those happening in South and Central America, Vietnam, and Palestine. In other words, the breaking of the Résistance myth had been used to maintain the political status quo, by striving to emphasize the disillusion that reassures apathetic public reaction. Consequently, the intensive discourses on memory and history provide a camouflage for ideology, and a mask for oppression.

The goal of a filmmaker or an artist in this 'site of struggle' should be to probe the process of reprogramming history and memory. Therefore, their role is not only striving to evoke an alternative representation of the past, but to understand its implication on present politics and present the past as external to the prism of political power. Here is where the innovation and uniqueness of Foucault's observation on the role of art emerges. Accordingly, the task of an artist is not merely to be involved in creating 'sites of memory'⁸ for a community, but rather to create awareness of the fact that by doing so

⁷ Foucault, Michel, and Sylvère Lotringer. 1996: p. 130

⁸ Here I am using Pierre Nora's terms that have been so popular as analytic tool in the discourse on representation of the past in visual art. See: Nora, Pierre. 2001. *Rethinking France = Les lieux de mémoire*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. And on the use of these terms in visual art see Saltzman, Lisa. 2006. *Making Memory Matter : Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

they generate ‘sites of struggle’ over the political power in the present. As such, they ought to take upon themselves the following role of the 19th century tradition of ‘popular memory’; memory is at work in its own pace, and their task is to subvert and challenge authorized history.⁹

While focusing specifically on the representation of heroes in the history of struggle, Foucault elaborates on what he sees as the real challenge that history and memory pose for the artist: “This has always been the aim of the history taught in schools: to teach ordinary people that they got killed and this was very heroic.” Any attempts to represent the individual hero – even a ‘positive hero’ or an ‘anti hero’ – are doomed to perpetuate the same historical cycle. As a result, the main effort of historical representation is to ask: “can you make a film about a struggle without going through the traditional process of creating heroes? It’s a new form of an old problem.”¹⁰ Beyond the specific problem of representation of heroes and struggle in French history, Foucault touches here upon a fundamental problem regarding the representation of the past. This problem consists of two entangled tasks for an artist: on the one hand, subverting the content that perpetuates the same ‘historical lesson’, and on the other, rethinking traditional forms and artistic strategies. The appropriate critical movement for the artist should be, first, exposing means of transmission as political apparatuses that perpetuate power in the present, and then finding a way to sever them from their meanings. This will eventually allow the presentation of alternative knowledge. Consequently, by following

⁹ This understanding evokes from the event of 1968, or the generational shift that took place in France. Documentary Films like *The Sorrow and the Pity* (Marcel Ophüls, 1969) challenge dramatically the myth of the résistance and Gaullism legacy.

¹⁰ Foucault, Michel, and Sylvère Lotringer. 1996: p. 125

Foucault's observations in this interview, contemporary artists ought to be aware that dealing with the past means taking part in the struggle to establish collective memory; that means taking part in the contemporary political debate over the interpretation of memory. Attempts by artists or art critics to a-politicize those works of art, claiming that they simply create sites of memory,¹¹ only enable reprogramming.

Thirty five years after this interview with Foucault on the new 'retro' style phenomenon in cinema, we know that this period marks the beginning of a long and jarring of representation of the history and memory of World War II, specifically with regards to the Jewish Holocaust. The political and social changes in Europe and America, including the generation shift (baby boomers, 1968 generation) provided the right environment for reopening the subject to widespread critical observation. Therefore, in addition to the films mentioned in this interview, we can add other important artistic projects. 1974 was the year that Claude Lanzmann started to work on his monumental film *Shoah*, and Jean Luc Godard concluded his film *Here and Elsewhere*, there, for the first time he used in his film images taken in the Nazi concentration camps. To name only a few more examples, Syberberg worked on his provocative film *Hitler, film from Germany*; in Italy we can name Visconti's the *Damned* and Pasolini's *Salò*; and in America the TV show *Holocaust* was first broadcast and forever changed people's awareness. We can also include in this list the German painter Kiefer, who presented his first pieces to deal with the subject. Since that interview, the production of films, television shows, and art that touch upon specific history and memory increase

¹¹ For example see Saltzman's discussion on Ann Hamilton's *welle*, 1997, in Saltzman, Lisa. 2006: pp.8-12.

dramatically and so do the theories and interpretations that follow them. This flood of productions had led to the emergence of a productive and intensive discourse over the representation of the Holocaust and the debate over the possibilities, imperatives, and limitations of the ethical representation of this tragic event. However, the conclusions that have been drawn from Foucault's analysis regarding the visual apparatuses that dictate what ought to be remembered have not been part of this discourse. The tasks that had been formulated by Foucault for artists seem to be forgotten. The political struggle over memory, which seems for Foucault to be so profoundly involved in the representation of memory, has been well concealed from the dominant discourse over artistic representation. Therefore, as I continue in my investigation into the 'sites of struggle' over memory, Foucault's understandings in this interview will provide guidelines for the configuration of my own argument in this dissertation.

In 1987, in the middle of the first Israeli-Lebanese war, after the massacres in refugee camps Sabra and Chatila, and on the eve of the first Intifada with the Palestinians, the Israeli philosopher Adi Ophir published a kind of manifesto concerning the legacy of the memory of the Jewish Holocaust, in Israel and around the world. In the end of the 80s, the memory of the Holocaust was by no means doomed to be forgotten, as many books, films and TV shows were produced in Israel and around the world on the subject. Moreover, the tremendous impact the film *Shoah*, released the year before, was still fresh in the Israeli public mind; the state of Israel was once again in the center stage trial for Ivan/John Demjanjuk – a former Nazi commander in Treblinka; and the end of the cold war allowed Israelis to visit Poland for the first time after WWII, and soon many

delegations of high school students started a tradition of annual pilgrimage to Auschwitz. All of that might explain why in “On Sanctifying the Holocaust: an Anti-Theological Treatise”¹² Ophir expresses alarm that the Holocaust memory has become a new religion. Mostly, he fears the common beliefs that the Holocaust should be considered a unique event in human history. He notices two major dichotomies that operate in the interpretation of the Holocaust memory: the ‘Jewish uniqueness’ versus the ‘universal’ approach; the metaphysic (transcendental) contra the political, epistemological approach. According to Ophir, memories of the Holocaust since the end of the war have been molded as a Jewish event, and the centrality of the Jewishness of the memory is interwoven with the tendency to study it as theological approach that mystifies everything regarding this historical event.¹³ Ophir sees it as a problematic message that leads toward recounting it as a specific and mystic event that made evil an absolutely unique and unexplainable phenomenon; as such it has nothing to do with the contemporary reality. Ophir even formulates four commandments that have become the paradigm in regarding to the memory of the Holocaust: “thou shalt have no other Holocaust”; “thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or likeness”; “thou shalt not take the name in vain”; “Remember the day of Holocaust to keep it holy, in memory of the destruction of the Jews of Europe”. The religious consciousness that has been built around the Holocaust may, according to Ophir, become the central aspect of this new religion; the face of absolute evil was revealed, or at least this is how the myth will reconstruct it, as the face

¹² Published first in Hebrew 1987, reprinted in: Hornstein, Shelley, Laura Levitt, and Laurence J. Silberstein. 2003. *Impossible Images : Contemporary Art after the Holocaust, New Perspectives on Jewish Studies*. New York: New York University Press: pp.195-205

¹³ More on the Jewish historians’ dilemma see: Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. 1996: pp. 95-103

of a bureaucrat (the Absolute, even the embodiment of Evil, cannot be understood without a certain degree of personification). “Holocaust is God”, claims Ophir, and this new religion is already reality.

But, “why is our Holocaust myth so dangerous?” Ophir raises the question straight forwardly and immediately responds:

Because it blurs the humanness of the Holocaust; because it erases degrees and continuums and put in their place as infinite distance between one type of atrocity and all other types of human atrocities; because it encourages the memory as an excuse for one more nation-unifying ritual and not as a tool for historical understanding; because it makes it difficult to understand the Holocaust as a product of a human, material, and ideological system; because it directs us almost exclusively to the past, to the immortalization of that which is beyond change, instead of pointing primarily to the future, to the prevention of Holocaust – like the one that was, or another, more horrible – which is more possible today than ever before but is still in the realm of that which is crooked and can be made straight.¹⁴

From this quote we can notice how Ophir follows the same line of thought that was formulated by Foucault more than a decade before, concerning the national identity and history surrounding interpretation and policy of memory of this event. Both of them protest against the powerful and dangerous apparatuses that the State operates in order to claim control over the official memory. Foucault was concerned with national honor in the struggle against or collaboration with the Nazi regime. In Ophir's case, his fears and concerns are around the rise of Israeli (Jewish) Nationality and the narrative of

¹⁴ Hornstein, Shelley, Laura Levitt, and Laurence J. Silberstein. 2003: p.199

victimhood. Both articulate the concern that this kind of interpretation leads to a specific policy. In the Israeli case, at end of the 1980s this discourse led directly to their policy in the political and military conflict with the Palestinians. For that reason, Ophir is mostly concerned with the tendency in the Israeli media and public to regard the Holocaust as a specifically Jewish event that is part of a large narrative of anti-Semitic discourse and therefore the dichotomy is clear – avoiding any responsibility for the contemporary atrocity or any other means for critical self-reflection in the political sphere. Once again, in the background of this manifesto is the Sabbra and Chattila massacre during the Lebanon war:

The Jewish Question turns the Holocaust into a holy source of reference to the past. The universal question presents the Holocaust as a permanently necessary background to interpretations of the present and intentions for the future. In the final account, the difference is a question of where we choose to place the Absolute Evil: as a revelation whose place is in the past, or as a possibility whose place is in the present.¹⁵

Out of this apprehension, in the second half of his manifesto Ophir calls for a change in the interpretation of Holocaust memorization, and crafts an alternative formation of its four commandments. His goal is to implement the other side of the dichotomy and try to consider the Holocaust a universal event that affects all of humanity. Accordingly, this side of the framework emphasizes political and moral standards, and leads to an understanding of what fuels those atrocities. Therefore, the

¹⁵ Ibid: p. 201

event is no longer the epitome of absolute evil, but a systematic human mechanism that might return. The main subject that Ophir underlines, and here is where he draws from Foucault the most, is the imperative to expose the mechanism of power that made this atrocity possible:

From the conflagration we must today carry a different message, a message at whose center lies the humanness of the atrocity, the fact that the atrocity is an existing human possibility – that is, our possibility. This is the proper basis for modern human solidarity. When the required modes of discourse exist, when the technologies of power are at hand, when love and hate are present in the proper dose and directed in the appropriate channels, then every person may be the sacrifice, and everyone may be the a participant in the slaughter. And we must also take into account how much the technologies of destruction have advanced since then, and how much, as a result, the investment in obedience, loyalty, and lust, required to operate them, has been reduced.¹⁶

The main point in this quote is not merely the fact that many of the technologies of power that operated under the Nazi regime are still functioning today, but accordingly, the most imperative interpretation of the memorization of the Holocaust will be to place it in the present. That means diverting the gaze from the meticulous search for historical facts and knowledge – that will discharge the furious discussion around the denial of the Holocaust, instead, emphasizing the close examination of the human side of power structures wherever and whenever they have operated. Ophir argues that in this way we will insist upon seeing the Holocaust as the realization of human possibilities, or in other words, of our own possibilities. Although in this short essay Ophir does not have the

¹⁶ Ibid: p. 204

opportunity to explore in depth the direction he suggests, he briefly comments on three courses that might be suitable to begin with. First, by understanding the powerful mechanism of “excluding” as part of the definition of reverse identity, the process of excluding and including parts from human society due to different reasons, once again crucial in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Secondly, he addresses the development, organization, and nurturing of the technology of power. And last, he exposes the tremendous eroticism invested in the organization of the power order. Thus, when Ophir concludes his manifesto, he tries to formulate a different treaty and commandments that will develop an alternative memory of the Holocaust, and he concludes: “thou shall have no other Holocaust”; yet, if one is possible, have another, do everything that you can to make the Holocaust concrete, remember in order to understand the technology of power and the mode of excluding that made the Holocaust possible.

Ophir only briefly, yet very insightfully, comments on the visual field’s role in memorization of the Holocaust. By formulating his comments so they closely resemble the second biblical commandant: "thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or likeness”, he states that the main thought beyond it is that no artistic or literary representation can succeed in this task. He explains by following the manner and attitude of many art critics and philosophers:

The best of literature, drama, or cinema can only touch upon the margins of the atrocity, document it through fragments of memories of those still living and anyone who actually tries to describe the hell is punished severely by the critics. What was then real is beyond the capabilities of poetry, art and dramatic reconstruction. Exactly as it is impossible to

understand the transcendental in the framework of a scientific theory, it is equally impossible to create it in the realms of the imagination.¹⁷

As I will explore later in this chapter, this dominant paradigm was formulated first by Theodor Adorno, right after the war, and has been maintained as a dogma in the fields of art. And as Ophir realizes: “The outcome of every such analytical or artistic attempt is distortion rather than representation, camouflage rather than reconstruction, forgetting rather than remembering. These are almost a priori rules of the critics, which are independent of the nature and quality of the specific artistic piece toward which they are directed.”¹⁸ Although Ophir does not provide more details on what should be considered a direction for artistic representation to the Holocaust, we can still assume that he, like Foucault, would like to see artists taking part in the political struggle over memory. That means focusing on exposing power technologies and apparatuses that made the Holocaust possible in the present. Ophir, in the second half of his manifesto, returns to the ban over the image but this time he calls upon artists: “Do everything that you can to concretize the horror. Honor its intricate details. Present as much as possible of its creeping before the explosion, its day-to-day occurrences, its uncountable human, all too human, faces.”¹⁹

Ophir's groundbreaking and inspirational observations on the problematization of Holocaust memory in this manifesto and in his following book, *The Order of Evil*, fully correspond to Foucault's understandings on reprogramming memory and technology of power in contemporary West. Ophir underlines a new phenomenon regarding the

¹⁷ Ibid: p. 197

¹⁸ Ibid: p. 198

¹⁹ Ibid: p. 203

memory of the Holocaust – sanctification – that in the year that followed has become even more central and troubling. Therefore, in the next chapters, Ophir’s argument will provide for me yet another tool to sharpen my own argument in this dissertation.

In 1995, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben published the first book in his landmark trilogy *Homo Sacer*. At that moment in time, the world was still celebrating what has been termed the ‘unipolar moment’ due to the end of Soviet regime, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin wall. It seemed obvious that from then on there would only one superpower, the U.S.A.; one political system, liberal democracies; and one economic system, capitalism. In this moment of celebration and chaos, some historians declared the ‘end of history’, the end of polar struggles between power regimes.²⁰ Nevertheless, in Europe, concerning events like the reunion of the two Germanys, and, the atrocity that took place in former Yugoslavia, evoked visions from traumatic past.

Agamben’s book, however, seeks to return to some basic questions regarding the logic of sovereignty, by following the understanding of central philosophers of the 20th century like Heidegger, Schmitt, Benjamin, Arendt, and mainly Foucault’s term *Biopolitic*. The third part of this book is the most provocative one; there, Agamben claims that the Nazi concentration camp has become the concealed paradigm of modern sovereignty. This is by no means a simple argument, and needless to say, was not created merely for provocation. It is a kind of argument that requires some clarifications to the definition of a paradigm, how it functions, and how it has been concealed in

²⁰ See Agamben’s reflection on this historical moment in “Notes on Politics” (1992) reprinted in: Agamben, Giorgio. 1999. *The Man without Content*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press: pp. 109-120

contemporary political power. These clarifications will be made in the second chapter of this dissertation. Nevertheless, it is clear that Agamben's provocation is made in two claims: First, the paradigm of the camp for many has been the example to the exceptional horror of human evil that emerged out of civilized norm, yet for Agamben it has become the rule of contemporary power. The second claim is raised by the question of how someone can state that the concentration camp – a totalitarian practice – is our cultural, political paradigm. This analogy seems perverse and vicious. Many of Agamben's critics use those two claims as the basis for their contra-arguments.²¹

What needs to be immediately addressed here is the fact that Agamben doubtlessly perceives the Nazi concentration camps as a unique historical phenomenon, and, as many critics notice, he treats them as representative paradigms. What can be said about Agamben's methods is that he uses paradigms heuristically; understanding of the past will provide a clear perspective on the present situation, and how it has come to be. Once again, Agamben uses the Foucaultian method of investigation and terminology – the history of the present – which will also be explored later in this dissertation. The methodological shift that Giorgio Agamben formulates in his books *Homo Sacer*, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, and *State of Exception*, probes the philosophical and ethical questions raised by Holocaust testimonies. For Agamben, Auschwitz/Holocaust is a paradigm, a historical singular phenomenon, a structure whose function is to establish or to make intangible a wider set of problems. The use of paradigm as a philosophical method allows us to draw upon a large group of related phenomena such as

²¹ See De la Durantaye, Leland. 2009. *Giorgio Agamben : A Critical Introduction*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press: pp. 217-228.

‘Muselmann’, ‘bear life’, ‘state of exception’ or the ‘camp’. As such, we treat them not as historical facts, metaphors, icons, or concepts, but rather, they become examples which are excluded from any form of familiar case of experiences. Emerging from the lacuna of Holocaust testimonies, these examples become intelligible as a constellation connecting a moment in the past and a moment in the present.²²

One of the central questions some critics raise, in regard to Agamben’s philosophical method is whether it is an outrage to the memory of those who lived and died in the camps to employ – or, more harshly, to instrumentalize – the site of their torture and murder as a paradigm for something else?²³ Since this was also my intuition while reading Agamben’s books for the first time, in the next pages I would like to address those issues by reflecting on my own experience. After reading Agamben’s preface to the book *Remnants of Auschwitz* – which is the second book in the trilogy – for the first time, I was left with a sense of ambiguity. On the one hand, I found myself identifying with and even relieved by sentences like: “Some want to understand too much 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.”²⁴ On the other hand, Agamben’s proposal to read or listen once again to Holocaust survivors’ testimony seems almost banal. After all, isn’t that what historians have been doing since the Second World War? Isn’t that what official

²² To define paradigm as a philosophical method I am using Agamben’s lecture from Aug. 2002, titled: “What is a Paradigm”, see: <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/agamben/agamben-what-is-a-paradigm-2002.html>

²³ De la Durantaye, Leland. 2009: p. 217

²⁴ Agamben, Giorgio. 1999. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. New York: Zone Books: p.13

memorial institutions like museums, monuments and commemoration events already offer us?

I am well aware of the problematic role that these mediations of memory present and how these mnemonic processes guide us in only one direction. As James E. Young notes in his book *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*,²⁵ these memorial institutions have the ability to narrate and inscribe testimonies according to their own ideological needs. These representations are ‘emplotments’ (using Hayden White’s term) therefore they must be regarded as the product of a limited, discursive, culturally specific, subjective position, and, whether consciously or unconsciously, they always lead to oblivion. Even considering alternative means for dealing with survivors’ testimony, as for example in Claude Lanzmann’s film *Shoah* poses a dilemma. This frustrating encounter with witnesses and their attempt to reenact the past leads us to retain the suspicion that this is ‘an event without witnesses’, indicative of its own impossibility to bear witness. As Shoshana Felman concludes in her commentary on the film: “In its enactment of the Holocaust as the event-without-a-witness, as the traumatic impact of a historically ungraspable primal scene which erases both its witness and its witnessing, *Shoah* explores the very boundaries of testimony by exploring, at the same time, the historical impossibility of witnessing, and the historical impossibility of escaping the predicament of being – and having to become – a witness.”²⁶ However, in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben dismisses such arguments. Although he agrees that Holocaust survivors’

²⁵ Young, James Edward, 1990. *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

²⁶ Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub. 1992. *Testimony : Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge: p. 224

testimonies contain at their core essential lacuna, or bear witness to something that is impossible to bear witness to, he still affirms that we have the obligation to interrogate it; “Listening to something absent”, Agamben states, “did not prove fruitless work for this author. Above all, it made it necessary to clear away almost all doctrines that, since Auschwitz, have been advanced in the name of ethics.”²⁷ Moreover, in referring to Lanzman’s film and Felman’s interpretation of it, Agamben suggests that the only way to comprehend the structure of testimony is by crossing the threshold of possibility/impossibility or inside/outside.

Simultaneously, Agamben deems it insufficient to leave this kind of interrogation to the discipline of history. Since the Holocaust, historical discourse has been preoccupied with questions regarding this tragic event, studying, analyzing and preserving any information about that era. Consequently, we have accumulated massive amounts of knowledge about the Nazi’s bureaucratic, technical, material, and legal circumstances. No matter how much information the paradigm of history can provide us with, we can enumerate and describe these events, but they will forever remain singularly opaque when we try to really understand them. According to Agamben, this enigma holds inside it what is, after all, most relevant for contemporary society – the ethical and political significance and implications of the concentration camps – instead of elevating it to the status of “sacred epiphany of evil”. The latter could only encourage the opinion of those who would prefer Auschwitz to remain forever incomprehensible. As he claims: “The aporia of Auschwitz is, indeed, the very aporia of historical knowledge: a non-

²⁷ Agamben, Giorgio. 1999: p.13

coincidence between facts and truth, between verification and comprehension.”²⁸ For Agamben, a true understanding demands a different set of questions or categories; it requires a different methodology. Therefore, the decisive lesson of this century should come from attempts to evoke survivors’ testimonies once again, to list and look inside the lacuna, in order to try to fill out the gap or the absence of historical knowledge.

After Reading *Remnants of Auschwitz* again and again, I discovered that Agamben’s proposal to confront the lacuna again is lucid and valuable. The original framework that he presents provides an escape from the trap immediately set by any discourse on the memory of the Holocaust by opening up a space for resituating critical thought. Thus, between the notions of mystification and the ‘history lesson’ between mass knowledge and a theological approach, Agamben’s method instantiates an original direction. Furthermore, the set of problems that he presents in exposing Auschwitz as a paradigm seems to be effective in understanding not only this historical tragedy, but also in tracking the diffusion of these conditions to contemporary society. The ethical obligation to reread Holocaust survivors’ testimony and reencounter the trauma appears, after all, to be an important tool to draw our attention to ethical and political conditions in Western society post World War II.

Consequently, in 2010 while concluding this dissertation I can declare that the reason I took it upon myself to deal with this subject once again emerged, not from the notion of amnesia, but rather reaction to the present inflation found in representations and misrepresentations of the Holocaust. The political interpretation of the past is still concealed, yet, present in many forms of political discourse. Therefore, we can argue that

²⁸ Ibid: p.12

we are still in the middle of the struggle over the memory of this event.²⁹ This is not merely due to the fact that atrocities and genocides happen again and again around the world. Hence, the historical lesson that was meant to be the motto for the Holocaust memory – “never again” – proved to be merely an empty slogan. As I would argue, our concern with the sites of struggle over Holocaust memory should follow the three philosophers’ arguments as describe above. As for today, there are increasingly numerous uses of the visual apparatuses to obstruct certain kinds of memory and maintain the dominant version of it. We are still debating over whether the Holocaust memory should stay as Jewish mythology – sacred – or become a universal lesson on power, and more than ever, Agamben’s argument in *Homo Sacer* seems more relevant than ever, particularly when facing the events after 9/11/2001. In addition, in the political arena the uses of the Holocaust memory and rhetoric have been made often to justify excess violent power. To mention just a few examples: to overuse power technologies in the name of homeland security, to declare war in Iraq, to escalate the nuclear crisis with Iran, to gain political achievements in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and even in demonstrations against healthcare reforms in America. As a result, this event is functioning in contemporary society as an absolute symbol for defining both evil and victimhood. Any human atrocities or tragedies that came after are fated to be handled with those criteria, and to measure under its scale.³⁰ Therefore, I still find it relevant to analyze, yet again, how we deal with this tragic past under the prism of contemporary politics. In this project

²⁹ For example Elie Wiesel’s letter to Barack Obama on the issue of Israel’s stance on Jerusalem construction, April, 2010: <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/israel-u-s-ties-stronger-than-recent-tensions-elie-wiesel-says-after-obama-meeting-1.288216>

³⁰ See Zelizer, Barbie. 1998. *Remembering to Forget : Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

I will follow these three philosophers' – Foucault, Ophir and Agamben – understandings regarding memory as a site of political struggle in the present as a framework to my analysis and as a basis for formulating my argument and observations.

It is well known that in the thirty five years since the interview where Foucault first reflected on the new awareness of memory, the Holocaust hasn't stopped being part of the contemporary visual culture. Since then, many major Holocaust museums opened to the public in central cities around the world. Oscar-winning Hollywood blockbuster movies on the subject keep being produced and keep being popular. Even the art world, which according to many art critics, was the last to react to this event³¹, we notice a number of central exhibitions in recent years of artists dealing with the memory of the Holocaust. This phenomenon has been defined by some art critics as a new emerging genre in art – Holocaust-related art – in 1980s. Thus, this vast field moves between Hollywood commercial clichés, which due to their popularity took over the role molding collective memory and challenging written historiography, to sophisticated artistic productions. Its products reflect consciously on collective and private mourning, melancholia, and trauma. Yet, unconsciously or unintentionally, they are taking part in the political struggle over memory without an adequately critical or theoretical framework. Mostly, they lack any discourse over their political perspectives, and here is where my concerns arise. As I will argue, these artistic practices should be regarded as 'sites of struggle', or, more appropriately, '*sights* of struggle', over memory in contemporary society.

³¹ For example: Godfrey, Mark. 2007. *Abstraction and the Holocaust*. New Haven, Conn. ; London: Yale University Press.

1:2 'Sights of Struggle'

My examination of practices of memorization arises out of discontent with the form of power and the violence it entails, in particular the way power been used to mask oppression in contemporary social reality. Memory and history, as argued above, are sites of political struggle, therefore I find it important to understand how contemporary artists take part in this struggle and how they challenge hegemonic discourse. Their main threat is falling into the trap of ideology, instrumentalization of memory. Therefore, as I will argue, confronting sites of struggle over memory and history is a means for artists to not only take part in the discussion over what kind of past one should have, but mainly to deal with and criticize the political ideology of the present. Thus, I would like to apply Foucault's investigation method - 'history of the present' - as a term for explaining and reasoning through this artistic practice. It is important here first to clarify what I refer to as 'politics'. By using Foucault and Agamben's arguments, it is almost self-evident that I am employing their definition of politics. In general, it is not addressing any particular point of view, 'left' or 'right', or taking a stance in polemic debate. Politics refers to any activity in the public sphere and institutions. It originated from the Greek distinction between the affairs of the city (polis) and what was regarded as the home (oikos) or natural beings (zoē). Yet, as these philosophers argue, in modern politics this division has become indistinct, while political power has taken over the others - *Biopolitics*.³² As I

³² See: Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo Sacer : Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

will explore and elaborate in chapter two of this dissertation, this blur or fusion is what marks the most troubling phenomenon in present society.

This project, then, aims to explore the connection between history, memory, political power, and visual art. It aims to contribute insight to how contemporary visual artists confront politics through the reformation of collective memory. Since we have already explored and described above the sites of struggle over memory in contemporary west, in this section I will attempt to formulate the role of the artist in this struggle. In a very schematic way, I will try to describe their role as a provider of a sight; a sight of the political struggle. First, I will portray some of the obstacles and the difficulties that emerge while facing the main discourse in field of visual art.

As much as the formation of my argument in this dissertation has been induced by theoretical and political discourses, it has not emerged from the current discourse in art history. The main approach to history and memory in art criticism has been keeping art apolitical. Yet disregarding politics as part of the artistic practice, I will argue, does not mean that it is not there. The tendency to neutralize the art discourse has been in the center of this field for many years, and as such it is no different from any explicit political act. Thus, I will argue, art critics have actively participated in the process of interpretation of memory as consistent with political ideology, yet, they find a way to camouflage their role. An example can be taken from a recently published book on the subject written by Lisa Saltzman, who is one of the central scholars in the field. The main

Foucault, Michel, and Robert Hurley. 1990. *The History of Sexuality : An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.

Foucault, Michel, Michel Senellart, and College de France. 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics : Lectures at the College de France, 1978-79*. Basingstoke England ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

argument in *Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art*, is that this phenomenon - contemporary artists dealing with memory - relates to a long tradition of historical paintings like those of David, Gericault, and Manet, yet with two important differences. The first is related to the artistic medium, as Saltzman explains, “What I seek to address in this book are those moments in the present when visual practice departs from the convention of what might still be called history painting, and using representational strategies at once archaic and advanced, makes history its explicit yet also, always, a necessarily elusive subject.”³³ Saltzman finds this point crucial and even structures the following chapter in her book accordingly. Needless to say, the point that Saltzman makes here is valid, yet, I find it hard to follow how history and traumatic experiences can be simultaneously explicit and elusive. It might be the case for obvious secluded from any interpretation to contemporary politics. The second diversity that Saltzman detects is regarded as the ‘end of history’ moment. As she describes it: “...the art and artists it (the book) considers, emerge in the aftermath not just of the “end” of history, which to say, in the aftermath of a certain Hegelian notion of history as a single, universal, evolutionary social process, but also, in the aftermath of historical events so catastrophic that history as a discursive form may be seen to have reached its limits.”³⁴ This claim about ‘the end of history’ is even more problematic since it reflects a very specific ideology that been termed the ‘unipolar moment’ with the fall of the Berlin wall. As I mention above, it celebrates the informal declaration of the U.S.A. as the only world superpower. This theory was found invalid for the most part in the events following 9/11.

³³ Saltzman, Lisa. 2006: p. 6

³⁴ Ibid

Consequently, we can see how the approach that Saltzman presents in her book reaffirms the tendency in art history to review artworks that deal with memory as remote and isolated from any ‘site of political struggle’ over memorization.

This apolitical approach becomes even more problematic with regards to representations of the Holocaust in art and film. The many arguments that have been made to explain and support this approach vary and have changed dramatically since the end of the war. The origin of this dogma is Adorno’s problematic claim that writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. The discussion that emerged around this claim (since then this has become a dictum) focuses on ethical questions regarding the representation of the Holocaust. The flood of movies, TV shows and exhibitions since the 1970s led to the emergence of a large and intensive discussion over the representation of the Holocaust and the debate and reasoning its possibilities, imperatives, and limitations. Scholars from different academic fields, including philosophy, history, Holocaust studies, literature, art, and film history, all try to collaborate around this fundamental imperative of the victims – ‘remember but never know what had happened’³⁵. Hence, Auschwitz has become the event that is unspeakable, unimaginable, and unintelligible, yet victims are obligated to do so. This imperative had been termed as the ‘aporia of Auschwitz.’ The main concern of most participants in the dispute circumscribes the prohibition to use of imagery, appropriation, voyeurism, commodification, pornography, and kitsch.³⁶

³⁵ See: Agamben, Giorgio. 1999: pp. 15-20

³⁶ See: Friedlèander, Saul. 1993. *Reflections of Nazism : An Essay on Kitsch and Death*. 1st Midland Book ed. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press. And: Lang, Berel, and ebrary Inc. 2000. *Holocaust Representation Art within the Limits of History and Ethics*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Needless to say, none of these concerns focus on the politicalization or apolitical implications for representation of the Holocaust.

In the field of visual art, concerns about Holocaust representation and the ‘aporia of Auschwitz’, vacillate even more. Contrasted with other arts, which rely on verbal means and language to translate the horror, the visual encounter is always direct and tangible. The dilemma as to whether archived photographs should be used is best illustrated in Didi-Huberman’s inspirational book *Images In Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*. In this book, he responds to the heated criticism that followed a show and a collection of essays that he was part of in France 2001. The exhibition reveals for the first time four photographs that had been taken in Auschwitz, and document the execution of a group of women in the gas chamber in the summer of 1944. These shocking photographs had been taken secretly by one of the Sonderkommando prisoners – therefore the images were created in spite of all the risks - and were supposed to provide evidence to the outside world of the horror that taken place in that camp. These horrifying documents were all but forgotten and for years lay in an archive until found and exhibited to the public for the first time in 2001's *Mémoire des camps*. The main argument that Didi-Huberman makes regarding these photographs is that in order to read and understand them, we – the contemporary viewers – have to address the unimaginable and refute it. As a result, according to him, in order to understand, we are required to imagine for ourselves life in Auschwitz in the summer of 1944. As Didi-Huberman soon found out, this requires that we transgress the ban on any

use of imagination in Holocaust representation, which is an unofficial but still strongly taboo in Holocaust representation.

All of the reactions against this approach lead to the conclusion that the only suitable manner is the kind crafted carefully by Claude Lanzmann in his film *Shoah*. There, he consciously avoids any use of archive documents (including photographs), and uses only testimonies of participants. This has become the dogma of Holocaust visual representation, and, for many, the only adequate way to remember, commemorate, and reflect on the issue as an unimaginable event.³⁷ In this way we avoid any “risk of over-interpretation” or “fatal reasoning”.³⁸ Didi-Huberman finds these claims and accusations disturbing. Needless to say, he greatly values Lanzmann’s film, yet he argues that the tendency to state that it is the only dogma for visually representing of the Holocaust is highly problematic. Didi-Huberman’s defense arguments will provide a point of departure for many of the claims and arguments that I develop in this dissertation, therefore I will elaborate on them a great deal in the following chapters. For our purpose in this section, it is important to mention his response to some of the claims on sanctification. As can immediately be noticed, this claim is quite close to Ophir’s argument on the troubling phenomenon of turning the Holocaust representations into a religion, with apparently only one dogma for those wishing to deal with the subject. This is exactly that kind of argument that my project seeks to dispute; the aim will be not only to locate alternative

³⁷ See Lanzmann’s lecture in: Caruth, Cathy. 1996: *Unclaimed Experience : Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

³⁸ Didi-Huberman, Georges. 2008: *Images in Spite of All : Four Photographs from Auschwitz*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

representations in visual art, but to understand their powerful opposition to hegemonic positions.

“Holocaust-related art” is the definition for a specific genre or a group of artists that contribute to the documentation of the event and function in the realm of personal expression, more particularly in the negation of trauma. Most critics that write about this kind of art connect it to Holocaust-related literature. This genre follows the obligation formulated by philosopher Berel Lang, and by maintaining close connections to the historiography, it ought to be realistic.³⁹ Thus, the inclusion of artists in this genre is based on their use of Holocaust-related motives, photographs, or objects. Art historian Andrew Weinstein notices that in the historiography of Holocaust-related art there are five main issues. The first topic deals with art as documentation of the event, mainly dealing with the use of photograph and other objects as a psychological revelation, examining post war art by survivors and their children; as a political barometer, focusing on monuments and memorials and their reception invoked issues of identities and ideologies; as a philosophical and ethical nexus, dealing mainly with the nature of representation and the ethical obligation to that kind of presentation; and as visual expression within the tradition of contemporary art, and here, Weinstein refers to the emergence in the beginning of the 1990s of American Jewish artists dealing with the Holocaust as part of their identity.⁴⁰ I find this close definition to Holocaust related art highly problematic, as it restricts artists that deal (in whatever manner) with the issue into narrow artistic ghettos, obligated to follow strict roles of representation. As I will further

³⁹ Once again we notice the request to artist to avoid any use of imaginary facts or fiction. I will elaborate on this notion in chapter 2.

⁴⁰ Weinstein G. 2006. *Art After Auschwitz*, dissertation, NYU; p. 15

elaborate in my analysis, the most interesting and sophisticated artwork on the topic complicates these roles and limits using a self-reflective method to question their meanings.

Apprehension about the ability of art to be part of the site of political struggle over the Holocaust memory does not merely refer to academic or critical discourses. In today's art world, where artists depend mostly on commission and invitation to public institutions like museums, foundations and government events, it seems impossible to promote controversy. As the historian Omer Bartov reflects: "Their (artists) real challenge is not to merely ask how, but rather why the Holocaust happened. Yet I fear that this challenge cannot be fully met, since the answer is politically, ideologically, and structurally so subversive of modern state that it would never be given expression in such state-funded and supported institutions as museum."⁴¹ To Bartov's concern I can only add that the difficulty is not merely related to the way these museums are funded and managed; the problem is that these institutions reflect a very specific narrative interpretation of their artifacts. While trying to connect between past and present, museums usually present history as a progressive trajectory that the nation state marks with its redemptive end. Hence, at the American Holocaust Museum in Washington, the presentation leads the viewer to understand the American Army as the "salvation army"; at the Yad Vasham museum in Jerusalem, the establishment of Israel after the war (1948), is presented as a Messianic moment in Jewish history. In these museums, photographs are merely used as illustrations of a specific narrative of national ideology.

⁴¹ Bartov, Omer. 1996. *Murder in OurMmidst: the Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation*. New York: Oxford University Press: pp. 9-10.

As a result, the “history lessons” embody and reconfirm the viewer’s national identity. Hence, contemporary artists that present in this environment immediately become entangled with those narratives, and the narratives become associated with artists’ ideologies.⁴²

After summarizing some of the main concerns and dissatisfactions regarding the role of visual arts as a ‘sight of memory’, I can only join Bartov and Didi-Huberman’s in fearing regarding its possibilities. The apolitical approach, the ethical question regarding representation, and institutional instrumentalization, all are traps that both artists and viewers face. As it seems from this survey, it might be that Adorno’s dictum declaring a ban on representations of Auschwitz is after all, the most applicable approach to the topic. However, this historical event is too important to merely keep silent about or mystify. As I argue above, Auschwitz is still very much a part of our present moment. Consequently, the main questions should be: how can artists deal with the memory of the Holocaust without falling into these traps? How, in the struggle over memory, can they find a way to challenge the dominant power regarding the interpretation of memory? On the other hand, how should we as the viewers encounter these kinds of works? If none of the above approaches to art prove adequate, how can we facilitate an analytic reading to works of art that still finds a way to confront the subject?

⁴² See for example Andrea Liss, in her book *Trespassing through Shadow: Memory, Photography and the Holocaust*, she presents a very problematic reading of artists that presented artworks that contain Holocaust-related photos in the museum. Liss, Andrea, 1998. *Trespassing through Shadows Memory, Photography, and the Holocaust*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

1:3 Paradigms

The answers to some of my questions, and therefore, a guide for my investigation, can be found in the following quotation from Ophir's book *The Order of Evil*:

There is poetry after Auschwitz, there is science after Hiroshima, there is ideology after the Gulag, and there is thinking that continues uninterrupted to the tune of the drowning of the drowning. Yet we are not just after Auschwitz, but always also before it, verging on it; not just after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also before the next bomb. The planet of the drowning is our planet. Therefore, if there are still poetry, science, and thinking, they should sound to us as the music played on board the Titanic would have sounded had the passengers only known how to see the iceberg.⁴³

Ophir argues, based on the present political moment, for sifting through the efforts to ban and prohibit the memorization of Auschwitz as they have been conducted since the end of the Second World War. The means of transmission available to us for learning, representing, and thinking about Auschwitz and other past and present atrocities won't radically change or disappear merely because of 'historical lessons'. It may be the case that discussions about the prohibition against representation are too radical in their goals and expectations. These traditional methods for representation "continue uninterrupted to tune of the drowning of the drowning." Hence, they have become

⁴³ Ophir, Adi. 2005. *The Order of Evils : Toward an Ontology of Morals*. New York Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books ;Distributed by MIT Press: p. 625

apparatuses for maintaining power and perpetuating violence. Paradoxically, the only way that is left for us to facilitate critical understanding of the relationship between past and present is through these apparatuses. As I will suggest in this project, by focusing on and analyzing the traditional means for representation, we are able to change. Therefore, in this project the focus will be on artistic practice – on methodology – in order to trace the leaps in critical thinking that connect the present moment with the memory of the past. In tracing this movement, unpacking its comprehensiveness, and revealing its political and artistic motivations, we will be able to point to alternative.

In order to shift our gaze toward this alternative method, we need to install new analytic tools. In other words, we need to find an appropriate theoretical structure for guiding our investigation. It is also necessary to find specific examples of art-works and films from the post-war period that provoke this line of thinking. Therefore, in the next pages, I will explain the choices that I have made in conducting my research.

As for pursuing my analytical goal, I chose to employ the philosophical concept 'paradigm.' In this project, paradigm takes two forms. The first definition of paradigm has been formulated by Thomas S. Kuhn in his groundbreaking book *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, as in the notion of the 'scientific paradigm.' The scientific paradigm designates the common assumptions of a given scientific community. Since then, it has become the common definition for 'paradigm' and has been applied not only in science but to other disciplines, for example, the representation of the Holocaust. The second notion for paradigm comes from Foucault's philosophical methods and is found in Agamben's essay, "What is Paradigm?" Since this notion is central to my investigation, I

will elaborate on it more in the coming sections, and it will be through my analysis of specific art-works that this notion will be clarified. Moreover, it is important to emphasize, as Agamben does, that the two definitions of 'paradigm' are analogous, rather than antagonistic.⁴⁴

The urge to rethink the concept of paradigm comes from Agamben in two different ways: first, in his book *The Becoming Community*, he attempts to find a way to overcome dialectical negation between the universal and particular in the Subject⁴⁵; second, he reflects on his own philosophical/historical analytic method, following Foucaultian methodology for the history of the present.⁴⁶ Therefore, paradigm, in Agamben's philosophy, is a content and a form, yet the two are tied to each other and are mutually influential. Paradigm is a unique example for something or someone that operates in relation between a part and its whole. Paradigms, explains Agamben, occupy a seemingly paradoxical position between universality and particularity.⁴⁷ As a result, they are powerful analytic tool. Interestingly, Agamben notes that analyzing paradigm provides an alternative to traditional historiography by establishing connections between present situations and past events. As Agamben explains, his paradigms' goals are to elucidate a series of phenomena whose relationships to one another have escaped, or might escape, the historian's gaze. Consequently, it through the use of unique historical phenomena, like Auschwitz, that Agamben exposes contemporary conditions. Thus,

⁴⁴Agamben, Giorgio. 2009. *The signature of all things: on method*. New York: Zone Books: p. 9-11

⁴⁵Agamben, Giorgio. 1993. *The coming community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: pp. 8-10

⁴⁶ first presented as a lecture given by Agamben in 2004 as an attempt to explain his *Homo Sacer* trilogy and as a reaction to the accusation that been made against the improper use of the memory of Auschwitz, reprinted in Agamben, G. 2009: pp 9-32

⁴⁷ I will explore this in more detail in chapter 3

Agamben's notion of paradigm will provide for me the theoretical and analytical tools to explore the artwork in this project. In particular, paradigm will be useful for exposing how history has been used by artists as a means for understanding and dealing with the present.

As for my choice of artworks and artists in this project, the two artists that I chose to focus on are Jean Luc Godard, a filmmaker, and Christian Boltanski, an installation artist. This combination is by no means a conventional one, and in the next pages I will try to justify this pairing. The two artists have been working in the same 'generation' of artists in France; both emerged during the sixties and were part of the activist groups of 1968 (Godard, who is the older, was then much more popular and well-known, and Boltanski was merely a young artist), and both can be referred to as second generation artists. The connection between them, however, does not end there. Moreover, this project does not intend to reflect on art in specific geopolitical context, but rather a much larger one. Both artists practice in France and are influenced by their social environment, such as the specific discourse around the memory of the Holocaust.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, as they might claim themselves, their oeuvre should be considered part of a much larger context; both gain their fame and artistic recognition outside of France as international artists.

The obvious connection is that both artists use, in some of their works, Holocaust-related photographs and archive footage. In the case of Godard, the first Holocaust-related images appear in a film dealing with the contemporary situation in the Middle

⁴⁸ See Rousso, Henry. 1991.

East – *Here and Elsewhere* (1974). Later, he engaged with the subject while working on the monumental project *Historie(s) du cinema* (1998), and in the recent films *In Pries for Love* (2001), and *Our Music* (2004). In Boltanski's case, the first direct encounter with Holocaust memory appears in a solo exhibition in 1985. In this installation, entitled *Canada* after one of the warehouses in Auschwitz, he uses abandoned clothes to evoke a specific place. In addition, he uses old photographs relating directly to that historical period. This practice raises the obvious question of whether we can define these artists as 'Holocaust related'; after all, they make extensive use of Holocaust-related images. As many critics point out, neither artist is straightforward enough regarding their reflection on the uniqueness and significance of this event. This kind of critique goes against the common approach, presented above, that calls to keep Auschwitz sacred and unique, inaccessible and incomprehensible. As we can conclude from these comments, neither Godard nor Boltanski will fit within this artistic genre. Boltanski, who is often included in the list of Holocaust-related-artists, comments on the issue, claiming that "My art is not about the Holocaust, but, about art after the Holocaust."⁴⁹ I found Boltanski's observation crucial for understanding the problems and challenges that his works evoke, and it echoes a similar statement by Godard on the death of cinema in Auschwitz. Therefore, I will treat this framework as a matter that needs to be solved in my analysis: What, exactly, is art after the Holocaust?

The encounter between Godard and Boltanski was clarified for me in their own unusual dialogue. In 1999, after concluding *Historie(s) du Cinema*, Godard created a

⁴⁹ Cited in Semin, Didier, Christian Boltanski, Tamar Garb, and Donald B. Kuspit. 1997. *Christian Boltanski, Contemporary Artists*. London: Phaidon: p.19

special commission film for the museum of modern art in New York – *The Old Place*. Although this film was meant to center on the history of the museum and its celebration of modern art in the end of the century, it only mentions a few visual artists and hardly any contemporary artists. One of the few who were mentioned is Christian Boltanski. His artworks are presented in a few shots, moving quickly from one to the other, while Godard reads a quote from an interview with the artist. In it, Boltanski talks about the sense of resurrection that is imbued in his works. Old photographs and clothes that nobody uses anymore get a second life in his work as art. This notion - the chance for resurrection - is what connects these two artists together. This notion, for these artists, specially refers to objects left behind from the tragedies of the last century: archive materials. Therefore we can argue that their exposure of images/objects in their artworks makes them similar. Moreover, this exposure is an opportunity to construct a new order from what have been left behind; the piles that Benjamin's Angel of History creates are at the core of their artistic practices. Finally, the way they both challenge and question the techniques that are available for them, as artists, to arrange these remnants, shows their concern with contemporary politics.

Consequently, both Boltanski and Godard are unique examples of the relationship between visual arts, history, and memory. As such, they provide for my research a profound understanding of the structure and problem of this complex relationship. In this context, their provocative uses and representations of the Holocaust, as I will present in the following chapters, are important for illuminating the struggle over 'sites of memory' and 'sight of memory'. Therefore, I will argue that the common denominator between

Boltanski and Godard is their unique view of the representation of the Holocaust as forming a self-reflexive perspective for their artistic practices. In the case of Boltanski, it is the institution of archive/museum and archival art that has been challenged, whereas Godard focuses on the cinematic montage only to rethink its function a process of understanding.

In the chapters that follow, I will pursue this line of investigation, focusing on Boltanski and Godard separately. The next two chapters will be focus on Boltanski's oeuvre. In the first, I will try to set up an opposition to the common interpretations of the way Boltanski confronts the issues of memory, history, and the Holocaust. In the second chapter on Boltanski, I will suggest my own alternative reading; while focusing on the way he challenges the space of museum/archive, I will invoke his concern regarding the ethics and politics of community. Chapters 4 and 5 will be dedicated to the reading of Godard's self-reflexive investigation of montage. In the center of chapter 4 is Godard's collaborative film *Here and Elsewhere* (1974), and it is there, I will argue, that he located the political problems of this practice. The investigation in chapter 5 will be around the *Historie(s) du cinema*, as a way to explore the possibilities of montage.

Lastly, I would like to reflect on my own problematic position in writing on such politically charged historical subject as the Holocaust,⁵⁰ since it is in naming the event that we automatically and unconsciously express our position toward its memory. By using the name 'Shoah' or 'Holocaust' we follow the Jewishness uniqueness approach. On the other hand, using the name 'Auschwitz' invokes the universal memory this event.

⁵⁰ On the history of the name 'Holocaust' see: Agamben, Giorgio. 1999: pp.28-31

Hence we find ourselves once again distinguishing between the particular and universal. In order to overcome this complexity I choose to employ both names as they are used by the artists themselves. Although it might sound inconsistent in the flow of my writing, I find this solution to be the most appropriate one.

Chapter 2:

Boltanski's Absent Subject

2:1 Presence/Absence

“I never speak directly about the Holocaust in my work, but of course my work comes after the Holocaust.”⁵¹ Christian Boltanski's statement about his work keeps haunting me, like the ghostly figures of his pieces. Both demand a full investigation. After all, using “After the Holocaust”, “After Auschwitz”, or “After the disaster” as temporal points of reference is not a neutral act; in addition to providing a fixed historical time frame, this choice reveals a theoretical and ideological stance. Nevertheless, Boltanski's statement embodies an inbuilt paradox: on the one hand, it sets his artwork apart from any direct exploration of this historical event; in other words, it distances his work from the task of historical documentation, which demands verification as well as a narration of facts. On the other hand, Boltanski's statement evokes Adorno's post-war (1949) declaration that is a vital point of reference, despite its problematic implications. Boltanski's “after” implicitly calls forth the all too familiar statement: “after Auschwitz to write poetry is barbaric.” Adorno continues by formulating the following imperative: “to arrange one's thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that

⁵¹ Semin, Didier, Christian Boltanski, Tamar Garb, and Donald B. Kuspit. 1997: p. 30

nothing similar will happen.”⁵² Consequently, whenever we try to deal with the discourse surrounding representation of the Holocaust we face an immense dilemma: representation of this cataclysmic event necessarily involves a troubling dimension of trivialization, and yet to refuse representation is to refuse the significance of lived experience, as well as the lessons that history has to offer. This dilemma allows no compromise; therefore, Adorno’s critique remains a philosophical ‘aporia’, with few operational options for aesthetic representation. Following Adorno’s statement, suspicion regarding artistic expression of the Holocaust has developed into an ongoing discussion, elaborating not only on this specific event, but also on the nature and definition of art in the second half of the twentieth century – after Auschwitz. Accordingly, since Adorno’s paradigmatic statement, artists, art historians, and cultural critics have tried to confront and challenge this dilemma and to find alternative means of representation. However, following Adorno’s dictum, this discourse will forever be necessarily bound to ethical and moral issues concerning viewers’ responses to works of art.

Boltanski’s statement cited above, although echoing Adorno’s dictum, also offers a kind of resolution for dealing with the subject: “My work comes after the Holocaust” sounds like a conscious attempt to define his practice. However, it leaves us once again with the obligation to investigate this description and ascribe meaning to it, which is by no means an easy task. Even though in his statement, Boltanski talks about dealing only indirectly with the Jewish Holocaust during the past twenty five years, many of his works directly address the memory of the Holocaust. In 1988, Boltanski showed an installation

⁵²Adorno, Theodor W., and Max Horkheimer. 1979. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New ed. London: Verso. p. 365

entitled *Canada*, which shares its name with a Nazi depot where possessions of the deported (clothes, shoes, spectacles and even hair) were stored and then recycled. Boltanski's installation is a disproportionate accumulation of thousands of items of clothing, randomly hung on the walls or strewn on the gallery floor. Another installation from 1988, *Lycée Chases*, is based on a 1931 class photo from the Jewish arts high school in Vienna. Boltanski rephotographs and enlarges individual faces from the photo, installing them on top of tin biscuit boxes or mounting them on the wall, and illuminating each with a black desk lamp that creates a large circle of light with a photo in its center. The visitor who enters this installation, armed with this information and knowledge of the past fifty years of world history, must be led to a series of assumptions and questions about what might have happened to these students after all these years; their possible fates include World War II, Hitler's death camps, exile, and old age. A similar photo installation is *The Festival of Purim* (1989) based on a photograph of a Purim party held at a Jewish school in Paris 1939. A different work that invokes direct memory of the Jewish Holocaust is *Missing House* from 1992, located in the remains of a house in East Berlin once occupied by Jews who were most likely evacuated to the Nazi camps. This unique monument keeps the shape of the ruined house, functioning as a commemorative site only through the mention of the names and professions of those who lived there before the war. To this list we can add another three works that deal with the memory of Nazism: *Sans Souci* (1991), a photo album of old, found snapshots captured by Nazi soldiers on vacation with their families and friends; a Boltanski exhibit in the Venice Biennial of 1993, displaying reproductions of the artwork shown at the 1938 Biennial, intermingled with photographs found in magazines of the same year; and lastly, the

artwork acquired by the Monchengladbach museum, discreetly shown during the Nazi regime alongside their contemporary art collection.

Moreover, since the 1980s, when Boltanski's works both directly and indirectly turned toward the investigation of memory in relation to World War II, some important facts about Boltanski's autobiography began to emerge in his writings and interviews. Repeatedly, the story about Boltanski's Jewish father,⁵³ who remained in the family basement for the duration of World War II, and the artist's alleged birth on the day of Paris' liberation (the reason his middle name is "Liberté"), appear as important factors that cannot be discounted in interpretations of Boltanski's pieces:

Ancestors: it is very important for an artist to come from somewhere, to have a history, a "village," but this history must tend towards the universal. In my case, it is the fact that I was born right after the end of the war, that as a child practically the only thing I heard people talk about was the Shoah, and that all the friends of my relations were survivors, which formed me. I didn't experience all this directly, but I did suffer the consequences, like the fear of the outside, the idea of danger, the thing to hide, of being proud of something while at the same time contemplating its danger...⁵⁴

⁵³ Boltanski confesses in *The Possible Life of Christian Boltanski*, 2009 that the period when he began to deal with memory of the Holocaust, the second half of the 1980s, was around the time of his parents death. "That period corresponded exactly to the death of my parents. That's when I began to talk about Judaism; I identified myself as a Jew, which I hadn't done before. Being Jewish was something you didn't talk about in my family, and suddenly, with the death of my father, I began reclaiming it, reading books, looking at images, and that had an effect on my work. Even if I didn't want to talk about it directly, it was obvious, for various reasons, that my work was really about that." Boltanski, Christian, and Catherine Grenier. 2009. *The Possible Life of Christian Boltanski*. 1st American ed. Boston New York: MFA Pub. : Museum of Fine Arts Boston ; Distributed by D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers: p. 141

⁵⁴ Cite in: Boltanski, Christian, Danilo Eccher, and Bologna (Italy). Galleria d'arte moderna. 1997: *Christian Boltanski*. Milano: Charta: p. 24

I am not Jewish in the traditional sense of the term. I have never been in a synagogue. I was brought up as a Christian, but I do feel like a child of the Holocaust.⁵⁵

Conversely, in many other works from the same period, Boltanski uses recurring visual tactics to deal with issues having no connection to the Holocaust. For example, in the monument to *The Children of Dijon*, he uses the same combination of lights and photographs as *Lycée Chases*; the *Dead Swiss*, which celebrates the neutrality of death in Switzerland, once again uses found photographs and biscuit boxes; *People of Halifax*, a memorial to Halifax's textile workers, uses the same installation technique as in *Canada*; and even art projects like *Cloaca Maxima* display in glass cabinets all the objects that had fallen into the toilets of Zurich during one week. These works problematize our task of understanding not only Boltanski's statement regarding "art after the Holocaust," but also his ambivalence toward artistic practice altogether. To this confusion, we can add works that raise ethical and moral problems, like the train station in Cologne 1994, where Boltanski distributed small posters of German children that were lost in the end of the war. In that way, Boltanski's uses of the same memorabilia strategies of identification, melancholia and mourning for both Jewish and German victims, which has been perceived by many critics as politically dangerous.⁵⁶ In addition, in many of his interviews, Boltanski continuously sends ambivalent messages regarding the memory of

⁵⁵ Cited in: Moure, Gloria, Christian Boltanski, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea., Igrexa de San Domingos de Bonavel (Santiago de Compostela Spain), Jose Jimenez, and Jean Clair. 1996. *Christian Boltanski : Advent and other Times*. Barcelona, Spain: Ediciones Poligrafia S.A. p. 105.

⁵⁶ See: Liss, Andrea, 1998, Kaplan, Brett Ashley. 2007. *Unwanted Beauty : Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press. and Solomon-Godeau Abigail. 1998.

the Holocaust in his works. In a 1993 interview, he states: “People also tell me that I work on the Holocaust, and that makes me furious.”⁵⁷

Not surprisingly, many art critics have reflected on this paradox, and often harshly critique Boltanski's artistic strategies. In an article that surveyed Boltanski's artistic activities, art critic Nancy Marmer characterizes Boltanski's work in terms of “Uses of Contradiction”: “Quasi-poetic, quasi-parodic, these mixed-medium works provocatively negotiate an ill-defined space between memory, history, and esthetic, invoking and at the same time distancing historical facts.”⁵⁸ These methods, adds Marmer, are no doubt useful and liberating for the artists: “It avoids politics. It avoids hard questions. It turns history into myth. No position is forbidden to it. It opts for the undividable. It is also very much like the romanticizing adult's view of the freedoms of childhood.”⁵⁹ The problems that Boltanski's various projects raise, claims art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau, have compelled art critics to fall back upon the notion of contradiction, which they consider a distinguishing, if not defining, principle of his productions. All of this, Solomon-Godeau argues, might be suitable in aesthetic practices, but they are highly problematic in artistic representation of the Holocaust.⁶⁰ Each critic is concerned with the melancholy evoked by Boltanski's installations, yet the reasons why are mostly unclear. This problem evokes Adorno's dictum by opposing passive response, claiming that it necessarily detaches the ethical from the aesthetic. These critical voices tend to define

⁵⁷ Cited in Kaplan, Brett Ashley. 2007: p. 138

⁵⁸ Marmer, Nancy. 1989: “Boltanski: The Uses of Contradiction”, *Art in America*, No. 77: p. 169

⁵⁹ Ibid: p. 235

⁶⁰ Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. 1998: "Mourning or Melancholia: Christian Boltanski's Missing House." *Oxford Art Journal*, 21, no.2: p.2

Boltanski as a postmodern artist who takes a relativistic stance toward the event and uses the tabooed images of the Holocaust as a point of departure for elaborating on more general issues. Thus, it prevents the viewer from identifying with the victims. Consequently, as American art historian Andrea Liss argues: “Boltanski animates both of these risky realms – the sentimental and inauthentic – precisely to implicate the ease with which the viewer gets trapped in a universalized quasi-ethereal and quasi-somber nostalgia.”⁶¹

Andrea Liss’s criticism of Boltanski’s works is important in this context, because her perspective marks the dominant political discourse regarding Holocaust representations, a perspective that Boltanski constantly refutes. In her book, *Trespassing through Shadow: Memory, Photography and the Holocaust*, she emphasizes the importance of Holocaust-related photos and artifacts in commemorating this historical event. While describing in depth the philosophy and methods that have been used by the Holocaust Museum in Washington (and other Museums around the world), she emphasizes two crucial functions these photos fulfill for contemporary viewers. First, Liss argues that they provide a site for mourning; as such, they function as gravestones for the millions of victims of the Nazi camps that do not have a place of burial. They bear witness to the sublime in terms of framing, naming, and strategically restaging mass death and the Holocaust. Thus, she invokes Sontag’s description of those photos as evocations of mourning: “irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started

⁶¹ Liss, Andrea, 1998: p. 49. For similar argument see Hirsch, Marianne. 1997. *Family Frames : Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying.”⁶² While recalling Theodor Adorno’s likening of the museum to the mausoleum, Liss emphasizes the function of the photographs and artifacts in the museum as monument.⁶³ In this way, she references the Jewish faith’s demand that each person have a burial space or a gravestone. These objects, then, for Liss, serve as alternative sites of burial. This gesture carries with it the dogma and demand, articulated by many scholars and historians, that the Holocaust should be remembered as a distinctly Jewish event, primarily pertaining to Jewish history. Empathy for and identification with the victims should be consistent with the recognition of their specific origin. However, many critics see in this ‘Jewish only’ approach a continuation of the Nazi racist ideology, separating Jews from universal discourse.

This approach is extremely problematic, particularly when we consider the second role that Liss gives to Holocaust-related photos: they impart the historical lesson of “never again.” Once again, she interlinks the function of the photos with the museum as a site of warning, as a historical marker. However the historical narratives evoked in these museums refer mostly to national ideology. While trying to connect past and present, these narratives present history as a progressive trajectory that the nation-state marks as its redemptive end. Hence, at the American Holocaust Museum in Washington, the presentation leads the viewer to understand the American Army as the “salvation army,” and, at the Yad Vashm museum in Jerusalem, the establishment of Israel after the war (1948), is presented as a Messianic moment in Jewish history. In these museums, the

⁶² Ibid: p. 15

⁶³ Ibid: p.10

photographs are merely used as illustrations of a specific narrative of national ideology. As a result, the “history lessons” embody and reconfirm the viewer’s national identity. In her suggestion, Liss merely echoes the traditional roles of Holocaust-related photos; they function as monuments that provide memory and closure to the Holocaust as a Jewish event that happened in the past. Moreover, by recalling a national ideology, they carry with them a sense of recuperation and redemption. Eventually, the “historical lessons” that Liss presents evoke once again the political and ethical conditions leading to the Holocaust and have contributed to other conflicts since then. Liss's treatments of Holocaust-related photos represent a fixed meaning or historical record, preventing any possibility for dealing with the mechanism of memory.

Considering her options, it is understandable why Liss strongly opposes Boltanski’s works that evoke the memory of the Holocaust. In her book, she refers to his works in two discussions: while comparing Boltanski’s photographic installations to the ‘Tower of Faces’ in the United state Holocaust Memorial museum, and while questioning his clothing installations compared to the use of authentic artifacts from the camps in the museum. The close resemblance between the museum displays and Boltanski's artistic strategy creates tension and anxiety among the museum’s curators. Liss quotes Martin Smith, the former director of the museum, as claiming, “this is not Boltanski” when describing the museum plan.⁶⁴ According to Liss, Smith has been right to fear association between the two. Boltanski's installations, she claims, are ambivalent and represent a dangerous approach to the memory of the Holocaust. As she explains: “I introduce some of the criticisms of his work to point out the dilemmas and possibilities it raised about

⁶⁴ Ibid: p. 51

eliciting feigned pathos and risking turning specific historical memory into nostalgia to provocatively engage the past with present and to implicate the contemporary viewer.”⁶⁵

In her criticisms, Liss points to the following problems that emerge from Boltanski's use of Holocaust-related photos and artifacts in his installations. Liss's first point is regarding the authenticity of Boltanski's installations. Authenticity as a notion has been challenged in most of Boltanski's works since the 1970s (for example, his childhood memoirs from *Vitirins* 1972) and in regard to his general oeuvre, as it always evokes ironic and humorous notions in otherwise accurate or authentic accounts. If Holocaust-related works are to be read under the same parameters, claims Liss, some ethical problems are raised. Specifically, it is problematic regarding *Lycée Chases*, where there is the presumption is that all the students in the photos are dead, due to the Holocaust. Yet some of the students recognized themselves, years after the show was on display in USA, and the viewers have subsequently found out the majority of the students survived the war.⁶⁶ Liss explains that in refusing to depict victims as victims, Boltanski's methodology challenges the documentary photograph's ability to function as an authentic document. As Liss concludes: “Boltanski thus plays a slippery game: coaxing the viewer to both reaffirm her outworn faith in the museum as spiritual carrier and suspend her belief in the historical efficacy of the photograph.”⁶⁷

In addition, Liss argues against Boltanski's technique of arranging the space such that it resembles kitsch. As she emphasizes, the provocation of sentimental and

⁶⁵ Ibid: p. 41

⁶⁶ Liss, Andrea. 1998: p. 43-44 and Kaplan, Brett Ashley. 2007: p. 130

⁶⁷ Liss, Andrea. 1998: p. 48

inauthentic art is risky – showing how easy it is for the viewer to get trapped in universalized, quasi-ethereal, and quasi-somber state of nostalgia instead of focusing on the Holocaust. Liss, whose central argument rests on the belief that Holocaust-related photographs should only be used as history lessons (“never forget”) and to provide sites of mourning, judges Boltanski’s works with the criteria of authenticity and historicity, which hardly fit his aesthetic practice. Armed with these criteria for legitimacy, she accuses him of deceiving and misleading viewers and of carrying them away from the facts of this historical event.

As we can conclude from this survey, any attempts to define Boltanski as a Holocaust-related artist, and his works as Holocaust art, will encounter opposition. It is also hard to determine, as many of his declarations indicate, whether Boltanski is sincere about his approach to the memory of the war or if his insincerity is a product of our own associations. In addition, when we try to approach Boltanski’s oeuvre as a whole, it is unclear how to interpret the works that deal directly with the war and the general topic works, together as a coherent totality. In other words, it is not clear whether there is a connection between all of these pieces; if there is, what is it? This is the main problem that every art historian that deals with Boltanski's oeuvre must face. Yet there is one piece of evidence that keeps repeating itself, spoken by Boltanski himself, in different interviews -- his works dealing with the aftermath of the camps without explaining what it means. Boltanski refers to the centrality of World War II and the Holocaust in the following quotations from *The Possible Life of Christian Boltanski*:

The war, the fact that I'm a Jew – these are the most important things to have happened to me in my life. And that's without having experienced the war, without really being a Jewish: I was a child of the Shoah more than a child of Judaism. But even if I deny it, if I refuse to participate in exhibitions on Shoah, if it poses a real problem for me to exhibit in a Jewish museum, the Shoah is without question the main event that totally conditioned my life. I think it's such an exceptional event, so incomprehensible, that once you know about it, you cannot go on the same way you had before. You have the sense that there's no order, that men are evil... it either makes you much more tolerant or it makes you hate the world. In a way, I never got over the Shoah.⁶⁸

I think that some primary event very often marks artists' lives; for me, that was it. I read very few books, but a lot on the concentration camps. ... when I was twelve to thirteen, I spent the whole day watching people in the street, and since I knew that six million had died in the camps, I would count them and think, 'All dead'. To try to understand what six million was. Now I'm older, I've intellectualized things, there've been new genocides – but I'm still very affected by the memory of the war.⁶⁹

Therefore, I will embrace his statements as a framework for my investigation in the next two chapters, and assert my task as a trajectory for understanding what Boltanski means, how it has been evoked in his works, and what art is, after Auschwitz. These questions on Boltanski have been the focus of academic debate in the last thirty years, hence, as the first step to formulate my argument, I will address the different approaches and principles that have been presented in the field so far. As I am about to expose in the next sections, the main discourse in this field is drawn from the interpretation of Boltanski's artistic goal as evoking the memory of the victims of the Holocaust by challenging the dichotomy of presence/absence. This framework has been conceived by different writers, as I am about to present in the rest of this chapter, and appears in many

⁶⁸ Boltanski, Christian, and Catherine Grenier. 2009: p. 22

⁶⁹ Ibid: p. 23

variations, yet the underlying principles remain the same. This topic was regarded not merely as a framework for dealing with Holocaust memory and representation, but as part of a larger discourse in contemporary philosophy on the ‘death of the Subject,’ or the end of the rational/Enlightened/humanist individual.⁷⁰

In addition, the discourse in art history regarding Boltanski's work provides an insightful survey into the paradigm and the problems that arise when dealing with the issue of representation of the Holocaust in visual arts. Therefore, in this chapter I will explore the main body of literature on Boltanski's oeuvre, as it has been amalgamated with the ‘aporia of Auschwitz,’ and Adorno's dictum. It is clear from these critical accounts that Boltanski's works have confused and ruffled viewers and art critics alike. Nevertheless, what triggers such strong reactions in Boltanski's works demands further exploration and comprehension. My ultimate goal is to distance my argument from these problems, yet through them I will try to understand the main principles underpinning Boltanski's claims about ‘art after the camps’. After all, as I am about to explore in the following pages, his works provide an alternative model for Holocaust representation as well as a different theoretical corpus regarding the memory of this event. Despite his ambivalence in his works and his claims of treating Holocaust memory only indirectly, I will argue that the Holocaust relentlessly comprises the core of Boltanski's artistic project, but this claim is different from others advanced by the majority of art critics, who

⁷⁰ Yaari, Monique. 2000: "Who/What Is the Subject? Representations of Self in the Late Twentieth-Century French Art." *Word & Image* 16, no. 4: pp. 363-77. And on the philosophical issue see Cadava, Eduardo, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy. 1991. *Who comes after the subject?* New York: Routledge.

see in Boltanski an example of the "Holocaust-related" artist. I would like to explore, in the next chapter, the political side of his pieces and his role as an artistic, self-reflexive, and archival site of political struggle over collective identity.

2:2 Child of the Holocaust

The means for understanding Boltanski's use of Holocaust photography, namely, regarding it in terms of 'an absented of Subject' or a failed practice of recalling memory from photograph, are presented by the philosopher Marjorie Perloff, in her article: "What Has Occurred Only Once: Barthes' Winter Garden/Boltanski's Archives." In it, she compares the photography in Roland Barthes's book, *Camera Lucida*, to the use of photography in Boltanski's work, *Alter to Lycée Chases*. Perloff claims that Boltanski and Barthes share the same "predilection with the ordinary photograph, the photograph of everyday life." Both "dislike 'art photography,' photography that approaches the condition of painting." Perloff states that, for them, the interesting photograph provides the viewer with testimony that the object being seen has some kind of real existence. In Barthes' words: "the photograph is never anything but an antiphon of "Look," "See," "Here it is"; it points a finger at certain *vis-à-vis*, and cannot escape this pure deictic language."

However, in Boltanski's oeuvre, argues Perloff, "this pure deictic language, this pointing at 'what has occurred only once,' takes on an edge unanticipated in the phenomenology of *Camera Lucida*."⁷¹ For example, Boltanski's uses of photographic representations of everyday life, claims Perloff, raise some hard questions regarding Barthes' theory. Her main point in this article is that the distance between Barthes' generation and Boltanski's "can be measured by the revisionist treatment Boltanski accords to the phenomenology of authentication practiced by the late Barthes."⁷² To support her argument, Perloff compares the differences between the two men's autobiographies: Roland Barthes was born in the first year of World War I (26 October 1915); Christian Boltanski, in the last year of World War II (6 September 1944). Barthes's father was killed in October 1916 in a naval battle in the North Sea; Boltanski's father, to avoid deportation in 1940, faked a divorce and pretended to abandon his family, though in reality he was hidden in the basement of their home for the duration of the Occupation. "The death of Barthes's father, an event his son understood early on as being only too 'real,' may thus be contrasted to the simulated 'death' of Dr. Boltanski at the time of his son's birth. Indeed," argues Perloff, "this sort of simulation, not yet a central issue in World War I when battle lines were drawn on nationalistic rather than ideological grounds, become important in the years of the resistance, when simulation and appropriation become common means of survival."⁷³

⁷¹Perloff, Marjorie. "What Has Occurred Only Once: Barthes's Winter Garden/Boltanski's Archives of the Dead." In *The Photography Reader*, edited by L. Wells, 31-41. London and New York: Routledge, 2003: p. 32

⁷² Ibid: p. 34

⁷³ Ibid: p. 35.

Another example of this simulation can be found in George Perec's⁷⁴ fictionalized autobiography, *W or the Memory of Childhood*, wherein he recalls that his widowed mother, who was to die at Auschwitz, got him out of Paris and into the Free Zone by putting him on a Red Cross convoy for the wounded on route to Grenoble. He writes, "I was not wounded. But I had to pretend I was wounded. That was why my arm was in a sling." The story about the sling turns out to have been fabricated. In the very next paragraph, Perec admits that, according to his aunt, his arm was not in a sling; rather, "it was as a 'son of father deceased,' a 'war orphan,' that I was being evacuated by the Red Cross, entirely within regulation."⁷⁵ Under such circumstances, "authentication" and "memories" become contested terms. Perloff concludes her article by emphasizing once again the role of History (with a capital H) in determining personal identity and artistic practice: "For writers and artists born in World War II France, and especially for Jewish artists like Perec and Boltanski, the Proustian or Barthesian souvenir of childhood seems to have become a kind of empty signifier, a site for assumed identities and invented sensations."⁷⁶ For Barthes, memory can invoke the past, and, however painful the memory, it relates past to present and creates Barthes's sense of identity. Memory, however, plays a completely different role in Boltanski's work, as a lacuna, it presents an invitation to raise questions that explore the knot linking subjectivity and collective identity in the second half of the twentieth century. Hence, memory becomes a useful critical tool for challenging the aesthetic tradition of personal expression, and thus to point to the absence of subject/Subject. As Boltanski claims, almost in homage to Perec's

⁷⁴ In many occasions Boltanski refers to Perec as his main influence.

⁷⁵ Perec, Georges. 1988: *W, or, The Memory of Childhood*. London: Collins Harvill: pp. 54-55

⁷⁶ Perloff, Marjorie. 2003: p. 40-41.

book: "I have very few memories of biography precisely to blot out my memory and to protect myself. I have invented so many false memories, which were collective memories, that my true childhood has disappeared."⁷⁷

2:3 Anti Monument

The *Missing House* created by Boltanski in 1990 for *Die Endlichkeit der Freiheit* (the finitude of freedom), an international art exhibition that took place in Berlin, was organized as an artistic response to the political situation in the city after the fall of the Berlin wall. The cultural department of the Berlin Senate invited artists to create public works of art that related to the current historical transformation and to the history of specific sites within Berlin. The interesting part of this exhibition is the sharp contrast that was created between the instructions that were given to the artists by the department and Boltanski's final work. The artists were charged with creating a public and ephemeral art that would inform the city but would not decorate or provide it with new monuments. The art works were to articulate the individual significance and history of their specific urban sites, and each artist's commentary or intervention was to join in an informative network uniting the two halves of the city in a dialogue of East and West.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Cite in: Boltanski, Christian, Danilo Eccher, and Bologna (Italy). Galleria d'arte moderna. 1997: p.80

⁷⁸ Czaplicka, John. 1995: "History, Aesthetics, and Contemporary Commemorative Practice in Berlin" *New German Critique* 65, no. Cultural History/Cultural Studies: p.159

The *Missing House* is located in what used to be East Berlin - *Große hamburger straÙe 15/16* - in an empty lot between two old apartment buildings. The *Missing House* contains 12 plates (120x60 cm) attached to the firewalls of houses adjacent to the empty lot. The plates include the following data: the names of the last inhabitants, dates of their birth and death, and their professions. These plates present the data in bold black letters against a white field surrounded by black frames, resembling the death notices of German newspapers. The distribution of the plates on the firewalls of the buildings that once formed the wings of the missing house seems to correspond with what used to be the residents' apartments. During the exhibition, Boltanski presented another work as a companion to the *Missing House* – *The Museum* – located in an abandoned and overgrown exhibition area near the Lehrter train station in West Berlin. The area was once used for art exhibitions and later as Hermann Göring's museum for airplane technology. *The Museum* includes ten vitrines filled with copies of documents concerning the former residents of the missing house that had been collected by Boltanski's assistants from Berlin's archives. Family photographs, postcards, letters, and copies of original documents, which were on display under glass, reveal the history or the story of this house. As the documents showed, approximately twenty of the former residents were Jews that had been deported to the death camps. This fact is not surprising when we realize that the house used to stand on the border of the former Jewish Quarter. The building itself had been demolished by Allied bombs on February 1945. At the close of the exhibition in 1990, the vitrines were removed after they had been vandalized, while the site of the missing house remained, and, as many of the tourist guides to the city

explain, the site functions today as a ‘site of memory’, which is integrated into a trail of historical traces in Berlin.

However, this empty space that contains only laconic information is seen by many as ambiguous. The missing house is an incomplete work that forces the visitor to complete the story and to recall and face the tragic history of the city. In this work, Boltanski employs his rhetoric of absence (an empty lot) via different means, combining material-situational facts (a real location) with an aesthetic. This combination raises many questions regarding the efficacy of this work as a site of memory, and art critics and historians disagree about its ability to attain a high degree of authenticity. In the next pages, I will explore these different views regarding the *Missing House* as a site of memory. Each of the following accounts is developed from an attempt to trace the “trajectory” that a visitor to the site needs to go through in order to comprehend the story, and suggests a different approach for understanding how the act of memory should be revealed and employed in this site, i.e. assuming the reaction of potential visitors. Each of the writers, as I am about to present, going beyond referring to the use of aesthetic means to recall history; above all, these writers imply a political perspective and stance concerning the memory of the Holocaust.

Art historian Lisa Saltzman links Boltanski’s work with James E. Young’s description of “counter-monument” projects created in 1980s Germany. This group of sculptures challenges the very premise of their being-as-monuments, resisting not just figuration but the conventions of commemorative sculpture or site-specific installations. The central works and artists of this category are Jochen and Esther Gerz’s *Monument*

against Fascism, Alfred Hrdlicka's *Monuments in Hamburg and Vienna*, and Sol Lewitt's *Black Form Dedicated to the Missing Jews*⁷⁹. These "counter monuments", according to Young, are characterized more by absence than presence, and more by impermanence than performance. Young considers these "counter," or in some cases "vanishing," monuments of the 1980s to be emblematic of questions about history, memory, and representation that have shaped public and political discourse in Germany during that decade. As Young writes, "Ethically certain of their duty to remember, but aesthetically skeptical of the assumptions underpinning traditional memorial forms, a new generation of contemporary artists and monument makers in Germany is probing the limits of both their artistic media and the very notion of memorial."⁸⁰ In his book *At Memory's Edge*, Young describes Boltanski's project in Berlin as emblematic, evoking the missing Jews who once inhabited it "as its void invited him to fill it with memory, he hoped it would incite others to memory as well"⁸¹

In contrast to Young's analysis, which does not have any doubt about the effectiveness of Boltanski's site and the "historical lesson" that it provides to its visitor, art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau claims that this house "is nothing but missing". "Situated where it is, in the rapidly transforming Eastern section of Berlin, one wonders how such a laconic installation might participate in the ongoing German project of coming to terms with the past in the new context of unification, a project charged with ambivalence, difficulty, and controversy. Neither monument nor counter-monument, commemorative only of absence, the missing house leaves unexamined the whys and

⁷⁹ Saltzman, Lisa. 1999: pp. 32-33

⁸⁰ Young, E. James. 1993: p.27

⁸¹ Young, E. James. 2000: pp.106-107

wherefores of its own mute testimonial.”⁸² By using Freud’s concepts of mourning and melancholia, Solomon-Godeau explains how the missing house is disqualified from functioning as a site of mourning. Mourning, according to Freud, requires acknowledgment of the irrevocable loss of the object and represents the triumph of the reality principle. Melancholia, on the other hand, represents that which is lost but not abandoned, and, also unlike mourning, melancholia is indeed characterized by the ambivalence of internal conflicts related to the subject’s investments in the lost object itself. Solomon-Godeau concludes that “perhaps it is this inability to fully acknowledge the ‘what’ in all its historical density, rather than the immediate ‘whom’ – the bombed out tenants of 15/ 16 *Große hamburger straÙe* – that disqualifies the missing house as a site of mourning. For if the *Missing House* invites the passerby to some kind of meditation, some somber contemplation of its significance as relic, ruin and absence, it does so at the cost of banishing its own historical legacy.”⁸³

Historian John Czaplicka, who measures the effectiveness of this site by following the experiential paths that the visitor has to go through in order to collect its historical insight, provides a different point of view. This process is best expressed by the German Concept *das Eigedenken*, which demands empathetic engagement from an informed beholder in contemplation or in material, formal, and documentary configurations. The *Missing House*, claims Czaplicka, provides a contemplative circumstance that may lead to commemorative insight, or, recalling Aby Warburg’s phrase, to a retrospective contemplativeness⁸⁴. In his article “History, Aesthetic, and

⁸² Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. 1998: p.18

⁸³ Ibid: p.20,

⁸⁴ Czaplicka, John. 1995: p. 157

Contemporary Commemorative Practice in Berlin”, Czaplicka demonstrates how historical traces and sites on the way to the empty space inform the visitor’s acknowledgement of its history. Hebrew script emerging from beneath peeling paint suggests the former character of this neighborhood, which was at one time one of the densest concentrations of Jews and Jewish institutions in Berlin, and is being rebuilt today. Everything around this empty space, states Czaplicka, functions as a testament to the violence that took place here during World War II and to the loss of Jewish community.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, while visiting the site in 1993, Czaplicka encountered a different visitor who evoked rather different memories. As he reports in his article, an old woman who resided in one of the still extant wings of the building for the last 53 years, told him about the “true” history of the house: “She remembered it as a ‘well-tended garden-house’, a noble structure set back from the street in a manner completely untypical for this part of downtown Berlin... she noted that this rather noble structure should not to be associated with the nearby *Scheuneviertel*, that voluntary ghetto of cheap living quarters, where the poor Jews from the East and especially Galicia had congregated in Berlin. Referring to the names on the barren firewalls in the *Missing House* she assured me that not only Jews had resided in the garden house and that they had not even been a majority. All one had to do was “read the names”... the resident also reassured me that those who had resided here in the 1940s had survived the war and that each had died in a ‘normal’ fashion. As a survivor herself she thought the empty lot should be closed.”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Ibid: p. 170

⁸⁶ Ibid: p. 169

Czaplicka, however, dismisses her memories and her ability to appreciate the site. First, he suspects that she might be one of the German tenants that took over the empty apartment of the evicted Jews. Then, he blames her for being oblivious to the historical context of the site. All she needs to do, he claims, is to read the names in combination with the dates to acknowledge the tragedy. The dates of the residency point to a sudden shift in the population between ca. 1933 to 1942. The obvious conclusion, claims Czaplicka, should be that: “this place was where many assimilated Jewish Germans had long settled, but no Jewish German would or could have called the new missing house home, especially after the deportations began in *earnest* in 1942.” Finally, he suggests that her emptiness was *unheimlich*, uncanny and foreign: “At her age, she only wanted her peace – and now all those “memory tourists” came, for the missing house had been integrated into a trail of historical traces.”⁸⁷

Reading about this random encounter, it seems that Czaplicka, in his endeavor to present the site as a commemoration of Berlin’s Jews and through his demands to evoke empathetic engagement with *das Eigedenken*, ignores important aspects of Boltanski’s work. The same can be suggested regarding the variety of potential visitors in Boltanski’s *Missing House* that previous writers described: Young and Saltzman’s active visitor, Solomon-Godeau’s “Melancholic passerby”, and Czaplicka’s “empathic beholder”. However, in their analyses, they are all oblivious to the fact that Boltanski’s work in Berlin was not planned to be a monument or counter-monument to the Holocaust. This site is marked by Boltanski as an enduring reminder to the citizens of Berlin (in their historical moment of reunion 1989), and of the ambivalent notion of liberty, by pointing

⁸⁷ Ibid

back to their historical ruin. As Boltanski claims in an interview: “What interested me about this project was that you can take any house in Paris, New York, or Berlin, and with that one house, you can reconstruct an entire historical situation.”⁸⁸ Particularly in Berlin, reconstructing the history of any house will lead automatically to History with a capital H: the war, the camps. From this perspective, Boltanski’s work evokes Walter Benjamin’s “Angel of History” (*Novus Angelus*), who emerges from the ruin of the *Missing House*, and looks back on it, paralyzed. He stares at the Medusa of history, as it has reminded him not to trust any assumption about the progressive movement of history or other utopian ideals. In that way, the old woman’s ‘uncanny responses’ in Czaplicka’s report, can be understood as a suitable reaction to the *Missing House*.

2:4 Holocaust Effect

One of the central books on Holocaust representation is Ernst van Alphen’s *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*.⁸⁹ Van Alphen’s main goal is to challenge the fundamental dichotomy of Holocaust representations between historical, realistic means and imaginative, aesthetic modes of representation. According to van Alphen, since the war, or more precisely, since Adorno’s dictum, the dominant paradigm deployed to remember and discuss this event

⁸⁸ Cited in: Gumpert, Lynn, and Christian Boltanski. 1994. *Christian Boltanski*. Paris: Flammarion: p.142

⁸⁹ Alphen, Ernst van. 1997. *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

has favored the realistic approach. As he explains in the next quotation, there exists a habitually rigorous stance against the use of artistic representations within the discipline of Holocaust studies:

Historical discourse has usually been the positive term, which consequently needs little explanation; by contrast the dubious, even nefarious, features of fictional imaginative discourse – the negative term – have been spelled out endlessly... the opposition that is usually created between the historical and the literary or artistic approach to the Holocaust is not based only on the practical norm of effectively. It is also heavily invested with morality. In the case of the memory of the Holocaust, imaginative representations are considered not only less effective, but even objectionable. Literature or art, after all, may yield pleasure. And pleasure is supposed to be a barbarous response when we are confronted with this particular past, which is itself barbarous. Instead we should focus and meditate on the hard facts of the Holocaust.⁹⁰

Critique of this preference has become louder in recent years from both sides of the representation spectrum. Van Alphen uses these voices of opposition to formulate his argument on the importance and the central role of artistic representations. One of the leading voices in the field is historian Saul Friedlander who, in his book *Reflections of Nazism*, discusses the dilemma that the historian dealing with Holocaust research faces. Accordingly, by uncovering the historical facts in their most precise, interconnected context, systematic historical research provides little understanding of the Holocaust. Such an approach protects us from the past, keeping it at a distance. This distance, as he explains, “is caused by the reading attitude the reader is encouraged to adopt by the historian’s language, of the expert, which in charge of checking the accuracy of the facts

⁹⁰ Ibid: p. 17

and the connections between them, protects the reader.”⁹¹ The problem that surfaces comes from understanding that the Holocaust is an historical event that requires more than objective knowledge of the facts; it necessitates a different kind of involvement and comprehension. Thus, Friedlander concludes “the historian cannot work in any other way, and historical studies have to be pursued along the accepted lines. The events describe are what is unusual, not the historian’s work. We have reached the limit of our means of expression. Others we do not possess.”⁹² And here is where van Alphen (as an art critic) replies by arguing that art and literature provide the means to represent this unusual, incomparable nature of the Holocaust.

Van Alphen is well aware of the dangers and the problem that artistic representation can entail. He specifically points to the difficulty of keeping a balance between the mixture of allegory and description, and the harsh reality of the Holocaust. This reality is transformed through the filter of memory and language to make it familiar, and thus distanced from the facts. Yet, as he explains, “this caution does not imply that the Holocaust cannot or should not be represented. Rather, there is a need to explore and develop manners and means of representation that preserve contact with this extreme history; means that continue to transmit knowledge of it, that simultaneously prevent forgetting and making familiar.”⁹³ The way that van Alphen suggests overcoming this problem is via a critical strategy that does not seek to tell but rather to show or reenact it directly. Here, van Alphen coins a new term *Holocaust effect* as a framework to read and understand art works that follow his principle. As he explains:

⁹¹ Ibid: p. 119

⁹² Frindlander cites in Alphen, Ernst van. 1997: p. 33

⁹³ Alphen, Ernst van. 1997: p. 35

When I use the term *Holocaust effect*, therefore, I do so to emphasize a contrast with the term Holocaust representation. A representation is by definition mediated. It is an objectified account. The Holocaust is made present in the representation of it by means of reference to it. When I call something the Holocaust effect, I mean to say that we are not confronted with a representation of the Holocaust but that we, as viewers or readers, experience directly a certain aspect of the Holocaust or of Nazism, of that which led to the Holocaust. In such moments the Holocaust is not represented, but rather presented or reenacted. In terms of speech act theory I might explain it differentially. The Holocaust is not made present by means of a connotative speech act – that is, as a mediated account, as the truthful or untruthful content of the speech act; rather, it is made present as performative effect. Those performative acts “do” the Holocaust, or rather, they “do” a specific aspect of it.⁹⁴

In this book, van Alphen devotes two chapters to the works of Christian Boltanski. He refers to Boltanski as a “Deadly Historian,” interpreting his work as an intervention in Holocaust historiographic discourse. He primarily uses this definition in regards to Boltanski’s methods of representation, such as his uses of the archive and old photographs, both recalling historiographic methods. Yet, van Alphen recognizes in Boltanski’s installations an aesthetic solution to the paradox of historiography. He applies the term *Holocaust effect*, and, thus, reveals the ‘Janus face’ of historical realism regarding this event, as presented by Friedlander. According to van Alphen: “Boltanski the artist presents himself not as a “believer,” but as a self reflexive historian like Friedlander.”⁹⁵ As van Alphen notices, Boltanski evokes the Holocaust in his works through his artistic method – mainly using photographed portraits and the archive. Boltanski’s deliberate manipulation of these devices brings about the reenactment of the Holocaust effect by emptying it of subjectivity. This argument is close to his belief, yet

⁹⁴ Ibid: p. 10

⁹⁵ Ibid: p. 119

different from the argument about Boltanski that I am trying to formulate in this project; moreover, van Alphen's reading of Boltanski's work with the term *Holocaust effect* contributes not merely to an understanding of installation pieces that refer directly to the war but also explains how his artistic project as a whole (since the 1970s) has always been touched by this event, as much of my argument states. I will in the next pages elaborate on the way it operates on each of Boltanski's artistic methods – photographs, archive, testimony, and shadows installations - in order to develop my own evaluation.

Photograph installations - *Alter to Lycée Chases* (1989) provides an example for understanding how van Alphen's *Holocaust-effect* is performed. In a unique process that Boltanski has developed, each one of the participants' faces from the original photograph is re-photographed and enlarged; the effect is that all the personal features become blurred and indistinct. Ghost-like images emerge as portrait stand-ins. In this process, Boltanski not only makes use of a 'found document', evoking the tragedy of the Holocaust, but mostly challenges the traditional artistic genre of photographed portraits. As is apparent in art history, a portrait gives the illusion of the presence and authenticity of the portrayed subject and presupposes a belief in the unity of signifier and signified. Whenever this unity is challenged, the homogeneity and the authenticity of the subject fall apart.⁹⁶ As a result, Van Alphen claims, "The memorials serve to memorialize not so much the dead person or, less ambitiously, a past phase of somebody's life, but a dead pictorial genre. The portrait is memorialized in its failure to fulfill its traditional promise."⁹⁷ As a result, the portraits in Boltanski's works do not signify "presence", but

⁹⁶ Ibid: p. 103

⁹⁷ Ibid: p. 108

do exactly the opposite: they evoke only absence. Moreover, in the process of dramatically enlarging the photograph, individual features are obscured and diminished. The subject in the portrait has been transformed into object. By presenting these enlarged portraits as a massive group in one space creates the sense of sameness among them. This transformation, according to van Alphen, is precisely what reenacts the Holocaust: “This reenactment is an *effect*, not a representation; it *does* something instead of showing it.”⁹⁸

Van Alphen also argues that the reenactment of Holocaust-effect principles in photographed portraits is not at all confined to the works Boltanski uses to address the Holocaust head on. His ability to produce the Holocaust-effect applies even more strikingly in photo installations that do not deal with the event in a direct way, as in early photo installations like *The 62 members of the Mickey Mouse Club in 1955* (1972), *Monuments: the Children of Dijon* (1989), and *174 Dead Swiss* (1999). Ultimately, as van Alphen concludes, the Holocaust-effect undercuts two elements of the traditional view of the portrait. By representing these people as dead, and by representing these human beings in the “Nazi Mode,” that is, without identifying features, he negates the “presence” of individuals in the portraits. “All the portraits are exchangeable: the portrayed have become anonymous. Likewise, they all evoke absence: not only absence of a referent outside the image, but absence within the image as well”⁹⁹

Leftovers – van Alphen’s term, Holocaust-effect, evokes in a similar way the installation where Boltanski presents second-hand garments and objects like *Canada* (1988), in earlier works like *Inventory of Objects* (1974). “In both cases”, he explains,

⁹⁸ Ibid: p. 106

⁹⁹ Ibid

“There seems to be a minimum of intrusion or “presence” of either subject or medium of representation in the ultimate product.”¹⁰⁰ In addition to Boltanski’s subversion of traditional artistic representations, these modes allow him to foreground and then question the notion of individuality. However, Van Alphen points out two specific aspects that are evoked in those archive installations. First, the garments in Boltanski’s installations, probably obtained from the Salvation Army, are employed as “Holocaust effect”: “because they reenact a principle that defines the Holocaust, to wit, the extreme deprivation of individuality. Denied their presenthood, the victims of the Holocaust were treated as specimens of a race that had to be collected and inventoried before they could be used (in the labor camps) or destroyed (in the gas chambers). Not only did the Nazis inventory the possessions of their victims; they applied the same principles to the victims themselves.” In addition, Boltanski reconstructs these installations of endless objects, expressing the notions of usefulness and uselessness: “The ‘inventories’ or the selections that were preformed when one entered the camp... The mechanisms of the Holocaust were such that ultimately everybody ended up in the ‘useless’ category.”¹⁰¹

Testimony – In this section, van Alphen refers to Boltanski's early works, like his mail art (1970) and his short films (1969). In them, he recognized the urge to correspond when voice fails to reach the addressee. Van Alphen connects this artistic practice to the Holocaust survivors’ testimonies’ performative quality as a humanizing, transactive process. He bases his reading on psychoanalyst Dori Laub’s observations on survivors’ traumatic testimonies, and his argument on the value of testimony as a particular process

¹⁰⁰ Ibid: p. 112

¹⁰¹ Ibid: p. 116

that enables the survivor to reclaim his or her position as an interrelated subject and as a witness of history. In a similar way, argues van Alphen, Boltanski's artworks are performative events in which the relationship with the viewer in the historical present is actively and insistently pursued.¹⁰²

Shadows Installation – Here, van Alphen refers to works from 1980s, such as *Shadows* (1984) and *Candles* (1987). Whereas in his earlier works, Boltanski used aggressive and brutal strategies to compel the audience into encountering the subject matter, in these works he uses naïve, childlike motifs that lure the viewer into engagement with his work. What makes these works instances of the Holocaust effect, according to van Alphen, is the presence of figures of death and the dead in their immediate correspondence with their living projections. The dead are no longer represented as absence, but are brought back to life. As van Alphen concludes: “This seems to me Boltanski's answer to the unrepresentation of the Holocaust, and the urgent need to keep its memory alive.”¹⁰³

As I have tried to emphasize in this short survey, van Alphen's approach to Holocaust representations and challenges they pose is unique and innovative. His use of rhetorical principles and his way of interweaving scholastic literature from the field of Holocaust studies with a reading of contemporary artworks is impressive. Regarding his reading of Boltanski's work I find many of his definitions and observations relevant and important to my own examination: in particular, his reading of Boltanski as a self-reflexive artist questioning historiography and the genre of portrait; the understanding

¹⁰² Ibid: pp. 153-154

¹⁰³ Ibid: p. 175

that there is a strong connection between works that evoke the war directly and those that do not; the realization that Boltanski as an artist casts suspicion over the authenticity of the image; and his fascination with the presence/absence of the Subject. Nevertheless, to conclude my discussion on Van Alphen's book I would like to raise three problematic points in his reading of Boltanski's work. These points serve as the basis for my departure from his argument and provide the grounds for the formulation of my own.

The first problem is related to van Alphen's readings of some of Boltanski's works, like *Sans-Souci*, and his statement regarding Klaus Barbie's case.¹⁰⁴ It allegedly seems to be a way of illustrating Boltanski's reflection on Nazi 'ordinary' evil. As Lynn Gumpert says: "these albums documented the lives of ordinary people during extraordinary times. Among the ritualized shots of birthdays and anniversaries were uniformed Nazi soldiers – smiling and holding babies, happy, it seems, to have a respite from their duties."¹⁰⁵ Contrasted with this stance, van Alphen argues that Boltanski is not making a claim about potential evil that hides in us all. Boltanski's work, however, exposes the problem of recognizing evil through images in snapshots, newspapers, television, and etc. This proves once again the failure of the photographic medium to capture the reality and the truth of a person subjectively.¹⁰⁶ In this way, van Alphen relies on a kind of essential Nazi evil that the image was supposed to depict. His claim,

¹⁰⁴ In 1987, when the trial of the infamous Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie in Lyon France was reported in all the newspapers and on television, Boltanski made the following comment: "Barbie has the face of a Nobel Peace Prize winner. It would be much easier if the terrible person had a terrible face." cited in: Alphen, Ernst van. 1997: p. 111

¹⁰⁵ Gumpert, Lynn, and Christian Boltanski. 1994: p. 143

¹⁰⁶ Alphen, Ernst van. 1997: pp. 110-112

therefore, can be added to the discourse around the Nazi absolute evil, and the Holocaust as extraordinary event.

My second point refers to van Alphen's problematic method and his disregard for the difference between historiography and collective memory. As his main argument emphasizes, Boltanski's critique is self-reflexive on the historiography of the field of Holocaust studies, and of history as a discipline in general. As he concludes: "Boltanski seems to suggest that the disciplinization of history and its modes of representation, with the consequent loss of utopian thinking, define the Holocaust in a crucial way. Again and again he turns to the archival mode of representation as a way of evoking the Nazi structuring of history and genocidal practices. His works, then, evoke the Holocaust by being not 'about' that event, but 'about' the disciplinization of history."¹⁰⁷ The critical focus in Boltanski's works, as I will argue, does not lie in the discipline of written history, but in the visual method that national museums have developed to commemorate historical events like the Holocaust. The problem, as Boltanski notices, is the modern ritual of death and memory that has been defined by the State, and not by historians. The way of dealing with a collective space and manipulating it constitutes his main goal to challenge the space of memory, and not historiography. The problem with van Alphen's argument, which appears in many books on the subject, is that as a literature scholar he relays heavily on literature and rhetorical analysis of the 'word', whereas Boltanski is a visual artist, and as such demands close analysis of images in space that challenge the method of museum display.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid: p. 121

Lastly, I would like to describe the danger imbued in the topic of ‘Absents Subject’ as part of Holocaust representation. As I mentioned before, this is part of the post-modern critique of the Humanist Subject of the Enlightenment. In this regard, van Alphen himself notices how it might entail a nostalgic view and memory of a time in history, before the war, where it was still possible to represent the true Subject. This, I will argue, is part of larger problem in van Alphen’s book, where there is no concrete explanation of the intentions behind Boltanski’s oeuvre with regards to the present moment. In other words, we still question why Boltanski is doing what he is doing as contemporary artist, why he tries to evoke the ‘Holocaust effect’ or the memory of the war in contemporary museums of art around the world, and how it is reflected in his other works. By using the tools of the history of the present, as I will argue in chapter 3, Boltanski invites his viewers to challenge and confront problems of communal identity in the present moment.

2:5 Aesthetic of Mourning

Brett Ashley Kaplan’s *Unwanted Beauty: Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation* is another important book that tries to deal with the ethical problem of Holocaust representation in contemporary art and literature. The main issue that Kaplan investigates in this book is the understanding of the aesthetic pleasure that many works of

art on the Holocaust create for the viewer, and she defines this aesthetic pleasure as ‘unwanted beauty’. Consequently, this artistic practice contradicts Adorno’s dictum and the prohibition on representation of beauty and aesthetic pleasure in Holocaust-related art and literature. In her book, she tries to collapse this opposition between important historical contributions and the beautiful by arguing that unwanted beauty offered by some Holocaust representations transforms Holocaust memory in important, enriching, and indeed beneficial ways. She coins the term “unwanted beauty” to describe this artistic practice of eliciting pleasure. As such, it provides for us a way to see the complexity of the Holocaust in ways that conventional works fail to achieve, thus providing an alternative means for the dominant discourse to interdict against beauty. Kaplan’s analysis includes first-generation (direct) witnesses to the event, like artist Paul Celan, and ‘second generation’ artists, like Kiefer and Boltanski. According to her argument, aesthetic pleasure provides a survival mechanism for the first generation to cope with the sights and memories of the concentration camps. It therefore enables poets like Celan and writers like Charlotte Delbo to explore how the Holocaust haunts memory. Yet for the postwar generation, the practice of unwanted beauty allows forgotten memory to be brought to the forefront of our cultural consciousness. However, as opposed to written pleasures of the first generation poets, the visual pleasure elicited by the works of Boltanski deepens yet also complicates the process of Holocaust memory.

Kaplan deals with Boltanski’s works in the same chapter as those of the German artist Kiefer; both are post-war second generation artists, although their personal histories

put them on different sides.¹⁰⁸ But this is not the only reason to combine the two artists. Kaplan claims that since they have both produced a stunningly varied body of work, ranging in media across painting, sculpture, clothing, actions, books, films, letters, and more, and ranging in subject matter from myths of Germania, Nazism, the Holocaust, Judaism, childhood, death, and more, it is impossible to reduce Kiefer's and Boltanski's oeuvres to the category of "Holocaust art". Yet, some of their works reflect on the Nazi genocide in a subtle way that deepens our understanding of the production of Holocaust memory.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, both artists, explains Kaplan, confront the viewer with ambivalence: their images are beautiful and deeply moving, yet also disturbing. As she describes this encounter with the works: "On the one hand because of its aesthetic pleasure, the subtle questions raised by Kiefer's and Boltanski's art encourage discussion of the Holocaust and encourage Holocaust memory; on the other hand, the political and historical ambiguities raised by their art muddies and perhaps even romanticizes memories of the Nazi genocide."¹¹⁰ One way to explain their attitude will be to blame it on the postmodern aesthetic that glorifies ambiguity, yet that explanation will put aside questions regarding Holocaust representation present in their works.

¹⁰⁸ Boltanski talks of his artistic connection to Kiefer, as well the Polish actor Kantor in *The Possible Life of Christian Boltanski*, as he evokes the memory of the war: "Kiefer is an artist I really like enormously, and I do think he's close to me. I've always wanted to have an exhibit that would bring together Kantor, Kiefer, and me: the way I see it is that Kiefer is the conqueror, I'm the Jew fleeing with only a small suitcase under my arm, and Kantor is the crafty Polish peasant. All three of us talk about the great plans of Poland, but what Kiefer evokes is the evil of killing, the evil of being a conqueror; for me it's the evil of being hunted and fleeing; and Kantor, it's that one survives because one is a Polish peasant who survives everything." Boltanski, Christian, and Catherine Grenier. 2009: p. 120

¹⁰⁹ Kaplan, Brett Ashley. 2007: p. 107

¹¹⁰ Ibid: p. 108

Kaplan's reading of Boltanski's works suggests a different direction, based on his strategy for transforming the museum's space into a beautiful installation, where the emphasis is on maneuvering the space by using effect of lighting/darkness and powerful images (his enlarged photos), while echoing the museum practices. Thus, she claims, he invites the viewer to participate in some kind of mourning, although it is occasionally not so clear for whom or why. This puts the viewer in a confused state in which simultaneously strong feelings of melancholy and loss emerge from these installations. These feelings flare up as a response to the powerful aesthetic, yet do not resonate with the specific loss triggered here. The memory of the Holocaust, argues Kaplan, is always present in Boltanski's powerful installations, where unwanted beauty is evoked, even when it lacks any historical grounding. That is how, according to Kaplan, Boltanski confronts the viewer with the work of interpretation and nuanced production of Holocaust memory.

According to Kaplan, the difference between the story told by photographs and the reality they supposedly depict can be encapsulated in the case of Boltanski's installation piece *Le Lycée Chases*, focusing on a found photo of Jewish high school students in Vienna 1931. As I have explained, Boltanski used the photo to evoke the assumption that most of the participants are dead. Yet, many are in fact still living and even recognized themselves in this photo, and Kaplan provides many detailed accounts of the survivors. Nevertheless, Kaplan argues that this inconsistency does not diminish the project's value as a force for inducing memory of this tragic event:

The *Lycée Chases* episode is paradigmatic of the interest and dismay Boltanski's art causes. On the one hand, his photo-sculptures, evoking loss, mourning, and melancholia seem to be powerful examples of Holocaust art. On the other hand, his photo-sculptures evoke the Holocaust in a radically anti-historical way that challenges viewers' investment in finding the Holocaust in many forms of commemorative art. Like Edmond Jabès' shadowy allusions to the Shoah, then Boltanski's work meditates on our interpretative strategies as much as on his desire to portray or treat the Nazi genocide.¹¹¹

Interestingly, Kaplan points to certain resemblances between Boltanski's strategies for dealing with the memory of the Holocaust and those of the French poet Edmond Jabès. Both artists demonstrate that we bear an ethical, aesthetic, and historical burden to try and grapple with the question of the Holocaust that has become embedded in Western consciousness. By avoiding direct and clear Holocaust representations, they force their readers/viewers to recognize their own investments in the nuanced process of memory, and thus to find the Holocaust for themselves in elliptical moments where it might not be clearly represented.¹¹² Boltanski and Jabès, claims Kaplan, create beautiful works that contribute to Holocaust memory even while maintaining only loose ties to Holocaust history. As is the case with many of Jabès' poems, the references to the Holocaust in his works are often shadowy, tentative allusions to loss, nostalgia, mourning, or melancholia.¹¹³

The division between "direct and "oblique" Holocaust representation, explains Kaplan, is to some degree artificial because one can never transmit directly the

¹¹¹ Ibid: p. 134

¹¹² Ibid: p. 79

¹¹³ Ibid: p. 105

experience of the Holocaust, and the desire for oblique representations has been prevalent among artists who represent the Holocaust. As she claims, the intriguing part in Jabès and Boltanski's art is their ability to illustrate how memory works, both on us and within us, so relentlessly that it paradoxically may seem to fill our memories with a past we did not experience.¹¹⁴

The problem with Kaplan's argument is her preference for artworks whose aesthetic components are aimed toward evoking a viewer response; these pieces are eventually classified as kitsch.¹¹⁵ Kaplan relies heavily on van Alphen's strict division between art and historiography in Holocaust representation, which, as I argue, is an artificial one. Kaplan tries to prove van Alphen's argument that art is the most powerful means to convey this tragic event.¹¹⁶ Therefore, she omits from her analysis on Boltanski works that have no direct connection to the Holocaust memory. Moreover, she dismisses works like the *Missing House* in Berlin, which lack strong aesthetic components. In these works, she claims, the focus of Boltanski's energy shifted from the aesthetic to the historical in a way that ironically diminishes the impact of art.¹¹⁷ Alternatively, as I would like to argue in this project, the power of Boltanski's oeuvre lies simultaneously in its aesthetic as well as its historical and political components. Attempts like Kaplan's, which aim to separate these aspects, merely expose their weaknesses as effective art.

¹¹⁴ Ibid: p. 80

¹¹⁵ See Kaplan's emotional account of her first encounter with Boltanski's work, Ibid: pp. 129-130

¹¹⁶ Ibid: p. 148

¹¹⁷ Ibid: p. 145

2:6 Art After the Disaster

In the last section of this chapter, I will try to connect Boltanski's work to the artistic milieu in France after the war. The work of this period persistently tries to deal with the problem of Holocaust representation. My attempt here is to read Boltanski project in this cultural context and to point out the influence he has received from key figures of the time. This will help us to understand some of the strategies of representation Boltanski uses, and their uniqueness in reflecting on the memory of the Holocaust. Moreover, some of the ethical issues raised by an encounter with Boltanski's works bring to mind the descriptions found in Maurice Blanchot's *Writing of the Disaster*, and Sarah Kofman's *Smothered Words* - an homage to Blanchot's book. Therefore, I will look into those two French writers, both of whom elaborate on ethical involvement, from a perspective that complicates, even subverts, the notion of identification. The statement opening Blanchot's condensed and aphoristic book presents the following effect: "The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact. It does not touch any one in particular; "I" am not threatened by it, but spared, left aside. It is in this way that I am threatened; it is in this way that the disaster threatens in me that which is exterior to me – another than I who passively becomes other."¹¹⁸

In this aphorism, explains Allan Stoekl in his article "Blanchot, Violence and the Disaster," Blanchot unfolds his method for facing the impossible task of writing about the unwritable, as well as its attendant necessity and guilt: "(Blanchot) ...takes great pains

¹¹⁸ Blanchot, Maurice, and Ann Smock. 1995. *The Writing of the*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press: p.1

from the outset to indicate that the ‘disaster’ – his disaster – is not a dialectical endpoint, does not entail what we might call ‘empirical’ destruction. Indeed, it is the very concept of the empirical – which can easily be set in opposition to the very concept of the ‘imaginary’ – which is out of the question here. Blanchot’s characterization of the disaster entails not the privileging of one opposing force over the other, but the doubling or canceling out of terms through the linkage of seeming contraries.”¹¹⁹

In *Smothered Words*, echoing Blanchot’s statement, Sarah Kofman mentions briefly in chapter II her father’s death in Auschwitz, which is followed by contradictory questions regarding the limit of representation: “How can it not be said? And how can it be said?” The following pages are comprised of a laconic list of facts about her father’s death and the bureaucratic document that record the tragic event:

My Father: Berek Kofman, born on October 10, 1900, in Sobin (Poland), taken to Drancy on July 16, 1942, was in convoy no.12, dated July 29, 1942, a convoy comprising 1000 deportees, 270 men and 730 women (aged 36 to 54): 270 men registered 54,153 to 54,422; 514 women selected for work, registered 13,320 to 13,833; 216 other women gassed immediately. It is recorded, there, in the Serge Klarsfeld Memorial: with its endless columns of names, its lack of pathos, its sobriety, the “neutrality” of its information, this sublime memorial takes your breath away.¹²⁰

“Its ‘neutral’ voice summons you obliquely,” continues Kofman, and she describes her father’s trace: “in its extreme restraint, it is the very voice of affliction, of

¹¹⁹ Stoekl Allen. 1995: “Blanchot, Violence, and the Disaster”, in: Kritzman, Lawrence D. 1995. *Auschwitz and After : Race, Culture, and "the Jewish Question" in France*. New York: Routledge: p. 140

¹²⁰ Kofman, Sarah. 1998. *Smothered Words*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press: pp. 10-11

this event in which all possibility vanished, and which inflicted on the whole of humanity ‘the decisive blow which left nothing intact’” – (the latter reference borrowed from Blanchot). “This voice leaves you without voice, makes you doubt your commonsense and all sense, makes you suffocate in silence: silence like crying without words; mute, although crying endlessly.”¹²¹

While trying to reclaim her voice, she turns again to Blanchot’s text which says: “Like writing ...the cry tends to exceed all language, even if it lends itself to recuperation as language effect. It is both sudden and patient... The patience of the cry: it does not simply come to a halt, reduced to nonsense, yet it does remain outside of sense – a meaning infinitely suspended, decried, decipherable-indecipherable.”¹²²

Chapter III in Kofman’s book starts with the following statement, which simultaneously recalls Adorno’s dictum and Blanchot’s book: “About Auschwitz and after Auschwitz no story is possible, if by a story one means: to tell a story which makes sense.”¹²³ What is essential for Maurice Blanchot, as well as for Sarah Kofman and other French writers, is to write endlessly about the act of writing about Auschwitz. The problem will always remain: how to write about Auschwitz without betraying Auschwitz. Hence, Elaine Marks explains in her article “*Cendres Juives: Jews Writing in French ‘after Auschwitz’*,” these writers never tell stories, but mingle philosophical inquiry, citations, and anecdotal fragments, which it is then up to the reader to piece together.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Ibid: pp.10-11

¹²² Blanchot, Maurice, and Ann Smock. 1995: p.51

¹²³ Kofman, Sarah. 1998: p.14

¹²⁴ Marks, Elaine. 1995: “Cendres juives: Jew Writing in French “after Auschwitz”, in Kritzman, Lawrence D. 1995: p .41

Remembering and forgetting are the contradictory imperatives between which all writers of (after) Auschwitz are caught, according to Blanchot and his followers. This principle, as Stoekl explains in his article: “there is and must be, wakefulness, vigilance, “*la veille*”. Blanchot, by his very refusal to forget the conflict within writing of the Holocaust, signals the force of his own vigil.”¹²⁵

That forgetfulness exists: this remains to be proved.’ (Nietzsche.) Exactly: unproven, improbable forgetfulness, vigilance that ever reawakens us.¹²⁶

In the movement from identification to vigilance, a method is invoked that also pertains to Kofman’s telling of her father's death in Auschwitz, in that it at once appears familiar and strange (as described above). Marks also considers these imperatives to be at work in the poems of the French poet Edmond Jabès.¹²⁷ Similar tactics operate in the book *W or the Childhood Memory*, written by Georges Perec, helping him to overcome the fact that he cannot recall his own childhood memories, which again sounds both common and extraordinary: “I was excused: a different history, History with a capital H, had answered the question in my stead: the war, the camps.”¹²⁸ Moreover, the filmmaker Claude Lanzmann also used these principles in his monumental film *Shoah*, in an attempt to overcome the proscription against visual representation.

¹²⁵ Stoekl, Allen. 1995: p. 146

¹²⁶ Blanchot, Maurice, and Ann Smock. 1995: p. 105

¹²⁷ Mole, Gary D. 1997. *Levinas, Blanchot, Jabès : Figures of Estrangement*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida: p. 18

¹²⁸ Perec Georges. 1975: p. 30

My suggestion is that it can be beneficial to place Christian Boltanski's artistic activity amidst this group of creators, and in this cultural environment. After all, he belongs to the same generation of French (mostly Jewish) cultural creators dealing with the memory of the Holocaust. And above all, as we are about to explore in the next pages, we can detect methods in Boltanski's installations that echo and employ the same rules. Accordingly, the works enact a constant movement from the familiar to the strange; meanings are indefinitely suspended and intermingle with philosophical inquiry. Boltanski's works are built as a collation of fragmented objects or images that the viewer must piece together. As a central principle, Boltanski demands of the viewer 'a state of vigilance', even if it carries the risk of ambivalence:

Question: In my work, I hope to move people and to pose questions. In principle, each work I make is a question to which I do not have the answer, and sometimes there is a question that leads to other questions. The role of an artist as I see it is to ask questions, not through writing but through images which pose questions to those who look at them. It is something open, for I do not know the answer. I also think that any answer is bad.¹²⁹

The installations that Boltanski builds from old photos, clothes, and boxes reenact ceremonial commemorations—though their subject matter stays ambiguous and general. To this, Boltanski comments: “What I can say with certainty is that if you use a life in your art you are always dangerous and a crook.”¹³⁰ All the above alludes to an interaction of sorts, or an artistic association, between Boltanski and the milieu of French writers that

¹²⁹ Cited in: Christian, Danilo Eccher, and Bologna (Italy). Galleria d'arte moderna. 1997: p. 124

¹³⁰ Ibid: p. 30

I discussed above (Boltanski's interest and fascination with his Jewish identity since the 1980s indicates such a connection, or at least its acknowledgement). It is not only that Boltanski employs similar tactics in his artwork. As I am about to explore in the next chapter, his strategy echoes these writers' aim, realizing that after Auschwitz the task of writing is "to write endlessly about writing about Auschwitz," which denotes the only possibility of artistic creation "after the Holocaust." However, transferring "writing about Auschwitz" to a visual equivalent is not a self-evident task (as even I am at a loss when searching for a suitable descriptive parallel). Consequently, addressing Boltanski's task involves a much more convoluted prescription: *after Auschwitz the task of the artist is to present endlessly the act of representation about Auschwitz*. Some of the reasons behind this difficulty have been exposed by the historian Martin Jay in his book "Downcast Eyes," which investigates the denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought. There, he emphasizes an intense fascination with Judaism that gripped many French intellectuals in the 1970s and 1980s. Central Jewish thinkers like Emmanuel Lévinas, Jabès, and Derrida instigate a new interest in Jewish themes and the biblical interdiction of graven images, hence, once again, evoking a suspicion of vision and gaze.¹³¹ Consequently, my aim in the next chapter is to present how Boltanski as a visual artist has been able to formulate a visual alternative to the task, while engaging the problem of museum space instead of a book to express his Auschwitz imperatives.

¹³¹ Jay, Martin. 1993. *Downcast Eyes the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press: p. 546

Chapter 3:

Boltanski's Archival Regulations

3:1: An Old Archivist¹³²

Nobody really knows who appointed him, but for the last forty years Christian Boltanski has functioned as the executive archivist of contemporary art practice. It is unclear what has motivated him to move from one city to another, from one museum to the next, or to build a new archive for each new community he joins. He collects old photographs, clothes, documents, and other used objects and then archives them by reorganizing them into museum installations. Thus, Boltanski's artistic materials are all found objects, and his artistic practices are archival museum techniques. Detractors and critics claim that Boltanski is too cynical when it comes to history, memory, and death. Others suggest that his works are merely an empty, sentimental expression of nostalgia. There are also some who view Boltanski as an incarnation of the post-modernist artist – stripping what he can from any artistic agenda he can reach. Many saw Boltanski's installations as exploitations of in/direct Holocaust representations intended solely for

¹³² Written as an echo and in the spirit of Deleuze's chapter "A New Archivist's reflections on Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge*", in: Deleuze, Gilles, and Seân Hand. 1988. *Foucault*. London: Athlone Press.

making money and building a successful career.¹³³ Yet some, myself included, notice in Boltanski's practice a distinct method for challenging the 'science of archive' and its transformation into the only paradigm for organizing history and memory in modern society. To all of that Boltanski replies: "What I can say with certainty is that if you use a life in your art you are always dangerous and a crook. I'm like a bad travelling preacher, preaching doom and destruction and then asking for money."¹³⁴

Touching upon issues of archive, history and collective memory necessarily evokes associations with political discourse. However, this assumption is not that evident in Boltanski's work. As he himself confesses to Catherine Grenier, his works are related more to the past than the present moment: "I think I'm really tied to the twentieth century, and particularly to the years after the war. I'm still in that world; I'm not at all in the contemporary world. The experience my work draws upon are first and foremost Communism, Nazism, Christianity: I'm talking about the terror of war, the terror of evil, of which war is an example."¹³⁵ To that, we can add Boltanski's repeated statements describing his works as art after the Holocaust (as discussed in chapter 2). Nonetheless, as we focus on the political challenges of history and memory in the present, we will also need to ask whether it would be possible to deal with Boltanski's works as political. I argue it is possible to interpret them as such if we shift the discussion on politics from polemic notions and policy issues to political and ethical questions regarding co-existence as a community. Therefore, my first task in this chapter is to present the ways

¹³³ See Kaplan, Brett Ashley. 2007: pp. 128-9

¹³⁴ Boltanski cited in Semin, Didier, Christian Boltanski, Tamar Garb, and Donald B. Kuspit. 1997: p. 30

¹³⁵ Boltanski, Christian, and Catherine Grenier. 2009: p. 57

Boltanski's archival works raise political questions regarding identity, community, and experiences of being a 'singular plural'.

Trying to read Boltanski's works as a whole poses an additional problem. As I have discussed before, although we can claim that the visual terms that Boltanski uses are similar – all operating under the logic of archive – they have been distributed across a variety of projects. The main difficulty for art critics reflecting on Boltanski's oeuvre has been to find a common denominator. Some critics use thematic connections like death, mourning, and melancholia, yet these associations seem to fall short. Additionally, Boltanski's artistic approach raises ethical questions regarding the sacred notion of Holocaust representations. By using the same visual techniques in works that reflect on the Holocaust and those that do not, it seems that Boltanski contradicts the demand to treat the Holocaust as a unique event.¹³⁶ For example, in the monument to *The Children of Dijon*, he uses the same combination of lights and photographs as *Lycée Chases*; the *Dead Swiss*, which celebrates the neutrality of death in Switzerland, once again uses found photographs and biscuit boxes; *People of Halifax*, a memorial to Halifax's textile workers, uses the same installation technique as in *Canada*; and even art projects like *Cloaca Maxima* display in glass cabinets all the objects that had fallen into the toilets of Zurich during one week. Needless to say, my concern here is not to follow these accusations, but rather to pursue an alternative line of investigation for understanding Boltanski's oeuvre under the logic of art after the Holocaust. I argue that the common denominator lies in Boltanski's artistic task of confronting archival *consignation*.¹³⁷ The

¹³⁶ See my discussion in chapter 1

¹³⁷ Derrida's concept for common signs of community that have been preserved in the archive: "the act of

purpose of this chapter is to explicate the rules that Boltanski imposes on this kind of reading.

As an artist, Boltanski deals primarily with space. When he enters a new space, he works with its structure, trying to manipulate it to suit his purposes. In a conversation with Grenier, Boltanski suggests that his artistic breakthrough in the 1980s happened during an invited presentation in America, where he had the opportunity to take over large spaces and big museums.¹³⁸ By playing with light, darkness, shadows, candles, and dim lighting, he infuses the space with drama. Moreover, by treating museum displays as diverse arrangements of objects, he forces the viewer to expand their knowledge. Yet it remains unclear what is on display for us, as the viewers, to confront and remember. Consequently, Boltanski is able to move the viewers into a space of uncertainty. This movement in space is a reflexive one, and it aims to expose the functions of space as an archive. It is the space that establishes and creates a communal identity, to preserve memory of common past, and to thus engender unification and standardization. The functions of the archive and museum spaces are constantly challenged in Boltanski's works. His objective as an artist/archivist is not merely to probe these modes, but to suggest an alternative. It is there that political agenda of Boltanski's works emerges, furthermore, it is also where the memory of the Holocaust is evoked. In the next pages, I elaborate on his strategies to achieve this evocation.

*consigning through gathering together signs. It is not only the traditional *consignatio*, that is, the written proof, but what all *consignatio* being by presupposing.” In: Derrida, Jacques. 1996: *Archive Fever : a Freudian Impression*. Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press: p.3*

¹³⁸ Boltanski, Christian, and Catherine Grenier. 2009: p. 116

Since the argument I present in this chapter is unconventional, it calls for a different theoretical structure. Therefore I will follow the logic of the works I am presenting, and the rules that they embody. The ‘Rules of the Game’ pieces (a term coined by Boltanski himself¹³⁹) will be the focus of my analysis, where each rule contributes to the understanding of the archive paradigm.

3:2 Rule# 1: Naming

Liste des Artistes Ayant Participe a la Biennale de Vienne 1895-1995, presented in 1995 at the Venice Biennial, is an artwork that has simple archival principles and trivial aesthetics. As is explained by Boltanski: “For the Biennial’s centenary, the names of thousands of artists who had shown in the *giardini* in previous biennials were painted on the façade of the central pavilion.” Yet the complexity of this archival work surpasses the artists themselves: “The majority of these artists, who were so proud to represent their country in this prestigious event, are forgotten today.”¹⁴⁰ This comment is not an internal critique on the prestigious nature of this exhibition and its powerful position in contemporary art world, nor is it a call to evoke forgotten history and to cast light on the

¹³⁹ In a conversation with Grenier, Boltanski explains the idea of posing one rule that dictates the whole show. It is also a suggestion to redefine his works no longer as conceptual but as ‘rule’ pieces, as it been a new element in his work. Boltanski, Christian, and Catherine Grenier: 2009 pp. 193-196

¹⁴⁰ Cited in: Moure, Gloria, Christian Boltanski, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea., Igrexa de San Domingos de Bonavel (Santiago de Compostela Spain), Josê Jimênez, and Jean Clair. 1996: p.187

long-forgotten names that have driven it. It is the event of naming and listing the past of this community that is at stake here. Standing in front of an endless, meaningless list of names, written on the walls from the top to bottom, most of them out of reach for the viewer, all in alphabetical order, and all sharing the same font size and type, simulates for the viewer an experience of the infinite. Facing this monumental installation in Venice brings other monuments to mind, like the Maya Lin *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* in Washington. These decisions cause us to wonder what the purpose of all of this is? Why does Boltanski put so much effort into listing the names of his artistic ancestors in the Biennial exhibition space?

A good point to start the discussion is with the inspirational book *Archive Fever*, where French philosopher Jacques Derrida reflects on the lack of function served by archive in modern society. Although the main subject of this book is the past and future of Freudian psychoanalysis, Derrida raises some important connections to the law and structure of archival practices in our culture. Accordingly, the structure of archive is not merely a means for recording memories of the past for any given community, but a way to construct identity; in psychoanalytic terms the arrangement of the archive is the configuration of our soul. Derrida starts his discussion at the beginning: tracing the functions of archive etymologically, to the Greek name *Arkhe*. It is there, he argues, that the dual functions of archive were formulated:

Arkhe, we recall, names at once the *commencement* and *commandment*. This name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, *there* where things *commence* – physical,

historical, or ontological principle – but also the principle according to the law, *there* where men and god *command*, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given – nomological principle.¹⁴¹

Archive is therefore a place (topology) – i.e. house, museum, and inventory – and also where the law is kept (nomology). Derrida names this functional intersection as *topo-nomology*. Archive comes to this form from the Greek word *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, and the residence of the superior magistrates, *the archons*, who held political power.¹⁴² But with the archons, Derrida notices yet another use for archive, which he names ‘the archontic principle’:

This archontic function is not solely topo-nomological. it does not only require that the archive be deposited somewhere, on a stable substrate, and at the disposition of a legitimate hermeneutic authority the archontic power, which also gathers the functions of unification, of identification, of classification, must be paired with what we will call the power of *consignation*. By consignation, we do not only mean, in the ordinary sense of the word, the act of assigning residence or of entrusting so as to put into reserve (to consign, to deposit), in a place and on a substrate, but here the act of *consigning* through *gathering together signs*. It is not only the traditional *consignatio*, that is, the written proof, but what all *consignatio* being by presupposing. Consignation aims to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration. In the archive, there should not be any absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity or *secret* which could separate (*secernere*), or partition, in an absolute manner. The archontic principle of the archive is also a principle of consignation, that is, of gathering together.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Derrida, Jacques. 1996: p. 1

¹⁴² Ibid: p. 2

¹⁴³ Ibid: p. 3

According to Derrida, starting with the original functions of archive makes it possible to rethink the place of and the laws for archive as a social institution. Considering the etymological basis for this term entails and preserves the ‘archonitic principle,’ alongside archive's authority over titles, genealogy, and legitimacy. In this way, we can interrogate or contest archive as an apparatus of power. Although Derrida refers here specifically to psychoanalysis, we can use his comments as a basis for challenging the practice of archive: “A science of the archive must include the theory of this institutionalization, that is to say, the theory both of the law which begins by inscribing itself there and of the right which authorizes it.”¹⁴⁴

Derrida explains that the archival logic we follow is based on contradiction; it is institutive and conservative, revolutionary and traditional.¹⁴⁵ As such, archive contains a violent power: things that are archived differently are lived differently, as well. “Archivable meanings” explains Derrida, “is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives. It begins with the printer.”¹⁴⁶ Here is where Derrida finally explains his notion of 'archive fever' as it relates to the changing conditions of modern archive that are driven by new technologies:

The model of this singular “*mystic pad*” also incorporates what may seem, in the form of a destruction drive, to contradict even the conservation drive, what we could call here the archive drive. It is what I called earlier, and in view of this internal contradiction, *archive fever*. There would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid: p. 4

¹⁴⁵ Ibid: p. 7

¹⁴⁶ Ibid: p. 14

possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression. Above all, and this is the most serious, beyond or within this simple limit called finiteness or finitude, there is no archive fever without the threat of this death drive, this aggression and destruction drive. This threat is *infinite*, it sweeps away the logic of finitude and the simple factual limits, the transcendental aesthetics, one might say, the spatio-temporal condition of conservation. Let us rather say that it abuses them. Such an abuse opens the ethico-political dimension of the problem. There is not one archive fever, one limit or one suffering of memory among others: enlisting the infinite, archive fever verges on radical evil.¹⁴⁷

Having explained the functions, principles, and the conditions that have operationalized archive as part of a communal and institutional apparatus of power, we can move on to discussing the philosophical and political idea of 'community', both in general and in Boltanski's work.

3:3: Rule#2: Inclusion/Exclusion

The Phonebooks, 2000, seems very simple at first glance. Boltanski installed bookshelves on the museum wall, and on them laid thousands of phonebooks that had been collected from all around the world. *The Phonebooks* piece was presented first as part of the group exhibition *Voilà* at the muse d'Art Moderne in Paris 2000. *Voilà: the world in mind* was created by Boltanski, in collaboration with artist Bertrand Lavier and

¹⁴⁷ Ibid: pp. 19-20

curators Suzanne Pagé and Beateice Parent, and its goal was to look how at the century ended. This goal was accomplished using artwork as evidence for memory, and the recording of time through using archival techniques. As Boltanski explains: “We thought it would be interesting to do an exhibition on the theme of archives, partly because it concerned the notion of time, but also because the theme was broad enough to allow us to bring together very different artists. It’s a theme that particularly interested me but one that was also close to a lot of artists: the idea of accumulating documents was very important to art in the second half of the twentieth century.”¹⁴⁸ This show was perceived as an exhibition of stars, and among the participants were Annette Messager, On Kawara, Huns Ulrich Obrist, and young artists like Anri Sala. As Boltanski explains:

Someone had asked me before that – I don’t remember what the circumstances were anymore – to come up with a work for the year 2000, and I told him we should name every single person on Earth. It was an idea I’d already had in Munster a few years earlier, and I thought I’d try it out. But we very quickly realized it was impossible: even if we were able to access the data through a computer, just saying each name would have taken more than five years, going day and night, and the list would obviously become obsolete as people were born and died. It was an impossible, utopian project, yet the only thing to do under the circumstances: to count one’s brethren. So, it was from there that I got the idea of the phonebooks.... so for ‘Voilà’ I wanted to bring together a thousand phonebooks, or as many as possibly, to exhibit the names of all the people in the world, or at least everyone who had a telephone.¹⁴⁹

Later, the work was presented in a south London gallery, and it was there that Boltanski noticed how his work demonstrated the important role of contemporary art. As

¹⁴⁸ Boltanski, Christian, and Catherine Grenier. 2009: p. 191

¹⁴⁹ Ibid: p. 192

he explains in a conversation with Grenier: “the gallery is in a neighborhood where a lot of immigrants live, and the piece worked out very well; people come to find the names of their families back home.”¹⁵⁰

Although the idea and presentation were fairly straightforward, *The Phonebooks* and the exhibition *Voilà* have been at the center of a major discourse in the art world in the last ten years. Many art critics have noticed two new trends which find their origins in Boltanski’s work: the centrality of archive as a new artistic practice and method, and the attempt to redefine and challenge the idea of what brings us together as a community. These two trends mark a shift in contemporary art practice, which invokes political and ethical reactions and reflections. The attempt to understand this shift and define it causes major controversy, as I will present in this section. Two major figures in the art field – philosopher Jacques Rancière and art historian Claire Bishop – have led this debate and both use Boltanski’s *Phonebooks* to explain their different views. Therefore, I will explore their arguments on the political shift in art and on Boltanski’s work. First, in order to understand this general shift in the significance of Boltanski’s work in this context, I will explore the philosophical discourse surrounding the idea of community that engendered this artistic response.

Questions about the idea of community evolved into philosophical debate during 1980s. This time coincides with the historical collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and thus has carried with it the awaking from the dream of communism as a utopian ideal. While stricken and concerned by this unipolar moment, philosophers

¹⁵⁰ Ibid

like Jean Luc Nancy,¹⁵¹ Blanchot,¹⁵² Derrida,¹⁵³ Agamben¹⁵⁴ and historian Benedict Anderson¹⁵⁵ have taken it upon themselves to rethink the question of what brings us together as community. It has been their mission to fill the void created by the fall of the Berlin wall (1989), and to address the catastrophic results and haunted memories of this period. The idea of community appears innocently at first, dedicated to bringing about common goals for the common good. However, history has taught us a different lesson, which is to fear totalitarianism. This lesson has made this debate urgent, as it is the historical understanding of 'community' that might be dangerous. As it was only fifty years ago that visions of the 'ideal community' led to the operation of concentration camps and the Gulag. Hence, it appears that the criteria for who is included and who is excluded from the common body are made by totalitarian forces. Therefore, at the core of the philosophical discourse on community is the goal to form a new idea of community, one that negates those ideas that had hitherto been given as organizing principles for communities.¹⁵⁶

In his chapter on "The idea of Community," de la Durantaye notices that the origin of this philosophical project emerges from Bataille's epigraph: "The community of those who have no community." As such, it motivates the agenda to redefine, rather than disavow, the idea of community. De la Durantaye notices that this discourse focuses on two tasks that are interwoven in these different texts. First, the goal is to move away from

¹⁵¹ Nancy, Jean-Luc. 1990: *The Inoperative Community*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁵² Blanchot, Maurice. 1988: *The Unavowable Community*. Barrytown, N.Y.: Station Hill Press.

¹⁵³ Derrida, Jacques. 1997: *Politics of Friendship*. London England ; New York: Verso.

¹⁵⁴ Agamben, Giorgio. 1993: *The Coming Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁵⁵ Anderson, Benedict. 1983: *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso Editions/NLB.

¹⁵⁶ De la Durantaye, Leland. 2009: p. 157

any traditional criterion which calls for exclusion, and try to establish categories for maximum inclusion. Yet no criteria for exclusion means, of course, no criteria for inclusion either, and here is where the difficulty and strangeness of the project first became apparent.¹⁵⁷ Secondly, it is the attempt to rethink the dialectical process that works in the experience of being in community - the negation of singular/particular for the absolute universality. This notion is based on Hegelian responses to the communal question of the relation of individual part to political whole.¹⁵⁸ According to de la Durantaye, it is Adorno who notes the danger in such dialectical negation. In his *Negative Dialectic* Adorno proclaims that “a true preponderance of the particular would not be attainable except by changing the universal”¹⁵⁹

After exploring the discourse around community, it is my task to understand its translation into contemporary art practice, specifically in the context of Boltanski’s archive. As I mention above, Rancière and Bishop took a similar task upon themselves, and used Boltanski’s *Phonebooks* as a distinct example, and therefore it is through their arguments that I will try to formulate my own argument.

In his essay, “The Politics of Aesthetics,”¹⁶⁰ Rancière uses the art exhibit *Voilà* and Boltanski’s work in it as an example of the problematic shift that he notices in contemporary art and its relation to politics. Needless to say, Rancière has no issue with the idea of connecting art and politics. Every time something occurs in a public space, argues Rancière, it constitutes a political act. What he emphasizes in this essay is the

¹⁵⁷ Ibid: p. 158

¹⁵⁸ Ibid: pp. 160-161

¹⁵⁹ Cited in De la Durantaye, Leland. 2009: p. 161

¹⁶⁰ Rancière, Jacques. 2004: *The Politics of Aesthetics : The Distribution of the Sensible*. London ; New York: Continuum: <http://www.16beavergroup.org/mtarchive/archives/001877.php>

difference between the 'aesthetics of politics' and the 'politics of aesthetics' which is the direct involvement of artists in political issues. Rancière explains the history of the 'politics of aesthetics', by discussing the artists involved and political questions that arise over the last two hundred years. Nevertheless, the new shift that Rancière observes in contemporary art is an abandonment of the dialectic as a central practice for symbolically dealing with politics. In this essay, Rancière uses Boltanski's *Phonebooks* as an example of symbolism as it is configured in art from the 1960s and 1970s:

Another exhibition showing in Paris three years ago was called "*Voilà. Le monde dans la tête*". It proposed to document a century through different installations, among which Christian Boltanski's installation: "Les Abonnés du telephone". Its principle was simple: two shelves on the sides with phone directories from all over the world, and two tables in the middle where you could sit down and peruse whatever directory you liked. That installation could remind us of another political work of the 70s, Chris Burden's piece: the Other Vietnam Memorial. That "other memorial" was of course the memorial of the anonymous Vietnamese victims. Chris Burden had given them names, written on the memorial, by randomly picking up Vietnamese names in a phone directory. Boltanski's installation still deals with a matter of anonymity. But that anonymity is not more emplotted in a controversial plot. It is no more a matter of giving names to those that the winners had left unnamed. The names of the anonymous becomes, as Boltanski puts it, "specimens of humanity".¹⁶¹

Moreover, Rancière uses Boltanski's work and the *Viola* exhibition to explain in detail the "politics of aesthetics to-day", and to answer the question of "what happened to the dis-sensual forms of critical art". As he explains, the "classical" form of the new symbolist aesthetic has been split into four main forms:

¹⁶¹ Ibid

1. 'The Joke' – In the joke, the conjunction of heterogeneous elements is staged as a tension between opposing elements, pointing to some secret, but the secret itself no longer exists. The dialectic tension is a game, playing on the inability to discern between the procedures for unveiling secrets of power and the ordinary procedures of delegitimization that are parts of the new forms of domination - the procedures of delegitimization are produced by power itself, by the media, commercial entertainment, or advertising.

2. 'The Collection' - In the collection heterogeneous elements are lumped together, but they are no longer in order, and so provoke a critical clash, without playing on the indecisiveness of their critical power. It becomes a positive act of gathering as an attempt to collect traces and testimonies of a common world and a common history. The collection is a recollection as well. The equality of all artifacts - works of art, private photographs, ads, commercial videos, etc. - is thereby the equality of the archive for the life of a community.

3. 'The Invitation' – Here, Rancière refers specifically to Boltanski's *Phonebooks* and the way it invited the visitors to take a directory on a shelf and open it randomly. Such attempts were systematized within the framework of "relational art"¹⁶²: an art that created no works or objects, but rather ephemeral situations for prompting the formation of new relationships. As Nicolas Bourriaud the chief theorist of this aesthetic puts it, "by giving some small services, the artist contributes to the task of plugging the gaps in the social bonds".

¹⁶² See Bourriaud, Nicolas. 2002: *Relational Aesthetics, Collection Documents sur l'art*. Dijon: Les Presses du reel.

4. ‘The Mystery’ - The mystery does not refer to enigma or mysticism. Since the age of Mallarmé, ‘mystery’ means a specific way of putting heterogeneous elements together, for instance, in the case of Mallarmé, the thought of the poet, the steps of the dancer, the unfolding of a fan, or the smoke of a cigarette. In opposition to the dialectical clash that stresses the heterogeneity of the elements in order to show a reality framed by antagonisms, mystery sets forth an analogy - a familiarity of the strange, the vision of a common world - where heterogeneous realities are interwoven and can always be related to one another metaphorically.¹⁶³

Because of Rancière's profound observations, his particular definitions for these new forms and trends in contemporary art today, and his clarification on the relationship between art and politics, the reader can overlook the harsh critique presented in his essay, “The Aesthetic of Politic”. And here once again, Rancière mentions Boltanski’s work as an example of some of the problems:

The shift from dialectics to symbolism is obviously linked with the contemporary shift in what I called the aesthetics of politics, meaning the way politics frames a common stage. This shift has a name. Its name is consensus. Consensus does not simply mean the agreement of the political parties or the social partners about the common interests of the community. It means a reconfiguration of the visibility of the common. It means that the givens of any collective situation are objectivized in such a way as they can no more lend themselves to a dispute, to the polemical

¹⁶³ Under the Mystery form Rancière brings as a distinct example Godard’s montage in *Histoires(s)* and specifically the way he links together images from Auschwitz and Hollywood films. I will refer to Rancière’s analysis of Godard’s mystery montage in chapter 5.

framing of a controversial world into the given world. In such a way, consensus properly means the dismissal of the "aesthetics of politics".¹⁶⁴

As a response to Rancière's review, Bishop, in her article "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its discontent", returns to Boltanski's work only to explain the wrinkle in Rancière's critique on contemporary art:

Rancière's point is not that all art is automatically political, but that good art is necessarily political in its redistribution of sensible forms that have a dissensual relationship to the autonomous world of art and the everyday world we inhabit. The translation of this into art criticism is difficult, despite the fact that Rancière, unusually among philosophers, pays attention to contemporary art. Yet undeniably his judgment falters when faced with the material and conceptual specificity of particular artists' practices. He dismisses, for example, in *Malaise dans l'Esthétique* (2004) the 'inventory' tendency featured in *Voilà*, and cannot differentiate the mournful sublimity of Christian Boltanski's *Les Abonnés du téléphone* (an installation of international telephone directories) from the rectitude of On Kawara's sound installation *One Million Years—Past, One Million Years—Future* (1999) from the delightfully banal excess of Fischli and Weiss's archive of 3,000 photographs, *Visible World* (1986-2001). Although he argues against 'critical art' that intends to raise our consciousness by inviting us to 'see the signs of Capital behind everyday objects'; Rancière's preferences incline towards those that offer a clear message related to a political topic—such as Martha Rosler's anti-Vietnam collages *Bringing the War Home* (1967-72), or Chris Burden's *The Other Vietnam Memorial* (1991).¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Rancière, Jacques. 2004: *The politics of Aesthetics : The Distribution of the Sensible*. London ; New York: Continuum: <http://www.16beavergroup.org/mtarchive/archives/001877.php>

Bishop, Claire. 2006: "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents". *Art Forum International*. Feb. 06: p. 11 <http://cliodhnashaffrey.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/Claire-Bishop.pdf>

It is obvious from Rancière's essay, argues Bishop, that he prefers for artists to embrace the dialectical method for dealing with politics, as it focuses on negotiating the tension that pushes art towards 'life' and separates aesthetic sensoriality from other forms of sensible experience. Bishop's argument, on the other hand, celebrates the social turn in art, as she emphasizes collaboration, between artists as the main trend in contemporary art. The act of collaboration claims Bishop, beyond challenging artistic authorship and focusing on society, produces a poetic and multi-layered event that resonates across many registers. Within these registers, she separates the aesthetic and the political, rather than subsuming both under exemplary ethical gestures.¹⁶⁶ To these views on Boltanski's work and on the new trends in contemporary art I would like to add yet another aspect, namely that by focusing on the conditions for archive as a practice (as explained in the last section) and their realization in archival art practice, we can facilitate supplementary interpretation. In order to do that, we have to reflect on the philosophical discourse on community and understand its diffusion into contemporary art.

At some level, the philosophical mandate to rethink community is an ethical debate, deconstructing how we can live together, with common goals and aspirations, without falling into violent exclusionary practices. It is a project that is haunted by the ghosts of a traumatic past and the urgency of a changing present. Therefore, community is a way for us to understand how the history of the present is operated and applied. The ethical problems of community are the ideas that motivate Boltanski's artistic project. It is the role of the archivist/artist to preserve, that is, to manage the object and property that bring us together. It is in public spaces like museums of art that the identity of the

¹⁶⁶ Ibid: p. 12

community has been embodied and reflected by presuppositions. Boltanski, as a ‘traveler artist’, challenges these properties with his new regulation, and thus brings to forefront of these public spaces questions of communal identity. By playing with the infinite possibilities for defining criteria of exclusion, Boltanski underlines the arbitrariness of this process. By organizing the symbols of inclusion into a new communal archive, he overrules the historical conditions. Between the particular, the name, and the universal, the telephone book, Boltanski highlights the simplest potential criterion for co-existence. As such, we have been forced to rethink the basic presuppositions that embody our communal identity – nationality, language, race, gender, etc. Under the formation of the philosophical community project, I read Boltanski’s artistic practice as a consistent movement from the present to the past.

3:4: Rule#3: Identity

Album de photos de la Famille D., 1939-1964, is one of the first archival works that Boltanski constructed for the 1972 *Documenta 5* art exhibition. This work presents a simple grid made from found photos, all in a minimalist iron frame. These photos depict different people posing in different events, yet they all seem to be family events or private occasions: parties, vacations, holidays, social gatherings and etc. Boltanski’s statement on the D. Family album in the exhibition catalog explains some of its unique ideas:

In July of '71, I asked my friend, Michael D. to entrust me with the photo album his parents possessed. I who know nothing about them, wanted to try to reconstitute their life by using these images which, taken at all the important moments, would remain after their death as proof of their existence. I could discover the order in which the photographs had been taken and the relations that existed between the persons represented in them. but I realized that I could go no further, because these documents appeared to belong to the memories common to any family, that each person could recognize himself in these vacation or birthday photographs. These photographs did not teach me anything about the D. family..., they return to my own memories.¹⁶⁷

In a conversation with Catherine Grenier in 2007, Boltanski replies, yet again, to the question regarding the idea behind his work:

CG: How did you get the idea of using his (Michael D.) family as a model?

CB: First, because, strangely enough, we had no family photos at my place, or very few in any case. That's the official reason. Second, because I've never liked talking about myself and I've always concealed my real life, especially back then: I never talked about it. I never said my father was Jewish. I never talked about the war, I never said my mother had had polio and couldn't walk. and I used Michel Durand's family because Durand is the most common French name, because he was from a petit bourgeois family, and because in this respect he represented the prototype of what I wasn't, the prototype of the true French Family. I wanted to hide my family partly because I was ashamed, and also because it seemed too personal. For this piece to work, I needed a reference point that was common to everyone.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Cited in DeRoo, Rebecca J. 2006: *The Museum Establishment and Contemporary Art : The Politics of Artistic Display in France after 1968*. New York: Cambridge University Press: p. 109

¹⁶⁸ Boltanski, Christian, and Catherine Grenier. 2009: p. 64

The important notions that we can draw from Boltanski's statements are the centrality of collective identity and assimilation into French society, and above all, the representation of these notions. As he explains to Greiner, it is through his experiences as an Other, or outsider, that he envisions this work. Thus, through *Album de photos de la Famille D., 1939-1964*, Boltanski finds a way to challenge the common perception of normalcy. Moreover, it is through the practice of archive that Boltanski was able to encapsulate all of these ideas into one simple installation. Other interpretations of Boltanski's early works, including *Album de photos de la Famille D., 1939-1964*, have been invoked to understand this work, and some of them raise misleading questions about the artist's intentions and the ideas behind his works. Most problematic are the attempts made by many art historians during the 1990s to tie *Album de photos de la Famille D., 1939-1964* to Boltanski's works from the 1980s relating to the Holocaust. Art critic Didier Semin claims that questions regarding the fate of the photos' participants are always present in such works, because of their strong connection to the discourse on Absence/Presence. The notions of death, loss, and absence surface not only in regard to Roland Barthes' observation in *Camera Lucida*, but mostly correspond to the period that those photos had been taken; in this case, during and after Second World War you cannot stop thinking the Jewish participants are missing.¹⁶⁹ This kind of reading draws upon only one, very narrow, aspect of Boltanski's oeuvre.

In her book, *The Museum Establishment and Contemporary Art*, art historian Rebecca DeRoo makes a similar argument regarding misleading interpretations of

¹⁶⁹ Semin, Didier, Christian Boltanski, Tamar Garb, and Donald B. Kuspit. 1997: pp 60-63, a similar argument was made by van Alphen, in relation to another one of Boltanski's works that deal with family photos from same years: *Sans-Souci, 1991*.

Boltanski's works. She finds it puzzling that art critics and museum curators in the 1980s were so eager to locate traces of Holocaust atrocities in Boltanski's works, even though he challenged those museums' ability to present such a memory:

The catalog essay that accompanied the exhibition, written by Lynn Gumpert, stressed that Boltanski had recently revealed that his father was Jewish and had gone into hiding during the Second World War. The faded family photographs, therefore, were taken by critics and curators to represent not merely deeply personal memories, but also the numerous individuals who had passed from life into memory in the violence of the Holocaust. In other words Boltanski seemed to have provided new ways for museum audiences to access and emotionally respond to a previously suppressed history and to have permitted the museum to represent what had previously been suspected to be unrepresentable within its confines. His work was deemed to give such powerful new access to history that its signature images and forms were adopted in other works that dealt with this unspeakable horror, such as the Tower of Life installation of family photographs at the Washington, D.C. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Even the German government saw Boltanski as a figure who could generate an appropriate artistic response to the past, commissioning him to installation in 1999 in the renovated Reichstag building in Berlin.¹⁷⁰

DeRoo traces the problem to the beginning of the 1970s, when Boltanski started his artistic career, and when works like *Album de photos de la Famille D., 1939-1964*, first entered the museum space. Around this time, in the aftermath of May '68, the museum establishment in France went through the process of rethinking its goals and policies. DeRoo explains that in France, art museums are a national institution, and as such they are regarded as an important component of national identity. This perception had been intensified after the Second World War, during 1950s and 1960s under the

¹⁷⁰ DeRoo, Rebecca J. 2006: p.1

Gaullist government, and under André Malraux's policy as minister of culture. As DeRoo explains:

Malraux thus intended the *maisons de la culture* to promote cultural cohesion, binding the nation together with that he saw as the shared history and values embodied in art. In this way, the *maisons de la culture* would function as reservoirs of cultural memory and points of national identification. Malraux's vision of cultural democracy, then, was one of extension, in which an already agreed-upon set masterworks was diffused more widely; it was an appropriate vision for a minister in conservative government which aimed to advance national unity rather than to transform the very notion of national culture itself.¹⁷¹

This cultural policy, continues DeRoo, came under fire during the demonstrations of May 1968. Different constituencies, including artists, museum administrators, critics, scholars, and students, rejected Malraux's ideal of the universality of art and critiqued the class biases inherent in cultural institutions. Many feared that art was being used to maintain the status quo and demanded that the museum be made truly democratic. In this context, DeRoo references sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who, in his book *The Love of Art*, first published in 1966, formulated a critique against the class bias of museums in France. As a result of this critique, the museum institution underwent profound changes in order to provide a satisfying answer to the activists' demands for better representation in museum complex. In that context, emerging young artists like Boltanski and Messager, with their new methods of representation, were ideal examples. "Boltanski and Messager's private images," explains DeRoo, "do not provide straightforward access to

¹⁷¹ DeRoo, Rebecca J. 2004: p. 5

previously excluded histories. Instead their private and everyday images emphasize the way the private histories, memories, and everyday experience of marginalized groups' are resistant to incorporation within museums' representations of national identity and public history."¹⁷²

However, reading Boltanski's and Messenger's works under these assumptions, claims DeRoo, is too simplistic and precludes understanding their challenges to the museum display. Moreover, representing works like *Album de photos de la Famille D., 1939-1964* under the prism of class and identity variation, as many art critics in that period did, merely reverses its content and political intention. The attempt to provoke identification through photographs of a familiar French petit bourgeois family not only perpetuates the class differences in the museum, but attaches to it an artificial nostalgic memory. This kind of misreading of Boltanski's work, ironically, claims DeRoo, made them popular not only in France in the aftermath of 1968, but also in USA during the 1980s and 1990s as an attempt to present cultural differences.¹⁷³ DeRoo, on the other hand, emphasizes that the way Boltanski problematizes the biography of the artist has consolidated an interpretation of his art to representing stubbornly elusive private memories and experiences. DeRoo's suggestion is to read works like *Album de photos de la Famille D., 1939-1964*, as echoing the philosophical discourse on 'death of the author', which became popular in those years. In this way, she sees Boltanski as

¹⁷² Ibid: p. 3

¹⁷³ Ibid: p. 6

revealing the limits of what can be retrieved from history and memory, and as challenging the role that representation of private experiences plays in museums today.¹⁷⁴

Although DeRoo presents an original argument that reflects the line of inquiry suggested in this chapter, I would like to shift my investigation once again to focus on the archival practice that Boltanski employs in his works in order to develop my own reading of his works.

3:5: Rule#4: Archeology/Ethnography

Hinter Verschlossene Türen, Monchengladbach, 1993:

The Monchengladbach Museum, like many German museums, has a large number of works acquired during the Nazi regime in its reserve collection. The exhibition, *Hinter Verschlossene Türen* consisted in retaining on display the collection of contemporary works (mainly pop art) while discretely showing the mementoes of this shameful past, which were concealed in small places and only visible by chance.¹⁷⁵

In this section I focus on the task of formulating the role of the artist as an archivist, following Boltanski's model. In order to do so it will be important first to

¹⁷⁴ DeRoo, Rebecca J. 2006: p. 11

¹⁷⁵ Cited in: Boltanski, Christian, Danilo Eccher, and Bologna (Italy). Galleria d'arte moderna. 1997: p. 149

review some of the central arguments in art history to explain the phenomenon of archive as an artistic practice. As I have mentioned before, the archive as a practice, technique, and concept has been evolving in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in the last ten years. Central exhibitions such as *Voilà* (2000) and *Archive Fever* (2008) have been created specifically to understand this new artistic operation. It is art historian Hal Foster, in his article “Archive Impulse”, who initially provides an analytic framework for considering this phenomenon: “The work in question is archival,” he explains, “since it not only draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private”¹⁷⁶ Foster emphasizes three practices that might help to characterize archival artists: first, these artists seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present (as in the case of Boltanski’s work *Hinter Verschlossene Turen*); secondly, archival samplings push the postmodern complications of originality and authorship to extreme; in his last point Foster makes a clear distinction between archival art and database art. The latter has evolved into the mega-archive of the internet. Yet archival art works, argues Foster, are recalcitrantly material, fragmentary rather than fungible, and as such they call out for human interpretation, not machinical reprocessing.¹⁷⁷

Foster, similar to Rancière, notes in archival art the will “to connect what cannot be connected”. This is not a desire to totalize so much as a will to relate to a misplaced past, to collate its different signs (sometimes pragmatically, sometimes parodistically), or

¹⁷⁶ Foster, Hal. 2004: “An Archival Impulse”. *October*, n. 110: p. 6

¹⁷⁷ Foster, Hal. 2004: p. 5

to ascertain what might remain relevant to the present. Therefore, argues Foster, it is different from the postmodernism allegoric impulse.¹⁷⁸ By the same token, he continues,¹⁷⁹ archival art is not anomic in the same vein as the work of Gerhard Richter and others by Benjamin Buchloh: the art here does not project a lack of logic or affect. On the contrary, claims Foster, archival art “assumes anomic fragmentation as a condition not only to represent but to work through, and proposes new as it also registers the difficulty, at times the absurdity, of doing so.”¹⁸⁰ In conclusion, Foster comments on the utopian ambition of archival art as: “desire to turn belatedness into becomingness, to recoup failed vision in art, literature, philosophy, and everyday life into possible scenarios of alternative kinds of social relations, to transform the no-place of the archive into the no-place of a utopia.” Rethinking utopia in a postmodern context is the optimism that Foster has located in the core of this practice, as he explains: “This move to turn ‘excavation sites’ into ‘construction sites’ is welcome in another way too: it suggests a shift away from a melancholic culture that view historical as little more than the traumatic”¹⁸¹

Although Forster's observations regarding archival practice in the “Archive Impulse” will add to our understanding of Boltanski’s archival works, the attempt to include Boltanski under Foster’s conditions of archival art raises some problems. First, despite Foster's conclusions on the shift from ‘excavation sites’ into ‘construction sites’,

¹⁷⁸ See Owens, Craig. 1980: “The Allegorical Impulse: Notes toward a Theory of Postmodernism”. *October*. no. 12

¹⁷⁹ See Buchloh, Benjamin H.D. 1999: “Gerhard Richter’s *Atlas*: The Anomic Archive”. *October*, no.88.

¹⁸⁰ Foster, Hal. 2004: p. 19

¹⁸¹ Foster, Hal. 2004: p. 22

Boltanski's works, particularly *Hinter Verschlossene Türen*, shows that evocation of traumatic history is still a problematic reality. To this example, we can add three more projects of Boltanski's with the same aim: *The Missing House* (Berlin 1990), as described in chapter 2; *Resistance* (Munich 1993), incorporating photos of members of the German resistance during the Nazi regime; and *The Children are looking for their Parents* (Cologne 1994), for which Boltanski distributed, in a Cologne train station, thousands of archived photos of missing children, as they been taken by that Red Cross, at the end of the war. On the other hand, as I have mentioned before, many of Boltanski's works, like *Workers: The Work People of Halifax 1877-1982*, aims to reconstruct alternative archives. Consequently, I argue, using Foster's terms, that Boltanski's works are located somewhere in-between the 'excavation sites' and the 'construction'. Therefore, he is constantly moving between the present condition and past memory, between ethnography and archeology.

In his book, *The Return to the Real*, Foster describes another trend in contemporary art. Foster observes that contemporary artistic practices become increasingly similar to ethnographic practices, and so ethnographic practices might be useful for understanding Boltanski's artistic practice. Foster notices many contemporary artists work horizontally, in synchronic movement from social issue to issue, from political debate to debate. In this way, explains Foster, the artist selects a site, enters its culture and learns its language, conceives of and presents a project, only to move to the next site where the cycle is repeated. In addition, continues Foster, this shift follows a spatial logic. The artist not only maps a site but also works in terms to topics, frames, and

so on. This horizontal way of working, argues Foster, demands that artists and critics be familiar not only with the structure of each culture well enough to map it, but also with its history well enough to narrate it.¹⁸² Boltanski, in the last forty years of his artistic practice, has developed in a similar manner as the trajectory described by Foster. Working by invitation, he moves from one city to another, penetrating the space of the museum, mapping it and investigating its history in order to excavate/construct a new archive. Hence we can argue he operates as an artist, ethnographer, and archeologist.

3:6: Rule#5: Whatever

Explaining the last rule of Boltanski's imaginary archival regulations is no simple task, since 'whatever' incorporates elements from four different aspects of Boltanski's archival practice. Moreover, the rule of 'whatever' simultaneously determines the logic of a given archive, reveals its motivation, exposes its history, and provides hope. In the following pages, I will explore each one of these aspects separately, yet the main goal of the section will be to understand how they all work together at once. In the center of my investigation is one of Boltanski's more unusual works, *Cloaca Maxima*, created in Museum der Stadtenwasserung Zurich, 1994. As he explains of his idea: "Hans-Ulrich Obrist invited me to participate in the exhibition *Cloaca Maxoma*, where I displayed in

¹⁸² Foster, Hal. 1996: *The Return of the Real : The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press: p. 202

glass-fronted cabinets all the objects that had fallen into the toilets of Zurich during the week, which had been retrieved in a city water treatment plant.”¹⁸³ Focusing on such an extraordinary work might incite questions and doubts about its ability to explain the rules and vocation of Boltanski’s oeuvre. Although *Cloaca Maxima* follows Boltanski’s archival practice, it is different from the works we encountered so far to evoke concepts like memory, history, loss, death, time, and the war, and therefore at first it seems like *Cloaca Maxima* has nothing to do with the others. However, dealing with exceptional examples is in the core of this project, as Agamben’s paradigm dictates. The example as a concept, explains Agamben in his exceptional book *The Coming Community*, provides a way to escape the antinomy of the universal and the particular: “In any context where it exerts its force, the example is characterized by the fact that it holds for all cases of the same type, and, at the same time, it is included among these.”¹⁸⁴ Exceptional examples like Boltanski’s work *Cloaca Maxima*, and Agamben’s book *The Coming Community* provide the formation of my argument in this section.

The logic of 'whatever' was first formulated by Agamben as a response to the philosophical discourse on community as it was evolving during the 1980s. As I have explained earlier in this chapter, in this historical context Agamben realized that the idea of community is about ethics. As such, we need to conceive of a way to live together, embracing common goals and aspirations, and avoiding degeneration into scenes of exclusion and violence. The only way to achieve this, argues Agamben, will be to

¹⁸³ Cited in : Moure, Gloria, Christian Boltanski, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporânea., Igrexa de San Domingos de Bonavel (Santiago de Compostela Spain), Josê Jimênez, and Jean Clair. 1996: p. 165

¹⁸⁴ Agamben, Giorgio. 1993: p. 9-8

eliminate any common basis of a presupposition – be it a nation, a language, a religion, etc.¹⁸⁵ This idea is at the core of the 'whatever', as he explains in the opening paragraph to his book, *The Coming Community*:

The whatever in question here relates to singularity not in its indifference with respect to a common property (to a concept, for example: being red, being French, being Muslim), but only in its being such as it is. Singularity is thus freed from the false dilemma that obliges knowledge to choose between the ineffability of the individual and the intelligibility of the universal. {...} in this conception, such and such being is reclaimed from its having this or that property, which identifies it as belonging to this or that set, to this and that class (the reds, the French, the Muslims) – and it is reclaimed not for another class nor for the simple generic absence of any belonging, but its being-*such*, for belonging itself.¹⁸⁶

This opening paragraph poses the main problem in Agamben's book: it outlines the steps for reformulating of the relationship between singularity and universality. Agamben only clarifies the use of whatever in the last chapter, where he deals with Tiananmen (as the Chinese May) demonstration.¹⁸⁷ According to de la Durantaye:

¹⁸⁵ Cited in : De la Durantaye, Leland. 2009: p. 161

¹⁸⁶ Agamben, Giorgio. 1993: p.1

¹⁸⁷ To explain the Chinese example I follow de la Durantaye's clarification: "in Agamben's view, what truly provoked the Chinese authorities was the protestors' refusal to make more concrete demands that could then granted or denied, revised, or ridiculed. The mute insistence of these protestors, their rejection of not just one incident or aspect of a corrupt system but the system as a whole, made their protest particularly threatening to the state – and explains, for Agamben, the violence with which it was met. (...) Following Agamben's logic, the most threatening thing imaginable for a state – be it communist, democratic, or other – is a billion Bartlebys saying they would prefer not to continue to live in their society as it is. In the final words of the book's final chapter, Agamben notes, "Wherever these singularities peacefully demonstrate their being in common there will be a Tiananmen, and sooner or later the tanks will appear." De la Durantaye, Leland. 2009: p. 171

the whatever with Agamben thus begins is not indifference seen from the point of view of the universal, where all particularities are of indifferent importance with respect to the universal that gives them their meaning (idea being that only universals provide us with the means of understanding particular cases, and without them we would find ourselves lost amid a world of nameless singularities). What Agamben uses this curious term to envision is instead singularity seen from an unfamiliar side – that of the singular. this would be the singularity seen as singularity or, in Agamben’s deceptively simply formation, ‘as it is.’ this is an idea of singularity not of indifferent importance but, on the contrary, conceived of in all its rich difference from other singularities –whatever they may be.¹⁸⁸

Therefore, to truly think of something ‘as it is’ represents a conceptual challenge, and it is to this challenge that both Boltanski’s work and Agamben’s book provide creative solutions. As they describe it, the goal is not merely thinking of the singularity in terms of its predicates or properties, such as ‘being red,’ ‘being French,’ ‘being Muslim’, but to see beyond them so as to grasp the singularity itself. To think of a thing as independent of its most obvious predicates is not particularly difficult, but to think of it independent of any and all predicates is another matter entirely. As Agamben claims: “when singularity is... freed from the false dilemma that obligates knowledge to choose between the ineffability of the individual and the intelligibility of the universal.’ that a singularity would be caught between *ineffability* and *intelligibility* is easy to understand. A singularity is *ineffable* because what is singular about it is not shared with anything

¹⁸⁸ De la Durantaye, Leland. 2009: p. 162

else – and for this reason it is nameless. It can become *intelligible* only by virtue of its parts and predicates.”¹⁸⁹

As we tried to formulate the rules for Boltanski’s archival practice in this chapter, they evidentially led us into the concept of 'whatever'. As I have argued before, to follow the attempts of Foster and Rancière, to understand archival art as the will "to connect what cannot be connected”, won’t be suitable for Boltanski’s archives, even in a work such as *Cloaca Maxima*. In the same way, it will be difficult to perceive it as anomic or even allegoric; Boltanski’s archives, I argue, present both logic, the whatever, and effect, rethinking the common in community. Boltanski, as a traveling artist, makes use of common or public spaces such as museums, and establishes in them a new archive. Following the ancient rule of archive and its contradictory functions, as described by Derrida, Boltanski’s archives are forever in motion between being institutive yet conservative, revolutionary but traditional, ‘excavation sites’ and ‘construction sites’. As curious gatherings, arrangements, and displays of objects, these archives' tasks are not to invoke identification with the familiar idea of the common or the community. Instead, they turn into community space that facilitates questions regarding common identity, history, and other presuppositions that bind us together. Hence, I will propose to understand Boltanski’s archival works as participating in the discourse on the idea of community.

At last our task becomes clear: in understanding Boltanski’s vocation, we can appreciate his motivation behind it. As I have mentioned before, the violent experiences

¹⁸⁹ Agamben, Giorgio. 1993 : p. 9

of the war are echoed in the discourse on the idea of community. The extreme example of the Nazi regime clarified the horrific potential located in the core of the idea of being together, as the question and act of including/excluding became a matter of life and death. To those memories, Boltanski can add his own family experiences in France, under the Vichy's rules and in the years that follow. As he comments in his conversation with Grenier in the *Possible Life of Christian Boltanski*:

The desire to assimilate dropped sharply with the war. My father's medical colleagues had all said he wasn't allowed to practice, all his friends turned their back on him. Some of my mother's family were collaborators; others a little less so.... The structure of their world – French bourgeois, vaguely Catholic – had completely collapsed. They saw that their world was meaningless. Having a Military cross was useless – my grandmother would go out with her decorated military Cross pinned to her yellow star... they were utterly devastated over having wanted to be French do badly and suddenly realizing it was pointless.¹⁹⁰

Above all, in this conversation Boltanski invokes, once again, the influential story about the family pet during the war, merely to emphasize the arbitrary brutality that is instinctive under the law of exclusion/inclusion:

My father must have gone underground in 43', I think before that they had lived through a two year period in which everything gradually became forbidden, in which life got more restricted, and the danger became greater and greater. There are more stories from back then, like the one about the cat: there was a Vichy government law that forbade Jew from having pets. One day, my family's cat peed over at our neighbor's, a perfectly nice

¹⁹⁰ Boltanski, Christian, and Catherine Grenier. 2009: p. 20

neighbor, whom my parents had known for years. This neighbor came over and said, “If you don’t kill that tonight, I’m denouncing you to the police and you’ll be taken away.” and they had to kill the cat. This story has always stuck with me because I think that if you give someone power, they use it; if you give your neighbor the power to kill you, he’ll kill you. That doesn’t make them mean; it’s just part of human nature. And so my parents’ world collapsed.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Ibid

Chapter 4:
Godard's History of Montage

*If direction is a look, montage is a heart-beat*¹⁹²

4:1 Introduction to the Practice

One of the chapters that had been planned by Godard for the TV series *Histories du cinema* is entitled “*Montage, mon beau souci*”.¹⁹³ This chapter's title comes from a 1957 article of Godard's bearing the same name, yet as he confesses to Serge Daney in an interview from 1990, the article was one “that I had written in innocence but that I don't understand today”. Eventually, due to production problems, the chapter was left unexecuted. The only information that we have on Godard's intentions for this chapter are summarized in a few short lines from the interview: “The main idea, just as painting succeeded in reproducing perspective, cinema should have succeeded in something, too,

¹⁹² Godard, Jean Luc 1957: “Montage my fine Care,” In: Godard, Jean Luc. 1972: *Godard on Godard; critical writings*. New York,: Viking Press: p. 39

¹⁹³ Original published in French, 1957 in republished and Translated to English by Jean Narboni and Tom Mile, in Godard, Jean Luc. 1972: pp. 39-41

but was unable to, (...) but there are traces of it...”¹⁹⁴ This is a serious accusation particularly when it is made by one of the leading directors of the 20th century, and as such, it calls for our attention and begs that we demand clarification. Accordingly, there is a basic failure in the fundamental practice of cinema, particularly in the application of montage. “The word ‘montage’,” Godard explains, “has been used a lot. Today we say, ‘Eisenstein’s use of montage, Welles’s, Bergman’s, or else the absence of montage in Rossellini’s films...’ But the cinema never found montage.”¹⁹⁵

The fact that the chapter on montage remains absent from *Historie(s) du cinema* should not be an obstacle in the attempt to understand the problem in the practice that Godard detects. The challenge of this chapter will be to map out Godard’s claims and allegations against the evolution of montage, and to trace the possibilities that he mentions for perceiving achievement. Attempts to place montage under the ‘limelight’ of any investigation in the history of cinema provides a challenge; while montage is a central technique for the film creator, it should also be concealed from the viewer. As a point of departure for understanding the problematic definition for montage that Godard

¹⁹⁴ Daney, Serge. 1992 (1988): “Interview”, in: Bellour, Raymond, Mary Lea Bandy, Laurence Kardish, Barbara London, Colin MacCabe, and Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.). 1992: *Jean-Luc Godard : son + image, 1974-1991*. New York: Museum of Modern Art : Distributed by H.N. Abrams: p.161-162; in this interview Godard ties the failure of the invention of sound. However, on many other occasions, including In *Historie(s) du cinema*, Godard refers to many other explanations for this failure. Among them, as I will explore in this chapter, is Auschwitz.

See Witt, Michael. 1999: 'The death(s) of cinema according to Godard', *Screen*, 40/3: pp. 331-346

¹⁹⁵ Daney, Serge. 1996(1988): p. 161

uses in the *Histoires du cinéma* (in chapter 4A), the explanation given by film director Alfred Hitchcock is representative of classic cinema (we hear his voice explaining):

We have a rectangle and this rectangle has got to be filled with succession of images. The real fact is that they are in succession. That's where the idea comes from, one picture after another. The public is unaware of what we call montage, or in other words, the cutting of one image to another. They are go by so rapidly, so they are absorbed by the content that they look at on the screen.¹⁹⁶

Bringing forward montage means to rethink the traditional concept of artistic expression. According to Agamben, our current concept is dominated by the Hegelian model, in which all expression is realized by a medium – a color, a word, or a montage – those elements that, in the end, must disappear in the fully realized artistic expression. Thus, the expressive act is fulfilled when the means, the medium, is no longer perceived as such. The medium must disappear in that which it gives us to see, in the absolute which shows itself and shines forth in the medium. Yet, Agamben implies that whenever this rule/paradigm has been challenged, it entails a political act.¹⁹⁷ In this chapter, I will suggest applying Agamben's strategy to Godard's chapter on montage in order to understand the course that Godard might have taken; to explain and support his thesis on the failure of montage in cinema practice as part of a political struggle in the 20th century.

¹⁹⁶ *Histoire(s) du cinéma*. 1998 : 4A

¹⁹⁷ Agamben, Giorgio. 1997: "Repetition and Stoppage: Guy Debord's Technique of Montage" in David, Catherine, Paul Sztulman, Documenta GmbH., and Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungen GmbH. 1997: *Documenta X : short guide = Kurzführer*. Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz: p.71

While trying to reconstruct the chapter on montage, and to understand the significance of montage in the *Historie(s)*, in Godard's work, and in general in cinema, we face a few problems. A great deal of literature has been written on Godard's extraordinary use of montage, and specifically on his use of montage in the *Historie(s)*. This chapter separates itself from the rest of this literature in two analytic aspects: First, I do not intend to deal with montage as a metaphor or symbol or any other abstract representation. This kind of analysis has been suggested by many film historians, among them: Richard Neer uses the act of hand counting as a metaphor for Godard's practice of montage in *histories du cinema*¹⁹⁸; Michael Witt offers the metaphor of judgment¹⁹⁹; and Kaja Silverman describes how montage in *histories du cinema* symbolizes the female absence.²⁰⁰ I, on the other hand, will argue in the next two chapters that montage is a tool for Godard to induce thought in his film.

Second, there won't be any attempt to formulate a general theory of Godard's montage. As we are about to explore, Godard's reflections on montage, in the *Histoires(s) du cinema* and in general, are not intended as a theory. That is, it is not meant as a context-free, ahistorical, objective description. Since my aim here is to understand how montage functions as a political apparatus, and as such constitutes a paradigm, it is important to observe the differences that Godard formulates each time he uses this practice. Therefore, the focus of our investigation, I will suggest, should be on difference rather than homogeneity.

¹⁹⁸ Neer, Richard. 2007: "Godard Counts", *Critical Inquire*. 34: pp. 135-173

¹⁹⁹ Witt, Michael. 2000: "Montage, My Beautiful Care, or Histories of the Cinematograph", in: Temple, Michael, and James S. Williams. 2000. *The Cinema Alone : Essays on the Work of Jean-Luc Godard, 1985-2000*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

²⁰⁰ Silverman, Kaja. 2002: "The Dream of the Nineteenth Century", *Camera Obscura*. 51. vol. 17: pp. 1-30

Therefore, to set up our investigation on the role of Godard's montage, we would be well-guided by his remark regarding his frustration at the critics' reaction to the *Historie(s)*, which focused merely on the cinema and neglected the historical aspect. Godard's comment articulates a basic understanding that lies in the core of his project: the connection between history and cinema. Daney says of this approach: "It was impossible to love the 'art of the century' without seeing this art working with the madness of the century and being worked by it."²⁰¹ These comments present a special challenge for me since the main objective of my project is to understand the interrelation between contemporary art and history of the 20th century, and to designate and define them. As I emphasized previously, any discussion of history and memory – whether verbal or visual – needs to be examined through the political prism of the present. As I will argue and emphasize in this chapter, the point of departure for Godard's investigation to the history of cinema emerged from a political problem in the present. In analyzing his film *Here and Elsewhere (Ici et ailleurs)*, 1974), I will trace the main problems that have persisted in the center of his historical investigation in *Histories du cinema* (1998) and in later films. Thereby, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, political representation in the 20th century, the memory of Auschwitz, the penetration of TV into everyday life, and montage – these are all authentic issues that Godard confronts in this film, and has continued to investigate in the last forty years of his artistic career.

This aspect is even intensified by Godard's provocative statement in *Historie(s)* that cinema ended in Auschwitz. Godard, as I'll argue, does not send us to the past to recal nostalgic moments from the glorified history of film, but send us on a mission to

²⁰¹ Daney, Serge. 2007: *Postcards from the Cinema*. Oxford ; New York: Berg.: p. 28

probe the genealogy of cinema for a specific problem that we are still facing in the present - the failings of cinematic montage as a practice and its implication for visual culture today. As I will argue, montage, according to Godard, is what makes cinema 'a thinking form' instead of 'a form of thinking' like propaganda and bad cinema. As he explains in an interview:

-Alors qu'elle est réputée être pensive, elle ne pense pas.

La définition est venue longtemps après. A la question : « qu'est-ce l'art ? ». Malraux répond que c'est ce par quoi les formes deviennent style. Et qu'est-ce que le style ? C'est la forme, et Manet introduit une forme qui pense. Il y a une pensée qui forme, parce qu'il y a une forme qui pense. Je cherche quelque chose que j'avais noté... voilà : « *L'Etat, c'est la pensée qui forme.* » moi, je crois plus à une forme qui pense. Quand on lit le scénario de Lola Montes, ce n'est pas fort. Ce n'est pas mieux que Marquis. Quand on voit le film, on voit que ce qu'on a lu, que ce qui était écrit était un élan, un tremplin. On peut aimer ou non, pareil pour Hitchcock. Même chez Wiseman, chez Van der Keuken. C'est la forme qui pense, au cinéma. Dans le mauvais cinéma, *c'est la pensée qui forme.*²⁰²

Therefore, Godard's powerful claim in the *Historie(s)* that cinema as a thinking form burned up in Auschwitz, should come face-to-face with the problematization of montage as a practice. My suggestion will be to define montage as a social paradigm – using Foucault and Agamben's definition – meaning Godard conceives of montage as more than artistic or even historiographic practice. Thus, montage will be defined as a model, apparatus, or the way the mechanism of power functions, a field of forces clashing, and as meticulous rituals of power. In referring to montage as a paradigm, and

²⁰² Godard, Jean Luc. 1998 : *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*. Paris: Cahiers du cinéma: p. 28

by conducting historical investigation into its past, we can hope to explore the ethical and political aspects that are embedded in this practice.

By following Foucault's method of analytic interpretation of 'the history of the present', I will first, in this chapter, identify what Godard diagnoses as a problem or failure of montage as a cinematic practice, and what the social, artistic, and political implications that followed from this. Therefore, I will focus on the film *Here and Elsewhere*, and more specifically on a single scene from this film which deals with montage. Consequently, in the next chapter I will follow Godard's historical investigation to understand the causes of the failure, and to understand the alternatives he alludes to.

4:2 *Here and Elsewhere*: Background

In my attempt to reconstruct Godard's lost chapter on montage and to understand his suspicious attitude regarding this practice, the first scene that I envision as a possible opening scene to this chapter is taken from Godard's film, *Here and Elsewhere* (1974). In this three-minute scene, five figures perform how montage comes about in film and on TV, while being directed by Godard via voice-over. Very generally, the participants in this scene, each of the five figures, carries a photograph in his/her hand, and each moves in turn to the front of the camera, presenting his/her image and saying the title of its photograph. They repeat this process five times. It is a very simple, didactic and straight-

forward illustration of the practice of cinematic montage. Nevertheless, something in the act of representing the practice with such clarity and transparency caught my attention. In the process of exposing the practice of montage to the viewer, Godard leads to its eventual dismantling. Therefore, as I will argue, we have here a clear examination by Godard of the classic montage (as is used in this film or any others) as a paradigm. It is perceived as an apparatus of power that programs the viewer with information and knowledge on “true” reality – in a simple and homogenized manner. As such, montage prevents any possibility for discussing and presenting complicated political and existential situations, such as the conflict in the Middle East,²⁰³ and makes it superficial and remote. Thus, it entails separation of the Here (the West) from Elsewhere (the Middle East). Needless to say, this situation does not relate specifically to the politics of the Middle East but, with this method, as Godard presents it in this film, contemporary authority maintains its power everywhere. In other words, Godard guides the viewer to the realization that this is how power works via visual media. Eventually, it preempts any possibility for thinking of alternative presentations or becoming a “form that thinks”. This practice of montage puts off any attempt for political activism through cinema or other visual media. And these realizations, as I will argue, are central to the film *Here and Elsewhere*, and to Godard’s oeuvre. The final version of his film, as I will present in this section, provides a turning point, in Godard’s view, for the role of cinema in engaging with political polemic, and it clearly points to the problematization of such an

²⁰³ On this issue see Godard’s interview with Andrew Sarris from 1970, where he declares his support of the Al Fatah while arguing that Europe and America are woefully ignorant of history in the Middle East. It is interesting to see the interviewer’s response as he evokes the memory of the Holocaust and Hitler. Reprinted in :Godard, Jean Luc, and David Sterritt. 1998: *Jean-Luc Godard : Interviews*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi: pp.56-57.

act. As film critic Serge Daney marks, *Ici et ailleurs* is one of the most beautiful films ever made on the idea of engagement, of political commitment and intervention, or more simply, of the impossibility of activism.²⁰⁴

Before my close analysis of this scene and its implication, I will provide some background to the unique circumstances that led to the creation of this film, which, as I will argue, molded the formation of this scene, and the critique on montage in general. *Ici et ailleurs* (*Here and Elsewhere*) or in its original name *Jusque a la victoire* (*Until Victory*, 1970) had been conceived and shot out of full ideological engagement and with great expectation for political change. The idea was to create a film documenting and explaining the Palestinian revolution and the Al-Fatah military movement. This idea had been brought about by members of the Dizga Vertov Group following an invitation and founding of the Arab league, out of highly sympathetic identification with the case. The Vertov group²⁰⁵ - J.L. Godard and J.P. Gorin - crystallized in the aftermath of May 1968 through the vantage point of Marxist ideology, and took upon itself to experiment in alternative film production and devoted itself to promotion of class and social struggles. The main goal was to explore the new possibility of political filmmaking – thus, developing politically committed cinema. According to Godard, the Vertov group was committed to producing more films and exhibiting more films differently (economically and aesthetically). Their film theory rested on a perceived cultural and ideological

²⁰⁴ Daney, Serge. 1996(1988): p.77

²⁰⁵ Named after the Soviet film director Vertov, who had been rediscovered in the late 60's in France. Vertov's film ideology (the kino-eye) provided for the group members new model (in different from Eisenstein's dogma) to think on Marxist cinema. other members of the group:

exchange value in cinema.²⁰⁶ As many critics argue, the activity of Godard in the Vertov group catapulted his cinematic career to a different trajectory: away from any conventional cinema, mostly further away from his early films.²⁰⁷ The group was able to finish eight films: *Un Film comme les autres* (1968) *British Sounds* (1969), *Pravda* (1969), *Vent d'est* (1968) *Lottes en Italia* (1969) *Vladimir et Rosa* (1971), *Tout va bien* (1972), and *Letter to Jane* (1972). Yet, there were more projects that had been planned and footage that had been shot. Among them is *Jusque a la victoire*.

In a 1970 interview, Godard expressed his sympathy with Al Fatah and their goal, focusing on their shared ideas of Marxist ideology:

Al Fatah began with nine people, and it took them more than a decade to become a major political force. The Palestinians are the real Marxist revolutionaries, the disinherited of the earth, but they never speak of socialism and radicalism. they gather in Cairo and Bagdad and take American oil money from bourgeois militarists of Cairo and Bagdad even though they know, as do the bourgeois governments of Egypt and Iraq, that Al Fatah and the Palestinians will eventually overthrow all the corrupt regimes in the middle East, be they bourgeois Arab or American Zionist.²⁰⁸

As such, they were ideal for this kind of task. The group members traveled to the Middle East in July 1970 to document the beginning of the Palestinian revolution. The goal, structure, and message were clear from the beginning of the production. The title on

²⁰⁶ Godard, Jean Luc, and David Sterritt. 1998: p. 51

²⁰⁷ Sterritt, David. 1999: *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard : Seeing the Invisible, Cambridge Film Classics*. Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press: p. 134

²⁰⁸ Godard, Jean Luc, and David Sterritt. 1998: p. 56

the screen in the film final version declares '*en repeneat a cela*', thus, as Godard explains to the viewer in the first seven minutes of the film: "*we shot things in this order and we organized it. She, you, he, and I organized the film like that:*" First came, obviously, the people's will... [on a plate appears the title in French and Arabic "la volonté du peuple"] then the people taking up arms [la lute armée]... and then the political work [le travail politique]... consequently the war extended [la guerre prolongée] ... until victory [jusqu'à victoire]. As such, the group recorded images and sights of the popular revolution: meetings of men in the camp strategizing, women practicing with weapons, girls reciting parts of the manifesto, children marching in military uniform, etc. It is all arranged according to the trope of the Marxist dialectic conception of history which unfolds toward or until victory.

Yet, in the process of editing this film, something went wrong. At first, in the weeks and months following Godard and Gorin return, a restless feeling followed the production, as Godard intimates in the final version of the film: "*Back in France very soon you don't know what to do with the film. Very soon, as one says, the contradictions explode, including you*". And then in September 1970, the horrible news arrived that the Jordanian army put an end to the Palestinian militant organization by killing thousands of Palestinians, most of whom had participated in the film. THINK OF THAT AGAIN asks the title in the film, ALMOST ALL THE ACTORS IN THE FILM ARE DEAD; THE ACTORS IN THE FILM WERE FILMED IN DANGER OF DEATH. These events put the production of the film on hold for the next four years. The events in the Middle East were not the only reason for the postponement; it was mostly due to the group members'

ideological shift in perception that raised critical questions regarding their project and the group's activities. Eventually, the group members ended their collaboration in 1972, and moved on, following different paths. Godard returned to work on the film in 1974, while collaborating with his new partner Anne-Marie Mieville. Together, they were successful in coaxing the material into a critical film-essay, by using the original shots from the Middle East (Elsewhere) combined with scenes shot in France (Here) of working class families and candid shots from the streets of Paris describing everyday life of the ordinary citizen.

As many critics notice, the end result of *Here and Elsewhere* is based more on the spirit and ideology has part of the new collaboration between Miéville and Godard.²⁰⁹ As the creation process unfolded, it addressed the dissolution of the Vertov group, and then questioned not only Godard's bourgeois films but also the ideology and works of the Vertov group. Another transition is marked by the movement from Paris to Grenoble (1973) and then to Switzerland (1977). As Buttner claims, leaving Paris was a radical revision by itself, her remark is based on Godard's comment years later: "I left Paris in '73 and that was the end of '68."²¹⁰ There, Godard and Miéville established their own film production studio/workshop: 'Sonimage' (sound+image). The name, explains Buttner, reflects the core of their future artistic discussions – sound and image now form a new alliance and should no longer be regarded as master and servant. The new creative framework, as Godard explains, is to incorporate time and space, "to see sound and

²⁰⁹ See: Grant, Catherine.2004, Buttner, E. 2003, and Loshitzky, Yosefa. 1995.

²¹⁰ Buttner, E. 2003: "In the Image Workshop: Jean Luc Godard, Anne Miéville and the Beginning of Sonimage," In: James, Gareth, and Florian Zeyfang. 2003: *I Ssaid I Love. That is the Promise : TheTtvideo Politics of Jean-Luc Godard = die TVideopolitik von Jean-Luc Godard*. 1st ed, *Critical readers in visual cultures ; #4*. Berlin: B-books: p.65

image again in the company of others” far removed from audience expectations, and to conduct a balanced dialogue about how the images are produced, not to evade procedural divergences and doubts.²¹¹ Godard and Miéville were able to begin experimenting with video, and worked on films that are primarily concerned with the technological, economic, and ideological ‘subjection’ of humans and their ‘communication by and through the modern media industries in particular television.’²¹² They focused on new forms of thinking in television rather than cinema. Among their productions during the ‘70s are: *Numéro deux* (1975), *Comment ça va* (1975), *six fois deux* (1976), and *France tour détour deux enfants* (1977-78). Miéville's input is no doubt the feminist voice in these films, which shifts the concerns and focus onto the politics of everyday life: family, school, workplace, etc. Godard says, of Miéville’s contributions and influence on the creative process: “She relentlessly criticized the assumptions of the Maoist revolutionary discourse and argued that it had continuously ignored the reality of daily life in France.”²¹³ In relation to the work on *Here and Elsewhere*, Loshitzky claims that the juxtaposition of domestic images borrowed from the private domain (the family) and political images borrowed from the sphere of the public space (politic) is evidence of Miéville's growing influence over Godard, and her feminist leaning towards the politicization of the intimate and familial.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Ibid: p.67

²¹² Grant, Catherine.2004: “Home-Movies”, in: Williams, James S., Michael Temple, and Michael Witt. 2004. *For ever Godard*. London: Black Dog: p.102

²¹³ Cited in James, Gareth, and Florian Zeyfang, 2003: p. 67

²¹⁴ See Loshitzky, Yosefa. 1995. *The Radical Faces of Godard and Bertolucci*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press: p.49 As she notices the film *Here and Elsewhere* also contains a feminist criticism aimed at Godard himself.

Something in Godard's filmic style has been radically changed in this film; the film, along with other films from this period, became more pedagogical in nature. Film scholar Loshitzky criticizes this shift and describes the new style as extremely didactic and dogmatic. However, film critic Serge Daney wrote one of the most important analyses of Godard's new style (post '68) in 1976. As he argues, this is not merely a style for Godard, but rather a method or logic of transmission of political knowledge. Daney coins in this article the term 'Godardian pedagogy' to summarize its characters. He says, regarding the main ideas behind this practice:

For the most radical fringe of filmmakers - those farthest to the left - one thing is certain in 1968: one must learn how to leave the movie theater (to leave behind cinephilia and obscurantism) or at least to attach it to something else. And to learn, you have to go to school. Less to the "school of life" than to the cinema as school. This is how Godard and Gorin transformed the scenographic cube into a classroom, the dialogue of the film into a recitation, the voiceover into a required course, the shooting of the film into a tutorial, the subject of the film into course headings from the University of Vincennes ("revisionism," "ideology") and the filmmaker into a schoolmaster, a drill-master or a monitor. School thus becomes the good place which removes us from cinema and reconciles us with "reality" (a reality to be transformed, naturally.) This is where the films of the Dziga Vertov Group came to us from (and earlier, LA CHINOISE.) In TOUT VA BIEN, NUMERO DEUX and ICI ET AILLEURS, the family apartment has replaced the movie theater (and television has taken the place of cinema), but the essentials remain: people learning a lesson.²¹⁵

School has become a metaphor for understanding Godard's films post '68, including *Here and Elsewhere*. Thus, in his analysis, Daney embraces the didactic style

²¹⁵ Daney, Sarge. (1976): "The T(h)errorized (Godardian Pedagogy), republished in: http://home.earthlink.net/~steeve/Daney_Godard.html

and molds it into a formal method. In his article, Daney draws upon three principles that this metaphor evokes: First, the school is perceived as a place where it is possible and acceptable to ask questions; mix up words and things; and experiment with ideas, definitions and notions. This practice remains possible until a later moment when one will have to closely examine these combinations. Daney explains how this scholastic logic functions in Godard's films:

Now there was a *sine qua non* for the Godardian pedagogy: never questioning the discourse of the other, whoever he is. Simply taking this discourse literally, and taking it at its word. Concerning oneself only with the already-said-by-others, with what has been already-said-already-established in statements (indiscriminately: quotations, slogans, posters, jokes, stories, lessons, newspaper headlines. etc.) Statement-objects, little monuments, words treated as things: take them or leave them.²¹⁶

Therefore in the Godardain process of studying, first he presents and lists the "already-said-already-established" to the viewer, without questioning or arguing for any essential 'truth'. As Daney describes this approach:

It consists of taking note of what is said (to which one can add nothing) and then looking immediately for the *other* statement, the other image which would counterbalance this statement, this sound, this image. "Godard," then, would simply be the empty place, the blank screen where images, sounds come to coexist, to neutralize, recognize and designate one

²¹⁶ Ibid

another: in short, to struggle. More than "who is right? who is wrong?," the real question is "what can we oppose to this?"²¹⁷The devil's advocate.

The second principle is related to the source of the knowledge the school master provides for his students. As it is in the schooling system, argues Daney, that the master does not have to declare the source of his discourse. School is not a place to question the origin of knowledge. Therefore, Godard as the school master does not concern himself with appropriation of knowledge, only with its re-transmissions. So the film has become an apparatus where to the master (director) and the student (viewer) is added the solicitation of what must be repeated (the discourse). Daney explains that under this logic Godard avoids answering important questions regarding the content of these discourses:

Two questions, nevertheless, are definitely eluded by this apparatus: that of the *production of the discours du manche* (in Maoist terms, the question "where do right ideas come from?"), and that of its appropriation (in Maoist terms, "the difference between true ideas and right ideas"). School is of course no place for these questions. There the drill-master embodies a figure at once modest and tyrannical: he must recite a lesson which he knows nothing about and which he himself endures.²¹⁸

Thirdly, is the well known principle of *tabula rasa*, which, accordingly, is only allowed in the beginning of each schooling year. Daney refers here both to the opportunity to be in that stage of no-knowledge, and to the possibility to start from scratch every year. Yet contrasted with school where attendance is mandatory, the goal of

²¹⁷ Ibid

²¹⁸ Ibid

cinema, according to Daney, is to retain one's audience, and filmmakers must give the audience something to see and enjoy and tell them stories (hodgepodes): whence the accumulation of images, hysteria, carefully-measured effects, retention, discharge, happy ending: catharsis.

Daney's important observation regarding Godard's pedagogical method will provide in the following pages guidelines for my analysis of the montage scene in the film *Here and Elsewhere*. As I will argue in the following chapter, these principles are not merely relevant in reading Godard's films from 1970s, but vital in understanding his practice of montage as a 'thinking form' in cinema.

4:3 Montage as a Paradigm

Now, back to the montage scene locates in the middle of the film, after the realization of the tragedy in Jordan and failure of the filming. Here, Godard moves from the original script/content/method to a new one that tries to investigate this failure. As such, this scene is a point of departure from the analysis of filmic methodology, and it aims to pinpoint the main problem of the original film, that is the editing - the paradigm that failed. "*So, one can finally see that what happened in this film happens in any American movie, in any Soviet movie, where I added, you added...*" Godard's voiceover intones to the viewer in the opening line of this scene. Godard's important understanding

here is that this paradigm is not exclusive to a particular political ideology, but operates in all of them, and is therefore very difficult to detect.

What follows is a reenactment of how film montage works – adding the images from Middle East together - performed by five figures in an empty white room. Participants in the scene are: an old man, a woman, a man, a middle aged woman, and a young man (described according to their order of appearance in this scene). In this stage of the film we can only recognize two of them – the man and the woman are the husband and wife in the family here. All the other figures will appear randomly during the film as part of candid shots of everyday life in France. Each figure holds a photograph in his/her hand, and each photo signifies a title from the original script, here are their descriptions:

- “la volonté du peuple” (the people's will) – a photograph of a Palestinian assembly.
- “la lutte armée” (the arms struggle) – a shot of Palestinian fighters with guns.
- “le travail politique” (the political work) – a group of Palestinian soldiers listening to a lecture
- “la guerre prolongée” (the war extended) – a Palestinian kid trained by soldier how to use a gun.
- “jusqu’ à victoire” (until the victory) – a photomontage combining a portrait of Golda Meir (Israeli Prime minister then) with a Palestinian soldier.

This performance of montage repeats itself five times. The order of appearance and ritual are repeated as a kind of didactic repetition. Yet, a close reading of this scene will reveal many differences and a multifaceted presentation encapsulating the problems that are inherent to this paradigm. Hence in my analysis of this scene I will submit five problems that Godard formulates in regarding to the practice of cinematic montage, as he

experienced them while trying to edit this film. The trajectory of the scene is moving gradually backwards from the final product (in front of a projector) to the initial stage of recording the images and the sounds (in front of a camera), as a kind of meticulous maneuver that facilitates deconstruction. Here are the descriptions of the five different segments in this scene combined with my interpretation of the methodological problems they pose:

1. On the screen we see the group of five figures, standing together in the corner of the room, and gradually each figure in turn moves forward and hangs their photo on a white wall, loudly stating the title of their photo. Then, the figure turns to the viewer and stands under their photo in front of a movie projector. Hence, in the end of that segment we have a long distance shot of two horizontal lines: of photos on the wall and the figures looking directly at us. In this arrangement, the images are hung too far from the viewer, which makes it impossible to see them in detail; consequently, we can assume that the emphasis here is on the titles and the narrative they create. Hence, my argument will be that Godard intentionally choreographed this segment, meaning to draw our attention to the problems surrounding the script of the original film. As we are told by Godard in the film, this narrative had been written and planned in advance by the Vertov Group, prior to their trip to the Middle East. Thus, the process transforms the situation in the Middle East into a narrative of stages which led to Palestinians' freedom/victory, through the 'will of the people' and the politics of armed struggle. Here, Godard asks us, as he does so many times during the film, to think about this again! It is not merely that the narrative was preconceived before any interaction of the filmmakers within this

specific area, and their comprehension of the complicated political situation there; it is mainly that the filmmakers chose to employ a famous triumphant narrative; a story on the unfolding of human freedom. And if this narrative sounds familiar to the viewer, it is! Given that it is the 'ideal modern historical narrative' of the idea of progress to freedom that has been reconstructed again and again since 1789 – the French Revolution. From the pure will of the common people to fight against injustice, until their victory, this linear narrative unfolds a time axis containing different stages that will lead eventually to a triumph of the real human spirit. From Hegel's "Phenomenology of spirit", Marx's "Historical materialism", and other revolutionary ideologies in modern history until post-colonialism, this storyline has been repeatedly told in many historical contexts. In this film, this trope has been employed by the Vertov group once again to describe the emerging Palestinian revolution.

Consequently, what we have in this segment is Godard's realization that he has failed in his promise to bring the true/real story and images from the Middle East. By using a ready-made historical narrative/topos, the filmmakers not only failed to see beyond their ideological screen (Althusserian theory), but determined, in a prophetic manner, the process and the result of the struggle. The result is a simplistic account of a complicated reality, which imparts political ideas to a foreign region. This account might be familiar to a Western viewer and fit historical experience, but is alien to the participants of the event. As such, we find ourselves identifying and sympathizing with its case and affect, hopes and dreams that are reconstructed to illustrate the images.

Godard explains and elaborates on this thought in the calculator scene that precedes the montage scene: *“Through adding hopes to dream, figures have probably been mistaken.”* The numbers he types are 1789 (the year of the French revolution) +1968 (the student and worker rally of May '68), which adds up to 5642. Here, we hear the sound of a shooting gun, and the picture changes to an image from Palestine showing a group of young men getting a lesson on how to operate a machine gun. Very quickly, we are back with Godard in front of the calculator thinking aloud: *“Or rather since we find ourselves near zero, we didn't add but subtract.”* As he continues his calculation, the sound of a machine gun is heard in the background: 5642-1936 (French popular front) =3706-1917 (communist revolution in Russia) =0000000000. And at that point, Godard keeps wondering: *“Or rather it's negative that had been added and first”* and he makes the calculation once again, this time by adding the numbers/years. There are two critical realizations from this scene as expressed by Godard. First, it is too easy to divide the world in two - Marxist or capitalist, rich or poor etc.; and second, the awareness that popular revolutions might lead to violent horror. Godard presents this through a chain of historical images and sounds from popular revolutions in Europe. These are combined with the gesture of saluting. From Lenin's image (1917) to the popular front in France (1936) to Hitler -- all were popular revolutions. This chain of images ends with a provocative montage of images combining Hitler, Golda Meir, the word *Israel* that changes to *Palestine*, accompanied by an elegy praying to the victims of Auschwitz.²¹⁹

As some critics notice, this harsh criticism of Godard in this film against the Vertov group ideology and practice, are part of Godard's self-reflexive process after the

²¹⁹ I will deal with this important montage of images in depth in the next pages of this chapter.

failure of this collaboration.²²⁰ Some critics emphasize the role of Anne-Marie Miéville (Godard's new partner) and hold her responsible for the ideological criticism in the editing of the final version of the film. Nevertheless, it is not by chance that in the same period that Godard formulates his concern on the great historical narrative, around the world scholars from different fields of knowledge begin to grapple with the same problem – Louis Althusser writing on ideology; Deleuze and Guattari in their criticism against psychoanalysis and Marxism; Derrida and the text; Lyotard and the meta-narrative; Hayden White with his critique on the historiography; and above all Foucault and his questioning of our construct of knowledge, of ourselves, and of the political and ethical reality that we live in. The deconstruction movement of thought that developed in France in the aftermath of '68 shifted the way we understand reality as a construct, and insisted on disenchantment and a questioning those grand narratives. The same critical act, I will argue, has been articulated and performed by Godard understanding his own naiveté in the original film that concluded in tragedy. Therefore, I will pursue this direction and elaborate on it for the rest of the chapter.

2. *“Ok but here the images can be seen altogether. At the movies, this is impossible or it is obliged to see them separately one after the other...”* Godard explains in the transition between segment one to segment two, *“...which result in:”* In that moment, the screen becomes dark we can hear the sound of the projector and we see a rectangle of light, then the photos appear in their order as a slide show, and we can hear each time the photo changes, the voice of the figure saying the its title. Between each

²²⁰ See MacCabe, Colin, and Sally Shafto. 2004: *Godard : A Portrait of the Artist at Seventy*. 1st American ed. New York: Farrar Strauss and Giroux: pp. 243-44; James, Gareth, and Florian Zeyfang. 2003: pp.61-67;

photo we encounter a black screen. Consequently, we can isolate three important elements that were strongly emphasized in this segment that are different from the first: the focus on the images themselves (we see them only as a close-up), and the fact that the images are not moving images but a series of frozen frames. Moreover, the transition between one image and another is done artificially, with the black screen and title. These elements, as I will argue, are significant in understanding Godard's critique against the paradigm of montage.

So, finally we can see here the images clearly in a close-up. Although all of them are taken in Palestine, they seem like many other photographs describing popular revolutions. In all of them we notice common men, women, and children, all taking an active part in the political and military struggle. From Delacroix's painting *Liberty Leading the People* (1830), through the communist revolutions, from the Fascist Propaganda, to the Third world revolts against colonialism, the same gestures, postures and compositions have been recycled in this film once again. This reproduction of images was highly disappointing for Godard. According to Colin MacCabe, he was hoping, before traveling to the Middle East, that *Jusqu'a la victoire* would justify the cinematic experiments that had done before by the Vertov group, and would provide images from Palestine that the world had been never seen before.²²¹ Yet, in this segment, as in the whole film, the images are visual topos, strictly stereotyped illustrations of the ideal narrative. Nothing in them reflects the complex and specific political situation in the Middle East. Therefore, we are not really seeing them but reading them in relation to the narrative, and that is why during this film the title LEARNING TO SEE, NOT TO

²²¹See MacCabe, Colin, and Sally Shafto. 2004: p. 243

READ, is repeated by Godard again and again. For the same reason, in the last part of the film, Godard and Miéville conduct a close analysis of a handful of scenes that had been shot in the Middle East. The most extraordinary revelation in that regard takes place when they analyze a scene where a little girl is standing on the ruins of Karame, wearing an army uniform and reciting very dramatically a poem by Mahmoud Darwish “I shall resist...”. As Anne-Marie Miéville explains to Godard and the viewer, this act embodies a long manipulative history of political gestures:

*Listen, you could talk first about the setting and about the actor in the set, that is about theater. This theater, where does it come from? It comes from 1789 from the French Revolution, and from the pleasure that the delegates of 89 took in making large gestures and reciting their claims publicly. This little girl is acting for the Palestinian Revolution, of course she is innocent, but maybe not this form of theatre.*²²²

The second and the third critical components in this segment are interwoven. Both rise from questions regarding the specific presentation that Godard chose in this segment: why use photographs instead of moving images, because after all, we are analyzing a movie? What does the black screen between the images signify? And what is the problem regarding the montage that Godard evolves in this kind of presentation? The answer in one word is movement, or in the case of this film, a false movement. As Deleuze explains in his chapter on montage in *Cinema I*²²³, it is only rarely in film that movement has been articulated by the mobility of the camera (the frozen shots in this segment). Furthermore,

²²² *Here and Elsewhere*, 1975

²²³ Deleuze, Gilles, Hugh Tomlinson, Barbara Habberjam, and ebrary Inc. 1986a: *The Movement-Image*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota: pp. 29-30

it is the function of montage, as Deleuze describes, to create movement from these fixed shots (the black screen and the titles in this segment). Therefore, montage is responsible for the movement in a film and as such it is the articulation of time. In order for that to work in a film it is necessary to think in advance of the whole narrative or idea of change through time. In this film, the movement expressed by the progressive narrative aims for victory, as mentioned above, was pre-determined by the filmmakers. Consequently, it is not due to the movement-images from the Middle East that the change has been devised, but by a false narrative that has been employed by the filmmakers. Thus Deleuze describes three levels in the construction of a film that circulate between themselves or prefigure the other. All three can be easily identified in the case of *Here and Elsewhere*: the determination of closed systems - the progressive narrative; the movement which is established between the parts of a system- movement from one stage to another conducted by the titles; and the changing whole which is expressed in movement – UNTIL VICTORY. The problem in this movement/time mechanism, as Deleuze concludes, is that “some directors are therefore able to ‘insert’ the montage into the shot or even into frame, and thus attach little importance to montage in itself.”²²⁴ And as Deleuze and Godard well understand, montage, with its endless possibilities to move from one segment to another, is what turns cinema into an art. Ultimately, this central principle of montage has been dealt with exhaustively in this film, and, as I will elaborate in the next chapter, the notion of montage has been crystallized round the word ET-and.

3. The light is turned on and now we can see the group standing in a vertical line in front of a movie camera. One by one, they present their photo to the camera lens

²²⁴ Ibid: p. 29

silently for a few seconds each. The transition between them happens once the figure in the back knocks on the shoulder of the figure in front of the camera, indicating that it is time for him to move on. In the background, we hear Godard's voice explaining the process of movement in film: *"This is made possible because the film moving... and the images don't come altogether, but separately to inscribe themselves one after the other, on their support: Agfa, Kodak, Onvo, Grevunt..."*

The third segment of this scene deals with multiplication, duplication and the circulation of the images. The major change from the previous two segments is the absence of the titles. The entire segment and the transition between the photos is conducted silently (aside from Godard's voiceover). Apparently, at first glance we can assume that in this segment the images are ultimately autonomous. They finally present the utopian idea of visual arts as separated from any text and circulated by themselves. However, this is not what Godard suggests here. As he explains, as a substitute we see the multiplication of the images as part of a capitalist system that keeps fueling itself by producing ever more. As such, it only supports the film corporations by increasing their profit. Yet this act is even more complicated than Godard's choreography in this segment suggests. Once again we are reminded of his use of freeze-frame images which are moved by random people in front of a movie camera. Serge Daney uses this segment to explain his argument about the problems of contemporary cinema.²²⁵ According to him, cinema as a practice was invented for placing moving images in front of immobile people (those locked in the theatre), but today, *we* tend to move before increasingly immobile

²²⁵Cited in: Bellour, Raymond, Mary Lea Bandy, Laurence Kardish, Barbara London, Colin MacCabe, and Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.). 1992: p. 77-79

images. Godard, argues Daney, is a filmmaker who was transfixed by the passion of the freeze-frame, sequences of images, and the assembly line. In this segment (as described above) you see people off the street carrying still images in front of a camera. Therefore, it is no longer the camera recording things, but people bringing their images before an indifferent camera, and that processes is what eventually creates montage. As Daney concludes, television, advertising, and tourist industries are only some of the contributors to this problem in late capitalism.²²⁶ These industries made it impossible for the director to film and create mobile and complex situations in cinema. Godard, as I will explore in this chapter, returned to dealing with freeze-frame and immobility in the *Historie(s) du cinema* which he there takes them to the extreme.

4. In this segment of the sequence the position has changed. We notice that the figures, now standing in a horizontal line, imitate a film's movement; each covers his/her face with the photo; and they are moving slowly from the right side of the screen to the left, but behind the camera. The emphasis here is obviously on the audio, yet instead of hearing again the same titles of the photos, we hear authentic recordings made in the Middle East for the original film: a political speech in Arabic, a machine gun, recitation of Darwish's poem in Arabic, a marching song in Arabic, and a child shouting a revolution slogan in Arabic.

Sound in cinema is a vital issue for Godard, since the beginning of his career as a film director he has been well known for his experimental ways of incorporating image and sound. Using live recording from location, playing with the volume scale, and creating a delay or split between the image and its sound - these are only some of the

²²⁶ Ibid: p. 79

tactics that Godard employed in his film. The co-existence of sound and image in cinema were his central interest in the mid-70s, when he established his production company named (not accidentally) SonImage (sound/image). In this film, one of the main arguments made by Godard to explain his failure, is that the sound was too loud and obscures reality. As the inter-title in the first part of the film concludes, the process as follows: DEATH IS REPRESENTED IN THIS FILM BY A FLOW OF IMAGES, THE FLOW OF IMAGES AND SOUNDS THAT HIDE SILENCE, A SILENCE THAT BECOMES DEADLY. So how does the flow of sounds contribute to this tragedy? Godard and Miéville provide a few answers in this film.

The first obvious difficulty regarding the soundtrack, which is well presented in this segment, lies in the process of the translation. Most of the original sounds that were recorded in the Middle East were in Arabic, which none of the creators spoke or understood. This language gap between participants (elsewhere) and their representation (Vertov Group) leads to many misunderstandings of the complicated reality in the region, as Godard concludes in the end of the film: “*we have like everyone, said something else about them, something else than what they are saying.*” In fact, it took Godard years to work on the translation for the soundtrack, to understand it, and bring it to the viewer (here) not only as part of the analysis, but in respect to the participants (elsewhere) that are dead. Serge Daney argues that making this film “is then, quite simply, to translate the soundtrack, so that one hears what is being said, or better: so that one listens to it. But it

is too late. Images and sounds are rendered as honors are rendered, to those to whom they belong: to the dead.”²²⁷

Yet, translation was not the only problem with the soundtrack that Godard admits to in this film. In a scene depicting a hand turning up and down the volume on a sound-player playing the same march song again and again, Godard confesses to the viewer: “*we did as several people, we took images and put the sound too loud. Always the same sound... always loud... Vietnam, Prague, May 68 – France, Chinese Cultural Revolution, strikes in Poland, tortures in Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Chile, Palestine. The sound so loud, that it almost drowned the voice it wanted to draw out of the image.*” Here we are facing the same problem of historical topos, cliché, and slogans, (as discussed above with regards to the images) that construct sound as a political actuality. The political rallies, the voice of kids shouting slogans, national songs and poets, all are part of a system that reproduces the same historical experience regarding popular revolution. Compared to images, Godard concludes in this film, they are much too powerful and dangerous since they prevent us from comprehending complicated political situations, and the others voices in the field.

But there is more to the loud sound, as Godard recounts, than the relation between sounds and images. Sound is also overwhelming here, in our everyday life and activities. As such, it is one of the apparatuses that prevent revolt against the dominant system. “*How does it happen?*” Godard’s voiceover asks, “*Something like this...*” The answer to that question is given by a montage of segments that present everyday life activities

²²⁷ Cited in James, Gareth, and Florian Zeyfang. 2003: p. 73

where sound takes over in subtle and undirected ways: a loud game-machine played by a young guy in a hectic café, a radio program interfering with the sound of housekeeping chores, in a busy noisy street a taxi driver turns on the radio sound, and in a family living room a couple argue while their little girl turns up the volume of the TV. Therefore, Godard's voice over-explains: "*one sees there is never only one but two movemens of noises that move in relation to each other.*" He is doing that by presenting two sound scales that bleach the voices from the preceding montage. Therefore, we live under a constant struggle between two or more sounds – and here we can obviously use Foucault's term 'discourse' instead of sound. And at a certain point in time, Godard continues, one discourse takes power over the others. The question that occupies Godard in the following scenes is: how does it happen, how did the sound take power? The answer to this question is not an easy one and Godard reveals it in the most powerful sound: the voice of Hitler giving a political speech, taking over the screen and the sound-scale rotating uncontrollably. "*In a moment of panic and lack of imagination there is always one that takes power*" explains Godard in the background. This is an important point which I will keep building on in the next pages of this chapter.

5. In the last part of the montage scene, the camera is standing in the middle of the screen, its lens facing the viewer. In the same order as before, each figure stands first in front of the camera lens (with his/her back to the viewer) presenting the photo saying SPACE and the title; then moves to the other side of the camera (now they are facing the viewer), and there saying TIME and the title again. At the same time, we hear Godard's long explanation:

*And on the whole, time has replaced space, speaks for it, or rather: space has inscribed itself on the film in another form, which is not a whole any more, but a sum of translations, a sum of feelings which are forwarded... that is time... and the film that is, on the whole, chain-work images renders good account, through this series of images, of my double identity, space and time chained one to the other... as two workers on the assembly line, where each one at the same time the copy and the original of the other.*²²⁸

This segment is the most complicated one, rife with profound recognitions regarding the function of montage. In a way, it had been formulated like a philosophical investigation. Godard puts it together once again, as a kind of summary; all the elements that were seen before in this scene are the photos, titles, figures and their double presentation in front of the camera and behind. However, this time he adds the words space and time to the performance. What do they signify? What is their relevance to montage and this specific montage which Godard deconstructs? If we add to that Godard's long explanation (as the voiceover), we find us that *time has replaced space, speaks for it, or rather: space has inscribed itself on the film in another form*; but in any case they are not representing the whole anymore what does it mean? According to this logic the whole, which is the film, cannot be acknowledged by space and time as the classic epistemological categories. In film, they are reconstructed through the practice of montage. Those terms, according to this explanation, have been chained to one another. Therefore, they have been transformed into a chain of images, which is the paradigm of montage. The questions that emerge when observing this practice are: what does it say about the whole film? And in *Here and Elsewhere*: "how does it work on *my double*

²²⁸ *Here and Elsewhere*, 1975

identity?” The answer to these questions as well as the main concern in this segment, as I would like to argue, is to understand how social identity has been constructed and manifested by montage – a chain of images.

This segment might seem like a prologue to the scene coming after it. In it, Godard presents the viewer with two more questions. The first: how to use one’s time to occupy one’s space or to organize a space? The second: how does one find one’s own image in the other’s order or disorder? In other words, these two questions express a concern regarding the way we construct (fabricate) one identity via flow of images that have been determined in a certain order by somebody else. We can connect this concern, as other scholars have done, with the issues raised in this film about the voice of the Other (the Palestinians) from elsewhere (the Middle East), the film being a representative of the ‘Other’ that now are dead.²²⁹ In his book, *Godard between Identity and Difference*, John E. Drabinski ties this film to a larger philosophical discourse that has been going on in France since World War II, among the leaders are Levinas and Derrida. In its center stands the problem of response to the ‘Other’ beyond feeling or impulse; a possibility to conceive representation as accustomed means through philosophical terms and mainly language. As such, language is the main concern of Drabinski’s philosophical analysis of Godard’s films.²³⁰ In a certain way, as I claimed before in this chapter, this concern relates to what Godard concludes from his attempt/failure to be a voice for the Palestinians. Thus, using narrative, images, and sounds was appropriate for Western experience and terms, yet foreign to the situation in the Middle East. Although it might

²²⁹Drabinski, John E. 2008: *Godard between Identity and Difference*. New York: Continuum: pp. 39-60

²³⁰ Ibid: p.3

be helpful to standardize it in a way that will be accepted by western viewers, the result is a complete misrepresentation of the complex political situation in the Middle East.

Nevertheless, the chain of images that accompany these two questions poses, as I claim, a means for a far more intricate understanding of representation. And Godard here is more pessimistic about it than Drabinski suggests. The problem of how to represent Others has spread further, from Elsewhere to everywhere. Hence, in a four minute scene that follows Godard's manifestation of his anxiety of space and time chained together. Moving rapidly from one freeze-frame image to the other, has united mundane images from advertisements and daily life with images of historical atrocity: Nazi concentration camps and evidence from Vietnam, Palestine etc. At one point, those images multiply and we see three or more images simultaneously. It is as if Godard, in this way, is trying to answer the questions he poses: how is time organized by space? This is exemplified by a fast, chaotic alteration from one random image to another, a movement characterized by montage. Another question is how do we fabricate an identity through the ordering of these images? We standardize, regulate, and normalize them until they are irrelevant. Thus, Godard explains, chain images create memories or tie past to present and present to future. In this way, they facilitate recognition of one's identity in the other's photograph. Godard claims: "*as a matter of fact it is likely that a chain also consists in arranging memories, chaining them in a certain order, which will get everybody to find one's place on the chain again, that is to rediscover one's own image.*"²³¹

²³¹ *Here and Elsewhere*, 1975

The question of power, according to Foucaultian theory, is embedded in this method. Although the reasons are varied from profit to exploitation or governance, they all revolve around the enigma of who exercises power. The massive reproduction of images by photographers, the media and filmmakers have taken over the task of constructing our social identity; not only by shooting them, but mostly in the way they have been arranged - montage. In other words, in their role as social representatives they are responsible for the manufacturing and standardization not only of the image but of our social identity. Ultimately, in this process of montage, images are severed from their content, context and power to manifest change or differences – the chain turns every individual image into a homogenized whole. Moreover, montage represses any possibility for revolting or forming an alternative. Consequently, the paradigm of montage, as it is exposed by Godard in this scene, is not merely a function of artistic practice but is a practice of power, which helps to manufacture political and ethical knowledge, that is, construct our knowledge about ourselves. For that reason, I argue we can define montage as a normalizing technology – a social paradigm.

The appearance of the photographic images at the end of this scene, with the endless sound of cameras shuttering (which resemble the sound of a gun shots in this film), intensifies our conclusion on the function of montage and add yet another realization. This mechanism is not just disconcerting for the viewer, but mostly for the artist who is responsible for shooting and arranging the images of the world – *my double identity*. This notion is summarized attentively in the final image of this chain, where news photographers try to catch a shot of a dead body laid in the street. As Godard

confesses regarding his role, while the camera slowly unfolds this revolting image: “As a matter of fact, it is likely that one constructs one’s own image with the other’s. Friend or enemy you produce your image. You produce and consume your image with mine... distributing mine to your image.”²³²

4:4 Auschwitz, *Here and Elsewhere*

As I mentioned above, this scene presents, as part of the montage of chained images, a photograph of prisoners in the Nazi concentration camp. This photograph and many like it from the camps keep appearing in this film in different contexts. The majority of them are well-known photos and footage that had been taken by the Allies Armies after the liberation. From time to time we hear the voice of a Jewish Hassan singing a prayer that was written after the war for the Nazi victims. Moreover, images of Hitler and Nazism are frequently and randomly repeated throughout the film as they are chained to other images, and the voice of Hitler giving his public speeches. Although the memory of World War II and the camp had appeared in some of Godard’s early films²³³, this is the first time that Godard used direct images from the Holocaust and tied them to the overall content of this film. Thus, Godard takes a clear side in the dispute over the moral right of direct representation of Holocaust images in artwork, as it has been described in chapter 1 of this dissertation. As I will argue in the next chapter, this is an

²³² *Here and Elsewhere*, 1975

²³³ Indirectly in the film *A Married Woman*, 1964

ideological and moral stance that Godard maintained in *Histories du cinema*; his approach provides an alternative to Lanzmann's dogma of Holocaust representation.²³⁴

Nevertheless, what is particularly problematic in the appearance of these images is the way Godard intermingles them with other images, in other words the montage that he creates with these images and the meanings that might be implied from this context. This can be well-illustrated by two examples from the film. The first montage appears in the first part of the film; an image of Hitler dissolves into an image of Golda Mier (the Israeli prime minister at that time) as she raises her hand in a gesture that alludes to the Nazi salute; the sound moves from Hitler's voice to the Jewish prayer for the Holocaust victims; and the letters in the title change from *Israel* to *Palestine*. The second montage appears at the end of the film. There, on a TV screen, appear images taken from a news report of the French TV, describing a lynching that took place in the Israeli town Beth Sha'an 1972 (not far from the Jordan border), to a group of Faddaun which entered the town in order to capture and murder Israeli civilians. These are horrific images, and we see the hysterical crowd throwing the dead bodies from the window into a fire. Miéville's voice explains to the viewer that there is nothing she can add to this sight, yet we hear once again the prayer for the Jewish victims in the Nazi camp in the background. As many critics noticed, this use of these images and this footage entails a relation between Nazi concentration camps and the Israelis in their fight against the Palestinians. Not surprisingly, this notion is perceived by many as a dangerous provocation and moral threat, which calls for explanation.

²³⁴ See Saxton, Libby. 2008: *Haunted Images : Film, Ethics, Testimony and the Holocaust*. London ; New York: Wallflower Press: pp.46-67

On the one hand, we can explain this in its historical context as part of a general discourse of the New Left aimed at Western Imperialism in the Middle East. This criticism has been explained and written about by the American film critic Andre Sarris in the *Village Voice* April 1970. In that month he heard Godard speaking in New York on Al Fatah as the true revolutionary movement that is active today (As cited on page 126 in this chapter). Uncomfortable with Godard's statement and his critique of the Israeli actions, he comments:

Anti-Zionism has long served as the anti-Semitism of the New Left and Black Power movements. Indeed, Stokely Carmichael seems to enjoy shocking Jews with a amateurish I-admire-Adolf routine. Even so, I hate to imagine the soulful rhetoric that would be lavished on the poor Arabs if there were two million of them besieged by 100 million Jews. (...) As a European-American, I still feel morally implicated in the Nazi slaughter of the Jews. Consequently, I cannot understand how European or any American can ask Jews in the Middle East to abandon the armed sanctuary of Israel to seek salvation in the arms of their Arab brothers. It follows that I don't share Godard's faith in Al Fatah as the instrument of benign transformation of the Arab vision from the holy warfare of Mohammed to the class warfare of Marx.²³⁵

To that we can add the critique of the Israeli film scholar Yosefa Loshitzky. In her book *The Radical Faces of Godard and Bertolucci*, she writes with acceptance and sympathy for Godard's shift to political cinema after the 1968 events. Yet, when she refers to the film *Here and Elsewhere*, she uses only harsh words to describe it, its style, and its intentions. As we can understand from her criticism, she is specifically concerned with the juxtaposition of Hitler and Meir:

²³⁵ Reprinted in: Godard, Jean Luc, and David Sterritt. 1998: p 56

The merging of the “here and there” raises the question of the relationship between what Godard perceived as the Palestinian revolution and French revolution that he envisaged in the 1960s. The naïve idealization of the PLO by Godard and Miéville is accompanied by an anti Israeli position equating the Israeli retaliations against Jordan (and in particular the Karame operation) with the Nazi atrocities. The climax of this anti Israeli stance (which verges on anti-Semitism) is conveyed through the image of the wedding of Golda Meir, Israel’s prime minister at the time, with the voice-over of a Nazi speech delivered by Adolph Hitler. The film, Like many of Godard’s other political movies is extremely naïve and dogmatic, if not infantile in its approach towards the East/West conflict. This conflict is presented and explained through a montage technique whereby images of advertising and consumption are associated with the West, while images of violence are linked with the East. This manipulation reaches its climax in the ideational and audio-visual link Godard create between the event of 1917, 1936 and 1968. Through this simplistic and horrifying equation Godard claims that the sum of 1917 and 1936 is the image of “Black September,” which occurred a few months after the shooting of *Jusque’a la victoires*. This simplistic and monstrous equation is carried further on the association aligning the capitalist system (visualized by images of mass production line) with images of the Nazis’ mass murder of Jews.²³⁶

On the other hand, we can consider the philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s explanation of this controversial montage. In his book *Cinema2*, he refers to this film, and specifically to the Hitler/Meir montage in the chapter on thought and cinema. There, as I will discuss in the next chapter, he tries to define the act of thinking in cinema after World War II. Thus, according to Deleuze, the practice of montage is central to understanding how thought is induced. Deleuze uses Godard’s montage to argue against a common perception that montage is merely a ‘chain of association’ or ‘attraction of images’. As he explains: “It can in fact, always be objected that there is only an interstice between

²³⁶ Loshitzky, Yosefa. 1995: pp. 49-50

associated images. From this point of view, images like those which bring together Golda Meir and Hitler in *Ici et ailleurs* would be intolerable. But this is perhaps proof that we are not yet ready for true ‘reading’ of visual image.”²³⁷ From that line of thought we can also refer back to Daney’s explanation of Godard’s pedagogy in his films after 1968, and to the principle of bringing what has been ‘already-said-already-established’ all together without questioning or hierarchy. And above all, we can add Godard’s repeated demands in this film “LEARNING TO SEE, NOT TO READ!”

Consequently, the montage segment from *Ici et Ailleurs* as well as the montage itself set up the problems that challenge activist filmmakers like Godard, working with the practice of montage and after exposing the viewers to the impossibility of working with this paradigm and creating political film. For Godard, as an artist who is interested in the question "How?" (as it been introduced in the previous chapter), developing an kind of urgency to maintain investigating the issue. One question that keeps emerging is how is it that montage – the creative and political force of cinema – has turned into paradigm, or, more specifically, a paradigm of power? And furthermore what is Godard’s alternative to the paradigm of montage in his films? As we about to explore in the next chapter, the course of this investigation split into these two channels: historical investigation interwoven with the history of cinema and the history of the 20th century, and experimenting with montage. By following Godard’s conduction of a historical investigation to understand how this unique tool, which had been considered by the pioneers of cinema to be a powerful instrument to develop utopian thoughts, had failed its promise, we can argue that these tools provide one of many questions that eventually led

²³⁷ Deleuze, Gilles. 1989. *Cinema 2: The Time Image*. London: Athlone: p. 179

Godard to unleash his long project on the *Historie(s) du Cinema*. As he declares his idea for the histories in series of lectures given in 1978 (three years after concluding *Ici et Ailleurs*) titled *Introduction a une véritable Histoire du cinema*:

En gros, La thèse c'est que le cinéma muet. Tous les grands cinéastes, ceux qui sont restés connus parce qu'ils sont allés le plus lion, le plus fort ou de la manière la plus désespérée étaient a la recherche du montage : c'est ça la thèse ; ils étaient à la recherche de quelque chose qui était spécifique au cinéma, qui était le montage. Et puis ensuite quand le cinéma parlant est venu, la société ou la manière dont ça a été repris puisqu'au départ ça s'est développe un peu anarchiquement, on a perdu ça.²³⁸

The connection between the film and *Historie(s) du cinema* is how, in this film, we can see the conception of ideas of histories. As I will explore in the next section, this thesis had developed in the histories of cinema into two directions of investigation. On the one hand, Godard explores the role of the 20th century History and mainly Auschwitz, as a cause of the failure. On the other hand, how the role of cinema as an industrial art failed to reach the artistic goal of montage.

²³⁸ Godard, Jean Luc. 1980 : *Introduction à une véritable histoire du cinéma*, *Collection ça/cinéma* ; 22. Paris: Albatros: p. 175

Chapter 5:
Historie(s) of cinema with 'SS'

*Cinema is made for thinking the unthinkable*²³⁹

5:1 The Flame in Auschwitz

"I was alone and lost in my thoughts," we hear Godard's voice and see a black screen that reads, "1 PENSEE" (1 thought). Soon, the picture changes, and we see him, alone in a dark editing room, silently smoking a cigar. His voice continues: *"I was holding a book: Manet, by George Bataille. Manet's women seem to say "I know what you are thinking". Probably because until Manet, Malraux taught me this – inner reality was more subtle than the cosmos."* Godard's image dissolves and serves as the background for the next three paintings – a drawing of a woman's face by De Vinci, Vermeer's *Girl with the Pearl Earring*, and Corot's woman in pink. Godard's voiceover continues: *"Famous, pale smiles of Vinci and Vermeer first say me, me and the world came after. Even Corot's woman in pink doesn't think the thought of Olympia."* Here, the image changes again to a black screen presenting the caption, JE SAIS A QUOI TU

²³⁹ Godard cited in: Didi-Huberman, Georges. 2008: p.140

PENSES (I know what you are thinking), and Godard continues his presentation. As he says “*of Berth Morisot,*” an image of Olympia’s face appears; as he says “*of Folies-Bergere barmaid,*” the face of Berth Morisot appears. “*Because timely, the world within has opened up to the cosmos.*” At this, the image of the barmaid at *Folies Bergere* appears and fades quickly into the black background of the screen. “*With Manet begins Modern painting: that is – the cinematography* [as he says this, the image of the barmaid’s face appears again and dissolves to a black screen] – *that says: a form making its way toward speech. Precisely: a form which thinks.*” The face of the barmaid’s appears once again and fades to black: “*Cinema was first made for thinking this would soon be forgotten.*” The face of the barmaid appears for a third time, for only a brief second, before dissolving again into black, and Godard's voice continues: “*But that’s another story... the flame went out for good in Auschwitz. This thought is worth at least a farthing...*” The segment concludes with the portrait of the boy playing a flute by Manet.

The scene recounted above is taken from chapter 3A in the *Historie(s) du cinema* and will be the center of our investigation in the next two sections, as it encapsulates all the elements leading our line of investigation in this chapter: montage, a thinking form, and Auschwitz. In this scene, the rapid interchange between different Manet paintings constitutes a visual montage, and Godard discusses his thoughts on the history of cinema from its birth as part of modern painting, to its death in Auschwitz. This is by no means a traditional or formal treatment of the history of cinema. Providing birth and death dates anchors this scene to historical events, and not conventional referents. Moreover,

connecting the death of cinema to Auschwitz²⁴⁰ is a provocative statement that has been made again and again by Godard in his films and interviews during the last thirty years.²⁴¹ In this segment, Godard refers to cinema as a particular type of art that is meant to invoke thought, and he argues that it has disappeared after Auschwitz. Once again, as in many of Godard's statements in *Historie(s)*, the viewer finds himself challenged by an enigmatic argument that needs some clarification. In my investigation, I will try to move beyond the view that this claim is just another one of Godard's polemical statements, by illuminating the exceptional logic of Godard's argument. Therefore, I will try, in the next few pages, to gather information from segments in *Historie(s)* and Godard's statements in order to validate this thesis. In this way, I will try to connect this statement, that cinema died in Auschwitz, to my discussion on the paradigm of montage, by tracing montage's origin in the realm of cinema as thought-provoking art.

Historie(s) du cinéma was first conceived as a TV series in 1978, as a result of a talk Godard gave in Montreal in honor of Henri Langlois.²⁴² In addition, as I argue in the preceding chapter, many of the problems and ideas formulated in the film *Here and Elsewhere*, lead for the formation of *Histoire(s)*, yet it took Godard ten years to find the funding and production to the project. *Historie(s)* took its final shape in 1989 when the television station Canal signed an agreement, and soon after it began broadcasting - the first two chapters aired in 1989, and the rest in 1998. The end result is a set of four DVDs

²⁴⁰ As discussed in chapter 4, the first time that images from the Nazi camps appeared in Godard's cinema was in *Here and Elsewhere* 1974, yet the argument on the death of cinema in Auschwitz was formulated in the *Historie(s) de cinema* (1998).

²⁴¹ Interview with Ishaghpour in: Godard, Jean Luc, and Youssef Ishaghpour. 2005. *Cinema : The Archeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*. English ed. Oxford, UK ; New York: Berg.

²⁴² Henri Langlois was the legendary director of the French cinématque, between 1938 to 1975. Many of the New-wave film directors, including Godard, see him as the father of the new French cinema, who introduced them to the magic of cinema.

and four art books – the latter reproducing some images from the films as well as text from the soundtracks. The series contains eight chapters, runs 265 minutes, and contains the following chapter titles:

- 1A - Toutes les Histoires (All the *Historie(s)*/stories)
- 1B – Une Histoire Seule (Only History)
- 2A – Seul le Cinema (Only Cinema)
- 2B – Fatale Beaute (Fatal Beauty)
- 3A – La Monnaie de L’Absolu (The Twilight of the Absolute)
- 3B – Une Vague Nouvelle (A New Wave)
- 4A – Le Contrôle de L’Univers (The Control of the Universe)
- 4B – Les Signes Parmi Nous (The Signs Among Us)

Needless to say, although it is titled *Historie(s)*, the series does not present any traditional history of cinema in the 20th century. As film critic Michael Witt explains, this is not the kind of series that one can present to film students as a teaching tool.²⁴³ Godard himself explains that the goal is less about the history *of* the cinema, and rather history *through* cinema. Therefore we are left with the question: what kind of history is Godard conveying? In a lecture Godard gave in 1988 on Montage (at FEMIS), he explains his intention regarding the kind of history he is about to deploy in his series:

²⁴³ Witt, Michael. in: Temple, Michael, and James S. Williams. 2000; p. 34

Il faudrait que des historiens comme Braudel ou Foucault viennent étayer ça pour qu'on puisse en parler, mais je pense que le muet appartenait au public parce que dans les public parlait.²⁴⁴

By evoking Braudel and Foucault, Godard references two modes for thinking and writing about history. These authors, as I will suggest in this chapter, are only two from a long list of historians and philosophers (among them: Blanchot, Pèguy, Malraux, and Bataille) which provide the groundwork for *Histoire(s)*. However, these are verbal references to written history, while Godard's aim is to assemble history using only cinematic materials: still images, paintings, newsreels, and movies. The soundtrack combines different types of music (from classic to pop) with a montage of quotations from different sources (poems, novels, political speeches, philosophical texts etc.). Another important element in *Historie(s)* is the titles that keep circulating and disappearing. *Historie(s)* as a visual montage, encompasses of all these elements, plus some original materials shot by Godard. The result, described by Jacques Aumont, is: "Montage, that wonderful and terrible instrument, developed and perfected by Godard into an all-purpose instrument, comes into its own."²⁴⁵

In chapter 3A, over the background of a black screen, Godard explains to the viewer: "*The flame went out for good in Auschwitz*". The 'death of cinema' has been one of Godard's favorite statements since 1980s, and it has resurfaced again and again in his interviews.²⁴⁶ However, until *Historie(s)*, the 'death of cinema' never appeared on the screen as tangible information, even though Godard had been, as a filmmaker, very

²⁴⁴Godard, Jean Luc. 1998: p. 248

²⁴⁵ Aumont, J. 1999: *Amnésies : fictions du cinéma d'après Jean-Luc Godard*. Paris: POL: p. 97

²⁴⁶ See: Godard, Jean Luc. 1998: p. 245

productive in the last three decades. These facts led many critics to dismiss this claim as just another one of Godard's polemical arguments. Many tied it to the trend of postmodernism, which declared every form of cultural practice dead. Some even saw it as a French sentimentality for elegy, or even as an apocalyptic statement at the end of the millennium.²⁴⁷ Finally, in 1998, Godard made this claim official, stating it against a black screen as part of the *Historie(s) du cinema*. Consequently, there is no longer any point in disregarding it, rather our goal should be to try and understand what, exactly, Godard means in this paradoxical declaration. As such, this is the kind of statement that sounds more like an assignment for the viewer; it raises questions like the following rather than providing answers. How did it happen? What caused it and who can we blame? And above all how does it affect cinema practice today?

Film historian Michael Witt took it upon himself to answer these questions. In two different articles, Witt explains that, according to Godard, both 'death' and 'cinema' contain multiple meanings and represent multiple contexts. In "The Death(s) of cinema according to Godard"²⁴⁸ Witt identifies, as with other historians before him, four different causes of the death of cinema: the first death happened as a result of the transition between silent cinema and the talkies; the second occurred in Auschwitz²⁴⁹; filmmakers in May 1968 called for death number three, only to recreate cinema again, discharged from any bourgeois myths and clichés; death number four is caused by the degradation of visual culture through television. Similarly, in his article "An Analysis of the

²⁴⁷ See: Ricciardi, Alessia. 2003. *The Ends of Mourning : Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film, Cultural Memory in the Present*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press. And Saxton, Libby. 2008: *Haunted images : film, ethics, testimony and the Holocaust*. London ; New York: Wallflower Press.

²⁴⁸ Witt, Michael. 1999: 'The death(s) of cinema according to Godard', *Screen*, 40/3: pp. 331-346

²⁴⁹ According to Witt Godard was the first to make that argument.

Cinema(s)''²⁵⁰ Witt analyzes Godard's notion of cinema that undergoes its own series of mutations, as well: as opposed to cinema, Cinema (with a capital c) exists in a specific historical context when the request for a national image surfaces (for example after the Russian revolution) coupled with the need for a nation to reinvent itself.²⁵¹ Ultimately, Witt's understanding of Godard's statement on 'the death of cinema' is as an event that unfolds gradually and has not yet concluded; 'a death in progress' with several experiences and explanations. Witt implies that it will be impossible to comprehend this statement as a single concrete event.

Yet, in this scene from *Historie(s)* we are informed by Godard of the specific time of the death of cinema - during World War II - and exact place of death – in Auschwitz. Therefore, we are obligated in this investigation to focus on recognizing the implications of such a death. As Witt notices, this thesis is uniquely formulated by Godard and has counterparts in film history and history in general. In an interview conducted in 1996 while working on the *Historie(s)*, Godard provides some detail and clarification:

Cinema has failed in its duties. It's a tool that we've misused. In the beginning, it was thought that cinema would impose itself as new instrument of knowledge, like a microscope or telescope, but very quickly it was prevented from playing its role and was turn into a toy. Cinema has not played its role as an instrument of though (...). Almost from the beginning, with the arrival of Thalberg as head of MGM. There were certainty individuals, especially in France, who rose up against this but they were not big enough. In the end, cinema failed in its mission (...).

²⁵⁰ Witt, Michael. 2000. "Qu'etait-ce que le cinema, Jean-Luc Gorard ? An Analysis of the Cinema(s)", in: Harris, Sue, and Elizabeth Ezra. 2000. *France in Focus : Film and National Identity*. Oxford ; New York: Berg: pp. 23-42

²⁵¹ Ibid: p. 32

Naively, we thought that the *Nouvelle Vague* be a new beginning, a revolution. However it was already too late. It was all over. The final blow had come when the concentration camps were not filmed. At that moment, cinema totally failed in its duty. Six million people, principally Jews, were killed or gassed, and cinema wasn't there. And yet, from the *Great Dictator* the *Rules of the Game*, it had announced the major events. By not filming the concentration camps, cinema threw in towel completely.²⁵²

Analyzing this quote, we can identify three different allegations that Godard raises against cinema's malfunction before, during, and after the war, that led eventually to cinema's death in Auschwitz. First, belief in the power of cinema to deliver a forewarning to the masses about what is about to happen, and thus prevent it, were proven false; second, cinema failed the task of documenting tragedy during the war, preserving images of the atrocity; and finally, the role of cinema after the war in molding collective memory and moral standards has turned out to be highly problematic. Godard's claims against cinema have opened a large discourse in recent years, one which extends beyond the field of film history and touches upon ethical issues regarding the limits of presentation of Holocaust memory. As I am about to present in the next pages, each one of these claims carries key elements in understanding not merely the death of cinema in Auschwitz, but the role of cinema in 20th century history and in the present. Therefore, I will elaborate on each one of them, unfolding the claims and arguments made by Godard, as well as those by scholars and critics reflecting on this thesis. Godard's argument on the death of cinema in Auschwitz is also evoked in the *Historie(s)* by the use of montage, superimposing footage and photographs from the Second World War and the camps, some of which are non-conventional. This practice will be the focus of our investigation

²⁵² Cited in Temple, Michael, and James S. Williams. 2000: p. 19

in the rest of this chapter. After all, dealing with Auschwitz in *Historie(s) du cinema*, as Didi-Huberman observes: “is one of the powerful leitmotifs consists in exposing how one extraordinary ‘means of expression,’ the cinema, was deprived of its very ‘expression’ – or its central object – when on the day the camps were opened to the world, it ‘gave up completely’”.²⁵³

In chapter 1A of *Historie(s)*, Godard provides for the viewer a chronology to ‘the history of cinema with the ‘SS’: “1939, 1940, 1941... *Betrayal by the radio but cinema keeps its word. Because from Sigfried and M to The Dictator and Lubitsch, films were made.*”²⁵⁴

This historical account is followed by a montage of archive footage from World War II, combined with images from movies that Godard recognizes as envisaging the tragedy, among them, *M*, *Sigfried*, *Metropolis*, *To Be or Not to Be*, *the Great Dictator*, and the hunting scene from the *Rules of the Game*. So far, Godard’s argument sounds similar to the one made by film theoretician Siegfried Kracauer in his book *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*²⁵⁵ (1947), on cinema as a tool of social prediction. But Godard’s argument focuses on the failure of cinema as a powerful social force that many believed was able to transfigure the masses. A powerful image of a woman fainting in front of the big white cinema screen encapsulates the promise that the pioneers of cinema and its critics recognized - to shock, hypnotize and eventually educate the masses. After all, in the years before the war, cinema was the most popular form of art. However, all of these films, as powerful and visionary as they might

²⁵³ Ibid: pp. 140-141

²⁵⁴ *Historie(s) du cinema*. 1998, 1A

²⁵⁵ Kracauer, Siegfried, and Leonardo Quaresima. 2004: *From Caligari to Hitler : a Psychological History of the German Film*. Rev. and expanded ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

seem today, were not able to catch the attention of the masses. As Godard explains to Daney: “Cinema disappeared at that moment, it disappeared because it had foretold the camps. Chaplin, whom everyone believed, well, when he made *The Great Dictator*, they didn’t believe him. (...) all of a sudden, people didn’t laugh anymore. Something happened there.”²⁵⁶

Back to chapter 1A and Godard’s chronology to history of cinema with the ‘SS’:

*1940, 1941, even scratched to death, a simple 35-millimeter rectangle save the honor of reality,
1941, 1942, if poor images still strike without anger or hatred like a butcher, it is because cinema is there: silent film with its humble and formidable power of transfiguration,
1942, 1943, 1944, that which plunges into the night is echo of what silence submerges. What silence submerges sustain in light that which plunges into the night.*²⁵⁷

Here the chronology ends with a contemporary (colored) shot of the main gate to the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, superimposed with the nuns from Bresson’s film *Angels of the Streets*.²⁵⁸

Thus, in this clip, Godard raises one of the most direct accusations regarding the role of cinema during Second World War. The fact is that movie cameras were never there in the Nazi concentration camps to document the atrocity. The silence of cinema, according to Godard, gradually led to its death. And in this clip we only see the place of its death – Auschwitz – even without declaring it. Yet in chapter 3A, as I mentioned

²⁵⁶ Daney, Serge. 1992(1988): p. 162

²⁵⁷ *Historie(s) du cinema*, 1998, 1A

²⁵⁸ *Angels of the Streets* (original French title: *Les anges du péché*) was the first feature film directed by Robert Bresson in 1943

before, we get the declaration but we do not have an image – only black screen. The cause of death is also clear to Godard - the fact that we do not have any film reels taken into the camp to document it. This is what Godard considers the ‘primary sin’ or the ‘lost honor’ of cinema, which was supposed to bring reality to the masses. As many have noticed before, it is not clear what kind of testimonial images Godard wishes cameras would have taken in the camp. After all, he uses in *Historie(s)* many archival images that were shot in the camps, and he even mentions George Stevens and Sidney Bernstein, who had taken most of the shots. Are these not enough to portray the tragedy? Is Godard, as many critics imply, looking for empirical proof of the existence of the Holocaust?

There are two possible answers to these questions. The first explanation is provided by Didi-Huberman in his book, *Images In Spite of All*. Godard refuses to see a real film for the camp in Bernstein’s and Stevens’ footage, because no one was able to assemble them into a montage. Didi-Huberman explains that the cinematographic services of the United States turned to John Ford to reflect on the use – that is montage – of sequences filmed by Stevens; and Bernstein promoted his friend Alfred Hitchcock to think about montage of this footage. Didi-Huberman reports on Hitchcock’s reaction (as it has been told by several witnesses): “it wasn’t a montage of investigation, a montage in the form of an *inquiry* (something Hitchcock was so good at) that ought to be put together, but rather a montage in the form of a trial.” Thus, Hitchcock, like Godard, understood that this form needed montage that does not separate anything.²⁵⁹

The second explanation can be gleaned from a provocative claim made by Godard in 1998 with the release of *Historie(s)*: “I have no proof of what I’m suggesting,

²⁵⁹ Didi-Huberman, Georges. 2008: pp. 137-141

but I think that if I set to work with a good investigative journalist, I would find images of the gas chambers after twenty years. You would see the deportees enter and you would see the state in which they emerge again.”²⁶⁰ As Libby Saxton explains in her book *Haunted Images: Film, Ethics, Testimony and the Holocaust*, what Godard is actually looking for is an image shot from the perspective of an invulnerable observer who is complicit in the violence: the SS guard/camera-operator. Saxton rightly connects it to another statement by Godard from the early 1960s, where he described a hypothetical script for a film on the subject: “The only true film about [the camps] – which never been made and never will be because it would be intolerable – would show a camp from the point of view of the torturers, with their daily problems.”²⁶¹ For Godard, presenting the perspective of the perpetrators appeals to the ‘banality of evil’ theory, which shockingly reveals that these perpetrators were normal and human, just like us.

The hypothetical ‘missing reel’, as Saxton argues in her book, turns out to be the subject of a tense debate in the French media on the nature of appropriate representation of Holocaust-related images, during the last eight years. As a result, it puts on the one hand Godard’s provocative uses of these images in the *Historie(s)* and his approach to the failure of cinema to be witness; on the other hand stands Lanzmann and his original decision in the film *Shoah* to not use archive footage from the war. Lanzmann’s approach, as Sexton describes, turns out to be a dictum for the most dignified and sophisticated way to deal with the Holocaust memory in visual representation in the last thirty years. When he was asked by a French reporter about the ‘missing reel’ and what

²⁶⁰ Cite in Saxton, Libby. 2008: p.53

²⁶¹ Cite in *ibid*: p.55

use he might have for it, Lanzmann replied straightforwardly that he would immediately destroy it. Godard's uses of these images in the *Historie(s)* challenge this dictum and as such provide provocative opposition – the necessity of using these images again and again as part of our history. As Saxton concludes in her book, the French media tends to emphasize binary opposition: image/no image, Godard as St. Paul/Lanzmann as Moses, etc.. From this, we conclude that the two filmmakers basically disagree on the ethical status of cinema images.

Back again to chapter 3A – *La monnaie de l'absolu* – where Godard reflects on the films made at the end of World War II:

The Russians made martyr films. The Americans made commercials. The English made what they always make: nothing. The Germans had no cinema. And the French made Silvia and the Ghost. The Poles made two expiatory films, The Passenger, The Last Step, and nostalgic film, Kanal. They welcomed Spielberg, 'never again' became 'it's better than nothing'²⁶².

In this list, Godard raises accusations against cinema after the war. As we can learn from this list, there are two issues here, and the first is the silence of cinema in regard to the camps. Moreover, European cinema let American cinema take over the representation of the Holocaust. With the growth of the influence of television, European representation of the Holocaust has become even harder than ever. Thus, as he examines in the end of this chapter, fifty years after the Liberation, the only way for us to

²⁶² *Historie(s) du cinema*. 1998, 3A

commemorate it is on television: “*because power has become a spectacle... And no decoration for Guy Debord*”. These charges have been made by Godard in many interviews, where he expressed his reservations against television and Hollywood, viewing them as a return to fascist images and ‘forms of thinking’. To that, we can add the conclusion of our analysis of *Here and Elsewhere* and the paradigm of montage. Godard is particularly critical of French cinema and his friends in the New Wave who preferred not to deal with this traumatic event. He even dismisses the works of filmmakers Alain Resnais and Lanzman who were among the few to provide an alternative to commercial cinema.²⁶³ Hence, according to Godard, the most profound event of the 20th century had not received yet a proper reflection in the cinema.

His accusations against the cinema industry after the war are not merely regarding reflection of the tragedy, but also cinema's inability to shake off the American method of filmmaking, and thus its inability to escape fascist presentation, which he equated with Nazi influence. As Godard mentions in chapter 1A of the *Historie(s)*, he once made a film about it – *Contempt* (1963) - where one of the leitmotifs was resemblance between the American and Nazi modes of production. To that, we can only add his accusation against television's colonization of the imagination, like a kind of cancer.²⁶⁴ Godard profoundly articulates these claims in his 1970s films - *Ici et Ailleurs* and *Comment ça va* – when he declared war against visual homogeneity (as I examined before). Yet, according to Godard, the only national cinema that was able to find a new form of articulation that fit the new post-war reality was the Italian cinema. Thus, it has its own

²⁶³ In an interview with Margarit Drus reprinted in: Godard, Jean Luc. 1998 : p. 124

²⁶⁴ Witt, Michael. 1999: p. 338

category in the *Historie(s)*: ‘cinema of resistance’. In the end of chapter 3A, Godard creates a special montage from Italian films as an homage to cinema of resistance. He does, however, have some reservations that we need to consider regarding the Italian cinema: “*How did Italian cinema become so great if no one – Rossellini, Visconti, Antonioni, Fellini – recorded sound with image?*” The Italian language and its literary tradition, according to Godard, were able to make their way into the image. Yet this cinematic resistance was limited in its artistic articulation and was able to resist American occupation only for a short time; Godard celebrates the end of it in 1963 in his film *Contempt*.

So far we have been following Godard’s claim about the death of cinema in Auschwitz, trying to understand the causes of this death. We have been able to reconstruct these causes from pieces of information - interviews with Godard and different parts and scenes in *Historie(s)* - reinforcing the idea that there is no one cause of death, but rather multiple ones. The ‘failure’ or ‘death’ was due to the malfunction of cinema before, during and after Auschwitz. The promises of cinema and montage to change the way society sees itself prove to be false. Cinema failed its role to deliver the message, to bring testimony, and to reflect on it. This self-reflexive account of the role of cinema is not only the main issue in the *Historie(s)*, but also in many of Godard's films during the 1990s. Films like *Forever Mozart (1996)*, *In Praise of Love (1999)*, and *Our Music (2004)* all hold in their core questions regarding the relationship between war, violence, history, and cinema. Nevertheless, in looking back at the scene for chapter 3A, *la monnaie de l’absolu*, which we focus on in our investigation, we are still missing a central point regarding Godard’s thesis on the death of cinema in Auschwitz. There, he is

specific not only about the declaration of death, but also the moment of cinema's birth and its potential: "*With Manet begins Modern painting: that is – the cinematography that says: a form making their way toward speech. Precisely: a form which thinks. Cinema was first made for thinking this would soon be forgotten. But that's another story... the flame went out for good in Auschwitz.*"²⁶⁵ Again, this statement raises more questions than answers: what does it mean to say that cinema was born from Manet's paintings? Why Manet? How does a form make its way toward speech? And how can a form think? Was that the promise of the new art- cinema? And why, according to Godard, did it all burn in Auschwitz? In trying to answer these questions I will therefore deal with the two remaining threads of my investigation – thinking form and montage. The task in the next sections will be not only to clarify this statement but to also understand how it is even possible to tie them together the way Godard did in this chapter.

5:2: What is a thinking form?

What is a thinking form in cinema or cinema made for thinking? Since the release of *Historie(s)*, Godard has been repeatedly asked about it in interviews, however, his replies are always elusive. Nevertheless, in the scene above (from chapter 3A) Godard provides the viewer with a few clues. Through close analysis of this scene, I will try to formulate a potential answer to this question. As I'm about to explore in the next pages, 'a

²⁶⁵ *Historie(s) du cinema*. 1998, 3A

thinking form' in cinema connotes more than one definition. My task will be to expose them all.

First, consider the names that Godard invokes to explain his argument: Edward Manet, a painter; George Bataille, philosopher; and Andre Malraux, art historian and minister of culture in France in the 1960s. These are by no means a common sample of references, for the simple reason that none of them dealt exclusively with film or film history.²⁶⁶ Even if we consider this scene as primarily related to paintings rather than cinema, Godard's choice to deal with Manet's paintings via Bataille's book is non-conventional; Bataille is not an art historian but a philosopher and his book on Manet is far from the standard account of Manet or modern art.²⁶⁷ Moreover, to argue that Manet marked the beginning of cinematography is an original move. The fact that Godard discusses them in chapter 3A '*La monnaie de l'absolu*' (the twilights of the absolute), which deals with resistance forms in cinema, merely adds to the puzzle.

At first glance, it is apparent that all three figures are connected. The name of the chapter is a reference to Malraux's book on art history, which carries the same name. As Godard has mentioned many times before, Malraux was one of the most influential figures in his artistic career. Many critics of the *Historie(s)* see Malraux's handling of art history as a collage, or a *museum without walls*, as the base that Godard used to form the *Historie(s)*.²⁶⁸ In this specific case, Malraux's thesis helps to formulate some of the ideas in Bataille's book on Manet. Bataille is another important influence on Godard's work;

²⁶⁶ With exceptional for Malraux's case that created one film and wrote many essays on cinema.

²⁶⁷ See Bois, Yve Alain, Rosalind E. Krauss, and Centre Georges Pompidou. 1997. *Formless : A User's Guide*. New York: Zone Books.

²⁶⁸ See: Temple, Micheal. In: Temple, Michael, and James S. Williams. 2000: p.77-97

he is even part of the thank you list that appears in the last chapter of *Histoire(s)*.²⁶⁹

Manet's paintings and especially his depiction of female models, argues Godard, are the origins of cinematography in the 19th century. As he explains in an interview:

La forme doit être formulée, si l'on peut dire... Donc, voilà pourquoi Manet a cette place, comparé à d'autres. Renoir, c'est un souvenir de famille. Bonnard, Cézanne, c'est tout autre chose. Manet, c'était un homme de cinéma. Du reste, il est contemporain des débuts de la photo. La fiction de cinéma est venue de Manet, elle n'est pas venue de Renoir. Elle est venue de la barmaid de Manet, pas des déjeuners sur l'herbe, ou des ballades champêtres au bord de la Marne de Renoir.²⁷⁰

But dealing with Godard's argument means going beyond this chain of associations. Godard evokes Malraux in this chapter with the use of '*twilights of the absolute*': this evocation extends beyond the title and includes the theme of investigating the connection between art and political change. This is the third volume of the book series the *Psychology of Art*, which surveys the transformation of Western art during the centuries. In this volume, Malraux deals with changes in art due to a change in the form of regime or dogmatic ideas (such as Catholicism). One of the examples that Malraux uses in this volume to prove his argument is Dutch art of the 17th century. As he sees it, Dutch art was able to formulate its unique form as a reaction and resistance to Spanish monarchy and its Catholic dogma. Malraux's original explanation ties the past with the present:

²⁶⁹ More on Bataille and Blanchot influence on Godard see Hill, Leslie. 2004: "A Form That Thinks: Godard, Blanchot, Citation", in: Williams, James S., Michael Temple, and Michael Witt. 2004: pp. 396-414

²⁷⁰ Godard, Jean Luc. 1998 : pp. 28-9

We must begin by ridding ourselves of the notion that the Dutch of those days were ‘bourgeois’ in the common meaning of the epithet. (...) The men for whom Hals, Rembrandt, Ruysdael, Terborch, Vermeer and so many *petits maitres* made their paintings had been the ‘sea-beggar’ who had won their independence under Philip II or were about to defend it against Louis XIV. (...) Is it not singular that even today we find people talking, as of quaint figures on picture-postcards, of a nation that put up an exemplary resistance to Hitler’s hordes and has led the way in post-war reconstruction?²⁷¹

Therefore, Malraux concludes from this example that any changes in a form of thinking, such as political regime and dogma (what he defines as the absolute), should influence a change in art and that is how the stylistic metamorphosis in Western art has occurred. Every time there is a transformation of dogmatic ideas, such as the movement in the 16th -17th centuries after the reformation or the changes in 18th century of the Enlightenment, there will transition in the artistic form. All of these periods lead to changes in art that are more suitable for new ideas and reflect the moment of transformation. These changes happen slowly, if at all, according to Malraux, but once they have an effect, everything moves forward with them, and the way society perceives and enjoys art changes forever.

But now eternity withdrew itself from the world. (...) for now the only enemy of the Eternal which the human mind has ever found was set up in its stead: and that enemy is – history. But history is a construction of the mind, and forms deriving from an interpretation of the past have not the

²⁷¹ Malraux, André. 1949. *The Psychology of Art*. Vol. 3, New York: Pantheon Books: p. 36

same weight as those by means of which man once freed himself from time. Inasmuch as it is only when the deepest layers of their personality are involved that artists embark on a metamorphosis of forms, the passing of the absolute in art was bound to be attended by upheavals of much violence.²⁷²

But, as Malraux notices, the surprise is not that art was affected by this passing of the absolute, but that art was not affected more. This point is the center of Godard's argument in this chapter of the *Historie(s)*: the surprise that art and cinema had not been affected much by the violence and atrocities of World War II; except for Italian Neo-Realism, no new forms of art arose from this period.

Now, Bataille adopted Malraux's theory on the form of art, and applied it to Manet's paintings, claiming that he was the artist who had finally made the shift from the absolute regime (monarchy in France) to a new form of art that reflects his contemporary setting (the republic). Goya is the first of the moderns, Malraux claims, but Manet alone explicitly inaugurated modern painting. As Bataille explains: "We are often led astray by the complexity of the human forms involved in the rise of modern art. That complexity, however, is reducible to its simplest elements." And from there, he explains the changes that occurred in Manet's paintings that Bataille sees as the signs of their time:

In the past art was the expression of 'supreme' forms, divine and royal (one and the same thing in early times). Though adulterated and practically meaningless by Manet's time, they yet lingered on. The triumph of the bourgeoisie – incapable of conceiving anything truly majestic that might compel and command unconditionally – hastened their

²⁷² Ibid: p. 52

disintegration. The upshot was an anarchy of form, fraught with possibilities, but saddled still with the last remnants of majestic form, even though one could possibly believe in them any longer.

However, the coming change, as Bataille well elaborates, was not popular nor was it immediately acceptable to contemporary viewers:

The people by itself cannot create new form. The bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century, which alone had the leisure to create them, had split up into partisans of an empty tradition and detractors of that tradition. The latter, however, while denying that tradition in art, did not deny it in politics. ('Strange', said Manet, himself republican, "how republicans turn into reactionaries the minute they speak about art.>"). As a matter of fact what they really rejected were not the forms as they had been in their prime, but the pale shadow of them which had survived.²⁷³

Like Malraux and Bataille, Godard, in his survey on the *Historie(s)* of cinema, tries to identify how cinema had changed due the tremendous changes in the world after the war. Who among the many active filmmakers of this period can be recalled for their innovation of form in the same way as Manet and Rembrandt? Above all, Godard seeks to formulate an argument resembling the one made by Malraux and Bataille on cinema as a seismograph through which we can observe social-political shifts. Therefore, we can argue that, according to Godard, a thinking form in cinema carries these characters, that is, it should point to or trace historical changes. As I have mentioned before, the only cinema that Godard feels fits this scheme is the Italian Neo-Realist cinema. The only

²⁷³ Bataille, Georges, Austryn Wainhouse, and James Emmons. 1955. *Manet : Biographical and Critical Study*. New York: Skira: p. 52

director that is honored as an innovator is Rossellini who, since *Roma Open City*, models a necessary new art form. With this film, Godard says at the end of the chapter, “*Italy regained the right for a nation to look itself in the eye. Then came the crop of great Italian cinema*”. While reflecting on this conclusion, Witt and Willimes argue that what Godard recognizes is the importance of national cinema to its people, thus Cinema with a capital C. This applies particularly in moments in history where national identity questions are at stake. Yet, I will argue that in the context of both Malraux’s and Bataille’s arguments, Godard perceives Cinema as a thinking form that cannot be tied to conservative or exclusive categories such as national identity. Moreover, we cannot help but doubt whether Godard, who carries Swiss and French citizenship and works in both countries, sees national identity as a crucial element for cinema as a thinking form.

After identifying the main character of thinking form, I would like to raise the following question: Is it possible that montage is cinema as a thinking form? Is that what Godard alludes to in this specific scene from chapter 3A? Is montage the form of cinema that provides a new way to see the world; the thinking form that burned in Auschwitz? Indeed by looking only into the scene for chapter 3A in the *Historie(s)* where Godard raises this claim, it would be hard for us to determine the answers to these questions. In it, the function of montage is a simple one; an illustration presenting Manet’s paintings in the order of their appearance in the text. That is a direct correlation between what we hear and what we see. This is by no means a thinking form. Nevertheless, how can we connect the two, montage and thinking form? In the next pages I will present a collection of evidence that will try to do exactly that. My goal here is not merely to argue that montage

is a thinking form, but to point out how Godard makes use of this thinking tool in relation to the past, especially the use of Holocaust related footages, and moreover, how he connects the past to the political situation in the present.

*Cinema was first made for thinking this would soon be forgotten*²⁷⁴

Godard's claim on the death of cinema in Auschwitz intersects with Deleuze's two books on cinema. There, Deleuze notices an immense change or a rupture between cinema that was created before the Second World War and after, especially in European cinema. Deleuze defines pre-war cinema as 'classic cinema' or 'movement-image', and post-war cinema as 'modern cinema' or 'time-image'. He perceives these changes as related directly to the traumatic experiences of the war. As Deleuze explains in the introduction to the English edition to his second book that deals with post-war cinema:

Why is the Second World War taken as a break? The fact is that, in Europe, the post-war period has greatly increased the situation which we no longer know how to react to, in spaces which we no longer know how to describe. These were 'any spaces whatever', deserted but inhabited, disused warehouses, waste ground, cities in the course of demolition or reconstruction. And in these any-spaces-whatever a new race of characters was stirring, kind of mutant: they saw rather than acted, they were seers.²⁷⁵

Deleuze's main concern in his books on cinema is to present a reflection on the notion of time and duration, viewing them as a philosophic problem that is evoked in and by cinema. Nevertheless, Deleuze deals with post-war filmmakers who have converted

²⁷⁴ *Historie(s) du cinema*. 1998, 3A

²⁷⁵ Deleuze, Gilles. 1989: p. xi

cinema into philosophy and thought, a rare marriage between philosophy and cinema. As he explains: “The great post-war philosophy and writers demonstrated that thought has something to do with Auschwitz, with Hiroshima, but this was also demonstrated by the great cinema authors.”²⁷⁶ One of the most important filmmakers of the second half of the twenty century whom Deleuze uses to address his argument is Godard. Hence, we can claim that the kind of subtle change that Deleuze notices in modern cinema is articulated in Godard’s cinema and that realization might help with understanding the precedent that Godard follows. There are too many differences between Deleuze’s investigation and Godard’s montage in the *Historie(s)* to be understood. Nevertheless, there is one line of thought between the filmmaker and the philosopher regarding the change after the war in cinema, which is very relevant to my argument regarding montage and thought. Godard and Deleuze talk about thinking forms or possibilities of thought in cinema that existed before the war but are quite impossible after; in order to understand this notion, we have to clarify those concepts. In doing that, we have to go back to the pioneers of cinema to understand how thinking form and the possibility for thought were articulated in their films. That is what Deleuze does in the first part of the chapter “Thought and Cinema”; he tries to explain how thought has been articulated through cinematic forms, particularly through montage.

The connection between cinema and thought is a central to Gilles Deleuze’s two books on cinema. In the chapter “Thought and Cinema” Deleuze tries to draw a connection between the two by emphasizing the importance of montage in the process. Starting from Sergei Eisenstein and his failure to move beyond the ‘form of thinking’,

²⁷⁶ Ibid : p. 209

and then ending with Godard's treatment of the 'thinking of the unthinking', the chapter is dedicated to the evolution of thought in cinema. One of the important terms that was coined by Deleuze is 'spiritual automata' to explain the mechanism of thought in cinema.²⁷⁷ The idea that thoughts are deduced from other thoughts is particularly important in the context of film, because everything in the practice leads to a closed frame that produces thought by constantly moving images: montage. This movement creates shock – vibration – and that stimulates thought. The 'spiritual automaton', Deleuze explains:

The spiritual automaton no longer designates – as it does in classical philosophy – the logical or abstract possibility of formally deducing thoughts from each other, but the circuit into which they enter with movement-image, the shared power of what forces thinking and what thinks under the shock. (...) Heidegger said: 'Man can think in the sense that he possesses the possibility to do so. This possibility alone, however, is no guarantee to us that we are capable of thinking. It is this capacity, this power, and the simple logical possibility, that cinema claims to give us in communicating the shock. It is as if cinema were telling us: with me, with the movement-image, you can't escape the shock which arouses the thinker in you. A subjective and collective automaton for an automatic movement: the art of the 'masses'.²⁷⁸

As Deleuze reminds us, by using Heidegger's quote, the possibility to think does not automatically imply that we are doing so; we need to be capable of doing so and cinema, according to Deleuze, provides for us such a capability. By using Eisenstein's

²⁷⁷ For more on this concept see: Bensmaïa R.: "On the 'Spiritual Automaton', Space and Time in Modern According to Gilles Deleuze", in Buchanan, Ian, and Gregg Lambert. 2005: *Deleuze and Space, Deleuze Connections*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: pp. 144-156

²⁷⁸ Deleuze, Gilles. 1989: p.156

example, Deleuze outlines the process that the viewer goes through while watching a film and developing a thought. The process contains three levels: 1. moving from thought to image; 2. moving back from image to thought (internal monologue); 3. trying to connect the thought to the outside – the Whole, the ideology.²⁷⁹ Yet, as much as it fits cinema before the war, when it was still possible to conceive of utopian ideology and the whole, the idea of the whole is a dialectical one, comprised of harmony or dichotomy. As it been already preplanned in the movement of the film – in the montage – and was therefore homorganic to thought in cinema. Whereas if the ideology is Marxist or Fascist, the movie would be imbued with it and that is where, according to Deleuze, cinema failed to produce a thought that is beyond knowledge, that raises the unthinkable in thought, and leads to unpredictable or unexpected outcomes.

Here is where the difference in spiritual automata after the war is. After going through the unthinkable during the war and witnessing unthinkable atrocities, cinema devoted itself to producing that kind of thought. And here is where Deleuze notices the differences in Godard's films, following the new mechanism of thought and unthought. Deleuze borrows this geometric terminology of problems and theorems to define two kinds of process: one that is being determined to follow specific roles; and the second is unexpectedly bringing the unthinkable into the process of determined thought. This mechanism does not provide the viewer with a well-determined process for overcoming differences (like dialectic thought), but instead facilitates understanding of process of thinking the unthought-of and the problems that are constantly there and need to be

²⁷⁹Ibid: 158-159, for example the whole in the case of Eisenstein's dialectical montage, or in Griffith's harmonically. See also chapter 3 in Deleuze, Gilles. 1986.

addressed in order to develop thought. This process will eventually, according to Deleuze, renew belief in the world after the war. And, in a way, it opens up the possibility for participation of different voices and the interweaving of those differences in one film. It is the desire for a heterogenic and inclusive approach, instead of the exclusive one in the mechanism of thought.²⁸⁰ As Deleuze notes with regard to specific post-war filmmakers, including Godard:

We have seen that the power of thought gave way, then, to an unthought in thought, to an irrational proper to thought, a point of outside beyond the outside world, but capable of restoring our belief in the world. The question is no longer: does cinema give us the illusion of the world? But how does cinema restore our belief in the world? This irrational point is the *unsummonable* of Welles, the *inexplicable* of Robbe-Grillet, the *undecidable* of Resnais, the impossible of Marguerite Duras, or again what might be called the *incommensurable* of Godard (between two things).²⁸¹

As we can conclude from this short survey, Deleuze's notion of cinema and thought, spanning from the pioneers of cinema to Godard, is that it is through montage that thought has been engendered in film. Consequently, as Godard implies in *Historie(s)* and many interviews, cinematic montage is a thinking form. Cinema falls under the logic of 'the order of things',²⁸² which means that the way the components of a film are organized influences the development of thought. This notion appears in Eisenstein's

²⁸⁰ Ibid: pp.175-177

²⁸¹ Ibid: pp.181-182

²⁸² Interesting to connect to this discussion Foucault's book *The Order of Things*, as he tries to trace how the development of knowledge in human sciences was connected to the way information and data been organized. Foucault, Michel. 1974. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, World of Man*. London,: Tavistock Publications.

provocation of ideological thought, and Godard's attempt to deconstruct this kind of thinking. Whereas Deleuze and Godard share many same ideas about cinema, thought, and the function of montage, there are many differences between them regarding the change that occurred in cinema after the war. They disagree about the transformation of montage, but they both agree on the practice's ability to provoke thought in cinema. Godard contends that the pioneers of cinema, including filmmakers like Eisenstein and Griffith, according to Deleuze's analysis, never really found montage to be dealing with thought in cinema. As Godard explains in his Lecture on Montage in 1988:

The idea that I'm defending in the history of cinema that I'm preparing, *Quelques Histoire(s)* a propos du cinema, is that montage is what made cinema unique and different as compared to painting and novel. Cinema as it was originally conceived is going to disappear quite quickly, within a lifetime, and else will take its place. But what made it original, and what will never really have existed, like a plant that has never really left the ground, is montage. The silent movie world felt it very strongly and talked about it a lot. No-one found it. Griffith was looking for something like montage, he discovered the close up. Eisenstein naturally thought that he had found montage... but by montage I mean something much more vast,²⁸³

Additionally, in his book, Deleuze sees the transformation in spiritual automatons as a negative transition, but, between the lines, he celebrates it as a way to develop a multiplicity of voices in the absence of a unified, global point of view. Godard, on the other hand, sees these changes as catastrophic; if in the classic cinema there was hope regarding thought in cinema, it all but disappeared after Auschwitz. As we have already

²⁸³ Cited in Temple, Michael, and James S. Williams. 2000: p.35

discussed above, Malraux and Bataille's analytic tools can be used to understand the changes noted in post-war cinema. Godard further explains his point of view to Youssef Ishaghpour in the book *Cinema, The Archeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*²⁸⁴:

YI: when you say that with Manet began modern painting, that is, cinema, in other words, towards, in fact, forms that think, you add that the flame finally went out at Auschwitz...

JLG: it's a bit sudden, but yes, the possibility of thinking was extinguished at that moment.

YI: you believe there was really thought in cinema before that?

JLG: Even if it wasn't entirely successful, there was hope. (...) There was the idea that it was possible. When Welles made *Citizen Kane*, it was because it was still possible.

JLG: ... My own view is that you could say broadly that it all stopped between 1940 and 1945, but it's more emblematic to say at Auschwitz. And actually people didn't really believe it at first, but there were individuals who thought or believed it...

YI: There was very little Auschwitz effect, at least consciously. Cinema only took it in much later, and perhaps never has absorbed it properly. In the immediate sense, the television-communications-media complex has had a much more seriously destructive effect on cinema and film makers than awareness of the impenetrable obstacle of the extermination camps, quite simply because that was buried, people didn't want to see it...

JLG: Absolutely...²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ The Book was published in France 2000, as a dialogue between the philosopher Youssef Ishaghpour and Godard. The interview had been initiated by Godard after his disappointment from the critics and responds to *Histoire(s) du cinema*. Godard, Jean Luc, and Youssef Ishaghpour. 2005: *Cinema : The Archeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*. English ed. Oxford, UK ; New York: Berg.

²⁸⁵ Ibid: pp. 73-74

In this context, it is important to mention that, except for the Italian cinema (Neo-Realism), Welles, and the new wave group, Godard hardly refers to modern cinema in the *Historie(s)*. The overall mood surrounding Godard's conclusions on the future of cinema is rather pessimistic – it is, as the Lumiere brothers thought, 'an art without a future.' The differences between Deleuze and Godard might be regarded as a formal matter, since the most distinct example that Deleuze uses in his book on thought in modern cinema is Godard's work during the 1980s. Therefore, we can claim that the real hope or promise that Godard provides for the viewer is the film itself. The practice of making *Historie(s)*, a film built almost entirely on the practice of montage, shows that montage is where the future of the cinema rests. Ultimately, it will be helpful first to describe the characteristics and the formation of Godard's montage, according to Deleuze, in order to understand the complexity of this promise, and the kind of 'thinking form' that emerges from Godard's *Hisotire(s)* in relation to the memory of Auschwitz.

The last pages in Deleuze's chapter on "Thought and Cinema" are devoted to an explanation of Godard's 'thinking form' – montage – in his films prior to the 80s. Deleuze is most interested in the way Godard creates a new synthesis, and in doing so, identifies himself with modern cinema. He illustrates that Godard commonly uses pre-determined and well-known rules and categories (like filmic genres). The way he passed them from one to another "may be through straight discontinuity, or equally in imperceptible and continuous manner with 'intercalary genres' or again through recurrence or feedback, with electronic procedures (new possibilities are opening

everywhere for montage).²⁸⁶ Accordingly, Godard's table of montage is conceived as a table of categories. As Deleuze explains:

There is something Aristotelian in Godard. Godard's films are syllogisms, which simultaneously integrate degrees of probability and paradoxes of logic. It is not a matter of a cataloguing procedure or one of 'collage,' as Aragon suggested but of method of constitution of series, each marked by a category (the types of series be very varied). (...) According to Godard, Categories are not fixed once and for all. They are redistributed, reshaped and reinvented for each film. A montage of categories, which is new each time, corresponds to a cutting of categories. The categories must, each time, surprise us, and yet not be arbitrary, must be well founded, and must have strong indirect relations between themselves: they must not be derived from each other, so that their relation is of the 'And..' type, this 'and' must achieve necessity. It is often the case that the written word indicates the category, while the visual images constitute the series: hence the very special primacy of the word over the image and presentation of the screen as blackboard. (...) Categories, then, are never final answers but categories of problems which introduce reflection into the image itself. They are problematic or propositional functions.²⁸⁷

Deleuze's comments on Godard's montage, although not referring specifically to *Histoire(s)*, are still valuable. As such, I will use them in the next pages to discuss Godard's unique and provocative montage in *Histoire(s)*. The goal will be to understand the alternative that Godard creates, not only to cinematic montage, but to the discourse of history and memory as a whole.

²⁸⁶ Deleuze, Gilles. 1989: p.184

²⁸⁷ Ibid: pp. 185-186

5:3: Montage of Auschwitz

After explaining the connection between cinema, thought/unthought and montage, according to Godard and Deleuze, the question still remains: how, in the *Historie(s)* does Godard move beyond verbal declaration into creating alternative modes of representation? In other words, can we trace an alternative mode in the way Godard uses the practice of montage in *Historie(s)*? As I have mentioned above, it is not only the declaration that cinema in a declarative form burned in Auschwitz that engenders a dissection of Godard's connections between montage, thought, and Auschwitz. It is mostly the combination of archival footage and images from the camps that brought this issue to the forefront. The most troubling montage Godard creates in the *Historie(s)* links footage taken by the American director George Stevens in Buchenwald-Dachau²⁸⁸ in April 1945, just after the liberation, with his Hollywood movie from 1950 *A Place in the Sun*. The montage superimposes Elizabeth Taylor and Montgomery Clift, in black and white, over color footage of corpses from the camp. Godard first explains this combination in a 1988 interview before displaying it as a montage in *Historie(s)*:

There is one thing that always touched me in a filmmaker I am not particularly fond of, George Stevens. In *A Place in the Sun* I found a profound feeling of happiness, which I have seldom found in other films, sometimes better ones, a feeling of simple, secular happiness, at one moment, in Elizabeth Taylor. And when I learned that Stevens had filmed the camps and that for the occasion Kodak had lent him the first rolls of

²⁸⁸ Mistakenly is been referred by most of the critics as footage from Auschwitz.

16-millimeter color film, I couldn't figure out how he was then able to make that great shot of Elizabeth Taylor radiating a kind of somber happiness.²⁸⁹

In the following pages, I will discuss literature that focuses on this specific montage as a way to understand Godard's connective logic in *Historie(s)*. The writers here all argue that montage is a thinking form, yet the ways they classify it, relate it to Auschwitz, and explain the reasoning beyond Godard's provocative montage are quite different. Therefore, I will try to describe their main suggestions in order to support my argument on montage as a thinking form, before moving on to formulate my alternative position.

One of the first articles written on this montage is Alan Wright's "Elizabeth Taylor at Auschwitz: *JLG* and the Real Object of Montage." Wright follows Godard's declaration, claiming, "Film exposes the brutal reality of human suffering in the interval between the beauty of a smile and the hell of human suffering in the Final Solution. Montage a la Godard constructs an image of history in the light of an extreme variation between a vision of happiness and the sense of catastrophe."²⁹⁰ In order to understand how it works in film, he elaborates on a theory that Godard had developed during the 1990s while working on *Historie(s)*. Godard's theory on the dubious nature of cinematic representation, for which montage provides the formula of projection, has been well articulated in the film *JLG/JLG*. As he explains, "for Godard the capacity of an image to

²⁸⁹ Interview with Daney in Bellour, Raymond, Mary Lea Bandy, Laurence Kardish, Barbara London, Colin MacCabe, and Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.). 1992: p. 160

²⁹⁰ Wright, Alan. 2000: "Elizabeth Taylor at Auschwitz", in Temple, Michael, and James S. Williams. 2000: p. 52

project in two different directions at once, to display distinct senses of meaning, assumes the status of rule. His theory of montage depends upon drawing a set of connections from a relationship of looks.”²⁹¹ Moreover, with its ability to direct the viewer's gaze to different images, montage, according to Wright, has a special function: “Montage sees a conjunction in the discordant clash of such incongruous images without ever seeking to resolve their irreconcilable difference. Rather than oversee the production of resemblance, it orchestrates a process of radical distantiation.”²⁹²

The most problematic part in Wright’s article is the attempt to explain Godard's intention to use images of Taylor and Auschwitz in montage. The tools that Wright deploys in his clarification come from the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, and its popular culture counterpart, as formulated by Slavoj Zizek:

Elizabeth Taylor’s smile is not like the grimacing rictus of skull. They are terribly different, and it is the gulf between that Godard makes visible. He superimposes one upon the other to show literally how both ‘realities’ inhabit each other. Their true face only appears within the maw of the Real (with a Capital R). The Real, as Lacan was fond of saying, is the Impossible. It founds the symbolic order but is also the object upon which it founders. Slavoj Zizek grants the Sublime a similar function: ‘the Sublime is an object in which we can experience this very impossibility, this is permanent failure of the representation to reach the Thing.’ something is missing. The impossible task of montage as imagined by Godard is to make visible the abysmal structure at the heart of cinematic representation, the absence that haunts every film image, i.e. the traumatic kernel of the Real. Montage shows that which narrowed range of vision renders imperceptible in the image, the unspeakable fact of an unrepresentable Thing. The name of the Thing is Auschwitz. Traditionally, documentary aims to record reality, to act as a witness to

²⁹¹ Ibid

²⁹² Ibid: p. 54

event. Yet Godard wishes to go further. By presenting a fleeting glimpse of happiness and the deadly grip of terror within the same frame, he attempts to document that which can only obtain expression at the extreme limits of comprehension. His version of montage produces an apparition of the Real, a sublime recognition of the impossibility of doing justice to reality.²⁹³

Discussing the Real in connection to Godard's practice of montage in *Historie(s)* might be effective in the context of understanding the horrific combination of Taylor and Auschwitz, which are both part of our experiences and knowledge in a post war period. However, invoking the 'Real' as a tool to interpret artistic intentions always leads to an impasse, as it is been located in the realm of the unknown or the unconscious. If there is something that Godard would like to evoke regarding Auschwitz and Hollywood, it is the fact that they are both located in the 'symbolic order' and are actual components of our power structure. Eventually, I will argue, in order to comprehend the possibilities and impossibilities such a montage summons, we have to use different tools of thinking.

An important attempt at dealing with montage as a thinking form was made by John E. Drabinski in his book, *Godard Between Identity and Difference*, where he tries to support the claim that Godard is a philosopher, yet his method is cinema. Accordingly, the main issues that Godard concerns himself with are the same as in philosophic discourse on the ethical position concerning the Other as the main dialogue between Levinas and Derrida. In their attempts to find a way to explain how the difference between the two forces explains the origin of western culture – the 'Jewgreek' or

²⁹³ Ibid: pp. 54-55

‘Greekjew’²⁹⁴ - Drabinski claims that Godard's cinema is haunted by death of the ‘Other,’ whether it is the female body, the dead Palestinians, or the victims of the Holocaust: all are ignored by the gaze of the movie camera. The goal of Godard's political films since the 70s has been to find a way to give the Other back their voices. An additional goal was to create an ethical cinema which will be well attended and aware of the suffering of the Other wherever they are – here and elsewhere. Consequently the object of investigation that Drabinski as a philosopher is concerned with is the use of language and Death (in his analysis of films like *Two or Three Things I Know about Her*, and *Here and Elsewhere* as explained in chapter 4).

In the chapter that deals with the *Historie(s)*, Drabinski argues that in this project Godard shifts his focus onto the ‘ethical language of cinema’ and specifically focuses on Montage. Moreover, the ghosts of Others who haunt this film are the ghosts of history, in particular the victims of the Holocaust. As he explains: “Godard’s enormously ambitious *Historie(s)* du Cinema is his most haunted work. Godard engages a difficult, yet very important question: what does it mean to think about cinema and the pain of the world at one and the same time? In that question, the concerns of the seventies are drawn into an encounter with the Other of history.”²⁹⁵ While in some points Drabinski’s argument sounds similar to mine, as I will explain in the next pages, the ethical stance that he attributes to Godard is based on the philosophy of Levinas and Derrida, vastly different from the one I develop. Moreover, the function of montage and the goal of identification

²⁹⁴ Drabinski John E. 2008: p. 125

²⁹⁵ Ibid: p. 116

via cinematic gaze are both problematic and distant from the standpoint of this dissertation.

Drabinski's analysis of *Historie(s)* is based on Godard's deployment of the 'logic of interruption'. This logic comes from Levinas's term for relation interruption: "The phenomenon of interruption presupposes two structural moments. First, I must find myself at home somewhere and see both my desire and myself (if the two are much distinct) in that 'somewhere.' second, as sense of the outside, otherness or countersignature must assert itself against where I find myself at home in a way or ways unanticipated and unexpected. Desire and identification are here part of a logic of antidialectical relation – that is, of negation without resolution, though always a negation that upsets or overturns what had been familiar."²⁹⁶ Interruption is the common thread, according to Drabinski, that motivates Godard's *Historie(s)*. Interruption provides a logical structure through which the spectator is invited into identification – the desire to immerse ourselves in unfamiliar cinematic images and sound – which is then overturned by the unexpected footage from Auschwitz. This logic uses montage in the same manner as the form described above with Taylor/Auschwitz.²⁹⁷ Therefore, the unexpected (Auschwitz) interruption reintroduces the problematic aspects of ethical cinema, moreover, that is where Godard redeploys montage.

Consequently, Darbinski coins the term "montage of interruption" to explain Godard's use of montage in the *Historie(s)*. As he perceives it, the language of cinema

²⁹⁶ Ibid: p. 122

²⁹⁷ In his analysis Darbinski uses two different, yet similar, montages: the photo of a boy in Warsaw Ghetto with *Nosferatu* (chapter 4B), and Hitchcock's *the Birds* and shot of underside of a bomber plan from WWII (chapter 3A). Ibid: pp. 137-141.

brings the unrepresentable and immemorial outside of the binary terms of representation and vacuousness. “Montage in *Historie(s)* stages the very welcome of - then disturbance, interruption of – history and memory.” As Darbinski explains, using Deleuzian terms, Godard causes cinema to “think for the first time,” by revolutionizing the structure of montage in order to open up possibilities for image and sound. As such, it fits what Levinas calls the 'ruin of representation': “Representation is ruined in the sense of decayed, leaving in the wake of that decay another sort of signification.”²⁹⁸ What makes montage in the *Historie(s)* so unique is its central technique for provoking and enacting this ruin, abusing cinematic language in order to convey that which cannot otherwise emerge in representation. To explain why it is montage that ruins representation, and not other aspects of the cinematic language like narrative, characters and etc., Dabinski presents a two-pronged argument: first, he argues that montage is what distinguishes cinematic language from literature and paintings; second, montage is a peculiar instance of the intersection of space and time. Montage is a suitable representative element that sustains meaning across multiple sights and sites.

To the question, “what do these experiments in montage accomplish?” Drabinski answers, “In the disturbing and interrupting history with its Other, Godard opens up a new possibility for philosophy as cinematic language – that is, for a philosophy concerned with the pain of the world, the unrepresentable, and the ghostly.”²⁹⁹ In spite of Drabinski's profound analysis of the function of Godard's montage as a philosophical or thinking tool, I found it impossible to follow his explanation or the intention beyond it. If

²⁹⁸ Ibid: p. 133

²⁹⁹ Ibid: p. 144

there are any conclusions that can be drawn from Godard's political films in the 1970s, and in particular a film like *Here and Elsewhere*, these conclusions are that any attempt to provoke identification with victims in cinema is risky. Needless to say, Godard tries to engage the viewer in *Historie(s)*, but, as I will argue, it is not merely the pain and suffering of the 'Other' that he is concerned with. What stands in the core of Godard's political view is the responsibility to cause each one of us to understand how specific power structures have created these depressed situations.

Another philosophical attempt to deal with Godard's montage in the *Historie(s)* was made by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière in two essays: "A Fable without a Moral: Godard, Cinema, (Hi)stoires" and "Godard, Hitchcock and the Cinematographic Image".³⁰⁰ Rancière argues that Godard's practice of montage went through a radical shift from the political films of the 1970s, through the artistic excitements of the 1980s, and into *Historie(s)*. He explains this position by connecting to two traditional aesthetic means of unbinding and rebinding in Western art: the Dialectic and the symbolist. Yet montage, Rancière claims, goes beyond these traditional tools:

Cinematographic montage plays on polarity of these two procedures. In so far as cinema is not merely and 'aesthetic' art but a mixture of representational logic and aesthetic procedures, cinematic montage can be described as a negotiation between three logics: first, the representational logic of the casual plot with its grammar of expression and dynamic of emotions; second, the first aesthetic logic, the 'dialectical' logic of tension

³⁰⁰ This essay has two English versions, one published in Rancière, Jacques. 2006. *Film fables Jacques Rancière ; translated by Emiliano Battista*. Oxford ; New York: Berg: pp. 171-188 The other as part of the collection *Forever Godard*, under the title "Godard, Hitchcock, and Cinematographic Image." In: Williams, James S., Michael Temple, and Michael Witt. 2004: in this chapter I will use both versions to explore Rancière argument.

between heterogeneous elements; third, the second aesthetic logic, the symbolist logic of association.³⁰¹

During the 1960s and the 1970s, Godard's practice of connecting anything to everything can be interpreted, according to Rancière, in the first aesthetic logic of dialectical reading. But the same cannot be claimed in regard to the *Historie(s)*. To emphasize this argument, Rancière invokes the provocative montage of Taylor/Auschwitz. If we follow the logic of dialectic montage, it might lead us to read this connection as an implication that American happiness, or the lover happiness in this film, has been soaking in the forgotten blood of the exterminated Jews.³⁰² In *Historie(s)*, Godard moves beyond these kinds of arguments, because, after all, Stevens filmed the dead of the camps positively, and in so doing, argues Rancière, he redeemed the art of cinema. This demonstrates the conversion of Godard's practice of montage, thus: "Montage is no longer a means of unveiling secrets; it had become a way to establishing a mystery."³⁰³ The linking of images in *Historie(s)*, argues Rancière, bears witness to the mystery of co-presence while framing symbolic representations of the human condition.³⁰⁴

Although I agree with Rancière's analysis of the transformation in Godard's practice of montage from the 1970s to *Historie(s)*, the call for 'mystery linkage', however, regarding the scene above, raises an ethical paradox that subtly prohibits us from trying to deal with these images, turning them into silent icons. "Releasing 'images'

³⁰¹ Rancière in Williams, James S., Michael Temple, and Michael Witt. 2004: p. 225

³⁰² Ibid: p. 225

³⁰³ Ibid: p. 226

³⁰⁴ Rancière, Jacques. 2006: p. 231

from stories” states Rancière, “thus, means increasing their power of infinite interconnection without a space whose aesthetic name is mystery and whose political name is History – history as co-existence and inter-expression”.³⁰⁵ Rancière notes that the montage of Taylor/Auschwitz links to another significant image that testifies to the “mystery” – Gotto’s painting of Mary Magdalene. Here, she embodies “the redemptive power of the Image which will come at the time of the Resurrection.”³⁰⁶ In this context, Rancière reads “Elisabeth Taylor coming out of the water as cinema itself rising from the dead. it is the angle of Resurrection.”³⁰⁷ Therefore, concludes Rancière, fragmentation as employed by Godard brings two aesthetic issues: first, the complex, if cinematic, image is a combination of several functions; second, the liberation of images does not mean restoring to them some pure essence, but it indicates that the symbolist way has overcome the dialectic.³⁰⁸

The harshest critique of Rancière’s analysis is in art historian Georges Didi-Huberman’s book, *Images in Spite of All*. As I mentioned in chapter 1, the book was conceived of as a response to accusations made against Didi-Huberman’s analysis of four photographs taken in Auschwitz by *sonderkommando* prisoners. The images, describing the execution of Jewish women in the summer of 1944, survive in spite of all obstacles. The accusations were aimed at the idea that images of the concentration camps can be displayed in such a way that invites the viewer to imagine these circumstances. The opposition, led by Gerard Wajcman, claims that these images and many like them show

³⁰⁵ Ibid: p. 226

³⁰⁶ Ibid: p. 227

³⁰⁷ Ibid: p. 227

³⁰⁸ Ibid: pp. 227-231

nothing from the *shoah*. Therefore, the only way to deal with this event, according to Wajeman, is to avoid any use of archival images from the camps. Following this logic, the best artistic strategy to deal with the Holocaust is Lanzmann's film, *Shoah*, where he refuses to use any archival photos, yet creates a film through testimony. Needless to say, Didi-Huberman rejects this suggestion as dogmatic and as forcing absolute totality on the mode of Holocaust representation. The contra-argument that Didi-Huberman formulates to this approach is based on the strategy of Godard's montage in the *Historie(s)*. In the first stage, Didi-Huberman calls on the power of montage to produce knowledge in its most fertile, albeit daring, movement. He provides examples of modern original thinkers that used montage to develop alternative frames of thinking like Baudelaire, Levi-Strauss, Warburg, Benjamin, and Bataille. "Montage is valuable only when it doesn't hasten to concluder to close: it is valuable when it opens up our apprehension of the history and makes it complex, not when it falsely schematizes; when it gives us access to the singularities of time and hence to its essential multiplicity."³⁰⁹ Montage, according to Didi-Huberman, is important especially when the image is snatched from the impossible description of reality. Artists in particular, he explains, refuse to give in to the unrepresentable because they – like any person who has faced the destruction of humans by humans – have had an emptying experience. So they make montages out of spite; they too know that disasters are multipliable to infinity.³¹⁰

Regarding Godard's montage in the *Historie(s)*, Didi-Huberman does not doubt the function of montage as a thinking form: "Montage is the art of producing this form

³⁰⁹ Didi-Huberman, Georges. 2008: p. 121

³¹⁰ Ibid: p. 125

that thinks.”³¹¹ In that context, Didi-Huberman argues that Godard’s montage proceeds in the philosophical tradition of dialectic, following the Benjamin and Bataille models rather than the Hegelian one. Thus, montage is the art of making the image dialectic.³¹² Didi-Huberman employs Benjamin’s ‘dialectical image’ as a guideline for his reading of Godard’s montage as a thinking form. He attends to the way Godard uses archival photos without attacking them, rather, he puts them in a rhythm that does not affect their indexicality. Therefore, montage is not an indistinct ‘assimilation,’ a ‘fusion’ or distraction of the elements that constitute it. “To place an image of the camps – or of the Nazi barbarity in general – in montage is not to lose it in a cultural hodgepodge of pictures, film extracts, and literary citation: it is to make something else understood, by showing this image’s *difference from and link with* that which surrounds it in this particular case.”³¹³

This passage is evidence for Didi-Huberman's dismissal of Rancière’s argument that the fragmentation of Godard’s montage in *Historie(s)* is redemptive. Regarding the combined Taylor/Auschwitz scene, Didi-Huberman asks: Why is the link constructed by montage? First, Godard has free choice as an artist. Here is where Godard’s thought intervenes a thought inherent to all forms constructed in the film – the dialectic of the images – the idea that one image could not have been created without the other – therefore the beauty of Taylor’s images unfurls against a background of horror. Moreover, Godard creates history, as well. As such, it is a historical fact that Taylor would not find happiness without the images of Dachau. “What this montage allows us to

³¹¹ Ibid: p. 138

³¹² Ibid

³¹³ Ibid: p. 142

think is that the differences brought into play belong to the same history of the war and cinema: it was simply necessary that the allies win the real war for George Stevens to be able to return to Hollywood and to his little fictional stories.”³¹⁴ For that reason, Didi-Huberman rejects Rancière’s reading of this montage of Taylor as ‘the angel of Resurrection’, as a simplification of a powerful Godardian ‘insertion.’³¹⁵ Didi-Huberman concludes by evoking another angel to counter the theological sense found in Rancière’s interpretation. It is Benjamin’s angel of History, as he, like Godard’s montage, “has not one single point of view to offer on the end of time, and even less on the Last Judgment of the righteous and damned.”³¹⁶

As much as it is attractive to consider Godard as a descendant of the Benjamin tradition, and to define his montage as ‘dialectical image,’ it was Godard himself who dismissed this analogy. When Ishaghpour asked him about the influence of Benjamin, implying similarities between *Historie(s)* and *Paris, The capital of the 19th Century*, Godard replies in surprise: “Oh yes, I didn’t know that... (...) When you, and many others, quote an author or talk about a book, you’ve really read it, but with me, I hear a sound, I think it ought to go here, there’s a mixture....”³¹⁷

³¹⁴ Ibid: p. 146

³¹⁵ Ibid: p. 148

³¹⁶ Ibid: p. 150

³¹⁷ Godard, Jean Luc, and Youssef Ishaghpour. 2005: pp. 20-21

5:4: ISRAEL/ISMAEL

During the conversation with Youssef Ishaghpour in *Cinema, The Archeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*, Godard explains his notion of juxtaposition and its function by using the following provocative example: “No one but me has said that at one point in the extermination camps the Germans had decided to declare a Jew to be a Muslim. Although they all knew it, the survivors, it’s in all the history books, but no one made the juxtaposition not even when war broke out in the Middle East...but that’s an image, one day it struck me as an image, that there should be two words juxtaposed, it’s two images...”³¹⁸

The first time that this kind of juxtaposition appears in Godard’s film is in *Here and Elsewhere*, 1974. As I mention in chapter 4, this was the first time that direct images from the camps appeared in Godard’s film. The specific scene that brings Muselmann into the discussion is found at the end of the film, when Mièville and Godard analyze the scenes from the Middle East, along with other footage on the subject. This scene is located after the discussion on the terrorist attack at the 1972 Munich Olympics, and before the discussion on the power of television. The scene starts with a shot of a French family in their living room watching TV. We can hear the voice of the reporter informing them about the Nazi concentration camps. Mièville was asked not to be so formal while the screen changed to a TV set; in it plays footage showing Nazis burying corpses in the camps. Over those images, we hear Mièville explaining that she read in a book on the camps that the Jews called the dying prisoners 'Muselmann'.

³¹⁸ Ibid: p. 105

In this specific conversation Godard proudly refers to a juxtaposition of images that appears in the end of the last chapter of *Historie(s)* (4B) *Les signes parmi nous* (the signs amongst us). Since this work of montage is central to my investigation of 'history of the present', the thinking form and Auschwitz, I will describe it in detail: From the black frame (a visual leitmotif for Godard in *Historie(s)*³¹⁹) a title slowly appears, saying: RAPPROCHER LES CHOSES – to bring (closer) together the things. Then, we hear a child reciting Muamud Durewish's poem on the Palestinian revolution in Arabic – a sound track taken from *Here and Elsewhere*. These two images appear in flashes on the screen– in the one image, we recognize an Israeli soldier brandishing his weapon; in the other, we see a corpse lying in the street. The next image in this sequence is of a Palestinian woman holding a gun – this image, too, was taken from *Here and Elsewhere*. A title appears again QUI NE SEMBLENT PAS - that didn't seem – DISPOSEES A L'ETRE - willing to be. Here, the sound turns to an old Yiddish song and a photo of Eisenstein appears in the left side of the frame, combined with a close-up image of running film on an old editing machine. The word ISRAEL appears and turns immediately to ISMAEL. A black screen with the title, SI JE NE MABUSE – I'm not Mabuse (Lang's movie 1924), turns to the image of *Mabuse* staring at the viewer like Medusa, accompanied by the title, ALLEMAN - German. This image then transforms to read JUIF – Jew, before changing into a Renaissance painting of the blind Jew, bound and suffering. Then, a black screen turns into video archival footage from the end of WW2, depicting two German soldiers dragging a prisoner's corpse in slow motion. On it

³¹⁹Aumont, Jaques. 1999: p.110

the titles change from ALLEMAN, JUIF, MUSILMAN – German, Jew, Muselmann. The black screen appears again, on it, the title L'ESPECE HUMAINE – mankind.³²⁰

As we can see, in this montage Godard creates a kind of movement in time – it is a historical movement, yet not a chronological one. The starting point is in the present moment: the violent Israeli/Palestinian conflict in the Middle East. The ending point is located in the image from the Nazi camp, while using the terminology of the camp: Jew/Muselmann. If we were try to trace Godard's historiographic movement in this montage, we would find the line crooked and disjointed; it wouldn't lead us simply from cause to effect or effect to cause, and it wouldn't depict the dialectical movement that tries to overcome two different elements and make them into a third. It is in this kind of montage that we understand the complicity of these images and how theoretical discourse, as presented above, failed to read it. There is something more complex in the movement of history that Godard draws our attention to here. After all, Godard evokes here once again the conflict in the Middle East, by reusing the images and sounds from *Here and Elsewhere*; once again, he combines images from the Nazi camps with these images; and they all combine to create a cinematic montage. With this sequence, we return to the central question regarding the kind of history Godard constructs through montage in *Historie(s)*.

Here is where Deleuze's chapter on "Thought and Cinema" becomes effective. Deleuze argues there: "But the essence of cinema – which is not the majority of films –

³²⁰ *Historie(s) du cinéma*. 1998, 4B

has thought as its higher purpose, nothing but thought and its functioning.”³²¹ As such, it will be problematic to try to refer to the practice of montage as mysterious, dialectic, or symbolic, rather, the focus should be on thought as an *act of resistance*. The aims of modern cinema, according to Deleuze, are to develop new conceptual relations and restore our belief in the world. In spite of the religious connotations, Deleuze insists that we need to believe in the world, especially in the aftermath of the Second World War, which was responsible for unleashing something so intolerable on the world, and confronts us with something so inconceivable.³²² The relationship between images constructed by montage, which Deleuze explores, is not about knowledge in the Foucaultian sense of defining knowledge as a social/political structure. It most directly deals with the development of thought that moves beyond cultural limitations, and in this way, reveals the option of resistance. “Thought,” Deleuze claims, “finds itself taken over by exteriority of belief, outside any interiority of mode of knowledge.”³²³ If we use Deleuze’s explanation, it will be possible to observe how Godard exposes the conditions that create thought through montage; thus, by inducing the combinations of thought/unthought or possible/impossible. Eventually, Godard’s goal is to locate the unthinkable and move it behind thoughts of knowledge and power. What Godard submits in this montage is a representation of the four dimensions that create Subjective thought: Knowledge - the relationships that have been formed and formalized; Power – the relationship between forces; Thought - the relationship to the outside, and the Unthought - not an external relationship, but one that lies at its very heart of thought, as that

³²¹Deleuze, Gilles. 1989: p. 168

³²² Ibid: p. 169

³²³ Ibid: p. 175

impossibility of thinking is what hollows out the outside.³²⁴ It is in this combination that the place of the impossible or the unthinkable in history is embodied. What we have to remember, as viewers, is that Godard's montage is not a polemical statement, and is not about propaganda, allegation, or judgment. It is also impossible to claim that Godard deploys the same argument as in *Here and Elsewhere* to expose a paradigm of power through montage, or, more specifically, to expose how power works within history and memory (as a site of struggle). The notion that Godard tries to expose in this montage is the notion of impasse – our limited position in front of these images that are located inside knowledge/power. However, the attempt here is to create resistance, and make it possible to think about the impossible.

In his short essay “Repetition and Stoppage: Guy Debord’s Technique of Montage,”³²⁵ the philosopher Giorgio Agamben notes the similarity between Guy Debord's use of montage and Godard's practice of montage in the *Historie(s)*. Agamben’s definition for the practice of cinematic montage is based on simply exposing the two transcendental conditions of montage: repetition and stoppage. At the core of this condition is the realization that “there’s no need to shoot film anymore but just to repeat and stop.” At this point, Agamben goes on an in-depth exploration of these conditions, thus Stoppage is the power of interrupt, the ‘revolutionary of interruption’ Benjamin spoke of. This break is not only a pause, it is non-coincidence, a disjunction between

³²⁴ Here I am using Deleuze’s terms to explain the condition of thought according to Foucault. See Deleuze, Gilles, and Sean Hand. 1988: pp. 96-98

³²⁵ Agamben, Giorgio. 1997: “Repetition and Stoppage: Guy Debord’s Technique of Montage” in David, Catherine, Paul Sztulman, Documenta GmbH., and Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungs GmbH. 1997: pp. 70-73

sound and meaning. It is the prolonged hesitation between image and meaning. It is not merely a matter of chronological cessation, but rather a deep freeze that works on the image itself, pulling it away from the narrative power to exhibit it as such. Accordingly, in answering the question, what is repetition? Agamben appeals to the modern philosophical discourse on repetition by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Gilles Deleuze. “All four” explains Agamben, “have shown us that repetition is not the return of the identical; it is not the same as such that returns. The force and the grace of repetition, the novelty it brings us, is the return as the possibility of what was. Repetition restores the possibility of what was, renders it possible anew; it’s almost a paradox. To repeat something is to make it possible anew.”³²⁶ Agamben notices that here lies the proximity between repetition and memory – restoring possibility to the past – and moreover that it is also the definition of cinema. Thus, concludes Agamben, “cinema does the opposite of the media. What is always given in the media is the fact, what was, without its possibility, its power: we are given the fact before which we are powerless. The media prefer a citizen who is indignant, but powerless. That’s exactly the goal of TV news. It is the bad form of memory, the kind of memory that produces the man of *ressentiment*.”³²⁷ Yet, by placing repetition in the center stage, Debord and Godard open up a zone of undecidability between the real and the possible. Agamben explains the historical lessons that are imbued in this act: “Hannah Arendt once defined the ultimate experience of the

³²⁶ Ibid: p. 70

³²⁷ Ibid

camps as the principle of ‘everything is possible,’ even the horror we are now being shown. It is in this extreme sense that repetition restores possibility.”³²⁸

Finally, Godard himself refers to this horrific montage (as described above) four years later in his film *Our Music* (2004). This film calls us to once again encounter past and present atrocities. Located in Sarajevo after the war, it brings together montage that evokes memories of the Second World War. The reconstruction effort in Sarajevo, an interview with the Palestinian poet Maumoud Durush (who plays himself) by an Israeli journalist on the conflict, and Godard himself lecturing to film students on the power of the cinematic image. During the lecture, Godard invokes, once again, images from the camps with the title Juif/Muselmann and the history of the conflict. As he explains to students, one of the problems of cinema is its inability to develop differences between a shot and its reverse, for example between images of man and a woman.³²⁹ The same problem, he continues, arises when we deal with historical and actual images. Here, Godard once again creates a montage of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, this time with two similar photographs describing refugees on boats. In this scene, Godard holds in his hands the two images, and moves them back and forth in front of the camera. He explains: “In 1948 the Israeli walked in the water to reach the Promised-Land. The Palestinian walked in the water to drown – Shot and Reverse shot – the Jew becomes the stuff of fiction, the Palestinian of documentary.”

Consequently, Godard repeats again and again the problems he notices in juxtaposition of the Jew/Muselmann/Israel/Palestine, as he described to Ishaghpour (see

³²⁸ Ibid: p.71

³²⁹ Thus by presenting images from Hawk’s movie.

above). Hence, the movement in his montage is a recurrent leap from past to present and back. As he keeps returning to this montage, it becomes evident that the goal here is not to describe a specific political situation or a social reaction; above all, Godard has no intention to suggest solutions or reconciliations to the political conflict or the presentation of images. As I tried to illuminate in this chapter, Godard is merely interested in provoking the problems that have been constructed by montage, thus to deduce the tension between thought/unthought.

Epilogue

*Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.*³³⁰ Walter Benjamin

*This has always been the aim of the history taught in schools: to teach ordinary people that they got killed and that this was very heroic.*³³¹ Michel Foucault

*(From a strictly political point of view fascism and Nazism have not been overcome, and we still live under their sign.)*³³² Giorgio Agamben

In the initial proposal to this project four years ago, I included my own family's story as an example of the way the memory of Auschwitz has been transmitted and transformed between the first and third generation. This story gave me the basic idea for and insight into how History and history are intermingled. Moreover, this story reveals not only the constant changes surrounding the memory of Auschwitz, but the complex relationship we develop with the past from our position in the present. Concluding this project, I would like to return to this story once again in order to explain my motivation / argument.

³³⁰ Benjamin, Walter, and Peter Demetz. 1986. *Reflections : Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writing*. New York: Schocken Books: p. 255

³³¹ Foucault, Michel, and Sylvère Lotringer. 1996: p. 122.

³³² Agamben, Giorgio. 1993: p. 62

In 1955, exactly ten years after the end of World War II and the liberation of the Nazi camps, *TIME Magazine* published a special memorial edition to mark this event. On the cover the editor chose a photograph that had been shot in one of the Nazi concentration camps, probably by an American soldier, after their liberation. In it a group of scrawny skeletal prisoners still wearing their striped dirty uniforms look with their ‘Muselmann’s gaze’ right into the camera. It is the kind of photo that, since 1945, has haunted us and keeps disturbing our everyday routines. Over the years, these types of photographs have become an icon to the atrocity of war. Paradoxically, although these images are still deemed horrible, they have become increasingly familiar and widespread, reappearing and being recycled in Holocaust museums and sites of memory, history books, memorial days, TV shows, films and more. However, in 1955 when my grandfather saw this photograph for the first time, it had a different effect.

In 1955 my father, looking to practice his English reading skills, as he was preparing for his high school English exam, had bought this American magazine and brought it home. Glancing at its cover my grandfather was paralyzed. In the photo he recognized, or he thought to have recognized the man he believed to be his brother who, according to some rumors, had died in Auschwitz during the war. Although he was aware of the fact of his brother’s death for almost 10 years, this encounter with that image was nevertheless shocking. For the first time, he came to terms with his family’s horrific destiny. Suddenly, History (with a capital H): the war, the camps, intermixed with history: his parents, brother, sister who all “disappeared” in Auschwitz. One glance into the photograph and his general acknowledgement of the past turned into verification of fact. Divested, he broke down in tears.

Nobody really knows what happened to my grandfather's brother during the war. Historical information suggests the following scenarios: in 1943 Ezidor Shebbi, together with his family, had been forced to depart from their hometown in Thessalonica, Greece in one of the Nazi's massive train transfers of Jews into Auschwitz. Once in Auschwitz he, and 96% of the members of Thessalonica's Jewish community, found their immediate death in the gas chambers. A second possibility is that being a young strong man he may have been chosen to work in the camp and probably died as a result of the inhumane conditions, or killed by a Nazi soldier after a short time. Any of these assumptions suggest that the prisoner that my grandfather recognized on the cover of the magazine was probably was not his brother. After all the American and British army photographers who had shot most of the photographs published after the war in the West, were documenting the camps and the prisoners, after the liberation.³³³ These documentations all describe only survivors of the camps located in Germany. The Red Army, which liberated the prisoners at Auschwitz and all the other camps in Poland, hardly documented the prisoners, and if they did, the chances that those photographs would end up on the cover of an American magazine, during the middle of the cold war, are very slim.

Consequently we can say, with a high degree of certainty, that the prisoner in the photograph on the cover of *TIME Magazine* in 1955 was not my grandfather's brother, but rather one of the survivors from the Nazi concentration camps in Germany. However, as far as my grandfather was concerned there was no doubt that the man in the

³³³Zelizer, Barbie. 1998. *Remembering to Forget : Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: pp. 49-56

photograph was his brother. He did not know or care about the historical facts, this photograph was for him a clear testimony of what had transpired and it somehow helped him to comprehend his tragedy. For years he kept the photo as a sacred remnant of his brother, mourning and crying over it like the gravestone he would never have.

My father as well had no doubt about the significance of this photo. Although he never met his uncle, for him this supposed photo of his uncle as a prisoner symbolized and verified every aspect of the Zionist ideology demanding the right for a Jewish State. A year after when he was recruited to serve in the Israeli Defense Army, he carried with him this image which motivated him through his difficult times, like the 1956 war - the first of many that he would participate in. Once again History and his-story intertwine, driving and determining the horror circle, only this time in a different geopolitical area.

My reaction to this family history is much more complex. On the one hand, I am well aware of the historical facts and circumstances that put in question the possibility of identifying the prisoner in this photograph as any of my grandfather's relatives. I am most certain that the individual in the photo was misrecognized; hereby, I can only sympathize with my grandfather's traumatic encounter. On the other hand, as with most of those in my generation who were born and raised surrounded by the Holocaust's legacy, photographs, and other representations, I find myself uncertain in my position toward the "history lesson" and empty slogans like "never again". My position in history has brought me to become highly suspicious about the "historical lessons" that my father's generation, as products of the Zionist ideology, have embodied or molded for us.

From this position I can only offer another look at Holocaust-related photographs³³⁴, a repetitive gaze which is very conscious of the paradoxical movement embedded in it – to repeat something is to make it or understand it possibly anew.

Looking back on my proposal, I realize that although the object of my investigation shifted from Holocaust-related photographs to the broader topic of artistic practices, the questions that motivated my interest in the subject are as relevant now as they were at the beginning. I structured our investigation of Boltanski and Godard's works around three general questions on art, history, and power. These questions provided a point of departure for my exploration, and helped with the formation of my arguments. At first, I tried to understand the presence of history in both Boltanski's and Godard's works. In other words, I wanted to understand why contemporary artists choose to confront history or historiography in their works. As I explained in this project, their motivations come from different reasons and events. There is a strong connection between personal experiences of historical event and artistic reactions. In the case of Godard, it was his visit to the Middle East that prompted him to look back into history. Boltanski's installations are imbedded within his own family and personal history, haunted by the memories from Second World War. Above all, as I have presented in this project, these artists use history in order to understand the conditions of the present moment. Therefore, I will argue that both Boltanski and Godard are historians of the present. Secondly, it was important for me to understand their specific use of the

³³⁴ This term is used by Andrea Liss to include not only the photos of the atrocity of the camps (aftermath), but photos that were taken before the war which evoke the lost, for example photos that document the life of Jewish communities before the war as present in the Tower of Faces, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. See: Liss, Andrea. 1998.

Holocaust and Auschwitz in their works. Here we notice how this event is perceived, as a reflection of social structures, and our understanding of the way power operates has grown accordingly. In this respect, Boltanski and Godard's works fall, both directly and indirectly, under the theoretical framework formulated by Foucault, Ophir, and Agamben. The third question relates specifically to the art world and art practice, focusing on the attempt to expose how artistic methods and technique function as apparatuses of power. In other words, I wanted to understand and expose how power suffuses art through artistic practices. Here, I followed Godard's own investigation of cinematic montage, and Boltanski's challenges of archival practice. Therefore, it was through their paradigms that I was able to consider alternatives.

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