The Coming Together of Times

Jean-Luc Godard's Aesthetics of Contemporaneity and the Remembering of the Holocaust

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ABSTRACT This article reads Jean-Luc Godard's film essay *Histoire*(*s*) *du cinéma* (1988–1998) as a contemporary artistic endeavour to resist the synchronising, standardising time of global capital, the pervasive uniformity of the global super-present, brought about by today's televisual and digital communications, which threatens to trivialise the different processes of memory and history, as well as art and culture in general. Taking its point of departure in Bernard Stiegler's observation that the final stage of capitalism is the control and synchronisation of "available brain time," the article argues that Godard's work opposes this control and synchronisation of our minds through an aesthetics of contemporaneity. The argument is based on the development of a theoretical framework that combines recent theories of contemporaneity with reflections on the politics of images. Focusing on the ways in which the Holocaust is remembered in *Histoire(s) du cinéma*, the article deals with Godard's image-political creation of temporal contemporaneity through a montage of clips of old films and newsreels, photographs, stills, images of paintings, new footage, advertisements, music, sound and voice recordings, textual citation, narration and commentary.
KEYWORDS Jean-Luc Godard, Contemporaneity, Holocaust, Image-politics, Time-experience

Towards the end of his grand film essay *Histoire*(*s*) *du cinéma*, Jean-Luc Godard declares himself an 'enemy of our times', an enemy of 'the totalitarianism of the present as applied mechanically every day more oppressive on a planetary scale', and of the 'faceless tyranny that effaces all faces for the systematic organization of the unified time of the moment. This global, abstract tyranny, which I try to oppose from my fleeting point of view'.[1] The aim of this article is to argue that *Histoire*(*s*) *du cinéma* can be seen as what Godard calls 'a thinking form' that tries to resist the synchronising, standardising time of global capital, the pervasive uniformity of the global super-present, brought about by today's televisual and digital communications, which threatens to trivialise the different processes of memory and history, as well as art and culture in general – instead of allowing for a contemporaneity of difference.[2] According to philosopher Bernard Stiegler, the final stage of capitalism is the control and synchronisation of what the former CEO of the major French TV channel TF1, Patrick le Lay, called 'available brain time':

Our era is characterised by synchronisation. The programme industries attempt to synchronise the activities of everyone's consciousness; a control over the life of souls through marketing and television, which establishes the psycho-power characteristic of our time. [...] From now on wherever you go, you have the same modes of production and distribution. This globalisation comes at the price of a synchronisation of modes of life and thought. Today, this becoming is extended to all aspects of our lives and destroys the singularity of existence through consumerism, which liquidates life skills [*les savoir-vivre*].[3]

I will try to argue that Godard's work opposes this control and synchronisation of our minds through *an aesthetics of contemporaneity*, and will also consider how such an aesthetics of contemporaneity relates to the case of the memory of the murder of the European Jews during World War II.

As has been remarked by the philosopher Giorgio Agamben and others, one of the principal concerns of Godard's work is the constitutive link between history and cinema. Godard – following up upon the question, which was posed initially by fellow post-World War II filmmaker Guy Debord – addresses the historical task of cinema.[4] Therefore what interests me here is also related to the question of the image, history, and our relation to images, which has gained ever more importance since Guy Debord's classic analysis of the 'becoming-image' of capital that gave us the name of the society of the spectacle, where our very communicative nature, our language and images are separated in an autonomous sphere, and in which the entire social production has been falsified.[5] It seems, however, that our relationship to images is even more complex than it appeared to be in 1967. The spectacle is not merely separated and external to us, it is part of who we are, part of our consciousness, and it strongly influences the ways in which we experience the world, each other, and ourselves. Thus, the new forms of image production and image circulation in contemporary media culture, not least on the Internet, bring the issue of circulation, or what filmmaker and theorist Hito Steyerl terms 'circulationism', to the fore. Circulationism is connected not with the art of making images, but with the postproduction, launching, and acceleration of images – and with the public relations of images across social networks that both establish and tear apart 'communities loosely linked by shared attention deficit'.[6] How is it possible for contemporary artistic practice to critically react to this circulationism, the uniformed time of the global super-present, and its concomitant attention deficit? And how might something like the events to which we refer by the name of Shoah or the Holocaust still be actualised and remembered in our historical present?

I

Recent studies in the aesthetics of memory have been occupied with the changes in our conception of memory where we have substituted a model of recall – or what has been called the original plenitude and subsequent loss-model that sees memory as something which is fully formed in the past, and thus which is assumed to have been experienced once in its completeness, and as something that it is subsequently a matter of maintaining and keeping alive – by a more constructivist understanding of the work of memory.[7] The latter stresses – among other things – the fact that memory is always an act of the present. Our relations and images of the past are always conditioned by the present, and our point of departure is always the present, not the past in itself.

In the following I would like to turn my attention to the quality of this present, to the quality of *our* present, as I would claim that the present present is different from past presents – so the present from which *we* try to remember the Holocaust is different from the present from which our predecessors tried to remember it. It is different from Primo Levi's presents of 1946 and 1986, it is different from Anselm Kiefer's present of the 80s and maybe also from his presents of the 90s and 00s. I will do this through a reading of Godard's film.

A crucial difference is of course the difference between the living memory of the firsthand witnesses and the so-called postmemory of the second and subsequent generations, but I think that this generational change within Holocaust memory should also be seen in relation to a broader change of the temporal quality of the present if we want to understand Holocaust remembrance today.[8] Not least when the topic is Holocaust remembrance in contemporary art – and how the Holocaust might relate to our very understanding of the contemporary. In relation to memory, the temporality of the survivors is necessarily different from that of the postgenerations. As firsthand witnesses and thus as contemporaries with the historical events, the survivors occupy a different temporal register – which also has its own internal differences regarding gender, language, victim, perpetrator, bystander etc. Therefore contemporary art dealing with the aesthetics of memory in relation to the Holocaust needs to try to thematise or reflect this condition of contemporaneity between different temporal registers, their co-existence.

The change of the temporal quality of the present, I will argue, drawing upon philosopher Peter Osborne's and art historian Terry Smith's recent theories, has to do with the fact that the general condition of our everyday life and of artistic production today is one of contemporaneity,

where the urgent question of being with time, or being genuinely 'contemporary', is a matter of grasping a coexistence of different temporalities and various 'ways of being in relation to time'. Thus, in recent decades we have seen a worldwide shift from modernity and postmodernity to contemporaneity, perhaps most evident in the fact that 'contemporary art' has substituted 'modern art' as a descriptor of the art of our historical present. It should of course be noted here that the historical beginning of the present present is debatable: Did our – or perhaps more objectively *the* – present begin when WWII ended, with '68', the fall of the Berlin Wall, 9/11 or some other time? And what about the so-called Second and Third Worlds?

Thus, before turning to the question of the aesthetics of memory and discussing Jean-Luc Godard's video work *Histoire(s) du cinéma* as a contemporary artistic work of Holocaust memory, I would like to begin with some general reflections on the quality of *our* present understood as being defined by *contemporaneity*, that is, the coming together of different times, and the temporal complexity that follows from the coming together in the same cultural space of heterogeneous cultural clusters generated along different historical trajectories and in other localities. As an integral part of the shift from modernity and postmodernity to contemporaneity, cultures and art worlds have become global phenomena in the sense that they have become interconnected and contemporaneous with each other, forming global networks. As Peter Osborne and Terry Smith observe, the idea of contemporaneity as a *condition* is new, and Osborne stresses that:

> what seems distinctive and important about the changing temporal quality of the historical present over the last few decades is best expressed through the distinctive conceptual grammar of con-temporaneity, a coming together not simply 'in' time, but *of* times: we do not just live or exist together 'in time' with our contemporaries – as if time itself is indifferent to this existing together – but rather the present is increasingly characterised by a coming together of *different but equally 'present'* temporalities or 'times', a temporal unity in disjunction, or a *disjunctive unity of present times*.[9]

This global contemporaneity means that new communication technologies and social and mass media play a decisive role both in shaping the field of art and culture and in the ways in which art and culture themselves function and create meaning. The internet in particular has produced an extreme spatial and temporal compression, which alters the ways in which we experience places, events and time as everything happens as

if contemporaneously. This geopolitical condition of contemporaneity not least occasions negotiations of identity, subjectivity and community on a range of different levels as it becomes increasingly evident that our being is a networked and connective being – which also raises the important question of the praxis of memory on these contemporary conditions.

The shift from the modern to an era of contemporaneity is connected to the realisation that time is not an empty duration unaffected by the events that fill it, and that time itself has a history. Time is constructed, multiple and asymmetrical, neither homogeneous nor blank, and there are many different co-existing ways of being in time and belonging to it. Ernst Bloch referred to the alternative, unseen and according to the modern nation-state untimely pasts as the temporality of 'non-contemporaneous contemporaneities'.[10] As Osborne observes, the term 'contemporaneity' should not be seen as a simple periodising category, but rather as a designator of the changing temporal quality of the historical present, which is not simply a coming together *in* time, but *of* times. 'The contemporary' points to an awareness of what it is to be in the present whilst being attentive to the presence of other kinds of time. It designates a multi-chronicity and a thickening of the present in contemporary experience, an extension of the present beyond the immediate instant back and forward in time and across the globe. 'Contemporaneity', Terry Smith claims, 'consists precisely in the constant experience of radical disjunctures of perception, mismatching ways of seeing and valuing the same world, in the actual coincidence of asynchronous temporalities, in the jostling contingency of various cultural and social multiplicities, all thrown together in ways that highlight the fast-growing inequalities within and between them'.[11]

Thus, the idea of contemporaneity undermines the modern orientation towards a particular future and the concomitant understanding of history as a linear teleological development in time. As Osborne has argued, modernist art must be understood according to 'a temporal logic of negation [whereby] it makes its claim on the present, through its negation of past forms, in the name of a particular, qualitatively different future'.[12] The temporal logic of modernity is oriented towards a qualitatively different future and thus implies an idea of historical linearity. The all-encompassing history authorised by modernity claims to have unified a vast plurality – in particular in the 'imagined communities' of the nation-states – but, as historian Harry Harootunian has pointed out, this history 'is actually undermined by the special histories and coexisting mixed temporalities that have steadily resisted its assimilating ambition'.[13]

What we seem to be witnessing now is an extension of the present

with no orientation towards one particular all-encompassing future. As the editors of a recent issue of the *e-flux journal* remarks, 'The phase of contemporary art has [...] been characterized [...] as a reformatting of time into a perpetual present. The contemporary is the now that never ends, the art that circles itself at the tail end of history looking back on defunct ideologies, archiving and polishing them for a future that never arrives'.[14] One could argue, with Terry Smith, that we live in a time of unsettlement in which the modern sense that all societies were moving toward a better future has been irrevocably lost (Auschwitz made that very clear); and that we have come to realise that we are all living in a condition of permanent transition, facing uncertain, unclear futures. Our highly differentiated and multidirectional contemporaneity within this shared uncertainty is what makes us no longer modern. Contemporaneousness is 'the pregnant present of the original meaning of *modern*, but without its subsequent contract with the future'.[15] Contemporaneity, Smith remarks, includes within it many revived pasts and wished-for futures that are all being lived out as live present. They are all possible, and, as distinct from the modern era, there is no overriding narrative to decide which is which – a world-picturing that thereby also runs the risk of becoming too permissible in its affirmation of pluralism.

This global or planetary uncertainty about the future (and having entered the so-called anthropocene the uncertainty includes the planet itself) is one of the main reasons for the recent upsurge in memory and memory culture. Historian Pierre Nora speaks of 'the age of commemoration', which he sees as intersecting with two major historical phenomena: a temporal 'acceleration of history' and a social 'democratization of history'.[16] The democratization of history is related to the marked emancipatory trend 'of all those forms of memory bound up with minority groups for whom rehabilitating their past is part and parcel of reaffirming their identity'.[17] The acceleration of history, which is the most important notion in our context, signals that the most continuous or permanent feature of the contemporary world is no longer continuity or permanence but change, which is an increasingly rapid change, 'an accelerated precipitation of all things into an ever more swiftly retreating past'.[18] A condition of permanent transition, as Smith calls it. This development has broken the unity of historical time, whose straightforward linearity traditionally bound the present and the future to the past. In the past it was a particular image or idea of the future that determined what different communities needed to remember of the past to prepare that imagined future. The imagined future gave meaning to the present,

which was merely a link between the past and that future, which could either take the shape of a restoration of the past, the shape of progress, or of revolution. Today we are uncertain as to which shape the future will take and we no longer use such interpretations of the past to organise history to the same degree. Because of this uncertainty about the future and our inability to anticipate it – and thus to anticipate what coming generations need to know about us in order to understand their own lives – the present puts us under an obligation to remember any phenomenon, trace or sign that might be significant. 'In other words, it is the end of any kind of teleology of history – the end of a history whose end is known – that places on the present this urgent 'duty to remember' [...] that is so much talked about', Nora remarks.[19] The historical and temporal continuity of modernity has been broken and the present no longer just functions like a bridge between the past and the future. The present has emerged as an autonomous category for understanding our own lives – which is why memory, as an act of the present, a re-presentation belonging to the present, has become so important.

The intensified global temporal and cultural interconnectivity and the changing perceptions of time and space also affect the status and memories of the events to which we refer by the name of the Holocaust. As cultural critic Andreas Huyssen observes,

> memory of the Holocaust as image reservoir, cipher of ultimate suffering, and model for working through the past [has] migrated into other historical contexts: Latin America after the military dictatorships, South Africa after apartheid, and Asia in relation to past and present-day instances of massive violence such as the Indian partition, the Korean comfort women, and the recent Hindu pogroms on Muslims in India. Today, the history of the violent twentieth century is being commemorated in very diverse artistic works across the globe.[20]

The idea of contemporaneity as an intensified global interconnectedness of different times is therefore inseparable from the circulation of images and the role of images in the global spectacle. The world is becoming 'uniformed' or 'common' not least because of the global circulation of images.

On the background of this general diagnosis of the historical present from which we remember the Holocaust as being defined by contemporaneity – understood as the coming together of different times, which at the same time are subjected to synchronisation and standardisation, I will now return to Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinemá* as a work of Holocaust memory.

II

In continuation of Osborne's observation: 'To claim something is contemporary is to make a claim for its *significance in participating in the actuality of the present*',[21] we might ask how the Holocaust may be said to be made contemporary in Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*? How does the temporality of the Holocaust appear as active in the historical present? How does the time of the Holocaust come together with other times in the present contemporaneity?

Histoire(s) du cinéma is a 264-minute video essay on the history or histories of cinema and its relation to the 20th century, which was completed in 1998 – making it still somewhat contemporary also in a more quotidian sense: Godard may be said to have had an intuition of the changes in our current experience of time. It consists of four chapters, each one divided into two parts, making for a total of eight episodes, and originates from an experimental series of improvised talks and lectures Godard gave at the Montreal Film School in the late 70s. Rather than delivering traditional lectures, Godard proposed a form of historical cinematic montage where he showed one of his own films along with clips from a range of other films as a basis for reflections on cinema history and his own place within it.[22] The opening two long episodes were eventually broadcast on French television in 1988 and 1989, and the subsequent six episodes were screened at festivals and museums in 1997 and 1998. In 1998 the work was released as a complete and re-edited whole on VHS, and in 2008 it became available on DVD. Made for TV and later VHS and DVD, the work is meant to be seen in the everyday environment of the viewer: on her TV or computer where she encounters or is bombarded with a dizzying number of images every day – where her brain is made available by the programme industries, according to Stiegler.

The video essay weaves together clips of old films and newsreels, photographs, stills, images of paintings, new footage, advertisements, music, sound and voice recordings, textual citation, narration and commentary, primarily by Godard himself, but also by the actors Juliette Binoche and Julie Delpy, and writers like André Malraux, Ezra Pound and Paul Celan. Every now and then we also see Godard at his desk with his books and his typewriter, smoking a cigar while orchestrating it all. In an experimental form which abandons the linear development of narrative cinema in favour of a kind of contemporaneity, as I will argue in the following, the work layers, superimposes, and juxtaposes all the filmic, musical, textual, voice-over, and art historical citations on top of

each other, dealing with a number of different subjects ranging from film and politics to globalisation, memory, genocide, art and God.[23]

The work is characterised by an emphatic use of iconic images from mostly the liberation of the concentration camps and the cinematic representation of the Holocaust. Speaking of cinema as a fallen medium, Godard remarks 'the fact of the concentration camp, that it was not shown [by cinema], it wasn't answered'.[24] In fact, it was of course recorded on film – apart from George Stevens, to whom I shall return, e.g. by Samuel Fuller and Alfred Hitchcock – but it was not *shown* by cinema in Godard's understanding. Thus, a recurring accusation in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* concerns the failure of cinema to fulfil its duty to be 'present' at the Nazi death camps, and he famously claims 'cinema did not manage to fulfill its role':

> Naïvely, it was thought that the New Wave would be a beginning, a revolution. Well, it was already too late. Everything was over. It ended the moment the concentration camps were not filmed. At that very instant, the cinema totally failed in its duty. Six million people were killed or gassed, principally Jews, and the cinema was not there. Yet, from *The Great Dictator* to *La règle du jeu*, it had announced the entire drama. By not filming the concentration camps, cinema gave up completely. It is like the parable of the good servant who died from not having been used. Cinema is a means of expression in which the expression has disappeared. It has remained the means.[25]

'Forgetting extermination is part of extermination', as he says in Chapter 1A, and the video-essay is to a large extent an endeavour to think critically about the images, writings, histories and the lack thereof that have reflected and commemorated the Holocaust.[26] Abandoning traditional narrativity, he explores cinema as a way of rethinking time, memory and history when fractured by atrocity.

Godard's history writing is based on a plural concept of history that also reflects the condition of contemporaneity. The unified big history is unachievable, but all the innumerable potential histories contained in it are not. They are all possible histories that do not pretend to be the only possible one, but merely possible.[27] The parenthetical 's' in the title *Histoire(s) du cinéma* indicates in itself the contemporaneity of a number of different histories: there is no *one* history – and there is also a double-meaning of the s in the sense of the histories of cinema as well as *its* histories, that is, history through or *as* cinema. Furthermore, the title of Chapter 1A, 'Toutes les histoires' (All the Stories), suggests not only that history, like public memory, is constituted by multiple histories

from a variety of competing perspectives, but also that history must include all perspectives and voices, including the voices of Hitler, Himmler and a number of other perpetrators.[28] I therefore understand philosopher Jacques Rancière to a certain extent when he criticises Godard for linking heterogeneous elements into a homogeneous layer of mystery, 'where all yesterday's conflicts become expressions of intense co-presence', and for 'constructing the world of "images" as a world of general co-belonging and inter-expression'.[29] I would argue, however, that this co-presence is not to be deplored, but to be appreciated as a possible actualisation of different temporalities and pasts, and of different relations to these temporalities and pasts. By juxtaposing documentary footage, photographic evidence next to fiction film – also including pornographic movies, popular songs, propaganda, recorded voices and testimony – and by mixing texts, soundtracks, music and double exposures, by not hesitating to mount the historical archive with the artistic repertory of global cinema, the assemblages of *Histoire(s) du cinéma* invite us to reflect upon how to distinguish 'a just image' (*une image juste*) from 'just an image' (*juste une image*) of different pasts, not least of the Holocaust.

III

One of the references to the filmic representation of the Holocaust is the use of two clips from Claude Lanzmann's nine-hour documentary *Shoah* from 1985. In accordance with the author of *The Postmodern Condition*, philosopher Jean-François Lyotard's claim that the Holocaust defies images and cannot be represented without slipping away, Lanzmann's film rejects representation in images and music in favour of the unfolding of the memories of the survivors and witnesses in the present. Thus, all archival images are banned and the sublime art of the unpresentable is the only art adequate and ethically proper to the Holocaust.[30]

The first citation of *Shoah* is the monumental image of the railway tracks leading to Auschwitz, which is also a citation of Alain Resnais's *Nuit et brouillard* (*Night and Fog*) from 1955. The image signifies all that cannot be seen: the millions of victims that Lanzmann's survivors give testimony to, and the destruction of evidence of the genocide, of which the image has become an icon. The second citation of *Shoah* is the recycling, in extreme slow motion, of the image of Henryk Gawkowski – a retired Polish train driver hired by Lanzmann to drive a locomotive to Treblinka – leaning out of the locomotive making a gesture by drawing his finger across his throat to symbolise the immanent death of the passengers who were to arrive in Treblinka. Godard dissolves Lan-

zmann's ban on images by installing the very image used to advertise the film *Shoah* into a sequence of archival images, which were the very ones Lanzmann refused to show. He emphasises the ambiguity of Gawbowski's gesture between an image of the past, a reanimation of the past and a reenactment of the past even more strongly by mounting the image from *Shoah* between two iconic photographs of the Holocaust and two movie clips of Hitler. The first photograph that enframes the image from *Shoah* is taken from the liberation of Bergen-Belsen and shows survivors waiting for their ration of soup. The second photograph shows a line of naked women holding on to their infants before being murdered by the Einsatzgruppen – taken either during the massacre of the Jewish population of Kiev in September 1941, or during the massacre of the Jews from the Mizocz Ghetto, then in Poland, today in Ukraine, in October 1942.[31]

Through the montage of Lanzmann's film, photographs, and movie clips of Hitler Godard implies that the ban on images imposed by Lanzmann and Lyotard among others in the 1980s is no longer an adequate way of representing and actualising the Holocaust. The ethics of silence and the sublime aesthetics of the unpresentable, which was an important contribution to the debates on the representation of the Holocaust at that point in time, cannot stand alone any longer. Today, if we do not actualise the images that do exist in spite of all – to use the title of a seminal book by art historian Georges Didi-Huberman – the generations born afterwards run the risk of losing sight of the actual historical events and of not being able to imagine what it is that cannot be represented and put into words, music and images.

There is thus an important temporal-historical dimension of the difference between the history writing and Holocaust memory work of Lanzmann and Godard. The present of the 1980s is different from the present present because of the time distance to the events and the dying out of a living memory of them, but also because of the changing status of the Holocaust, which has migrated into other historical contexts and has been supplemented by a number of other genocides and war atrocities, adding a greater complexity to what might be called the prehistories of the present. For instance, this situation is depicted in a sequence in chapter 3A where images of the Holocaust are mounted with images of the Vietnam, Bosnian and Gulf wars, while elsewhere images of the Rwandan genocide appear.

One of the most widely discussed sequences in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* occurs in the last minutes of chapter 1A, when Godard declares: 'and if George Stevens hadn't used the first 16 millimetre colour film at Ausch-

witz and Ravensbrück, Elizabeth Taylor would never have found a place in the sun'. The fragment involves the superimposition within a single frame of Stevens's images of Holocaust victims, a stop-started sequence from Stevens's film *A Place in the Sun* (1951) with a swimsuit-clad Elizabeth Taylor, and Mary Magdalene from Giotto's *Noli me tangere* (1304–6). Giotto's painting is tilted ninety degrees so it looks as if Mary Magdalene is descending like an angel to draw Elisabeth Taylor up towards the heavens. Godard's voice accompanies two images from Goya's *Disasters of War* series of etchings (1810–20) and pauses before the line about Elizabeth Taylor's happiness. During the pause the screen fades to black, and a colour image of bodies of Holocaust victims piled in railway wagons at Dachau appears out of the darkness, while gradually the black and white image of Taylor caressing the head of Montgomery Clift in *A Place in the Sun* is superimposed over the colour image of the Holocaust victims. The head of one of the victims seems to rest on her arm close to her chest along with that of Clift's. The colours bleed into the image of Taylor as Clift's image disappears. Rather than suggesting a replacement of the figure of the victim for Clift or vice versa, this fading in and out offers a shocking contrast to this same image.[32] Commenting upon the historical connection between the two recordings in 1988, Godard explained: '[W]hen I learned that Stevens had filmed the camps and that for the occasion Kodak had lent him the first rolls of 16-millimeter color film, I couldn't figure out how he was then able to make the great shot of Elizabeth Taylor radiating a kind of somber happiness'.[33]

Still from Jean-Luc Godard, *Historie(s) du cinéma* (*1988–1998*), Chapter 1A.

In this way Godard uses montage – what he calls 'mon beau souci', my beautiful care – as a technique for articulating the past. According to Godard, only montage can produce historical connections because history is always a matter of juxtaposing one thing with another. Time-based audio-visual media like film and video thus produce specific modes of historical articulations through techniques of movement, decomposition and superimposition of images.[34] By incorporating both moving and still images, Godard creates a complex assemblage of perspectives from different temporal strata. Painting and photography in particular are often perceived as a slice of time, suspended time, or time at a standstill, while film, as a time-image, is linked to a temporality that endures, to a time that reproduces the flow of 'real time'. By basing his video essay on photographs, paintings and film, Godard blurs these apparently opposite time economies for the benefit of a contemporaneity of multiple, heterogeneous temporalities that compete with and overlap each other, suggesting a notion of a fractured, layered, multiple temporality.[35]

IV

As in other works and texts, Godard draws upon Walter Benjamin's critique of the historicist conception of time only in the abstract form of an 'empty, homogeneous continuum' that the historian only needs to fill with a succession of facts, thereby producing a 'history of events'. The problem with this abstract notion of time and the historicist notion of history as a linear development is that once time is divided into a chronological series of instants, any moment in the past becomes unreachable as it is irrevocably severed from the present by an infinite number of instants.[36] It becomes a dead object of knowledge, something that can be accumulated without end, but which will never form what Benjamin calls the 'true picture of the past'. 'The true picture of the past flits by', Benjamin writes in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History':

> The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. [...] For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.[37]

Godard's artistic practice in *Histoire(s)* is defined by montage as the bringing together for the first time of elements that are not predisposed to be linked. It creates singular images by connecting well known but previ-

ously unconnected elements and images. Godard thus uses montage as an experimental method for the production of historical intelligibility, and to construct what Benjamin called 'the image in the now of its recognizability'. As Benjamin writes in one of the notes for his *Arcades Project*:

> Every present day is determined by the images that are synchronic with it: each 'now' is the now of a particular recognizability. In it, truth is charged to the bursting point with time. [...] It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather image is that wherein *what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation*. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: not temporal in nature but figural ‹*bildlich*›. Only dialectical images are genuinely historical [...]. The image that is read [is] the image in the now of its recognizability.[38]

Historical knowledge only comes about through the 'now', that is, through a state of our present experience from which emerges, from amongst the immense archive of texts, images and testimonies of the past, a moment of memory and readability.[39] According to Benjamin, this critical moment appears as an *image*: a dialectical image in which 'what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation', i.e. a coming together of times, a contemporaneity of past and present.

By speaking of the image that is read and recognised, Benjamin – whose thinking on history and memory, at a pre-globalised time, obviously has paved the way for the understanding of the idea of contemporaneity that I am trying to outline here – points not only to the formal aspects of the image, but also to the time of its reading and recognition, that is, to the recognising spectator. This understanding of the image as something that develops out of the spectator's relation with the image is also made explicit in Godard's own comments on his artistic practice of montage: 'But an image doesn't exist. This is not an image, it's a picture. The image is the relation with me looking at it dreaming up a relation at someone else [*sic*]. An image is an association'.[40] The spectator so to speak animates the image. The montage and interruptions that allow the true picture of the past to flash up for an instant before it disappears irretrievably are a spacing of time and an opening in which memory can emerge. According to Godard's conception of the image, images only exist in the plural. Without reducing their differences or provoking a fusion between them, it appears in the intermediate space between two images, which can either be located in the many instances of black screens, or in the

intervals of the superimpositions where two images are co-present on the screen; in the difference between them. Godard comments: 'The basis is usually two, always to present from the start two images rather than one, that is what I call image, the one made of two'.[41] In this way the montage appears as a spatialising narrative into which the spectator can 'enter' – a spatialisation of time in which the time-connections are *felt* or *sensed*. With reference to the recurring sentence 'une forme qui pense', 'a form that thinks', the montage can be regarded as an epistemological and dramaturgical space in which various kinds of temporality may be produced or shown to coexist.[42]

It is thus not only about the time of the images. Godard *shows* us these images and movie clips. They are addressed to us as viewers, which means that *our* time, our present, is being involved – our historical present of the year 2015 as well as our 'phenomenological present' for the duration of our watching and listening to the film, four and a half hours. This adds another dimension to the time structure of the work, especially when we are concerned with memory too, and not only with detached historical material. The temporality of the viewer, who – to use the vocabulary of reception aesthetics – concretises the artefact of the video essay and gives it an individual form, plays an active part in the constellation of the dialectical image.

The montage is a production of historical knowledge. However, in the case of *Histoire(s)* this does not imply a knowledge production where the work of the spectator is controlled. The potential readings and recognitions of Godard's complex montage images are almost infinite, and the product of their combination cannot be predicted as it only appears in the here and now of each particular vision, that is, in each concretisation of the visual artefact, which each time gives it an individual form. *Histoire(s) du cinéma* demonstrates that memory is something that has to be made, not just received. It testifies to the fact that memory is an activity, a praxis, involving the spectator in the actualisation of different temporalities.

Godard's fleeting point of view and a-chronological movements through time and space bring together things and times 'that have not been brought together before, and do not seem disposed to be brought together at all', as the title cards reads in chapter 4B, *Les signes parmi nous*, thereby reconfiguring the material and media through which we remember the Holocaust in hitherto unseen images that come to participate in the actuality of our present. In this sense he is a true contemporary according to Giorgio Agamben's different – because personalised rather than historical – understanding of the contemporary as a person who, among other things, is 'the

one who, dividing and interpolating time, is capable of transforming it and putting it in relation with other times'.[43] *Histoire(s)* exhibits the globally circulating images of our everyday, including the images of Dachau, the Warsaw ghetto etc., while establishing a relation to these images and making the co-existence of their different temporalities, their contemporaneity in the historical present, *felt* – it is an *aesthetics of contemporaneity* in opposition to 'the systematic organization of the unified time of the moment. This global, abstract tyranny'.

Notes

1. Jean-Luc Godard, *Histoire(s) du cinéma* [1998], DVD (Paris: Gaumont, 2008), Chapter 4B.

2. Cf. James S. Williams, 'Histoire(s) du cinéma', *Film Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (Spring 2008), 10–16: 16.

3. Bernard Stiegler, 'Dans la vacance, on cherche à retrouver la consistance dans son existence', *philosophie magazine* no. 21 (2008),
http://www.philomag.com/les-idees/bernard-stiegler-dans-la-vacance-on-cherche-a-retrouver-la-consistance-dans-son-existence

4. Giorgio Agamben, 'Cinema and History: On Jean-Luc Godard', trans. John V. Garner and Colin Williamson, in *Cinema and Agamben*, eds. Henrik Gustafsson and Asbjørn Grønstad (New York and London: Bloombury: 2014), 25–26: 25.

5. Cf. Giorgio Agamben, 'Marginal Notes on *Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle*', in *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 73–90: 76.

6. Hito Steyerl, 'Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?' in *e-flux journal #49* (November 2013), 1–10: 7, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/too-much-world-is-the-internet-dead/

7. Cf. Ann Rigney, 'Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory', *Journal of European Studies* 35, no. 1 (2005), 11–28.

8. For an analysis of changes within Holocaust memory, see Jacob Lund, 'Acts of Remembering in the Work of Esther Shalev-Gerz – From Embodied to Mediated Memory', in *Revisiting Holocaust Representation in the Post-Witness Era*, eds. Diana I. Popescu and Tanja Schult (Houndsmill, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 28–43.

9. Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), 17.

10. Ernst Bloch, *The Heritage of Our Times* [1935], trans. Neville Plaice and Stephen Plaice (Cambridge: Polity, 1991),

11. Terry Smith, 'Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity', *Critical Inquiry* 32 (Summer 2006), 681–707: 703.

12. Peter Osborne, 'Non-Places and the Spaces of Art', *The Journal of Architecture* 6 (Summer 2011), 183–94: 183.

13. Harry Harootunian, 'Remembering the Historical Present', *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 3 (Spring 2007), 471–94: 481.

14. *e-flux journal* issue 57 (2014).

15. Terry Smith, 'Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity', *Critical Inquiry* 32 (Summer 2006), 681–707: 703.

16. Pierre Nora, 'Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory', *Transit – Europäische Revue* 22 (2002), 1–9, http://www.eurozine.com/pdf/2002-04-19-nora-en.pdf.

17. Ibid., 5.

18. Ibid., 4.

19. Ibid.

20. Andreas Huyssen, *The Shadow Play as Medium of Memory in William Kentridge and Nalini Malani* (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2013), 5.

21. Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, 2, my italics.

22. Cf. Michael Witt, 'Introduction. Jean-Luc Godard: *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–1998)', *Screen* 40, no. 3 (Autumn 1999), 304–5.

23. Cf. Dimitrios S. Latsis, 'Genealogy of the Image in *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*: Godard, Warburg and the Iconology of the Interstice', *Third Text* 27, no. 6 (2013), 774–85: 778.

24. Gavin Smith, 'Interview: Jean-Luc Godard', *Filmcomment*, March/April 1996, http://www.filmcomment.com/article/jean-luc-godard-interview-nouvelle-vague-histoires-du-cinema-helas-pour-moi

25. Godard quoted from Georges Didi-Huberman: *Images in Spite of All*, translated by Shane B. Lillis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 140. French original: Jean-Luc Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, II: 1984–1998 (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1998), 336.

26. Cf. Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli, '*Noli me tangere*. Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*', in *A Companion to Jean-Luc Godard*, eds. Tom Conley and T. Jefferson Kline (Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 456–87: 457.

27. Cf. Monica Dall'asta, 'The (Im)possible History', in *For Ever Godard*, eds. Michael Temple et al. (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004), 350–63: 352.

28. Cf. Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli: '*Noli me tangere*. Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma*', 461.

29. Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2007), 62 and 63.

30. Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the Jews'*, trans. Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1990), 26.

31. Cf. Ravetto-Biagioli, 465 and 482, note 36.

32. My description of this fragment draws heavily upon Ravetto-Biagioli, 472, and Williams, 14.

33. Jean-Luc Godard, '*Histoire(s) du cinéma*: Godard fait des histoires. Entretien avec Serge Daney' (1988), in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard*, II: 1984–1998, 172, quoted from Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 147.

34. Cf. Trond Lundemo, 'Godard as Historiographer', in *A Companion to Jean-Luc Godard*, 488–503: 496.

35. I here draw upon the description of photofilmic time economies in the programme for the conference *Photofilmic Images in Contemporary Art and Visual Culture*: http://photofilmic.com/photofilmic-images-in-contemporary-art-and-visual-culture-conference/

36. Cf. Dall'asta, op.cit.

37. Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 255.

38. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 462f., my italics.

39. Cf. Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Opening the Camps, Closing the Eyes: Image, History, Readability', trans. Katie Tidmarsh, in *Concentrationary Cinema: Aesthetics as Political Resistance in Alain Resnais's* Night and Fog (*1955*), eds. Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 83–125: 87.

40. Gavin Smith, 'Interview: Jean-Luc Godard', *Filmcomment*, March/April 1996, http://www.filmcomment.com/article/jean-luc-godard-interview-nouvelle-vague-histoires-du-cinema-helas-pour-moi

41. Jean-Luc Godard and Youssef Ishaghpour, *Archéologie du cinéma et mémoire du siècle* (Tours: Farrago, 2000), 27.

42. Cf. Terry Smith's description of contemporary exhibition curating, in *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012), 29–31.

43. Giorgio Agamben, 'What is the Contemporary?', in *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 39–54: 53.