



Spectres of War in Deimantas Narkevičius's *Legend Coming True* and Sergei Loznitsa's *Reflections*

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Abstract. This text discusses Deimantas Narkevičius's *Legend Coming True* (*Legendos išsipildymas*, 1999) and Sergei Loznitsa's *Reflections* (*Отражения*, 2012), two films by contemporary artists and filmmakers that revisit war traumas – the Holocaust in Lithuania and the Siege of Sarajevo in Bosnia – indirectly, without narrative reconstruction of the events or use of the archival images to display their atrocities of these two tragedies. Instead, these two experimental films, I argue via Jacques Derrida, evoke spectres of the war in the contemporary urban setups to activate the half-mourning in the present. Aesthetic strategies used to expose the haunting past are closely scrutinized and compared in order to demonstrate the films' aesthetic potential of walking the spectator through war traumas without departing the present.

Keywords: trauma and film, Jacques Derrida, hauntology, mourning, half-mourning, artists' cinema, documentary film, spectres, Sergei Loznitsa, Deimantas Narkevičius.

Introduction

The relationship between modern technologies, new modes of visibility and altered perceptions of temporality has been widely discussed by the critics, theorists and philosophers within the framework of studies of modernity and the everyday life.¹ Mary Ann Doane, Murray Pomerance, John Orr, among other scholars, remark that in the nineteenth century questions about time, memory and subjectivity were relocated from the realm of religion to the realm of science and technology (see Doane 2002; Pomerance 2006; Charney and Schwartz [eds] 1995, Orr 1993).

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Cinema, too, can be regarded as an outcome of industrialization, urbanization and technologization – the processes that were taking place at the time of the rapid modernization and colonization of the world (Doane 2002). Emerging as a unique apparatus for recording and repeating images in time, early cinema did not only portray the processes of the mass modernization of the everyday and the expansion of capitalism, but also provided by means of its ability to reproduce the photographic images a new means to reconsider the past in the present. That is, early cinema allowed modern imagination to speak to its own time.

Since the invention of the cinematograph, film viewers and critics have been discussing cinema's capabilities to complicate habitual divisions between visibility and invisibility, appearance and disappearance, living and dead. The observations of Maxim Gorky, the Russian writer who in 1896 described cinema as a soundless spectre and an art of phantoms, have remained pertinent (Gorky 1896). On the one hand, depictions of various kinds of unnatural or supernatural figures have been continually employed in films to tell the stories about the afterlife intruding our quotidian. All the way up to the present, audiovisual motifs and figures of phantoms, ghosts, spirits, apparitions and other spectral occurrences have been repeatedly used to entertain viewers around the world. On the other hand, the history of cinema's spectrality cannot be exhausted by the scrutiny of popular representations of fictionalized ghosts. Cinema's eerie duplication of the real also characterizes a ghostliness that surpasses depictions of the afterlife. From Ricciotto Canudo, Jean Epstein and Béla Balázs through Sergei Eisenstein, Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin up to Maya Deren and Laura Mulvey, cinema's mechanical reproduction of photographic images inspired a number of thinkers to discuss various ways in which films can either regain time or mummify change. Conceived as a medium capable of re-exposing the viewer to the past, cinema has often been discussed as a spectral medium that can alter memories of historical events. With a focus on two works by contemporary filmmakers that attend to collective war traumas, I will explore in what follows cinema's spectrality by putting Jacques Derrida's thoughts on hauntology into dialogue with contemporary forms of creative filmmaking.

Derrida and Spectrality: From Marx to Film

The book *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* marks the ethical turn in Derrida's scholarly work (Reynolds and Roffe 2004, 49). The French philosopher proclaims that the hope of a righteous

future is dependent on the willingness “to learn to live with ghosts” (Derrida 1994, xviii). As he writes: “no justice [...] seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some responsibility, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppression of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism” (Derrida 1994, xix).

With these words, Derrida puts forward his theory of hauntology, which, first and foremost, presupposes the ethical importance of being considerate toward all those who have already passed away or who are yet to be born, learning to host both the past and the future in the present.

To haunt for Derrida is neither to be present as a ghost nor to represent a ghost (Derrida 1994, 202). Instead, as Katy Shaw points out, his hauntology “gestures toward the ‘agency of the virtual’” because the spectre is never fully here and now, “yet is capable of exercising a spectral causality over the living” (Shaw 2018, 2). The neologism itself is composed of two words, haunt and ontology. Contrasting hauntology and ontology – the latter denoting fixed being and referring to a stable identity moored to the present –, Derrida implies the ever-changing identity full of spaces to be haunted in each and every moment of the fleeting present. According to Derrida, being half-present and half-absent, spectres do not have a fixed identity, their ontological status is indeterminate (Derrida 1994, xvii–xviii). Hauntology, therefore, has nothing to do with mysticism, supernatural forces, mythology or religious dogmas, nor can it be reduced to pragmatic teleology.

“The time is out of joint” – the phrase that originated in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, is in *Spectres of Marx* redeployed to define the functional principle of hauntology, i.e. the persistence of “a present past or the return of the dead” (Derrida 1994, 126). To put it in simple words, being in the present for Derrida is always overshadowed by the temporal trace of the past. The present, he suggests, is never contemporaneous to itself, but rather is always comprised of elements coming from the past. Calling into question the linearity of time, Derrida draws attention to the ephemeral nature of the divide between present and past in order to unbalance a progressive flow of history. In his ethico-political project, which is oriented towards alternative (and more righteous) futures, Derrida questions the simultaneity of time and history to reveal the presence of spectral spaces, gaps between the perceptions of and reactions to historical events, otherwise ignored by the logic of linear temporality and the quantitative separation between now

and then rooted in the Hegelian understanding of history. It therefore does not surprise that the theory of hauntology is considered as a method for exploring the situations characteristic of simultaneously knowing and not being able to explain, and as such, it is often brought up in the studies of collective traumas and their representation.

Before examining the question of the representations of war traumas in the films of the abovementioned filmmakers, I want to focus on the fact that apart from a number of academic and literary employments of Derrida's theory of hauntology, it has not been stressed enough that Derrida extended his ideas to the realm of cinema. Given the entire tradition of thought about cinema as a shelter for ghostly appearances, it is no surprise that it found a place in Derrida's theory of hauntology and his attention to the unsteady boundaries separating past, present and future. Arguing that the present is constantly haunted by spectres exposing us to the potential path towards alternative futures we might have missed in the past, Derrida was of course aware of the fact that cinema makes it possible to capture temporally elusive events and ensure their spectral return. Though Derrida was by no means the first person to write about the ghostly nature of cinema, he attends to cinema's spectrality in a unique way, defining its two registers and connecting them to the discourse of psychoanalysis.

Derrida discusses the connection between cinema and ghosts for the first time in his onscreen dialogue with French actress Pascale Ogier while playing himself in one of the scenes in *Ghost Dance* (1983), a film by the British film director Ken McMullen. One year after the scene with Ogier and Derrida was shot, the actress died in a car accident. Derrida recalled the tragic event years later while elaborating his thoughts on the hauntological nature of cinema in his conversations with another French philosopher, Bernard Stiegler, first shown on TV and later transcribed and published in book form as *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews* (Derrida and Stiegler 2002). However, Derrida's interview on the "thoroughly spectral structure of the cinematic image" entitled *Cinema and Its Ghosts*, published in the famous French film magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 2001, still remains the most comprehensive elaboration of his ideas on cinematic hauntology (Derrida 2015).

To be haunted while watching film is not merely a metaphor for Derrida, nor is it a concept that can be narrowed to a fixed definition of simply seeing ghosts onscreen. Consistent with his general theory of hauntology, Derrida defines filmic spectres as equivocal and ambiguous. According to him, the spectral presence in cinema can be perceived only approximately, there is no definitive description

of the process of hauntology as it presents itself onscreen. And yet, Derrida elaborates his thoughts on cinema as a distinctive medium for the manifestation of spectres. In his conversations with Stiegler, he expatiates on spectres' ability to introduce an element of heterogeneity into our perception of reality. Among other themes, Derrida also refers to the spectre of Pascale Ogier, which, as he puts it, haunts him every time he re-watches McMullen's film (Derrida and Stiegler 2002, 120). This illustrates how film medium allows one to experience the presence of phenomena that simultaneously are and are not present at the place and time the film is being watched. Thus, through connecting the viewer to non-corporeal ghostly images of reality, cinema provides an opportunity to exceed habituated modes of perception by subjecting the film viewer to the "apparition of the unapparent" and casting a fundamental doubt on the perception of the linearity of time and the solidity of one's subjectivity (Derrida 1994, 156).

How do ghosts from the past and the future make their way to the screen and what is involved in this process? In the interview published in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Derrida delineates two different registers (degrees) of cinema's spectrality. "Elementary spectrality" is the name Derrida assigns to the first register of the filmic apparition of the unapparent. For him, the first register is guaranteed by a default aspect of the film apparatus. Cinema's ability to mechanically or electronically reproduce indexical (to certain degree) images makes it, according to Derrida, elementarily spectral (Derrida 2015, 27). In other words, through technological reanimation of the screen traces of reality that has passed, each and every film gives rise to a series of spectral connections because of the way the viewer's perception functions. The second register of spectrality is more idiosyncratic. It depends on particular aesthetic techniques consciously employed by filmmakers in their films to make one "see new spectres appear while remembering the ghosts haunting films already seen" (Derrida 2015, 27). Alongside the first register, the second register of cinema's spectrality is able to produce critical and self-reflective perceptions of the past.

Although throughout the past century the technological nature of the film apparatus has radically altered, manifestations of the second register of spectrality in fiction and non-fiction films remain pivotal for explorations of contemporary society and its connection to the past. Given the unprecedented proliferation of digital images and the heated ethical and political debates over representation that this proliferation has caused, an analysis of film's spectrality can be conceived as a critical way to concentrate on representations of the past in the image-saturated present. Thus, I contend that considering hauntology in the

name of doing justice to the past and to the future will provide a valuable ethico-political method for researching filmic representations of historical traumas. For, as Derrida demonstrates, spectrality is intrinsic to the film medium itself. Posing challenges to the separability of past, present and future, cinema should not only be understood as the mechanism for the mimetic reconstruction of past events, but also as a space where the past can return in unpredictable forms over time and even interrupt the present. In what follows, I will show that Derrida's ideas on cinema's spectrality can be used to expand contemporary discourse on ethics and politics vis-à-vis representations of historical traumas. To do so, I will explore as case studies Sergei Loznitsa's Ukrainian film, *Reflections* (2012) and Deimantas Narkevičius's Lithuanian film, *Legend Coming True* (1999).

Representation of Traumatic Events

As Mary Ann Doane has put it, the etymology of the word catastrophe is based on the conjunction of the Greek words over and turn. The traumatic experience of a catastrophe of any sort "overturns" everyday thought and behaviour, exposing one to what lies beneath the visible layer of a seemingly solid and ceaseless reality, namely contingency, discontinuity, and rupture (Doane 2001, 275). Cathy Caruth, meanwhile, writes how trauma designates "the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge" and which takes the form of recurrent hallucinations, dreams and pathological thoughts (Caruth 1995, 153). An overwhelming encounter with a sudden catastrophe exceeds understanding, occupying a space to which "willed access is denied" (Caruth 1995, 151). Caruth further suggests that trauma is a temporal event, always experienced too soon, too unexpectedly to be fully predictable and is not accessible to one's consciousness until it returns to haunt the victim later.

Dissociation caused by a split in the psyche's symbolic function, which often involves a delay in attention to the traumatic event, is one of the main post-traumatic symptoms first diagnosed by Sigmund Freud. As Joshua Hirsh writes, due to dissociation, in post-traumatic memory, as opposed to narrative memory, linear chronology collapses. Temporal coordinates change and time becomes fragmented, felt either too remote or too immediate (Hirsh 2008, 105). Trauma, therefore, is not easily locatable through chronological reconstruction of the horrific event precisely because its spectral location mirrors its own very unassimilated nature (Caruth 1996, 4–5). Despite its perceptual strangeness,

the narrativization and representation of personal and societal traumas is often considered to be a necessary step in understanding post-traumatic breakdowns of the personal or collective psyche. However, the common strategies of linear narration cannot truthfully respond to the traumatic experience.

In *Work of Mourning*, Derrida takes issue with some points of Freudian psychoanalysis vis-à-vis attempting to mourn in order to reconcile with the death of a loved one. For him, mourning – in the Freudian sense – results in a conscious wish to dismiss the traumatic event without allowing its ghosts to return. In other words, mourning, according to Derrida, is often based on the attempt to ontologize the remains of the deceased phenomenon – the attempt to identify and localize the dead, thereby seeking to represent it as it was. This representation turns the lack and scarcity of information into a desperate attempt to re-construct the event of death and horror, which has almost never appeared in the form of figurative image. Instead of accepting common practices of mourning, Derrida therefore proclaims the necessity of an interminable mourning or a “half-mourning,” which distinctly differs from the Freudian definition of the normal mourning treated as a teleological and rational process towards reconciling with the loss that must involve the full withdrawal of libidinal attachment to a deceased person. Derrida’s concept of half-mourning lingers between the successfully resolved normal mourning and the pathological melancholia, the two opposed reactions to traumatic experiences originally delineated by Freud in his *Mourning and Melancholia*. As is well known, for Freud, to fully recover from a trauma, one has to remember and “relive” the repressed memories of the traumatic event. Mourning is considered to be completed when the subject of a traumatic experience successfully manages to accept the grief. Melancholia, however, according to Freud, results from a lack of mourning and is conceived as a form of pathology caused by an unconscious refusal to deal with trauma (Freud 1957).

In contrast to both: mourning and melancholia, the Derridian concept of half-mourning keeps mourning and melancholia in an enduring state of tension (Derrida 1986, xvii). Half-mourning means only partial forgetting, securing some virtual agency for traumatic memories to haunt the subject. As Alessia Ricciardi writes, half-mourning significantly differs from the Freudian conception of mourning because it “does not pretend to achieve a successful ‘dismissal’ of the lost object, but instead adopts an inconclusive psychic rhythm of oscillation between introjection and incorporation” (Ricciardi 2003, 36). In other words, in the case of half-mourning, the subject is perpetually re-exposed to the spectres of their traumatic history rather than having forgotten them. By employing the

notion of mourning against its Freudian use, Derrida connects the process of mourning to the dismissal of trauma. For him, mourning in the Freudian sense makes one unable to imagine the horror and results in a conscious wish to dismiss the traumatic event without allowing its ghosts to return. Derrida thus proposes to think about half-mourning as an alternative, as a never-ending process of working-through the enigmatic and ghostly past. This understanding of mourning resonates with Derrida's thoughts on hauntology inasmuch as they both rely on the need for ethically- and politically-informed spaces welcoming to spectres.

Therefore, I suggest to treat Derrida's hauntological concept of half-mourning as an indirect answer to some impossibility of mimetic attempts to represent trauma. As opposed to either the subconscious repression of trauma or the conscious overwriting of it, hauntological cinematic half-mourning can be treated as a third way to attend trauma, as a non-representational and more affective cinematic attitude towards historical events. In what remains, I will apply Derrida's hauntological insights to an analysis of the apparitions of war traumas in Sergei Loznitsa's *Reflections* and Deimantas Narkevičius's *Legend Coming True*, two contemporary creative non-fiction films.

Double Imposition of War and Everyday in Loznitsa's *Reflections*

A tension between the desire for reconciliation with the historical wound and the impossibility of representing the atrocities of the traumatic war is inherent in *Reflections*, a film by Sergei Loznitsa, the noted Ukrainian filmmaker, whose original cinematic excavations of the complex historical events of the twentieth century have secured him an exceptional place in contemporary Eastern European cinema. *Reflections* is not the first creative documentary in which Loznitsa examines the horror and absurdity of the historical events that have resulted in a collective trauma. *Blockade* (2005), one of the most renowned documentaries by the Ukrainian filmmaker, was his first attempt to expose viewers to the atrocities of war by re-working the archival footage documenting the siege of Leningrad during World War Two. In *Austerlitz* (2018), a more recent film, Loznitsa approached the traumatic past in a different way. This time, the Ukrainian director did not consult the archive of the genocide and instead remained in the present in order to change its relation to the past and to Auschwitz, a site haunted by past trauma and which has now become a Holocaust memorial, a place of dark tourism.

Seeking to reactivate the collective trauma, *Reflections* employs a similar strategy to *Austerlitz*. The film was produced for the anthology of audiovisual works entitled *The Bridges of Sarajevo* (2014). Presented in cinemas and released as a DVD, the anthology explores the history of the city of Sarajevo from the outset of World War One to the present. What makes the Ukrainian director's contribution distinct from the other twelve films included in this collection is that *Reflections* never leaves the present and does not attempt to tell the stories of the turbulent history of the city by recreating or staging them, but instead bridges (echoing the title of the anthology) the traumatic memories of the Bosnian War with the peaceful urban quotidian of the present day.

The extremely bloody war began after the collapse of Yugoslavia and took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995. The ethno-nationalist conflict escalated between the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and those of Herzeg-Bosnia and Republika Srpska, proto-states led and supplied by Croatia and Serbia. The conflict included the Siege of Sarajevo, a prolonged blockade of the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina that lasted longer than the infamous siege of Leningrad. In May 1992, the Serbs blockaded the city with approximately 70,000 troops. With poorly equipped Bosnian soldiers unable to break the blockade, a total of 13,952 people, including 5,434 civilians, died during the siege, which lasted 1,425 days (Bassiouni 1994).

The conflict ended after the NATO intervention, which forced the Serbs to lift the blockade. But the conflict left a deep mark on the collective psyche of the ethnically diverse city.

The Bosnian government reported a soaring suicide rate by Sarajevans, a near doubling of abortions and a 50% drop in births a few years after the siege began (Bassiouni 1994). Human casualties were followed by the destruction of the fabric of the everyday. Obviously, then, the trauma experienced during the siege of Sarajevo left a mark on the city and its inhabitants. On a surface level, however, Sarajevo has made a full recovery. In terms of the functioning of the urban fabric and the ongoing everyday activities, one can scarcely conceive the horrific events the population of the city experienced in the 1990s. The past haunting the seemingly peaceful present of the city is precisely what interests Loznitsa. Without giving much information about the traumatic event of the siege, the Ukrainian director's film re-activates the spectre of a trauma in a purely cinematic way.

Throughout the film, we see a number of wordless photos of young Bosnian fighters who died in the war. The photos that were taken during the siege of Sarajevo in 1992 by photographer Milomir Kovačević are superimposed on

the film footage shot in various contemporary spaces of today's Sarajevo. The mundane scenes including children playing in the street or young people having dinner in an outdoor restaurant were recorded by the cinematographer, Oleg Mutu for Loznitsa's film. At first sight, Loznitsa's film looks like an attempt to bring the traumatic past into the present à la Freud, who in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* states that trauma should be understood as both an external event and an internal psychological process. From a Freudian perspective, traumatic experiences are usually "forgotten" because the conscious mind cannot make sense of them at the time of their occurrence and, as a consequence, it develops a "protective shield" against distressing memories, such as memories of war atrocities (Freud 1920). The photographs of the participants of the Bosnian war, the external signifier of the source of the collective trauma, are highlighted as if they could simply break this Freudian protective shield. However, Loznitsa has a more complicated take on the trauma of war that surpasses a simple attendance of repressed memories, and resonates with Derrida's ideas about half-mourning and its spectral potential.

Against the mainstream historical documentary strategies that frequently rely on the documentation of the stories told by witnesses which are often illustrated by the archival material, the reflections of the past in Loznitsa's *Reflections* are based on close-ups of the young and handsome soldiers who died during the war super-imposed on the present-day urban sites. Significantly, this double imposition was achieved by filming the images from the reflective surface of a specially-constructed booth filled with the archival photographs of the fighters. Such a material setup makes the film a mirror for the images of a peaceful urban quotidian viewing its traumatic past: the frame of urban panoramas populated with people walking the streets, sitting in the coffee-shops with their families and playing games with their children suddenly haunted by the portraits of the soldiers makes one simultaneously remember and forget.

In his aforementioned interview in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Derrida directly links his theory of film's spectrality to psychoanalysis. According to him, it was psychoanalysis that taught us that the dead can become more powerful, more frightening and even more alive than the living. This is also consistent with the definition of the Derrida's spectral spaces that one experiences while watching a film. In response to the question "Do you believe in ghosts?" in *Ghost Dance* Derrida suggests a formula: "cinema plus psychoanalysis equals a science of ghosts" (Derrida 1983). What links the two constituents of the formula? According to Derrida, the spectre is what one imagines, "what one thinks one sees and which one projects – on an imaginary screen where there is nothing to see" (Derrida

1994, 125). As this quote elucidates, the philosopher distinguishes film images as physical manifestations from imagination as mental activity, and, consequently, equates the film experience with the psychoanalytical session (*séance*). As has been pointed out by James Leo Cahill and Timothy Holland, the French term *séance* for Derrida means both the process of the film projection (“une séance de cinéma”) and the psychoanalytic session (“une séance de psychanalyse”) (Cahill and Holland 2015, 6–7). As Derrida himself explains, “you go to the movies to be analysed, by letting all the ghosts appear and speak. You can, in an economical way (by comparison with a psychoanalytic *séance*), let the spectres haunt you on the screen” (Derrida 2015, 27).

Moreover, in the interview in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Derrida elaborates even further that the film medium does not only project things to viewers, it also absorbs the projections of viewers (Derrida 2015, 29). There are thus structural similarities between seeing images on the screen and working through traumatic memories in the mind. According to Derrida, the film experience can be compared to a psychoanalytic session precisely because both are based on mediated encounters with spectres. And yet, due to the two registers of spectrality at work in cinema, cinematic encounters with the past are different from psychoanalytical sessions, and in a way that is mirrored by the difference between Derrida’s and Freud’s conceptions of mourning. This particular difference can be extrapolated into broader thinking about the spectral functioning of films that deal with war traumas.

Creating a double imposition of images representing two different times, Loznitsa does not provide a lot of hints as to their broader context, maintaining instead a cinematic neutrality towards the siege of Sarajevo: the film does not re-enact the actual war nor does it represent the atrocities. On the contrary, by employing the material techniques to record the images of the everyday mirrored on the surface of the reflective booth filled with the photographs of Bosnian soldiers, Loznitsa creates a spectral place for the ghosts of the war to haunt present-day Sarajevo. The horrifying and forgotten Sarajevo meets the peaceful and melancholic Sarajevo. The black-and-white background blurs the distance between the two temporalities. The ghosts of the dead soldiers and the people who used to kill or tried to escape the killings face each other in this illusionary and yet purely cinematic space, allowing the viewer to reflect on the presence of the post-traumatic city haunted by its traumatic past.

Loznitsa’s film is therefore not only capable of enlarging the traumatic images but also of facilitating the experience of the heterogeneity of space and time (the attributes of cinematic spectrality identified by Derrida). Making the

photographic past visible within the reflective booth mirroring the durational present, Loznitsa creates conditions for an encounter with the traumatic past not unlike a psychoanalytic session (Derrida 2015, 26). This is to say that through the material construction of the double imposition, the trauma of the Bosnian war in Loznitsa's film is returned in a non-representational way to activate new pathways of dealing with the past. In this respect, sound is an important technique in the procedure of half-mourning the killed Bosnians. A few unexpected gunshots intruding into the diegetic layer of sounds recorded in the streets of present-day Sarajevo are heard throughout the film. They strengthen the hauntological experience and remind viewers that the present is always haunted by the past, even if the latter is barely visible or ignored. In other words, although the city's inhabitants appear to have successfully overcome the past (their daily activities look as if the traumatic past has been forgotten), the gunshots on the soundtrack make it so that the viewer is routinely awakened from the fantasy of forgetting.

Through the material implementation of the double imposition and the application of the experimental matter-image-sound montage, Loznitsa does not only remind about the societal trauma and invite viewers to walk through the hard memories of the recent history of Sarajevo, he also reassesses the audiovisual system through which traumatic memories acquire cinematic sensibility. What Derrida names a first or elementary register of spectrality is present in the footage of the quotidian life of the city and is inherent to the photos of the soldiers. However, the secondary register of spectrality is what matters the most in this film. The reflective booth made specifically to mirror the reality of war can be understood as a device to call the present-day Sarajevo inhabitants (and, consequently, the film's viewers) to meet head-on the war spectres that have been preserved from being forgotten without having been represented.

Aural Evidence and Ghostly Space in Narkevičius's *Legend Coming True*

The essayistic and personal films by Deimantas Narkevičius, one of the most consistent and widely recognized Lithuanian film and video artists, have been exploring the paradigmatic historical shifts in his own country and the entire post-Soviet region. Renowned for his *Once in the XX Century* (2000), a reversed video documentation of the removal of the communist statue of Lenin that took place in Lithuania in 1991 designed as an ironic gesture pointing to the repetition of history and the longing for or denial of certain political and economic

ideologies, Narkevičius's body of work exemplifies an original examination of the relationship between personal memories and political histories.

Legend Coming True, Narkevičius's third film, is a non-fiction reflection on the memory of the Holocaust that took place in the current capital of Lithuania and the actions of resistance undertaken by Vilnius's Jewish population. The film refers to the traumatic past of the Holocaust in Lithuania that resulted in the killings of almost the entire community of Lithuanian Jews. The Vilnius ghetto was established in September 1941, a few months after the Nazis occupied Lithuania. It was a key move in the Nazi-led process of separating, persecuting and ultimately killing the Lithuanian Jews. During the two years of its existence, starvation, diseases, street executions and deportations to concentration and extermination camps reduced the Vilnius ghetto's population of Lithuanian Jews from an estimated 40,000 to almost zero. Only a few hundred managed to survive, either by finding shelter among locals living outside the territory, hiding in the forests surrounding the city or joining partisan resistance troops.

The history of the Jewish Holocaust in the country, which was silenced by the Soviet regime in the post-war period to the advantage of the national discourse, is still very often ignored in contemporary Lithuania, which regained independence from the Soviet Union more than three decades ago. Without a public discussion, the trauma of witnessing and participating in the Holocaust has affected multiple generations of Lithuanians. In the late 1990s (when *Legend Coming True* was made), its recognition was not common in the public discourse, thus Narkevičius's film can be seen as a timely and much-needed reaction to this situation. Narkevičius's one-hour-long film superimposes and edits together sounds and images in order to re-activate the spectres of the most traumatic event in the history of Lithuania. At the beginning of the film, a teenage girl appears in front of the camera and retells, in Lithuanian, the founding legend of the city of Vilnius. Afterwards, the screen turns dark and her voice gives way to the voice of an elderly woman speaking in fluent Russian. The girl's recitation of the widely known legend about the establishing of Vilnius creates a sense of time being out of joint. We hear about the prophetic dream of the iron wolf howling on a hill where the town should be built, of the dream that famously encouraged Gediminas, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, to build the town in 1333 and of the letters that he sent to the leaders of different European countries inviting people from all around the continent to come over and live in the new town. Contemporary Lithuanians tend to link the foundational myth of the Grand Duke's letters to an idea of Vilnius's inclusivity, diversity and tolerance, yet this entails a convenient

forgetting or ignoring of the fact that despite such aspirations a large number of Vilnius's inhabitants passively or actively participated in the Holocaust and the slaughter of Lithuanian Jews.

In contrast to the girl's voice, the subsequent monologue of the older survivor of the Holocaust unfolds in monotonous yet hypnotically rhythmic fashion. At times dramatic and horrific, but always sad, the story of Fanja's life in the 1940s covers a lot of ground from Vilnius to Germany, Israel and even Australia. However, a visual layer, which the aural story is superimposed on, is constituted by only four shots filmed in four empty locations situated across the present-day city of Vilnius: the street where Fanja spent her childhood, the exterior of her secondary school, the yard of Vilnius's Jewish ghetto and the unspecified location in Rūdninkai forest, where the Jewish partisan headquarters used to hide during the Nazi occupation.

The film ends with Haisa, another survivor of the Holocaust, a Vilnius resident who played an important role in the resistance movement. Looking directly into the camera, Haifa sings, in Yiddish, *Never Say (Zog nit keynmol)*, the vital song of resistance, written in 1943 in the Vilnius ghetto by Hirsch Glick, which became the anthem of the Jewish partisan movement. The title of the song derives from the beginning of the lyrics: "Never say that you're going your last way/ Although the skies filled with lead cover blue days/Our promised hour will soon come/Our marching steps ring out/'We are here!'" The song straightforwardly contrasts the words of the foundational myth of Vilnius read at the beginning of the film with the all-too-real horrors of the Holocaust. Indeed, in an interview, Narkevičius referred to the girl as a "representative of the present that has not yet been reconciled with the past" (Timofeev 2015).

Beyond the two short scenes that frame the film at the start, Fanja, who is the main storyteller, remains invisible during the whole film. The woman's voice is heard as the screen is filled with imagery of the four sites that recall her and Vilnius's past trauma. Notably, in each of the four locations, Narkevičius set his 8mm film camera to shoot for twenty-four hours at a speed of one frame a minute. As a result, when the film is played at normal speed, the viewer experiences four sequences of so-called time-lapse footage. Each provides a compressed time recorded in the four spaces. Thus, in contrast to Loznitsa's *Reflections*, in which the editing of images from the reflective booth, of photographs and sound carefully juxtaposes past with present making the trauma of the war haunt the quotidian life of the present-day Sarajevo, in *Legend Coming True*, Fanja's testimonials recorded in the present day are exposed on places in Vilnius which

look the same as they did during the time of the Holocaust. Only through Fanja's voice does the history of the past resurface and re-enter the empty historical buildings of Vilnius – which, unlike the majority of the city's Jewish population, survived Holocaust.

Although the time-lapse imagery looks like it could designate a present time (the sites of Fanja's memory were recorded from sunrise to sunrise), the four empty places signify the absence of their present time as well as a virtual future and seem as empty as the rehearsed foundational myth of the city. Reverberations of Fanja's testimonies turn these sites of Vilnius into spectres of the past. Paraphrasing Derrida, while listening to her voice, one feels that the ghosts have survived, they are re-presentified, they appear in the whole of their speech, transforming the urban materiality – the bricks and mortars that constitute the present of Vilnius's Old Town – available to Narkevičius's camera into a spectral space populated with the ghosts of the past that, through this register of spectrality, finally re-enter the viewer's everyday (Derrida 2015, 32).

Describing the strategy he used to shoot in the places that were important for the history of Vilnius's Jewish community, Narkevičius calls the time-lapse a “very strange visual effect that simulates the architectural point of view rather than a human perspective.” According to the artist, “combined with the narrative of the fate of people that have suffered under inhuman conditions, this effect creates a different sense of time, a sense that the past is not something unattainable. That the past can be entered and exited” (Timofeev 2015). Thus, in line with the filmmaker's thoughts and with Derrida's ideas that the recording of speech in films “gives living presence a possibility, which has no equivalent and no precedent, of ‘being there’ once again,” I suggest that the superimposition of voiceover and images as well as the spatially cleared and temporarily compressed urban images exemplify another kind of the spectral presence characteristic of a capacity for a “‘quasi-presentation’ of the world whose past will be, forever, radically absent, unrepresentable in its living presence” (Derrida 2015, 32–33).

The multi-dimensional spatio-temporal structure in *Legend Coming True* exemplifies the film's spectrality at work, exposing the spectator to the traumatic event that haunts them by being visually absent. This absence of the images that are being spoken about puts one into an active imaginative encounter with the unrepresentable events of the Holocaust which took place in Vilnius. As Derrida writes, the films “that have represented the extermination can put us into relation only with something reproducible [and] reconstitutable, [something] that is” (Derrida, 2015, 32). *Legend Coming True*, however, remains (as does *Shoah*) at

the same time where the tragedy has taken place and within the impossibility that “it has taken place and can be representable” (Derrida 2015, 32). The film restores the traumatic event without reconstituting it. By refusing to represent the images of Holocaust, Narkevičius’s film by no means weakens the intensity of re-experiencing the trauma. Quite the contrary, by re-exposing and re-temporalizing the sites of Vilnius that normally lack visible traces of the Holocaust, Narkevičius counters the common state of forgetting it. Thus, by acknowledging the spectral status of the memories of the Holocaust in contemporary Lithuania and respecting the trauma’s unrepresentability, Narkevičius pushes the viewer into the state of half-mourning of the killed, which perfectly illustrates how the spectral images can be, in Derrida’s words, “the testimony itself and a trace of the forgetting, [a] trace of something without trace” (Derrida 2015, 31).

Conclusions

The “spectral turn” in memory and trauma studies has only recently been linked with film studies. As Caruth, Kaplan and Wang among others write, haunting is often understood as the return of repressed trauma, in the sense that “to be traumatised is to be ‘possessed by an image or event’ located in the past” (Blanco and Perrier 2013, 11). Spectres of the past, therefore, can be seen as a symptomatology of trauma as they become both the objects of the present and metaphors of the future.

Film is the perfect medium for temporal impositions, or, in Derrida’s words, for the practice of cinematic conjuration (Derrida 1994, 120–121). As traumatic images are continuously undone by the impossibility of exhausting the limit experiences of catastrophe, filmmakers as well as film scholars are searching for a language that could allow traumatic events to be conceived ethically and comprehensively in such a way that viewers can access the painful past rather than forget or dismiss it. As I showed, Loznitsa’s and Narkevičius’s films both create spectral places where different temporal dimensions meet. In so doing, they showcase the influence of the traumatic past not just on how one lives in the present, but also on how one conceives of the possibility of living “more justly” in the future. Attempts to ignore, conceal or forget traumatic events, whether the Bosnian War in Sarajevo or the Holocaust in Vilnius, invite potentially intense hauntological effects. Without aiming at a filmic reconstruction of historical atrocities, Loznitsa’s *Reflections* and Narkevičius’s *Legend Coming True* create spectral spaces in order to invite the ghosts of the past to manifest themselves in

the present. In seeking to create spaces of possibilities for new futures, Loznitsa and Narkevičius do not rely on the conventional connection between mourning and representation; rather, they connect mourning with the imagination. While all films enable viewers to see the world, Loznitsa's and Narkevičius's works offer reviews of the past from a reflective stance, and they refuse to reconstruct the past as if it was an untroubled image simply needing the proper representation. By superimposing the past on the present (Loznitsa) and the present on the past (Narkevičius), both filmmakers refuse to place images of the past within a determinate context, as if they were incapable of haunting the spectators from more than one place and more than one time. As Narkevičius has explained: "Although my work deals with topical issues, the underlying problems usually come from the past [...]. The new political situation has brought us back to the revolving circle of history, which inevitably requires a vision. But when we began to create this vision ourselves, the past began to creep in, phenomena that had previously been hidden behind the surface of ideology. They led us into unmarked, unwanted, unpleasant territory, clouding our vision of the future" (Narkevičius, 2020).

The filmmakers' efforts to explore the spectrality of film is a critical task in the process of understanding how today's media-saturated societies deal with trauma that is situated in the past but haunts the present and threatens to haunt the future. "To learn to live with ghosts" – even for Derrida himself the task was by no means a simple one. To complete this task requires that one rethink ethics, politics and aesthetics of representation vis-à-vis trauma, time and memory in hopes of being able to learn and remember "more justly" (Derrida 1994, xviii–xix). Mourning without dismissing the loss, coming to terms with a complicated past without erasing it, mourning just half-way – these are the tasks proposed by Derrida and cinematically enacted in the films by Loznitsa and Narkevičius.

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