

Sylvie Lindeperg

*La Voie des images.*

*Quatre histoires de tournage au printemps-été 1944*

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To Sylvie Lindeperg, a historian who specialises in the Second World War, to follow *La Voie des images* is an imperative that begins with *Les Écrans de l'ombre*, the first outcome of a research that aims to ascertain the awkward link between the recording of an event and the multiplicity of points of view that establish the processes of its reception and therefore of its historical, symbolic and memorializing re-actualisation.

*La Voie des images* has a similar purpose, even though it moves from a different starting point: its 'path' opens up to the present, then identifies the book's vanishing point in four films shot in 1944 by partisans from the Vercors Forest or occupied Paris, or even by people internalised in the concentration camps in Terezin (Poland) and in Westerbork (Netherlands). Lindeperg's analysis of these fragments is anticipated by the observation of the "uniformisation croissante des formes d'écriture de l'histoire" made today for the general public. Films (*La Rafle*), TV series (*Apocalypse*) or docu-fictions (*Auschwitz: les nazis et la solution finale* and *La Résistance*) challenge the scholar to recognise the drift that characterises the intensive exploitation of the archives and images and finally icons of recent history.

In the first chapter, "Les tyrannies du visible," Lindeperg sums the elements up to justify her statement. History (a juicy and marketable topic) is today manipulated and transformed into a sort of "digestible object." Thanks to the newest digital processing, restoration and editing technologies and thanks to a renewed accessibility to archives, producers and filmmakers and technicians are involved in procedures that mix up times, lengths and models of vision, encouraging an aesthetic of the *overabundant*, of the *hyper-visible*, of a history free from uncertainties or errors that speculates on its knowledge and transmission.

So it goes in *La Résistance*, where the filmmaker Christophe Nick indifferently uses so much *fictional* images (as Guy Moquet's killing scene, shot by René Clement in *La Bataille du rail* in 1945) and archive footage (related to the Parisian Resistance) that he can mix them up and level them out. Similarly in *Apocalypse* each archival footage (originally in black and white) is re-coloured, re-framed and post-synched to take in the temporal distance, which separates today's spectators from the original footage's aesthetic rules. In this way, what

Lindeperg calls the *hors champ* of History is filled up with a *champ plein* “un espace recrée où le spectateur-visiteur se déplace comme il le ferait dans un jeu vidéo” (p. 30). To counterbalance this tendency, Lindeperg suggests an alternative methodology. It consists in opposing “la lenteur persistante et obstinée d’un commerce renouvelé avec les images de cinéma” (p. 15) to this contemporary saturation and speed of circulation that does not let the archive *live* and *happen*. Lindeperg uses two methods in her survey: first is the return to the fragment to study the image in its singular epiphany. Like cutting off the sequences of the French Resistance or those shot in Westerbork or Terezin, from the context that has “appauvries [theses sequences] par l’usage [...], transformées en lieux communs et en icônes marchandises” (p. 10) she studies the images in a *patient* and close way to let vibrate, in their sensible presence, the fragile and imperfect traces of the spectres that are hidden within. Examining the archive seems to mean implicitly a need for a freeze, a still produced in reading to re-evaluate the role of the imagination in the historical reconstruction process. This attitude allows a form of not-reconciled *survivance* of the images, and in this sense it establishes the truly temporal dimension of the archive.

The study of Anna Maria ‘Settela’ Steinbach, *laïc icon* (Susan Sontag) of the horror of the extermination, is a clear example of this process: in 1944 Jewish photographer Robert Breslauer framed her face leaning out from a train from Westerbork to Auschwitz. As the only close-up of the film ordered by the Nazis to the photographer, this very frame seems to accomplish itself in a quest for an “instant aussi bref qu’interminable” (p. 187), so symbolic to contain all the meaning of the tragedy. If on one hand Breslauer seems to push inside the image that which he was otherwise prevented from stating, on the other hand Lindeperg, by following the trajectory of that very gaze, reproduces, as in slow motion, that short *ralenti*, that decisive instant in which the look of the filmmaker and the look of the young woman meet.

If on one hand then, by privileging these details, the author’s method seems to eliminate the *hors champ* of the film, on the other hand this same method is nourished by a constant consideration of its production/reception context, as if the analysis were moved by a double trend which permits us to confute the perceptible evidence of what is shown in the light of an accurate documentary reconstruction.

To remain further on the Westerbork footage case, we can therefore retrace the various phases of its readings, uses, and rewritings to Harun Farocki’s crucial *ready-made* work on Breslauer’s footage titled *Respite/Sursis*. The chapter that, in Lindeperg’s book, introduces these kinds of reflections, “Le double jeu du cinéma,” leads us to follow the questions that open the volume further: how can we illustrate History? How can we re-open the perspective of its possible readings instead of closing or saturating them?

It is actually by putting in contact these two kinds of work that we would like to take into account the value of her text in the wider frame of a contemporary debate on the archive and on the ethics of its preservation and re-use.

Georges Didi-Huberman, in a main oeuvre entitled *Remontage du temps subi*,

dwelt on the archival work promoted by the German artist Farocki. One of the *formulae* employed by the scholar to describe Farocki's critical, political and creative engagement seems to us an appropriate return to what also characterises Lindeperg's engagement in *La Voie des images*: "L'artiste-archéologue n'est pas du tout un nostalgique replié sur le passé : il *ouvre les temps* par son effort constant de transmission, ce qu'on appelle si bien, en français, un 'passage de témoin.' Et c'est en ce sens qu'il nous *reprend* par la main en nous ouvrant les yeux" (p. 108).

By inviting us to re-confer to the images their *initiative* and suggesting to us to read them closely as if we were struck by them, but also able to respect the rigour of their eluding mystery, Lindeperg succeeds in keeping History's vanishing point wide open. While *carrying us by [her] hands* (as Didi-Huberman puts it), she *re-opens our eyes* in order to transmit to us a knowledge that tries to build "patiemment un sens toujours instable, en éternel devenir" (p. 15).

[Martina Panelli, Università degli Studi di Udine]