

Produced, written and directed as a film school project by Macedonian filmmaker Mitko Panov, *With Raised Hands* is a short film based on one of the most well known images of the Shoah. Taken by an anonymous SS photographer in the aftermath of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, it represents a group of Jews walking out of a building with their hands raised, surrounded by the SS. Central figure of this photograph is a slight, seven or eight year old boy wearing a short winter coat and a beret. The photograph is part of the Stroop Report, a day-by-day account of killings carried out in the ghetto by the SS in April and May 1943, and it was used in Nuremberg trials as evidence. The grotesque disproportion in size between the little "prisoner" and the soldiers, the boy's age and the gesture he's forced to execute made this image emblematic of the brutality of the Nazi terror.

*With Raised Hands* is a rich visual text with many challenging substantial and formal aspects. It poses a string of questions pertaining to the use and function of emblematic images in historical memory (and nostalgia as one of its articulations), especially when their re-statement questions and disturbs the conventional understanding of historical narrative, as it is the case with this film. It is an attempt to grasp a possible version of history, witnessing of an enormous event without foreshadowing. My concern will be with what Roger Simon defined as "stickiness" of an image produced by the connotative richness on one hand, and visual syntax on the other. A photograph captures only a fragment of reality, which in time acquires different meanings. In addition to this fragmentary character of photography, emblematic photographs are burdened with an excess of meaning testifying to Holocaust's public persistence, which makes them both ubiquitous and extremely challenging to use. How does Mitko Panov respond to this challenge in light of difficult ethic, aesthetic and political issues surrounding representation and circulation of knowledge about the Holocaust in Central Europe? In *The Paradoxical practice of Zachor*, Roger Simon argued that remembrance as discontinuity and unsettlement reach beyond the limits of the communities of memory and relations of kinship.

Jewish presence in Central Europe is matter of the past, and despite the fact that even after 1989 there has been no period of soul-searching or significant disturbance of the mainstream version of national narratives about the World War Two, the theme of the destruction of the Jews, like an uninterrupted red thread, is woven into the fabric of the Central European cultural history. *With Raised Hands* suggest temporal discontinuities, spatial fractures, indeterminacy and ambiguity. It is rich with possibilities for reflection about the disruptive potential of emblematic images of the past, and how such images work inside a film, which, while mourning the loss, doesn't give up on hope. Nostalgia is generally perceived as an affective way of relating to the past that seeks to erase time and flatten out the conflict in an attempt to establish an intimate relationship with the past. *With Raised Hands* complicates and challenges this understanding. It proposes a different approach to historical memory. It is based on one hand, on the acknowledgment of the radical difference of the past and the irreversibility of time. On the other, it complicates the lines of temporality, both technically and substantially. It touches the spectator by portraying a child who likely ended up in a death camp, all the while challenging the mind to not simply acknowledge the irreversibility of this loss, but to contextualize it. In *Foregone Conclusions*, Michael Bernstein wrote about the dangers of backshadowing and the host of ill-conceived assumptions into

which fictional accounts of the Shoah often fall. According to Bernstein the incredible condescension implicit in backshadowing obscures the complexity of lives and diversity of motivations, hopes, illusions and expectations of those who experienced it. In the eye of a contemporary, the photograph from the Strop report, together with many other similar documents, stands as the metaphor for the end of story, enormity of the Shoah as the dark warrant of the inevitability of the end, standing behind it. Bernstein put backshadowing forward as a feeling of comfort one derives from the knowledge on how it all ended. Discussing the difference between photography and film, Susan Sontag wrote: "In contrast to the amorous relation, which is based on how something looks, understanding is based on how it functions. And functioning takes place in time, and must be explained in time. Only that which narrates can make us understand." With *Raised Hands* is an attempt at complicating and unsettling a known episode through narration. Through fantastic reconstruction based on the emblematic photograph, the film restates its historical situatedness and restores the temporality and humanity to the experience of the protagonists. Panov stages a sideshadowed version of the event, which through its fragile wishing for a different outcome, makes the probable end of a past situation come alive in the present. This opens up the possibility of being touched by other people's suffering and thus re-establishes the affect beyond the temporal divide.

Film is a cultural artifact the meaning of which cannot be summed up by its diegesis. Much of the connotative richness of film comes precisely from its cultural situatedness. Film also has the ability to draw on all the other arts – music, photography, theatre, dance, etc. by simply recording them, or using them in a more creative manner (that is how *With Raised Hands* cites then temporalizes a photograph). By the means of visual tropes film has the ability to convey meaning not only by representation, i.e. by what is shown, but also by what we don't see. "Stickiness" of the filmic images is further enhanced by aesthetic choices that a director makes – film stock and its variables, the codes of *mise en scène* and editing, in other words the visual syntax of the film. I will argue that the "stickiness" of *With Raised Hands*, while enabling and carrying Panov's version of sideshadowed history, does something beyond that. It gives new texture to an emblematic image by the way of narrative, brings it back to life and invites readings invested with different kinds of interest. Reactualization through restatement is not simply a nostalgic, easy reflex of reaching for emblematic images for the sake of spectacle. Iconic images represent an artistic challenge because they are impossible to experience directly. It is as if the emotional content with which the image was invested initially fades with time through multiple literal quotations. Benjamin was also concerned with this issue. In the *Work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*, he asserted that wide circulation of photographs affects their power to bear witness to a particular period of history. In recent years, there has been a host of artist re-photographing the old photographs and using them as a part of installations that include other media. The work of Shimon Attie and Christian Boltansky exemplify this approach. Awakening of an emblematic image in a different medium takes away years and makes its content available again, but it is the double bind of nostalgic memory: access to the original emotional charge can be enabled only by adding another layer of mediation. Speaking about thematization of the sense of separation and loss in Shimon Attie's work, Bernstein points out that our knowledge of the Shoah is fundamental to the power of Attie's projections of the old photographs onto the walls of the old Jewish neighborhoods in Berlin. However, he writes: "artistic imagination that conceived of such a project makes our encounter with these pictures diverge from the ways we respond to a meticulously historical and commemorative documentation." Attie's work, which he refuses to label "Holocaust art," has the power to

fascinate and unsettle us precisely because of the freedom of imagination and techniques he uses. Similarly Panov's film moves us because it represents a historically rich meditation to which we respond in a way different from that of the original photograph.

Photographic quotation inevitably touches upon the way we relate to the moment in history represented in such work. *With Raised Hands*, by the fact of being formally as well as thematically conceived as a historical reconstruction, is didactic in its approach, therefore more demanding, and more admonishing than the original photograph. Simultaneously the film hesitantly offers a thought that the little prisoner could have escaped - many children did indeed escape death through their own devices. However, Panov's "glance sideways" doesn't dispose of history, on the contrary. The freedom to step out of the gaze of the SS photographer, and out of the picture does not belong to the realm of the real. The boy is a specter from the world, which in Bernstein's words "was never allowed to become the past through the normal rhythms of gradual evolution and decay." (1994b) It is the very incongruity of the disappearance of this world, and the inability of the generations born in its aftermath to grasp the brutality with which it was obliterated that enables the imagining of the impossible. Rediscovering the reality of an event such as Shoah by the way of the non-happened creates a moment of instability and doubt. Such moments have the power to make the event appear sharper, providing as it were an opportunity to re-position ourselves in relationship to it.

I have known the photograph of the boy from Warsaw Ghetto as long as I can remember. Among the images of Jewish suffering, photographs of children hold special place, even if one was not raised in an environment concerned with memories of Second World War. They strike me by something unruly and uncontrollable that never quite fits the all-encompassing darkness of the event. A mixture of fragility and animal-like resistance, both unbreakable and eminently mortal, images of children shock by their immediacy. Photograph of a child is always a promise. It contains a treasury of time and indeterminacy, countless possibilities of lives to be lived. If one were to look for a particular aspect in the representation of the Shoah that denies the chill of doom and defies the pathos of the spectacle it would be found in the photographs of children. Simultaneously the awareness of the number of destinies and life choices these children could have contributed to the world obliterated by the Nazis, makes clear their utter fragility. Use of photographs of Jewish children from the Central European ghettos in new work is difficult. Although the ethical content of such photographs appears to be unquestionable - according to Susan Sontag they have "gained the status of ethical reference," (1973, p. 21) simple quotation as an artistic approach presents many challenges. One of them is the way audiences encounter such work. Re-stating images of dead people - lost family members, friends, etc. guarantees an emotion. It can be moving, surprising, or shocking, but simple quotation is often incapable of breaking the conventional framework of reception, and as such it turns into a spectacle. According to Simon spectacle "opens on to the melodramatic structure of phantasmagoria, inviting identification and the reading of the particulars of images and narratives on the terms of moral certainties we hold dear." However, work of artists who use the re-statement to question the conventional conditions of the reception of emblematic images is capable of unsettling the foundations of our relationship to a particular historical moment. I chose to present *With Raised Hands* as a case study because the nostalgic, fragile poetic of this film sent me back into the past, both the past reconstructed in the film and my own memories of growing up in an environment so concerned with the preservation of the war memories, that my earliest

memories are mostly made of the remembrance of the events that predate my birth. I also admired Panov's willingness to take the risk of engaging the subject of Holocaust directly resulting in a rich text, complexity of which I felt compelled to explore.

With *Raised Hands* catches the spectator off guard. The initial confusion stems from a kind of genre indeterminacy. The film is made in black and white, on old film stock, and the director made conscious choice of using the documentary movie-making techniques from the Second World War. Original "noise" often seen in old films was preserved; hence the spectator is initially left without precise indications about the genre. Panov doesn't give any of the usual clues: establishing shot, containing basic information about the place, time, etc. The opening is a close-up of a camera, with the hand of an invisible camera operator preparing for the filming. The focus seems to be accidental as the subjects appear as shadows. The hand manipulating the lenses prevents the spectator from concentrating on the events in front of the camera and creates the impression that the shots on the screen came from the cutting room floor. The image and the sound progressively grow clearer, but initially the film requires an effort of patience and concentration, interpellating the spectator by absence rather than presence. The first part of Panov's film is all about the technical aspects of the filmmaking: camera, lenses, adjustment of focus and speed, etc. Panov leads the spectators through all the stages of preparation, akin to a magician showing an empty hat and empty hands to suggest truthfulness, absence of "tricks" and manipulation. As the focus sharpens, the spectators are finally able to identify German soldiers forcing a group of people to raise their hands. The sound of a passing train, until this moment an indistinguishable hum becomes clear. Identity of the protagonists and the genre of the film are finally revealed. Spectator's previous knowledge is summoned up and the tone is set for the rest of the film. Most theoretical writing about this film is concentrated on the question of who is seeing, i.e. the point of view. In this respect *With Raised Hands* raises a set of questions regarding the relationship of ethics to knowledge, mediation and witnessing. According to James Monaco the "moving camera has an ethical aspect to it. Question of point of view is at the heart of this ethical code." Panov challenges this assumption by alternating the view of the German soldier, taken with the fixed camera, and the view of the moving camera of the narrator. Although his presence is only suggested, the German cameraman is the one directing the events in front of the camera. The opacity of his intent in the eyes of the subjects echoes the didactic tone and pseudo-scientific neutrality of army photographs and documentary films made in concentration camps and ghettos of Central Europe. The moving camera of the narrator captures what the fixed camera leaves out: the desolate image of the Ghetto, empty of its inhabitants; wind carrying feathers from ripped bedding, blowing dark smoke up the deserted streets conveys a feeling of despair and loss within this space of absence. It searches the faces inside the perfectly still crowd facing the camera. It reveals an acutely alive group of scared people. The way Panov uses the limit of the frame and focus undermine this carefully staged scene. Panov constructs the shot so that the spectator is always acutely aware of the events outside the frame. Several times, the boy walks out of the frame, both narrator's and the German cameraman's. This openness of the frame suggests an anxious acceptance of the immensity of the event, yet it affirms the will to make the attempt at capturing one part of it all the while leaving it open-ended. According to Paul Willemin editing is a tool "primarily used to impose as far as possible, the reading." Panov's willingness to take the risk is suggested also by the use of jump cuts in editing, which suggests discontinuity and leads to ambiguity in interpretation. Both use of frame and editing illustrate his preference for the connotation and indeterminacy. For example, in an

apparent point of view shot, which is not interrupted and continues as a pan, "camera picks up the boy himself. The boy seems to appear in what he himself is looking at." Dramatic tension of the film is suggested by the scarcity rather than abundance of visual devices. Panov relies almost entirely on the absence of both movement and music to maintain the sense of expectation. At the same time absence and broken connection between the group and their homes alludes to their probable end. There is a sense of expectation of an event, a movement that will break the tension: life that will take precedent over death. The faces that the camera searches one by one are poignantly expressive. Tragic is not the mode of experience, asserted Bernstein. It is a narrative mode. While death camp as their probable destination was certainly on the minds of the people in the original photographs, it is less certain that they believed themselves to be condemned. The hero of the film is resisting the stillness throughout, refusing to remain immobile for the German camera, resisting the definite character of history being staged and recorded by the Nazis.

Silence envelopes the scene. People are pushed closer together in order for the cameraman to start filming. The soldier issues the order to raise hands. The boy refuses, runs to his mother but he's forced back to his original spot and his hands raised by force. The scene is set. It is that of the original photograph of the Warsaw Ghetto. The image freezes for a few seconds. All movement seems to be suspended. People in the shot are holding their breath, careful not to break the stillness of the moment. The frame freeze is the cue after which the narrative switches into the fantastic mode. Everything before this moment was likely to happen. After this moment we are inside the fantastic structure of the Theatre of Memory. Suddenly a gust of wind blows the boy's beret away. As he looks around him at other prisoners, and the soldiers, all careful not to break the position they are holding for the camera, the first transformation takes place: the boy becomes just a boy concerned with his hat, who instinctively wants to chase it. He cautiously walks outside the frame where other Jewish prisoners remain standing with raised hands. Among the protagonists only a little girl seemed to have noticed the boy's absence from the frame, but even she can't be sure because when she starts to the direction he's taken, the boy can no longer be seen. As the winds carries the beret farther away, camera plays Red Light-Green Light with the boy. The camera closes its eye, the boy runs. When the eye opens, the boy is still. And again. With every passing moment, as he distances himself from the group in front of the camera, the boy is no longer the object of photographic gaze but a by-stander. His face grows defiant. He tentatively tries to grab his beret from the ground, but the wind lifts the hat in the air again and carries it further down the street. Freedom to walk out places him into a different historical time. In this fragment Panov touches on two issues that question the very possibility of witnessing to destruction of Central European Jewry. First is the alleged Jewish passivity (the group of prisoners remains standing in front of the camera, holding the pose for the photographer while the boy walks out freely). Second issue is the frustration with the impossibility of imagining the unimaginable, and anger against the victims (" Why did they let themselves be led like lambs to a slaughterhouse?"), a growing feeling of a profound ontological lack. The only possible response to these questions is that representations of the Shoah remain necessarily attempts, maintaining an uneasy relationship with their subject matter. Any other way of approaching represents the risk of re-victimization of the victims.

Holocaust is the black hole in European history, mourned the way one mourns natural death: as a fatality, inevitable and inexorable. Modernity is often wrongly interpreted as a kind of the new religion, similar to others, eschatological from its inception. Like

a rigorously choreographed dance, it inevitably led to the rise of fascism and Holocaust. According to Bernstein, foreshadowed history happens on all levels, "theological, historical or psychological. Christian apologetics, Marxist teleology, and psychological determinism are striking instances of how powerful our impulse toward foreshadowing can be." (1994a, p. 2) The world of the Holocaust is often represented as a world strictly predetermined by the history of modernity inside of which individual actions have little or no meaning. Phantasmagoric reconstructions as a form of sideshadowing break this framework. According to Bernstein they are the way of "disrupting the affirmations or a triumphalist, unidirectional view of history in which whatever has perished is condemned because it has been found wanting by some irresistible historico-logical dynamic." (1994a, p. 2) When the breaking of the teleological framework happens in cultural artifacts such as *With Raised Hands*, it is more than just nostalgia for a better past. Heterogeneity of human existence and contingency explored in sideshadowed events do not deny the truth of the happened. Bernstein stresses, "Sideshadowing and counterlives, far from undermining the authority of the concrete instance, are its most radical guarantors precisely because they insist on the primacy of human freedom." (1994a, p. 2) *With Raised Hands* is a reflection about the representations of Holocaust by the way of the non-happened. Just as the taking of a photograph or shooting of the film are selective activities, Holocaust and its representations are projects staged by people for other people. Historical developments that gave rise to modernity created the conditions for a catastrophe such as Shoah to happen. It also contained innumerable other possible courses of events. The meaning of Shoah to contemporary Central European ethos is best understood when it's approached by the way of sideshadowed events, against totalizing master narratives.