

Radical Hope or the Moral Imperative of Images in the Work of Susan Sontag and Jean-Luc Godard

By Idit Alphandary

Abstract

In the films *For Ever Mozart*, *In Praise of Love* and *I Salute You Sarajevo*, Godard's images introduce radical hope to the world. I will demonstrate that this hope represents an ethical posture in the world; it is identical to goodness. Radical hope is grounded in the victim's witnessing, internalizing and remembering catastrophe, while at the same time holding onto the belief that a variation of the self will survive the disaster.

In *The Gift of Death*, Jacques Derrida argues that choosing to belong to the disaster is equivalent to giving the pure gift, or to goodness itself, and that it suggests a new form of responsibility for one's life, as well as a new form of death. For Derrida, internalizing catastrophe is identical to death—a death that surpasses one's means of giving. Such death can be reciprocated only by reinstating goodness or the law in the victim's or the giver's existence.

The relation of survival to the gift of death—also a gift of life—challenges us to rethink our understanding of the act of witnessing. This relation also adds nuance to our appreciation of the intellectual, emotional and mental affects of the survival of the victim and the testimony and silence of the witness, all of which are important in my analysis of radical hope. On the one hand, the (future) testimony of the witness inhabits the victim or the ravaged self (now), on the other hand, testimony is not contemporaneous with the shattered ego. This means that testimony is anterior to the self or that the self that survives the disaster has yet to come into existence through making testimony material. Testimony thus exists before and beyond disaster merely as an ethical posture—a "*putting-oneself-to-death* or *offering-one's-death*, that is, *one's life*, in the ethical dimension of sacrifice," in the words of Derrida. The witness is identical to the victim whose survival will include an unknown, surprising testimony or an event of witnessing. The testimony discloses the birth or revelation of a new self. And yet this new self survives through assuming the position of the witness even while s/he is purely the victim of catastrophe, being put to death owning the "kiss of death."

Keywords: Susan Sontag, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Derrida, Film studies, hope, testimony, the Bosnian war

Radical Hope or the Moral Imperative of Images in the Work of Susan Sonntag and Jean-Luc Godard

In the films *For Ever Mozart*, (Godard 1996) *In Praise of Love* (Godard 2001) and *I Salute You Sarajevo*, (Godard 2006) Godard's images introduce radical hope to the world. I will demonstrate that this hope represents an ethical posture in the world; it is identical to goodness. Radical hope—I suggest—is grounded in the victim's witnessing, internalizing and remembering catastrophe, while at the same time holding onto the belief that a variation of the self will survive the disaster.

In *The Gift of Death*, (Derrida 1995) Jacques Derrida argues that choosing to belong to the disaster is equivalent to giving the pure gift, or to goodness itself, and that it suggests a new form of responsibility for one's life, as well as a new form of death. For Derrida, internalizing catastrophe is identical to death—a death that surpasses one's means of giving. Such death can be reciprocated only by reinstating goodness or the law in the victim's or the giver's existence.

What is given—and this would also represent a kind of death—is not the thing, but goodness itself, a giving goodness, the act of giving or the donation of the gift. A goodness that must not only forget itself but whose source remains inaccessible to the donee. The latter receives by means of a dissymmetry of the gift that is also a death, a death given, *the gift of a death that arrives in one way but not another*. Above all it is a goodness whose inaccessibility acts as a command to the donee. It subjects its receivers, giving itself to them as goodness itself but also as the law.¹ (Derrida 1995: 41, my italics)

The relation of survival to the gift of death—also a gift of life—challenges us to rethink our understanding of the act of witnessing. This relation also adds nuance to our appreciation of the intellectual, emotional and mental affects of the survival of the victim and the testimony and silence of the witness, all of which are important in my analysis of radical hope. On the one hand, the (future) testimony of the witness inhabits the victim or the ravaged self (now), on the other hand, testimony is not contemporaneous with the shattered ego. This means that testimony is anterior to the self or that the self that survives the disaster has yet to come into existence through making testimony material. Testimony thus exists before and beyond disaster merely as an ethical posture—a "*putting-oneself-to-death* or *offering-one's-death*, that is, *one's life*, in the ethical dimension of sacrifice" in the words of Derrida. (Derrida 1995: 48) The witness is identical to the victim whose survival will include an unknown, surprising testimony or an event of witnessing. The testimony discloses the birth or revelation of a new self. And yet this new self survives through assuming the position of the witness even while s/he is purely the victim of catastrophe, being put to death owning the "kiss of death".²

In the films that I examine, Godard's images influence the relation of viewers to hope, too, by displacing the viewer's relation to the suffering of others through implicating her/him in the image. Viewers must determine the value of pain and

alienation, for both of these affects preside in the images, and Godard's cinema teases out precisely these emotions.³ Technically, images that have the power to make the viewer question the limits of her/his privacy—thus enabling an alteration in the viewer's relation to otherness—comprise empty signifiers. Such a sign or image carries significance even though its placement in the scene is random. Thus, empty signifiers may unravel the aesthetic and moral dimensions of representing and identifying with the pain of others.⁴ Radical hope presides in this gap between significance and meaning, between recognizing the pain of others and establishing moral commitment to reinstating the wellbeing of the others.

An examination of Alain Badiou's analysis of the structure of hope reveals that hope is also what underwrites the gap between significance and meaning, the space in which identity is traversed by otherness. In *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, Alain Badiou argues that hope comprises faith in justice. He then analyzes this relation of hope to power, and suggests that Saint Paul does not preach for the kind of hope that follows from the belief that the Last Judgment certifies that retribution will be visited upon the evil and that the righteous will be rewarded for their love and faith. Rather, according to Badiou, Paul sees hope as the obstinacy of subjective survival.

In Thessalonians I, faith is compared to striving (*ergon*), and love to grueling work, to the laborious, the troublesome. Hope, for its part, pertains to endurance, to perseverance, to patience; it is the subjectivity proper to the continuation of the subjective process. (Badiou 2003: 93)

Hope impels us to "go on". Hope is not "an eventual connection" in the language of Badiou. (Badiou 2003: 94) The subject does not hope that a source of power from the outside will inflict punishment on those that destroy the subject's life, thus enabling the survival of the subject.

In this sense, hope belongs to the real. It is not primarily related to a future outcome desirable to the faithful, but to one's ability to maintain fidelity. Hope signifies the excess that presides in the real precisely because it is "charged with the real". (Badiou 2003: 96) The power of subjective hope emerges from the notion that it signifies the victory of an ethic of love as such:

Hope indicates that I can persevere in love only because love inaugurates the concrete universality of the true, and this universality subsumes me in return. This is the strong sense of the statement "If I...have not love, I am nothing" (Cor. I.13.2). For Paul, universality mediates identity. It is the "for all" that allows me to be counted as one. Wherein we rediscover a major Pauline principle: the One is inaccessible without the "for all". What designates and verifies my participation in salvation—from the moment I become a patient worker for the universality of the true—is called hope. From this point of view, hope has nothing to do with the future. It is a figure of the present subject, who is affected in return by the universality for which he works. (Badiou 2003: 97)

As I return to explaining Godard's and Sontag's thinking of radical hope, it is important to keep in mind that Susan Sontag brought Godard to America.⁵ She is the

most important theoretician of Godard's major, early films from the sixties. But in *Reading the Pain of Others*, Sontag's focus is photojournalism rather than film. I think that Sontag reads the suffering of others similarly to the later Godard. For both, hope is an ethical position and the two worked with the aim of introducing radical hope into the world through studying and exploring the crucial role that images play in our lives. Sontag's analysis of the art of photojournalism and the forms of observation that it makes possible and Godard's experimental uses of stills images within film, enhance our understanding of the power of observation in the lives of viewers. Both author and *auteur* attach seeing itself to mediums that thematize the gaze and turn the act of observing into a malleable sensation that is amenable to the different possibilities for change that the aesthetic and moral postures of images bring about.

Sontag states that the photograph is a unit of memory that registers a memorable piece of information or a unique fact: "The photograph is like a quotation, or a maxim or proverb." (Sontag 2003: 22) She finds that remembering is a moral act. More important, because photos enhance our ability to remember, photojournalism vouches for the morality of images obtained and printed. Magnum Photo Agency, founded by the famous photojournalist of the Spanish Civil War, Robert Capa, had a charter:

...moralistic in the way of other founding charters of the new international organizations and guilds created in the immediate postwar period, spelled out an enlarged, ethically weighted mission for photojournalists: to chronicle their own time, be it a time of war or a time of peace, as fair-minded witnesses free of chauvinistic prejudices. (Sontag 2003: 34-5)

Indeed, Godard's rhetoric of images unearths two characteristics vital to hope, not just to morality. First, representing their pain appeals to and affects the victims. Godard's images give testimony of the atrocities committed against the victims and thus (the images) may restore the survivors' connection to communication and life. The image as testimony gives a voice to the victims—it brings back to life visual and acoustic memory and reinstitutes in the victims the voice they were deprived of by the catastrophe. With this voice, victims may speak of the catastrophe and give meaning to the meaninglessness of violence and trauma.⁶

Second, the pain of others moves viewers. Oftentimes movie spectators do not have direct knowledge of utter devastation, and because Godard's cinematic language is eye-opening, it allows the viewer to see the self in the other. Godard's images are directed at unmasking the suffering of others. Moviegoers may identify with, or internalize, the plight of the other. The spectators can feel the victims' triumphs, defeats and silences, and know them as if from the inside. Thus, the images on the screen assume the form of testimony and carry the burden of witnessing. In such cases, the spectators may emerge from a film equipped to protest against perpetrating war on civilians, and hopeful that their new vantage point may prevent future atrocities from taking place.

In Godard's recent films, which explore the Bosnian War specifically and catastrophe in the twentieth century more generally, the director demonstrates that, on the one hand, hope is an ethical stance during times of personal and/or cultural devastation. On the other hand, he cautions against allowing hope to become an illusion. We must neither repress the evil origins of human suffering during wartime, nor assume that victims might survive thanks to messianic intervention. This means that hope is compound. When the possibility of extinction appears likely—whether of self or of one's larger culture/community—one hopes to survive seemingly imminent death. At the same time, one cannot hope to continue the existence of a known self, an ego ideal or a cultural tradition, for these are being destroyed by catastrophic events.

At this point I will take a detour to explore the structure of hope in psychoanalysis. Jonathan Lear, the American psychoanalyst and anthropologist, construes hope's relation both to the real and to reality. In his recent book, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, Lear studies the destruction of the Crow Indians by the White Man and tells the story of Plenty Coups, the illustrious Chieftain of the Crow Nation who died at the end of the nineteenth century.

Plenty Coups accepted the possibility that the future could hold goodness in store, even as the livelihood of the Crow Nation, its traditions and the subjectivity of every one of its members were being destroyed. At the outset, his biographical story foreshadows the loss of the Crow subjectivity using the expression: "After this nothing happened." (Lear 2006: 2) "*This*" signifies the event of the Buffalo's going away and "after" this happening history came to an end. Lear interprets this as an admission of utter passivity and finds that it enhances the possibility of narrating a biography that revolves around the loss of the narrating "I:" "This suggests that according to Plenty Coups, there is no importantly first-person narrative to tell of this period. It is as though there is no longer an I there" (Lear 2006: 3).

Hope became an empty signifier; it compelled the Crow subject to become flexible and to adapt to new realities in order to survive, even though her/his identity as a Crow Indian was being destroyed and depleted of its substance. Men stopped hunting the Buffalo—the primary commitment of the Indian hunter—and women stopped teaching the traditional code of duty and honor to their children, because the lore as such became obsolete. And yet Plenty Coups envisioned a future in which the Crow nation continues to exist, despite having undergone radical changes. Plenty Coups transcends the particular traditions familiar to the Crow nation, while maintaining his commitment to the idea of goodness that allows for the continued existence of a Crow nation, themselves committed to new and as yet unfamiliar modes of being. Lear writes:

There would be ways to continue to form oneself as a Crow subject—ways to flourish as a Crow—even though the traditional forms were doomed. This hope is radical in that it is aiming for a subjectivity that is at once Crow and does not yet exist (Lear 2006: 104).⁷

Godard, Sontag and Lear show that radical hope inheres in one's ability to envision a future for one's selfhood, although the disaster is designed to annihilate the subject. They also demonstrate that the victim may choose to accept the fact that a new subjectivity will have emerged from witnessing disaster and giving testimony. In the same vein, Derrida—who explores the unknown aspects of autonomy retained under conditions of injuring randomness—finds that goodness comprises a gift of death. This means that the subject envisions or hopes for a continuation of life uniquely because s/he accepts the fact that a new subjectivity will have emerged from this giving. The gift cannot be reciprocated by the law, but it may reinstate the law, thus bringing the subject's autonomy back into existence.

One wonders what is the relevance of footage and photojournalism to the fictional scenes in Godard's films and to the aesthetic efficacy of the films, and how Godard projects the polysemy of hope on film? His films raise questions regarding how we choose to document the pain of others.

In *For Ever Mozart*, for example, Godard employs images in order to achieve two different goals: 1) produce drama; 2) enable spectators to internalize the pain of others, and introduce radical hope to the world. Godard's films about the Bosnian War, the besieged city of Sarajevo, and about the catastrophes of the twentieth century, suggest that there is a moral dimension to survival. His introduction of radical hope points to the possibility of a viable future for people whose lives have been ravaged by disaster.

For Ever Mozart is a philosophical reflection on the relation of images to war and hope. Scenes are peppered with imitations of photojournalism. In other words, the film combines beauty with remembering, thus arguing that beauty inheres in memory and in giving testimony about the pain of others.

In *For Ever Mozart*, visual happenings distil the multiple meanings of hope. The film is about staging a play in Sarajevo during the war in Bosnia, yet the actors never reach Sarajevo. In Bosnia they are kidnapped by Serb and Croat militiamen, and *Bolero Fatal*—the film within *For Ever Mozart*—documents the travails that the actors undergo. The actors suffer the horrors of war—they are stripped naked and tortured, are forced to dig their own graves, after which they are shot, their bodies left lying on the ground; meanwhile, the Muslim actress is brutally raped by her captors. But *For Ever Mozart*, a film that does not reproduce the reality of war, deepens illusions and emphasizes the power of posturing. Clearly, Godard is suggesting that through stylizing the war-narrative and imitating photojournalistic images of war, the film acquires moral authority and conveys hope. Thus, his films raise the question of how beautiful images alter our perception of violence, and how violence renders aesthetics a necessary means of restoring radical hope and a return of goodness to the world?

Sontag points out that the atrocities of war are depicted in paintings, not just in photos. The difference is that paintings are evocative while photographs focus on

deploring and condemning. Although the photographic image is not a made image, the photograph involves artistic decision-making. Photographs are not transparent, rather, they convey moral judgments. Sontag cites common wisdom: "The camera is the eye of history." (Sontag 2003: 52) Here, the photograph is aligned with realism. The only way to be in touch with History is through conserving the reality of an epoch in pictures. Godard would have agreed with Sontag, for indeed his images document History and evoke a particular zeitgeist. Godard's images convey History by opening up a gap between the signifier and the signified and introducing radical hope, i.e., the possibility that new significance might come into the world.

This use of the image needs to be explained in psychological and epistemological—aesthetical and ethical—terms that clearly articulate the dialectic of radical hope. I would like to briefly return to Jonathan Lear and study his explanation of what it means for hope to be an empty signifier.

One needed some conception of—or commitment to—a goodness that transcends one's current understanding of the good. Kierkegaard coined the phrase "teleological suspension of the ethical" to describe Abraham's response to God's alleged command that he sacrifice his son. That is, the ethical requirement to nurture one's children is to be suspended in the light of a higher call. What is so striking about Plenty Coups's situation is that it was a nonmythical, realistic, and plausible account of someone who experienced himself as receiving a divine call to tolerate the collapse of ethical life. This would include even a collapse of the concepts with which ethical life had hitherto been understood. (Lear 2006: 92)

The documentary elements of Godard's cinematography must employ signifiers from which specific ethical meanings are absent. These images become enigmatic; they enforce the films and the viewers' commitment to "a goodness that transcends understanding", in Lear's language (Lear 2006: 95). Indeed, this is the rhetoric of Godard's images.

In *For Ever Mozart*, Godard analyzes the gap between actual suffering during war and the images that document this pain. The camera focuses on a single militiawoman, on the battlefield, who is taking snapshots with a disposable Kodak camera, as do modern tourists. In the same scene, she shows a batch of family photos to a Frenchman. The two do not understand each other's languages. And yet the sequence is eloquent; the photos speak for themselves, twice depicting this woman's entire family. On the one hand, the family members seem to be looking into the eyes of viewers. On the other hand, once her parents and sister have been slaughtered, the moviegoers find themselves transformed into voyeurs as they stare at the bloody, mutilated faces of the corpses that the snapshots commemorate.

In this scene Godard argues against Descartes and articulates the sensation that people exist differently as matter and as numinous. The scene raises questions regarding Descartes' dictum "I think therefore I am", and instantiates radical hope

as that which burgeons at the interstices of existing and reflecting.⁸ Camille, the leading actress and a teacher of philosophy explains:

In "I think therefore I am", the "I" of "I think" is not the same as the "I" of "I am". Why? The relation between body and spirit has yet to be shown. Between thought and existence... The sensation of existence is not yet a "me". It's an unreflected sensation. It's born within me, but... without "me". (Godard 1996: chapter 6)

The subject becomes ethical or good when radical hope pervades the gap between "I" and my consciousness and inhabits the "me", a "me" that is coterminous with my movement and my freedom.⁹ Godard translates this intricate argument into images and depicts difference through his photos.¹⁰ The camera follows Camille and Jérôme as they are digging their mass grave and discussing philosophy.

Camille:

Philosophy will be our girlfriend. Forever.

Jérôme:

Day and Night.

Camille:

Even if she loses her name. Even in her absence.

Jérôme:

A clandestine friend. We respect what prevents us from getting close to her.

Camille:

As we sense that we're not awake...

And that which is wakeful in us, even in our sleep, is due to her difficult friendship (Godard 1996: chapter 6).

The hostages are then gunned down and a large image fills the screen, an image that imitates photojournalism in its depiction of violence: it portrays Camille's foot lying in the dark soil as if severed from her body.

Nevertheless, radical hope does pervade this scene, which captures the heroic dimension of survival and beautifies the act of witnessing the pain of others. There is an element of pathos, as well, as Camille and Jérôme confront the solemnity of their looming deaths. They realize that culture is undergoing an irreversible change, and that the face of death, too, is changing. Yet they believe that philosophy will endure, albeit under a different name. They trust that the circumstances that bar their access to goodness will be overcome and that culture will be subjected to the law. Viewers witness "Choc des corps et choc des cultures", in Serge Toubiana's phrase (Toubiana 1996: 12).

Through stylizing the violence, as in the image of the severed foot, and using aesthetics in order to set up this violence, the film perverts such images of mutilated bodies and makes them affective. The film renders meaningful the silence of the victims captured in the photographs. In fact, Godard restores to these horrific images the dimension of reflection, that which is un-self-identical in them and the

movement of difference. The entire scene is, indeed, not simply about violence but about the relation between violence and images, about the passage of the images through the violence and the passage of the violence through the images. Here we "protest suffering, as distinct from acknowledging it", as Susan Sontag's writes. (Sontag 2003: 24)

How may *Bolero Fatal* break free from *ressentiment* or the repetition of the same? How can Godard imitate Ravel's *Bolero* and cause the repetition of a basic theme or melody of death to evolve and become suspenseful, interesting and life affirming? A brief reflection on "The Exigency of Return (1969)", by Maurice Blanchot may help us to answer these questions.

Blanchot argues against the notion that the logos comes to an end every time that repetition is used to affirm it. He speaks against the "madness" of repetition. But because the eternal return, in Nietzsche's understanding of this concept, is related to the will to power, Blanchot suggests that when difference permeates into the self it produces pseudo-thoughts (dreams) to eliminate this difference. Blanchot concludes that nothing that comes back to the self is the same, "except, *the return itself* (turn, detour, overturning); and is it not the case that the affirmation of return leads to affirming together—but without constituting a whole—the difference and the repetition, thus the non-identity of the same?" (Blanchot 1995: 283)

For Ever Mozart utilizes precisely this principle of repetition that introduces difference to the film, when it articulates the significance of empty signifiers. The film enhances the movement of difference and brings about the deferral of meaning and of identity in favor of thinking. More important, the deferral and thinking that issue from introducing repetition as difference into the film are identical to radical hope. The old director of *Bolero Fatal* discloses that for him cinema contains profound sadness. "Both a possibility of expression and the trace of something essential, renounced." (Godard 1996: chapter 11) This sadness has something to do with the fact that the image may bring about hope only when it remains an empty signifier.

Godard's entire cinematic philosophy is grounded in the conviction that signifiers in which *something essential is renounced*, enhance significance. "It's what I like in cinema", the old director continues, "a saturation of glorious signs, bathing in the light of their absent explanation." (Godard 1996: chapter 13) Significance emerges from an image that neither enforces a particular explanation on the "me", nor precludes the meanings with which this "me" endows certain "glorious" signifiers. At the end of *Bolero Fatal*, facing the open sea, a beautiful, young actress is pronouncing a relentless, open-ended, life-affirming "Oui". (Godard 1996: chapter 13)

As I pointed out earlier, for Sontag "The photograph is like a quotation, or a maxim or proverb." (Sontag 2003: 22) Thus, we recall the needed photograph at

any given moment of our day-to-day-living. The Bosnian War is a good example of this phenomenon. Images of this war were anachronistic—they reminded Europeans of the Second World War. Yet Europeans thought that such images could never become a reality again. Because photos bring to mind other photos, journalists presuppose that only an agitating image is eye-opening. If this is the essential trait of the more important images that document and give testimony about the pain of others, then "The image as shock and the image as cliché are two aspects of the same presence", Sontag asserts. (Sontag 2003: 23)

In the same vein, I want to briefly examine a sequence from *In Praise of Love*, but in order to explain this segment I have to study the status of the proverb in language. In *The Storyteller*, Walter Benjamin asserts that the cliché or the proverb receives its authority from its relation to eternity. Benjamin states that the authority inherent in storytelling resides in death's relation to eternity and in the self's relation to the other. The dying man's story is conterminous with a lesson for life, precisely because he has achieved experience. The proverb is the limiting case of storytelling:

In fact, one can go on and ask oneself whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman's relationship, whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way. It is a kind of procedure which may perhaps most adequately be exemplified by the proverb if one thinks of it as an ideogram of a story. A proverb, one might say, is a ruin which stands on the site of an old story and in which a moral twines about a happening like ivy around a wall. (Benjamin 1968: 108)

On the one hand, the proverb is a dead element in language. Here the signifier is identical to its significance. On the other hand, the proverb is swarming with life. From this proverb the storyteller could fashion and elaborate a new relationship of storytelling to its material, "human life", and bring an expired world back to life.

In Praise of Love examines how the face of storytelling has changed in the aftermath of the *Shoah*. After the *Shoah* love may preside uniquely between people; it cannot be given to the state. "You say 'State,' but the state is the very antithesis of the image of a loved one, whose sovereign reason negates that of love." (Godard 2001: chapter 18) Here the screen fills up with the image of a black record and a needle turning on the turntable. Paul Celan's voice emanates from the speakers. In German, he is reading the following lines from *Todesfuge*: "he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair/ Margareta". (Celan 1995: 31)¹¹ Godard explicitly tells the viewers that the face of storytelling, too, has changed, not just the face of death. Testimony belongs to the pantheon of realism in literature. In the mind of Celan death, a "master from Deutschland", (Celan 1995: 31) has become a death fugue. Death has a constant presence in the life of the human race. The recurrence of testimony—in images and in poetry—cannot redeem the dead. But Celan intervenes with the work of death. He insists on the specificity of the history of death and sabotages the erasure of memory: he finds

images to depict this violence and resists such depictions at the same time. In Celan's *Deathfugue*, love or testimony and death or the immemorial past co-create "the ability to exchange experiences", in Benjamin's words. (Benjamin 1968: 83)

Thus, the conclusion of *In Praise of Love* introduces both documentation and radical hope to the framework. The voiceover states: "Image and sound are vital to History. And most important that basic element: not knowing how History will end." (Godard 2001: chapter 22) Because we do not know how History will end, images are morally binding: they tell us to be hopeful and influence historical developments.¹²

As I approach the conclusion of this paper, I would like to cite a short clip from *I Salute You Sarajevo*, in Godard's own voice. Here Godard turns photojournalism into motion-picture. He uses a harrowing image from the Bosnian War and comments on the war in Bosnia as motion is introduced to the image:

For there's a rule and an exception. Culture is the rule, and art is the exception. Everything speaks the rule: Cigarette, computer, T-shirt, TV, tourism war. Nobody speaks the exception it isn't spoken, it's written: Flaubert, Dostoyevsky. It's composed: Gershwin, Mozart. It's painted: Cezanne, Vermeer. It's filmed: Antonioni, Vigo. Or it's lived, and then it's the art of living: Srebrenica, Mostar, Sarajevo. The rule is to want the death of the exception. So the rule for cultural Europe is to organize the death of the art of living, which still flourishes. (Godard and Miéville 2006)

Susan Sontag was afraid that because we do not understand the Bosnian War this same image will reduce the pain of others to a mere icon. She made clear that "harrowing" photographs are very explicit but they do not make us understand the events that they depict. "Photographs do something else: they haunt us." (Sontag 2003: 89)

The *New York Times* published the image with minimal captions: "'The image is stark, one of the most enduring of the Balkan wars: a Serb militiaman casually kicking a dying Muslim woman in the head. It tells you everything you need to know.' But of course it doesn't tell us everything we need to know", Sontag states,

From an identification given by the photographer Ron Haviv, we learn that the photograph was taken in the town of Bijeljina in April 1992, the first month of the Serb rampage through Bosnia. From behind, we see a uniformed Serb militiaman, a youthful figure with sunglasses perched on the top of his head, a cigarette between the second and third fingers of his raised left hand, rifle dangling in his right hand, right leg poised to kick a woman lying face down on the sidewalk between two other bodies. The photograph doesn't tell us that she is a Muslim, though she is unlikely to have been labeled in any other way, for why would she and the two others be lying there, as if dead (why "dying"?), under the gaze of some Serb soldiers? In fact, the photograph tells us very little—except that war is hell, and that graceful young men with guns are capable of kicking in the head overweight older women lying helpless, or already killed, in the head. (Sontag 2003: 90)

Sontag and Godard both add narrative to the image. Narrative establishes significance because it can make us understand that the subject is emerging from testimony as yet s/he is composing a eulogy to radical hope.

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Notes

- 1 Derrida's argument emerges from a close reading of Jan Patočka's, *Heretical Essays on the Philosophy of History*. See "Translator's Preface" (Derrida 1995: vii-viii).
- 2 I find reinforcement of this notion that hope is related to testimony in "Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening" by the American psychoanalyst Dori Laub. Laub's witness contends that four chimneys were blown up during the uprising at Auschwitz. This is historically inaccurate, for only one chimney was destroyed. Yet Laub argued that the witness's testimony was coherent because it showed that she remembered elements that were survival-inducing. These particular memory traces brought hope into Auschwitz. The testimony reenacted the woman's resistance to extermination and enhanced "the breakage of the frame of death" that presided in Auschwitz (Laub 1992: 62). Also relevant to this issue is the fact that in *Remnants of Auschwitz* Giorgio Agamben describes the opposite phenomenon of over-remembering as related to a radical desire to survive in order to give testimony about the utter destitution of the "under man" in the death camp. Agamben cites Primo Levi: "sentences in languages I do not know have remained etched in my memory... something anomalous happened to me, I would say almost an unconscious preparation for bearing witness" (Agamben 2002: 27).
- 3 In *The World Viewed*, Stanley Cavell argues that images in films stimulate the sensation that one's biography has come to life. Cavell experiences images on the screen in the company of other moviegoers, and these images seem to him like aspects of the lives of others, others who become relevant to the self.
I remain faithful to responses I first had to movies ... The events associated with movies are those of companionship or lack of companionship: the audience of a book is essentially solitary, one soul at a time; the audience of music and theater is essentially larger than your immediate acquaintance—a gathering of the city; the crowd at a movie comprises various pools of companions, or scattered souls with someone missing (Cavell 1979: 10).
- 4 In *Reading the Pain of Others*, Sontag, too, asserts that the reality of an image is equal to its ability to anchor the viewing subject in morality: "The photographs are means of making 'real' (or 'more real') matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore" (Sontag 2003: 7).
- 5 In the article "Godard's *Vivre Sa Vie*", Sontag addresses the question of Godard's use of the image as an empty signifier. See, for example passage no.5:
Vivre Sa Vie ... shows the inexorability of an event ... Godard's films are drastically untopical. An art concerned with ... topical issues can never simply show that something is. It must indicate *how*. It must show *why*. But the whole point of *Vivre Sa Vie* is that it does not explain anything. It rejects causality (Sontag 1961: 199).

- 6 The films of Godard examined in this essay do not clearly belong to the genre of testimony founded by Claude Lanzmann in *Shoa*. Godard's works comprise fictional integers, yet they do undertake the task of witnessing the devastation that the Bosnian War brought back to Europe, as well as testifying to the fact that the twentieth century was grounded in disaster. I suggest that the main idea expressed in Simone de Beauvoir's "Preface" to the text of Lanzmann's, *Shoa* is also significant in Godard's work: "In spite of everything we knew, the ghastly experience remained remote from us. Now, for the first time, we live it in our minds, hearts and flesh. It becomes our experience." (De Beauvoir 1995: iii).
- 7 Hope is effective in the world precisely as Plenty Coups turns his dream—the epistemological environment in which elements form the real become known to the subject—into a Historical grand narrative. This Indian *epos*—which I will discuss in detail hereafter—may capture the imagination of members of the Crow Nation and compel them to alter the history of their own existence. Yet the substance of the change is not defined by the dream, and will emerge only when the Crow Nation will insist on re-inventing its existence even while it is laboring to retain its identity. Here the double time of trauma or the structure of the subject—which always attains fulfillment in the future anterior—acquires national, historical significance.
- 8 Radical hope may appear in singular interpretations of one's dream. This is precisely the lesson of Plenty Coups's dream that Lear examines. The Crow nation used dreams as carriers of information from the world of spirits. The information was enigmatic—because the spirits convey enigmatic messages—but the dream's interpretation had to be concrete, ready to be used as a tool with which to alter reality. Lear writes, "But young Plenty Coups's dream ... did not predict any particular event, but the change of the world order. It was prophetic in the sense that the tribe used it to face up to a radically different future." (Lear 2006: 68) Plenty Coups dreamed that the plains of Crow land were covered with Buffalo-bulls. But the bellowing and the beef were not like Buffalos, "they were strange animals from another world...". (Lear 2006: 70) In the second part of the dream Plenty Coups sees an old man sitting in a tree and an image of a guide, the "man-person" tells him that he is this old man. He commands Plenty Coups to learn from the Chickadee, a weak bird that gathers wisdom. In that tree is the lodge of the chickadee. He is least in strength but strongest of mind among his kind. He is willing to work for wisdom. The Chickadee-person is a good listener ... Whenever others are talking together of their successes and failures, there you will find the Chickadee-person listening to their words ... He never intrudes, never speaks in strange company, and yet never misses a chance to learn from others. He gains success and avoids failure by learning how others succeeded or failed, and without great trouble to himself... (Lear 2006: 70-1)
Plenty Coups is advised to be like the Chickadee-man who listens to and learns from others. Lear shows that as Plenty Coups is pervaded by goodness he uses radical hope in the interpretation of his dream. Plenty Coups accepts an interpretation of the dream that indicates that the Buffalo will disappear and, at the same time, the white man's cattle will overtake the plains. The future of the Indians lay in learning from the White man, not fighting him, and in teaching the members of the Crow nation to find their livelihood in farming not hunting.
- 9 Stanley Cavell points out that things of the everyday are meaningful precisely because they are strong enough to show both that man is subject to doubt and that man achieves intimate knowledge of the world. In this context Cavell's understanding of the relation between Cartesian philosophical doubt and the medium of film as such is crucial. In his book *In Quest of the Ordinary*, Cavell states that his own philosophical endeavor is to make meaningful his "feeling that the ordinariness in question speaks of an intimacy with existence, and of an intimacy lost, that matches skepticism's despair of the world" (Cavell 1994: 4). This loss of intimacy between me and existence is well pronounced by Camille in *For Ever Mozart*, but is this loss inherent in film? And if so, could film be the medium that also lends intimacy to our perception of existence?

- 10 In Cavell's masterpiece, "Naughty Orators: Negation of Voice in *Gaslight*", he specifically engages a film by George Cukor, in which Paula (Ingrid Berman) is reduced to the mad position in which all her most intimate knowledge of her own history and memory and of her present life is cast into doubt. Her husband Gregory (Charles Boyer) is bent on driving his wife crazy and he almost achieves his goal when he enters the attic unseen, and haunts the house like a demon. Paula is lapsing into hysterical fits when the gaslight is dimming precisely because she is feeling haunted, as if someone who is inhabiting the house is doing so in hiding. Cavell argues that the relation between the weakening brightness of the light and our vulnerability to madness is inherent in film. He shows that in *Gaslight* the projector itself is maddening and that film produces dreaminess that is grounded in Cartesian illusion. Am I awake or am I dreaming? is a serious question for moviegoers. But because *Gaslight* is about making someone mad through dimming the light, it can also use the changes of the light's brightness to restore Paula's ability to reason. If Paula could confirm with a third observing party, so to speak, that indeed the light is falling, she would gain hard evidence of what her eyes behold, and would thus truly know the world that surrounds her.
- Upon the detective's confirming the dimming of the light, the woman says, "You saw that too? Then it really happens Every night when my husband goes out. . . ." She stops, startles by hearing her own words. The man continues for her, carrying on her words: "The light goes down. Then what?" And she is able to go on: "I hear things. . . . I watch. . . . Then the light goes up." A hesitation again, and again the man continues: "And he comes back." And again she can take the words on: "Yes, always quite soon after" (Cavell 1996: 57-8).
- Cavell continues: " Only a human being could be *prohibited* . . . from subjecting herself to her own words, having her own thoughts" (Cavell 1996: 58). Here Cavell implies that the film turns this difference from an aesthetic posture to what enables ethical action in the world. I suggest that Godard does the same in *For Ever Mozart* but for him difference inheres in the image, not in the projector. That is, Godard is using imitations of photojournalism to both aestheticize horror and return power to horrific images: these are the images that carry violence into the world—a world that is blind to such imaging of violence. It is to this world, and to this blindness, that film buffs belong.
- 11 I am using John Felstiner's translation, "Deathfugue".
- 12 *In Praise of Love* also offers an interpretation of the concept of love. A woman, driving a car in the pouring rain, is asking her companion, the young filmmaker of *In Praise of Love*: "Do you know that saying by Saint Augustine: 'The measure of love is to love without measure?' – 'Yes'" (Godard 2001: chapter 22). Here Godard is affirming life-as-hope just like he did in *For Ever Mozart*. Godard also explains the movement of difference or the hope that empty signifiers bring about: "I am thinking about something," the young filmmaker is saying. When I think about something, in fact, I'm thinking of something else. You can only think about something if you think of something else. For instance, I see a landscape that is new to me but it's new to me because I mentally compare it to another landscape, an older one, one that I knew (Godard 2001: chapter 22). Here, indeed, image of double-exposures of city-lights and the seascape fill the screen. This foggy observation turns to an attribute of the consciousness that survived disaster by the end of the film. The film ends with a citation from an unspecified novel: "Thus everything in my story wanes. As I am left with only images of what happened so quickly, I will go down to the Elysian Fields [Champs-Élysées] with more shades than a man has ever taken with him" (Godard 2001: chapter 22).

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