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Introduction: Is the Past a Foreign Country?

Cinema is part of history, namely a discourse on the past. But what is the past? 'The past is a foreign country', is an answer which immediately appears in my head. These words, opening L. P. Hartley's novel, *The Go-Between* (Hartley 1953: 9), were repeated or paraphrased by so many historians (see, for example, Lowenthal 1985, 2007; Judt 1992; Hobsbawm 1997; Fuchs and Cosgrove 2006) that they became a cliché. And yet, they require scrutiny, because they are ambiguous and therefore their meanings divide contemporary historians. Explaining their meanings will also allow me to locate my book within a number of debates concerning the status of history and its relation to cinema.

Past and present, history and memory

One way to approach this sentence is to treat it as a methodological directive. Some historians, such as Eric Hobsbawm, whom Alun Munslow describes as 'reconstructionists' and 'constructionists' (realist, empiricist, positivist) (Munslow 1997: 18–19 and 36–56; 2006: 216–18) regard it as a warning against projecting current ideas and views onto the past, for example attributing contemporary concepts of nations and states to ancient civilisations, as reflected, for example, in the recent dispute about the name of Macedonia (Hobsbawm 1997: 7). For Hobsbawm, past events, institutions, structures and people should be analysed in their original context, as elements of a complex web making up distant societies and cultures. Other historians, however, derive an opposite conclusion from the premise about the foreignness of the past: rather than trying to access the past 'as it really was', they postulate to treat the past as if it was similar to the present or even as if it was a version of the present, openly introducing current views and insights into their

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studies. For such historians, grouped together as postmodern or deconstructionist, many of them influenced by Jacques Derrida (1996) and Michel Foucault, especially Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) (whose work *Cahiers du cinéma* described as a systematic attempt to restore to light what lies forgotten in the black archives of the ruling class), there is no single, objective past, past which is not 'historiographically uncontaminated' (Munslow 1997: 25–6 and 57–75). Past, as we know it, is already a text, existing in relation to other texts. Consequently, there cannot be a single, objective history, there are only histories written according to different discursive regimes, in different, ultimately untranslatable languages, and competing for space on library shelves, in the university curricula and on the desks of film and television producers (Jenkins 1997; Munslow 1997). This is also a view to which I subscribe.

In historical practice or historiography, however, the difference between these two camps is not as radical as it appears. Historians from the first group frequently, albeit tacitly, judge past events using current political ideas and moral standards. This refers especially to the events which, if they happened today, would offend our sensibilities, such as slavery and acts of genocide. On the other hand, few deconstructionist historians try to construct discourses in the way which is radically different from those proposed by their colleagues belonging to the reconstructionist school. Equally, it often requires some effort to decide whether a given historical book is written from a reconstructionist or deconstructionist perspective, as the terms 'discourse' and 'truth' tend to appear in the same chapter.

Alongside those who occupy themselves with creating the best methods to discover or construct the 'foreign land of the past', we should mention those who maintain that the past ceased to be foreign or at least is no more foreign than the present. Fredric Jameson claims that in our times of consumer capitalism the present changes into the past so quickly that we lose a sense of both the past and the present, becoming schizophrenics, unable to differentiate between different moments of history and our own biography. The main responsibility for this situation lies with the media, especially film and television. As he puts it, 'One is tempted to say that the very function of the media is to relegate such recent historical experiences [as the age of Nixon and Kennedy] as rapidly as possible into the past' (Jameson 1985: 125). A similar argument is proposed by Pierre Nora, who begins his essay 'Between Memory and History' by saying 'The acceleration of history ... An increasingly slippage of the present into a historical past that is gone for good, a general perception that anything and everything may disappear – these

indicate a rupture of equilibrium' (Nora 1989: 7). Andreas Huyssen in a somewhat complementary argument to that offered by Jameson and Nora maintains that the gap between past and present is disappearing because the

recent and not so recent pasts impinge upon the present through modern media of reproduction like photography, film, recorded music, and the Internet, as well as through the explosion of historical scholarship and ever more voracious museal culture. The past has become part of the present in ways simply unimaginable in earlier centuries. As a result, temporal boundaries have weakened just as the experiential dimension of space has shrunk as a result of modern means of transportation and communication. (Huyssen 2003: 1)

Anton Kaes puts it in even simpler terms: 'The further the past recedes, the closer it becomes. Images, fixed on celluloid, stored in archives, and reproduced thousands of times, render the past ever-present' (Kaes 1989: ix).

Recognition of a significance of the subjective and cultural factors (language, gender, class) in the construction of historical texts and thus of the impossibility to reach an unmediated, 'pure' past, and a sense of melting the boundary between the past and the present, led to a perception that history as a discipline of the humanities is in a state of crisis. This perception is also affected by the idea that history, understood as humanity's march towards a better future, has reached its end, either because of the exhaustion of the old grand ideas and inability to create a new ideological project (Niethammer 1992) or because the best of the worlds was reached (Fukuyama 1989, 1992; see also Anderson 1992: 279–375). The sign of the crisis of history (as well as its ability for renewal and development) is, on the one hand, an immense growth in metahistorical research and, on the other, an increase in what tended to be left behind or marginalised in historical studies, namely microhistory or history written 'from below', which includes oral history and family history.

The sense of a crisis in history is also regarded as one of the causes of the development of 'memory studies' and their penetration of other disciplines of the humanities, such as literature and film studies. At the same time, the 'memory boom' adds to the perception of the current crisis in historical research (see, for example, Klein 2000), rendering history as old-fashioned and unsophisticated, yet elitist. Some authors also link the fashion for memory with the expansion of university education,

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beginning in the 1960s and, connected with it, the increase in disposable income and leisure time, which allows ordinary people to delve into their past (Winter 2001: 59). Last but not least, the shift from history to memory is attributed to the Holocaust: a historical event which, due to being perceived as a traumatic rupture in the Western experience and understanding of history, defies 'ordinary' historical representation and can be accessed only through the work of memory (ibid.: 53; Hirsch 2004: 1–13).

This memory boom inevitably raises a question about the relationship between history and memory. For Pierre Nora, whom Jay Winter describes as an *agent provocateur* of the current memory wave (Winter 2001: 52), the closeness between 'history' and 'memory', paradoxically, signifies the crisis of memory. As he puts it, 'We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left' and 'There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory' (Nora 1989: 7). In a similar vein Michel Foucault argues that what the workers at the end of the nineteenth century knew about their past was remarkable and this knowledge is fast shrinking (Foucault 1975: 25). Nora perceives history as an aggressor on memory, whose 'true mission is to suppress and destroy it' (Nora 1989: 9; see also Wood 1999: 1–37). Yet, at the same time as proclaiming memory as a delicate flower, in need of constant protection, he describes history in terms which render it profoundly unattractive, especially for contemporary sensibilities, as distant, intolerant, even totalitarian, unsubtle, institutionalised, with pretence to telling the truth, but really misleading its users, being powerful yet practically dead. Not surprisingly, anybody who falls under the spell of Nora's prose must feel disinclined to engage in history; being a 'memorist' appears to be the only acceptable way to talk today about the past. Kerwin Lee Klein, in an essay published a decade after Nora's 'Between Memory and History', observes that we 'use *memory* as a synonym for *history* to soften our prose, to humanise it, and to make it more accessible ... Memory appeals to us partly because it projects an immediacy we feel has been lost from history' (Klein 2000: 129). It is worth adding that a consequence of anti-historical propaganda, perpetuated by Nora and his followers, is an edification of a witness or anybody who remembers over a professional historian who has only a second-hand knowledge of the past.

The erosion of the division between history and memory is reflected in the proliferation of terms standing somewhere between 'history' and 'memory'. They include 'collective memory', 'cultural memory', 'social memory', 'public memory', 'national memory', 'structural memory',

'mnemohistory', 'collective remembrance', 'hauntology', 'ego-history', 'present past' and 'Memory with a capital M' (see, for example, Klein 2000; Kansteiner 2002). Let us look at some of these terms. The first, 'collective memory', is also the oldest. It was coined by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s, to reflect the idea that memory can be shared and sustained through the continuous production of representational forms, such as literary texts (Halbwachs 1992). Due to its social character 'collective memory' is thus similar to (classical) history. Another term bridging the gap between history and memory, 'cultural memory', was developed by Jan and Aleida Assmann (Assmann 1995, 2006; Assmann 2008). They distinguished between 'communicative memory' and 'cultural memory'. The first term 'includes those varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communication' (Assmann 1995: 126). Practically everybody participates in this form of memory, but it lasts only as long as human life, thus 80 to 100 years. 'Cultural memory', on the other hand, 'comprises that body of reusable texts and images specific to each society in each epoch, whose "cultivation" serves to stabilise and convey that society's self-image' (ibid.: 132). 'Cultural memory' is thus far longer lasting. It is also an object of contests, of power games, because certain texts prove more appealing to the public or are imposed with greater force on certain groups in certain times than others; the other texts have to wait in the archives for better times. This is also a reason why communicative memory feels more 'pure' and trustworthy than cultural memory, although if we are to believe Halbwachs, it is no less a product of cultural influences than cultural memory.

The Assmanns' cultural memory is especially close to traditional history. Not surprisingly, many contemporary historians regard history as a particular form of cultural memory (for example Burke 1989; Hutton 1993; Tamm 2008). However, even if we agree with this statement, a historian might in his/her practice emphasise or play down/reject the fact that s/he deals with what is remembered: discuss past events as taking place objectively or as remembered/represented by a particular individual or a group of people. The first, objective approach, as I have already indicated, dominates in reconstructionist history; the second, subjective, in the deconstructionist one.

The importance of Mnemosyne as the mother of Clio is also recognised by filmmakers. In contemporary cinema we observe a strong tendency to present past events as filtered by somebody's memory or as transformed by cultural representations, typically films or television. In non-mainstream/avant-garde filmmaking, the tendency of 'memorising

history' is even stronger (Skoller 2005). The most celebrated and, partly for this reason, controversial example of the domination of memory over history is *Shoah* (1985) by Claude Lanzmann. The author of this film does not use any documentary footage to represent or confront the Holocaust, but bases it entirely on interviews with people who remembered the genocide and on the traces of past events in the present, such as trains and train platforms and the absence of Jews where there was once their presence. According to Lanzmann and his advocates, such representation is truer than showing the past in its 'past-ness', precisely because it does acknowledge that the past is unrepresentable as past; it can only be represented in and as the present.

The current memory wave has its precursors and its leading figures. As for the first ones, we should list Hegel with his concept of original, reflective and philosophical histories (Hegel 1975: 12–24), Nietzsche with his idea of monumental, antiquarian and critical histories (Nietzsche 1997: 59–23), Marx with his idea of history as a memory of a ruling class (Marx 1977), Freud with practically all his work due to its focus on memory, including memory of the events which traumatised entire populations, such as the First World War (Freud 1961). As for those responsible for the shift from history to memory (or Memory), apart from Nora, who was the main inspiration behind one of the most influential ventures in cultural history in the past 20 years, *Les lieux de mémoire*, published between 1984 and 1992 (Nora 1996–98), we should also list a large group of authors working on Jewish history and the Holocaust, such as Saul Friedlander (1993a) and Amos Funkenstein (1993), due to the idea that Jews are a nation with memory rather than history and that the Holocaust requires memory work on top of historical research.

History and spatial research

There is another aspect of the sentence from Hartley's novel which is less explored by historians, although, in my view, it deserves equal attention. This aspect is conveyed by the use of the words a 'foreign country'. Let us begin with the second word: 'country' – as opposed to 'period' or 'epoch'. 'Country' has a spatial rather than a temporal dimension, suggesting that history should be understood as a spatial entity and, consequently, as a subdivision of such disciplines as geography, cartography or architecture. One of the first to recognise the importance of the study of space for learning about history, and vice versa, was Maurice Halbwachs, who in his discussion of 'the legendary topography of the Gospels' commented on the practice of building

Christian churches and other Christian monuments on the sites of earlier religious buildings (Halbwachs 1992: 193–235). The importance of space as a means to transmit histories and memories and create traditions was also noted by numerous anthropologists and historians (Burke 1989: 101–2; 2001; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). The spatial dimension of history is also recognised by the chief ‘memorist’, Pierre Nora. Large parts of his *Realms of Memory* are devoted to history immortalised in places. Part II of its third volume is entitled ‘Major Sites’ and includes studies of Lascaux, Reims, the Louvre, Versailles, the Pantheon, the Eiffel Tower and Verdun (Nora 1996–98: vol. 3, 163–401).

In a lecture delivered in 1967 and published in the 1980s as ‘Of Other Spaces’, Michel Foucault went further than these authors, announcing that space is winning over history in contemporary culture:

The great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history: with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis, and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men and the menacing glaciation of the world. The nineteenth century found its essential mythological resources in the second principle of thermodynamics. The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. (Foucault 1998: 229)

A similar position was expressed by Fredric Jameson in 2003. He begins his essay ‘The End of Temporality’ with the question ‘After the end of history, what?’ and suggests that the obvious answer is

[T]he spatial alternative. Statistics on the volume of books on space are as alarming as the birthrate of your hereditary enemy. The rise of intellectual stock of architecture accompanied the decline of *belles lettres* like a lengthening shadow; the opening of any new signature building attracted more visitors and media attention than the newly published translation of the latest unknown Nobel Prize winner ... So the dictum that time was the dominant of the modern (or the modernism) and space of the postmodern means something thematic and empirical all at once: what we do, according to the newspapers and the Amazon statistics, and what we call what we are doing. I don’t see how we can avoid identifying an epochal change here, and it affects investments (art galleries, building commissions) as much as the more ethereal things also called values. (Jameson 2003: 696)

The shifts from time to space and from history to spatial discourses are explained by such factors as the proliferation of new media, especially the Internet, which allows easy access to many distant sites at once, the increased speed of transportation and, connected with it, growth in migration and diaspora. Jameson specifically mentions the end of colonialism, which leads to bringing many people, who previously lived, metaphorically speaking, in different time zones, into one place (ibid.: 700–1).

Paradoxically, the current 'space wave', not unlike the 'memory wave', might also be linked to the perception that (physical) space lost in significance. Such a conclusion we can draw, for example, from the book by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (first published 1983), which argues that physical space is now less important in creating communities than it used to be. Modern and postmodern communities, thanks to the mass media, can be imagined. From this perspective, studying space equals studying a 'shrinking subject', although nobody has pronounced yet the 'end of space', the 'death of geography' or 'post-geography'.

From Foucault and Jameson's meditation on the importance of space in contemporary culture we can deduce that, in order to study history, we should pay attention to its physical embodiments: buildings, monuments, museum exhibits and the space of a city itself. It is worth mentioning in this context the works of Paul Virilio (Virilio and Lotringer 1983; Virilio 1994) and David Harvey (1989, 1996), who both perceive a city as a spatial-temporal entity, although each of them privileges different histories, imprinted on the city-text. For the first one, it is a history of warfare; for the second, the history of the accumulation of capital. Equally, we should search for concepts and theories which allow us to bring space and time close to each other, even collapse them into one entity. Jameson mentions two such theories: Kant's theory of time and space as universal categories through which we perceive the world, and Bakhtin's chronotope (Jameson 2003: 697). To those notions I will add the categories of time-image and movement-image introduced by Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze 1997, 2000). Bakhtin introduced 'chronotope' as a tool of literary research (Bakhtin 1981), but it turned out to be very useful for film studies (for example Stam 1989; Sobchack 1998; Naficy 2001; Nāripea 2010a). Deleuze's categories were invented to analyse films and proved very appealing to film scholars.

Although the topic of spatial representations has been a major concern in the humanities, it is not widely reflected either in history with a small 'h' or in metahistory. For example, Alun Munslow's *Routledge Companion to Historical Studies* ignores Bakhtin and pays little attention to Deleuze, while focusing on the problems of 'language', 'narrative'

and 'emplotment' (Munslow 2006). This might reflect the way historians have been educated; for example, the works of Walter Benjamin or Paul Virilio are not included in the staple diet of history students. It might also be a consequence of the fact that the notion of 'space', like that of 'time', proved multifaceted and therefore difficult to grasp. For example, the recent volume on *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* includes as many as 52 'important thinkers informing current debates about space and place' (Hubbard and Kitchin 2004: 3; emphasis added; see also Crang and Thrift 2000), including a myriad of geographers, sociologists, philosophers and literary historians. It is exceedingly difficult to even begin to imagine the possibility of a single theoretical framework for analysing space in history or any other area of the humanities. This discovery is, of course, rather unsurprising in the continuing era of the 'postmodern condition' which as long as 30 years ago was diagnosed by Jean-François Lyotard as incredulous towards metanarratives (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). Nevertheless, in my view, it puts off historians, already battling with their own problems, from potentially adding new ones.

Foucault and Jameson also indirectly point to the importance of film and moving image in a wider sense as a perfect embodiment of Bakhtin's chronotope, therefore a bridge between the time-oriented modernism and space-obsessed postmodernism. Studying film should thus allow one to overcome the tension between the old concept of history as 'written' and the new as 'visual'. However, it is only one of the many advantages of using film in history, which I will discuss shortly.

Beyond that, I shall turn to another word from Hartley's definition of the past – 'foreign'. Its use suggests that if one wants to learn about the past of one's country (or class, family, gender or any other aspect of one's identity, for that matter), one has to look at the past of other countries. Such an idea encourages the researcher to move away from a national framework towards transnational and comparative studies. Even the past of one's own country should be regarded as existing in conjunction or in tension with the history of other countries, such as, for example, their neighbours, enemies or colonies, and looked at from the perspective of the 'other'. A model of such an approach is *Orientalism* by Edward Said, published for the first time in 1978 (Said 2003). Transnationalism also entered the study of history, as demonstrated by the works of authors such as David Thelen (1999), Patricia Clavin (2005), Thomas Bender (2002) and Ian Tyrrell (2007). However, a transnational approach is used more in relation to American than European history and the vast majority of histories are still written from one nation's perspective, most likely because, as Hobsbawm observes,

'Our era is still one of nation-states – the only aspect of globalisation where globalisation does not work' (Hobsbawm 2007: 156). The historians of cinema also recognise, to use Andrew Higson's phrase, 'the limiting imagination of national cinema' (Higson 2000; on the discussion of national/transnational cinema see also Crofts 1993; Ezra and Rowden 2006), but a transnational history of cinema is still a project rather than a fulfilled idea.

History and film

The relationship between history and film was of interest to filmmakers and film historians for almost as long as film has existed. One of the first authors to discuss it was a pioneer of cinema, cinematographer to the court of the Russian Tsar and employee of the Lumière company (and a fellow countryman of mine), Bolesław Matuszewski. In 1898, Matuszewski published in the Paris *Le Figaro* an essay entitled 'Une nouvelle source de l'Histoire', in which, true to its title, he argued that film is a new and highly valuable historical source, and therefore should be treated with respect similar to that granted to other historical documents such as books and paintings. A mark of this respect would be the creation of film archives. Matuszewski maintained that the specific value of film in relation to history results from its immediacy and talent for mimicry:

A cinematographic photographer is an indiscreet individual, a feature inherent in his profession, on the lookout for an opportunity, he frequently intuitively finds the place where the occurring facts will turn out to be historical causes. And it will be necessary to restrain his over-zealousness rather than accuse him of shyness. Sometimes the natural curiosity of the human mind, sometimes greed, and not infrequently both, will stimulate his ingenuity and courage. Authorised to operate during the official celebrations, on another occasion he sneaks in with no authorisation and is usually capable of detecting places and circumstances in which history of tomorrow is in the making. He will not be intimidated by any revolutionary movement or an outbreak of riots and one can easily envisage him in wartime with his camera taking aim from the same trench as riflemen and photographing at least a fragment of the battle. (Matuszewski 1999: 26–7)

The advantage of cinema, according to Matuszewski, also lies in its ability to allow us to access things which we cannot see with a 'naked

eye'.¹ With regards to history this means seeing historical events clearly and thanks to that being able to get access to their causes (*ibid.*: 26). Furthermore, photographic and cinematographic histories are very efficient: 'Had we had reproductions from the times, let's say, of the First Empire and the Great Revolution ... we would have saved a sea of ink' (*ibid.*: 27).

However, Matuszewski's concept of history was narrow. For him, history was concerned only with events of great importance for public and official life, such as the visit of the President of the French Republic to St Petersburg in 1897, which he filmed himself (*ibid.*: 29). The history of clothes fashion, popular events such as carnivals, the everyday behaviour of ordinary people, what we now term 'cultural history', for Matuszewski was not worth registering and even less worth keeping in the archives.

Yet, it was also early noted that a cinematograph has a special ability to bear witness to such 'ordinary' features of reality. Attitudes to this talent divided authors. In 1920, when the Dutch Academy asked Johan Huizinga about the value of a project for an archive of documentary films, the Dutch anthropologist, despite his visual approach to history, advised against this idea on the grounds that film made no serious contribution to historical knowledge since what it showed was either unimportant or already known (Burke 2001: 155). For Walter Benjamin, on the other hand, who wrote his famous essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in 1936, the special value of film lay precisely in its ability to capture ordinary human behaviour (which slips the notice of 'professional' historians):

For the entire spectrum of optical, and now also acoustical, perception the film has brought about a similar deepening of appreciation. It is only an obverse of this fact that behaviour items shown in a movie can be analysed much more precisely and from more points of view than those presented on paintings or on the stage. As compared with painting, filmed behaviour lends itself more readily to analysis because of its incomparably more precise statements of the situation. (Benjamin 2007: 235–6)

In many decades of cinema's existence discussion about its historical value revolved around its mimetic qualities, which surpassed those of older arts (see, for example, Kracauer 1960, 1969). The most powerful glorification of cinema as a mimetic medium was offered by André Bazin in his essays written in the 1940s, especially 'The Ontology of the

Photographic Image' from 1945, in which the author describes cinema as a descendant of the practice of embalming the dead and in this way prolonging their lives (Bazin 1967: 9). Bazin bases his argument that 'photography and the cinema ... are discoveries that satisfy, once and for all and its very essence, our obsession with realism' on the fact that these media reproduce reality mechanically (ibid.: 12). For Bazin, the filmmaker records what exists in front of his eyes and the reality leaves a trace on a print. In the digital age this is no longer the case. As D. N. Rodowick observes, 'one of the defining features of digital cinema ... is combining images recorded from physical reality with images generated only on computers in the absence of any recording function or physical referent' (Rodowick 2007: 102–3). Yet, as Rodowick observes, perceptual realism remains an important goal for creators of digital images (ibid.: 99–110). Creating the impression that what we watch on screen truly happened did not disappear from the agenda of 'historians with cameras', only they attempt to achieve this impression by different means.

Post-Bazin the question of the usefulness of film for history gradually moved from shooting/registering reality to editing. However, cinema's ability to connect or disconnect events more often than praised was dismissed for being counter-productive in achieving valuable historical results. Authors such as Ian Jarvie and Robert Rosenstone claimed that in contrast to history 'proper', which presents historical debates about what and why something happened and how to convey it, film simplifies the past, changing it into an uncomplicated and usually sensationalist narrative (Jarvie 1978; Rosenstone 1988). This reasoning, however, is undermined by Hayden White, a historian who, drawing on authors such as Foucault and Jameson, argues that history, like works of fiction, also uses a narrative discourse. This discourse, 'far from being a neutral medium for the representation of historical events and processes, is the very stuff of a "mythical" view of reality, a conceptual or pseudoconceptual "content" which, when used to represent real events, endows them with an illusory coherence and charges them with the kinds of meanings more characteristic of oneiric than of waking thought' (White 1987: ix). Armed with the idea that history tells tales not unlike fictional works, White maintains that 'historiophoty', understood as history conveyed or rather created by film, is essentially no different from traditional historiography. The filmmaker, like a historian, chooses his 'facts' and edits them in the same manner that the historian connects them in a historical study. For example, he 'zooms in' on certain events and personalities, leaving others in the background or off-screen. White's conclusion is that we should not demand from film a historical

fullness and objectivity which ordinary historiography cannot achieve (White 1988).

It is also worth noting that from White's perspective, with which I identify, there is no difference between documentary and feature cinema in relation to 'historical facts'. Both propose a discourse, rather than the former giving us direct access to 'facts', the latter offering facts transformed or manipulated by a filmmaker to suit his audiences, as many critics and viewers believe. However, it makes sense to separate documentary and feature films for aesthetic reasons, regarding them as different genres, employing different conventions.

Cinema not only bears witness to important events, but also transmits them in a manner which comes across as more attractive to the general public than any other form of historical discourse, such as an academic book or a historical novel. As Robert Rosenstone maintains, 'Each day it becomes clearer to even the most academic of historians that the visual media are the chief conveyor of public history in our culture. That for every person who reads a book on a historical topic about which a film has been made, especially a popular film such as *Schindler's List* (1993), many millions are likely to encounter that same past on the screen' (Rosenstone 2006: 12).

In my native Poland the conviction about the power of the moving image to win the battle with a 'correct' version of history led to crude acts of censorship. In communist times many films, such as *Człowiek z marmuru* (*Man of Marble*, 1977), directed by Andrzej Wajda, or *Przesłuchanie* (*Interrogation*, 1989), directed by Ryszard Bugajski, were shelved due to their not 'correct' take on national history. In postcommunist times some popular television series made under the communist regime such as *Stawka większa niż życie* (*More Than Life at Stake*, 1967–68), directed by Andrzej Konic and Andrzej Morgenstern, and *Cztery pancerni i pies* (*Four Tank Men and a Dog*, 1966), directed by Andrzej Czekalski and Konrad Nałęcki, were forbidden from being shown again on television on account of falsifying Polish history (Kurz 2008: 10). Of course, on both occasions what was deemed false was inconvenient for the current political establishment.

In the light of these troubles with 'screen history' it is worth returning to Rosenstone, who, echoing White's idea that the form of historical research is as significant as its content, argues that rather than dismissing popular historical films, 'as mere "fiction" or "entertainment", or lamenting their obvious "inaccuracies"', it seems more judicious ... to investigate exactly how films work to create a historical world. This means focusing on what we might call their rules of engagement with

the traces of the past, and investigating the codes, conventions, and practices by which they bring history to film' (Rosenstone 2006: 12). Few 'proper' historians follow Rosenstone's advice but many film historians do. For example, Richard Neupert and Jeffrey Skoller, the second drawing on Deleuze's concepts of movement-image and time-image, argue that films gravitating towards classical, mainstream cinema or 'closed text' help to reaffirm dominant ideology and a hegemonic vision of history, while open and avant-garde films tend to question history (Neupert 1995; Skoller 2005). David Martin-Jones, also drawing on Deleuze, as well as Homi Bhabha's and Benedict Anderson's work on the construction of national identity, suggests that movement-image tends to be more or less pedagogical 'in that it aimed to establish one dominant view of national history, and identity', while the labyrinthine time-image reflects the potentially ungrounding 'performative rethinking' of those notions (Martin-Jones 2006: 33). At the same time, in many films the elements of movement- and time-image co-exist and intertwine, even though one or the other ultimately defines the overall 'ideology' of narrating time and space, nation and history:

Accordingly, the various European new waves of the 1960s and 1970s, can be interpreted not only as comments on the state of their respective national cinemas, but also on the changing postwar conditions each nation experienced. A jumbled, fragmented, multiplied or reversed film narrative ... can be interpreted as an expression of the difficulty of narrating national identity at a time of historical crisis or transformation. Such narratives formally demonstrate a nation's exploration of its own 'national narrative', its examination of the national past, present and/or future in search of causes, and possible alternatives, to its current state of existence. (Ibid.: 1)

Finally, cinema not only transmits history, but becomes history in a double sense. Firstly, as Siegfried Kracauer argues in *From Caligari to Hitler*, certain films and cinematic movements are able to see the seeds of momentous changes. For Kracauer, the works belonging to German Expressionism foreshadow the coming of Nazism in Germany by, for example, choosing as their main characters tyrants and madmen and presenting the society as doomed (Kracauer 2004). We can also list here Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967) as a film about the premonition of May 1968 and Wajda's *Man of Marble* seen as the anticipation of the Solidarity movement. Films also become history in the sense that the stories of making and screening them become historical facts in their own right,

often occupying front pages of national newspapers. In this category we can list films such as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) by D. W. Griffith, *Bronenosets Potyomkin* (*Battleship Potemkin*, 1925) by Sergei Eisenstein, *Shoah* (1985) by Claude Lanzmann and in my native Poland *Krzyżacy* (*Knights of the Teutonic Order*, 1960) by Aleksander Ford and, recently, *Katyni* (2007) by Andrzej Wajda. Of course, the special place of these films in the cultures of their countries and continents points to the significance of the past for the present: the use of old (hi)stories for current political debates and especially for transformation of national identity. As Foucault put it, 'If one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamism' (Foucault 1975: 25).

Of all histories conveyed by film and film historians, Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988–98) has attracted most attention from film scholars in the recent period (see, for example, Witt 1999; Temple *et al.* 2007).² In its conception and execution, this monumental work, which took its author over ten years to complete and lasts 265 minutes, fulfils many ideas proposed by authors such as Matuszewski, Benjamin, Bazin, Kracauer, White and Deleuze and approaches the ideal of history produced by film. It is also a meditation on the relationship between film and history. History, for Godard, is based on the skill of connecting events distant from each other in space or time, as expressed by such words:

If you say that around 1540 Copernicus introduced the idea that the Sun no longer revolved around the Earth, and if you say that a few years later Vesalius published *De humani corporis fabrica*, which shows the inside of the human body, the skeleton and écorchés, well, then, you have Copernicus in one book and Vesalius in another ... And then four hundred years later you have François Jacob who says: 'The same year, Copernicus and Vesalius ...' Well, Jacob isn't doing biology anymore, he's doing cinema. And that's what history really is. (Godard, quoted in Wright 2000: 56)

These words suggest that media other than cinema are also able to bring distant images, ideas or objects together. We can even be historians using only our heads, by connecting literally or metaphorically 'our country' with 'another country', but cinema is privileged in this respect because it makes connections without special effort, thanks to employing editing, and because it allows the viewer to *see* the links, rather than helping them to imagine them or grasp them intellectually. In this sense cinema is alone. Godard also states explicitly that cinema's ability to see and show the connections between things furnishes it with

great responsibility towards humanity. This medium, in his view, is able to warn people against approaching disasters, such as wars and genocide. On some occasions, it has played this role; an example is German Expressionism, which, following Kracauer, he perceives as a movement predicting and warning against the perils of Hitler's rule. History, even the history of distant epochs, is never finished, because what happened a long time ago can and should be juxtaposed with new events and looked at through new lenses. Godard goes as far as to say that history has not yet begun. A fitting example of the audacious juxtapositions advocated by Godard and a proof that history is never finished, according to his definition of 'history', is a fragment known as 'Elizabeth Taylor in Auschwitz' from Chapter 1A of his series. In it, the author superimposes a fragment from George Stevens's melodrama, *A Place in the Sun* (1951), based on Theodore Dreiser's novel, *An American Tragedy*, with footage shot in the concentration camp following its liberation. He superimposes pictures of stacked corpses onto an image of Taylor's peaceful smile as she cradles Montgomery Clift in her arms on the shores of a lake. This fragment is open to different interpretations (see, for example, Wright 2000), and it is beyond the scope of this introduction to discuss them. What is important for me, is that by linking the Holocaust atrocities with Hollywood melodrama, Godard generates new responses to history, making the past alive.

The subject, method and structure of this book

My book draws on many notions and views, presented in this introduction. First, in accordance with the opinion that the past exists for us only as a text, the overall object of my study will be intertextual connections. I will compare written texts, for example historical studies and biographies with cinematic texts, as well as older films with newer films, histories presented on screen with stories circulated in the media at the time they were made and, on occasion, my own memories. My study thus belongs to the widely understood field of 'adaptation', which in recent years revamped itself into a study of intertextuality (see, for example, Stam 2000; Elliott 2003, 2004; Aragay 2005; Mazierska 2011). Authors following an intertextual approach propose to treat film and literature not as 'original' and its 'adaptation', but as equal partners, existing in a complex and unstable web of relationships with other texts. For example, following Gérard Genette's study of transtextuality (1997), Robert Stam proposes to treat adaptation as a relation between the 'hypertext' to an anterior text, the 'hypotext', which the hypertext

transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends (Stam 2000: 65–6). In common with this approach, my aim is not to decide whether any film chosen for the discussion represents the past truthfully, but to which discourse it adheres and which it opposes and why. For this purpose I will situate the films in the context of different pasts (different hypotexts), as well as different presents (different hypertexts). Yet, inevitably, some pasts and presents I will privilege, for example because they reflect my personal experience or my knowledge gained when writing this book but, equally, with an awareness that discourses about the past can be constructed differently by those interested in different issues, having different experiences and using different sources. To paraphrase Jean-Luc Godard's words, I will say that this is not a just book on history and cinema, this is just a book on history and cinema.

Secondly, this book focuses on history and memory (individual and collective) and their mutual relationships rather than exclusively on history or solely on memory. This is reflected first by the choice of films for discussion. The majority of them refer not only to what happened, how and why, but also how it is remembered by somebody or reimagined on screen. Some of the films even take as their topic memory contests, namely different versions of the past, competing for a privileged position in the culture of a specific society or in the life of an individual, examples being *Éloge de l'amour* (*In Praise of Love*, 2001) by Jean-Luc Godard, *Ararat* (2003) by Atom Egoyan and *Weiser* (2000) by Wojciech Marczewski, discussed in Chapter 1. Furthermore, a large part of them are based on memoirs or testimonies of people who purport to have first-hand experience of the represented events. The history-memory approach is also embedded in the concepts and methods I use, such as applying the distinction between communicative and cultural memory, proposed by Jan Assmann.

In common with Matuszewski's view that historical film should concern itself with events which are of importance to large groups of people, I chose films devoted to such momentous events as wars, revolutions, terrorist attacks and acts of genocide, to what can be labelled 'political history'. However, this does not mean that 'ordinary' people will not feature in my analysis. They will, because in the films at hand history is presented as a force shaping the life of an ordinary person and/or as filtered through the memory of such a person. Furthermore, even if the films deal with people whose names were printed on the front pages of newspapers, they tend to represent them as 'ordinary', closing the gap between them and us. The most poignant examples are recent films on Hitler, as discussed in Chapter 2.

My book will also be concerned with spaces, places and objects where history is played out and then immortalised, such as Mount Ararat in Chapter 1 and the disgraced monuments of the communist leaders in Chapter 5. Equally, however, I will ponder on the fact that (physical) space has lost in significance for memory and history, giving way to the virtual space of the television screen where histories are today created and replayed. This is the case, for instance, of the histories of terrorist attacks of the 1970s, presented in Chapter 3, and Polish martial law, which is encapsulated by the televised image of General Jaruzelski, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Following Godard's idea that in order to learn about history we should juxtapose distant histories and films, in each chapter I 'jump' from place to place, usually comparing films dealing with the same issue, but made in different countries, for example comparing German, Polish and Czech films about communist secret agents in Chapter 6. Moreover, although my book is preoccupied with history represented in the films of the past two decades, in order to account for their specificity I will frequently refer to earlier films on the same subject. However, in common with Godard, whose *Histoire(s)* privilege European and American cinema at the expense of the 'Third World', my search for foreignness will have distinct temporal and geographical boundaries: twentieth century and Europe. I have chosen the twentieth century because many of the events of this period are still remembered by individuals who experienced them first-hand – they do not belong to a (stale) history in the same sense that the Battle of Hastings does (although if we are to believe Godard, the Battle of Hastings can also be 'put in motion'), but to the living history or even to communicative memory. Practically all of them constitute Nora's 'sites of memory': small islands of remembrance on the huge sea of forgetting. This means that their names are recognised by contemporary people, even if they do not have any detailed knowledge about them. To the greatest extent, this refers to the Second World War, which will be a thread weaving other events and sites discussed in this book.

I chose Europe not to belittle other continents, but because of my unfamiliarity with the histories and cinemas of other regions. However, my concept of Europe is wide, encompassing not only the West, but also the East, even reaching as far as Armenia. Nevertheless, the largest part of my book will be devoted to German history. This is because Germany played a crucial role in shaping the history of Europe in the twentieth century and, hence, learning its history is a required condition to grasp European history as a whole. To use Nora's language, there are many

sites of memory in contemporary Germany which enter into productive relations with the histories of other nations and places. German's ability to transform memory into art is reflected in the long and beautiful words used in this language to describe the work of memory, such as *Geschichtsaufarbeitung* and *Vergangengenheitsbewältigung*. The number of times I have encountered them in books published in English is for me a clear sign that today Germans are seen as being in the forefront of the 'memory wave'. Another, albeit connected reason why German films feature so extensively in this volume is the success of German cinema to project its own history and its memory to domestic and international audiences, as testified by the impressive box-office results of films such as *Good Bye Lenin!* (2003), directed by Wolfgang Becker, *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004), directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel, *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*, 2006), by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, and *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* (*The Baader Meinhof Complex*, 2008), directed by Uli Edel. By extension, the popularity of these films, unparalleled by films from any other European country, supports the idea that post-unification Germany regained its position as a 'land of the middle' of Europe (lost following its defeat in the Second World War), with whom the whole of Europe can identify. Choosing these films for analysis also reflects my desire to discuss not only films, but cinema, namely movies which, thanks to their popularity, attest to the state of mind of a large section of society, as opposed to only that of an individual artist and a handful of his/her followers. For the same reason, I avoid films labelled 'avant-garde' or 'experimental', although some of my examples, such as the films by Jean-Luc Godard and Atom Egoyan, divert from mainstream cinema. Equally, some of the popular films considered here use the means associated with the avant-garde. I will also devote much attention to Polish history, as much on account on my familiarity with Polish history and cinema, as due to the importance of Poland in changing European history of the past 20 years or so. For this reason, I decided to devote a whole chapter to the representation of martial law imposed in Poland in 1981, which led to the abolition of state socialism in Poland and elsewhere.

My book follows the chronology of historical events, as represented in the films at hand, but this chronology is often disrupted by the need to juxtapose events from different periods. In Chapter 1 I discuss the memory of the Second World War, Armenian genocide and anti-Semitic attacks in Poland after the Second World War, as rendered in *Éloge de l'amour*, *Ararat* and *Weiser*. Chapter 2 presents the portrayal of Hitler in the films *Moloch* (1999), directed by Aleksandr Sokurov, *Max* (2002),

directed by Menno Meyjes, *Downfall* and *Mein Führer – Die wirklich wahrste Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler* (*Mein Führer: The Truly Truest Truth About Adolf Hitler*, 2007), directed by Dani Levy. Chapter 3 is concerned with the representation of European terrorism of the 1970s in *The Baader Meinhof Complex*, *Buongiorno, notte* (*Good Morning, Night*, 2003), directed by Marco Bellocchio, and *Five Minutes of Heaven* (2009), directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel. The last three chapters are devoted to the end of communism and the memory of communist times. Chapter 4 deals with the representation of Polish martial law, analysing films such as Kazimierz Kutz's *Śmierć jak kromka chleba* (*Death as a Slice of Bread*, 1994), *Rozmowy kontrolowane* (*Tapped Conversations*, 1991) by Sylwester Chęciński, *Moonlighting* (1982) and *Success Is the Best Revenge* (1984) by Jerzy Skolimowski and *Passion* (1982) by Jean-Luc Godard. Chapter 5 discusses the representation of the end of communism in the German *Good Bye Lenin!* (2003), *Balti armastuslood* (*Baltic Love Stories*, 1992) by Peeter Urbla and dedicated to Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, and the Romanian *A fost sau n-a fost?* (*12:08 East of Bucharest*, 2006), directed by Corneliu Porumboiu. Finally, Chapter 6 tells the stories of communist secret agents, told in German, Polish and Czech films, such as *The Lives of Others*, *Korowód* (*Twists of Fate*, 2007), directed by Jerzy Stuhr, and *Kawasakiho Růže* (*Kawasaki Rose*, 2009), directed by Jan Hřebejk. Of course, the events and films discussed represent only a small fraction of European history and cinema. However, I believe that my choice is representative of certain approaches to studying both, which, for the lack of a better word, I will describe as postmodern.

Drawing on Hayden White, Gilles Deleuze, Mikhail Bakhtin and many of their followers who believe that 'the form is the content' – in this case the form of the film attests to how certain histories are remembered and evaluated – I will pay attention not only to the subject matter of the films, but also to their style. In particular, I will try to discover which genre conventions were used by filmmakers. As the reader will notice, a large number of the films discussed in this book are comedies. Such a choice in part results from my desire to focus on the films which gained wide international popularity. But this, of course, raises the question why history tends to be presented in contemporary films in a humorous way and why comedies about history became so popular. I will suggest two complementary answers to this question. One was offered by Karl Marx, who began 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' with these words, later repeated by many authors: 'Hegel remarks somewhere that all the great events and characters of world history occur, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.'

Caussidière in place of Danton, Louis Blanc in place of Robespierre, the Montagne of 1848–51 in place of the Montagne of 1793–5, the Nephew in place of the Uncle' (Marx 1973: 146). The sense of the repetition of history is also conveyed by the films chosen for my discussion. The second reason why the comedy genre is so often applied in the films at hand might be their authors' conviction that laughter is the best response to historical trauma. In laughter we recognise the absurdity of such historical events as wars and the smallness of an individual against the circumstances of history (also recognised by Marx on many occasions) but also show a desire to overcome the pain and disappointment which history brings and master our past.

As I noted about reading historical books, many of them reflect their authors' histories, for example their position of being descendants of Holocaust victims or survivors who through the study of history attempt to learn more about their own past. This book in relation to my own past is both similar to those and different, as I tended to perceive myself as a person without history and with little memory. What can be regarded as 'my history': the history of my country, region and family, was always for me a 'foreign land'. A possible reason for that might be a failure of my history teachers to show me the connection between the past and the present, instead rendering the past as sealed off from current problems. Another factor might be the fact that at my home national history and family past were neither celebrated nor suppressed in a way which made me sense any meaningful gaps that needed to be investigated. The past in my home was simply ignored: we always lived in the present. This happened despite the fact that in my family (as I believe in every family) there were events which were historical, such as the death of my paternal grandfather in the Mauthausen concentration camp. I was a teenager when martial law was declared in Poland in 1981: an event which many of my peers regarded as proof of belonging to 'historical times' and even an opportunity to carry a badge of martyrdom. For me, however, there was nothing worth remembering from this period and, most importantly, this time did not give me any sense of belonging to history. While 'real past' was alien and meaningless for me, I always identified with histories created by cinema. Writing this book was in large part motivated by my desire to overcome the 'thinness' of my own past: to feel more connected to some larger narratives of the past, and I hope that I have achieved this goal.

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